

The Issue Arenas Framework of Democratization:
An Alternative Approach

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Introduction¹

An important observation emerging from the "third wave" of democratization that has sweep the globe over the past two decades is the notion that democratic reform occurs unevenly in a political system.² That is, at both an abstract level and on the basis of empirical evidence, it seems evident that some democratic reforms advance more quickly than others in the same subunit of a political system (i.e., at the national level, or in some subnational political unit, such as a state or municipality). Moreover, progress on a single democratic reform (e.g., judicial reform) may advance at varying rates across different subunits of a political system.

Upon reflection it is not difficult to think of specific examples that illustrate these points. For instance, with regard to the uneven progression of different reforms in the same political system, countries like El Salvador and Chile come to mind. In these case, where the military has historically played a tutelary role in politics, reforms to establish clean and regular elections have advanced more quickly than measures to bring the military under civilian authority (Karl 1986; Valenzuela 1992). Similarly, in countries like Guatemala, efforts to provide for regular elections have advanced at a more rapid pace than efforts to guarantee the protection of human rights for all groups in society (Ebel 1996). With regard to the same reform advancing unevenly within different subunits of a political system, one can point to countries like Italy and Mexico, where

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²The phrase "third wave" was coined by Huntington and refers to the more than 30 countries that made a transition from nondemocratic to democratic forms of rule during the period from 1974 to 1990 (Huntington 1991).

measures designed to strengthen the responsiveness and effectiveness of local representative institutions have varied significantly across regions (Putnam 1993; Rodríguez and Ward 1995).³

The "unevenness" of democratic reform should come as no surprise. Inherent to the process of any complex social and political change is an incrementalism, an unfolding, a lack of uniformity. This recognition, however, does not take away from the importance of addressing the question of why democratic reforms unfold unevenly within a political system. Does difficulty implementing one reform as opposed to another stem from its being opposed in a particularly intense manner by a political actor? Given that almost any democratic reform will have actors who are in favor of and opposed to a reform, what accounts for whether the opponents or proponents will succeed in getting their way? Most authors have agreed that the relative power of the actors involved in the democratization process is "the primary factor explaining the shape of emerging institutions" (Munck 1994, 370). There also appears to be a consensus among scholars that power comes from the resources actors possess relative to other actors. Yet while scholars have attributed an important role to the concepts of relative power and resources, they have not addressed important questions such as: Are different types of power resources more effective in some issue arenas than in others? If so, which actors are more likely to achieve their goals in which particular issue arena? How does this affect the overall prospects of the transition process and its outcomes? A long record of research which concludes that different resources will vary in their effectiveness across different issue arenas suggest that this notion of relative power in the democratization context needs to be further specified (Dahl 1961, Skocpol 1985; Immergut 1992).

Another key question is, what accounts for the successful implementation of a single reform in one region of a country and its failure in another? This question has received little attention by researchers up to this point. However, those scholars who have addressed this

³Perhaps one of the most notable examples of the uneven consolidation of democratic institutions across different regions of a political system comes from the United States, where the persistence of Jim Crow laws in the South prevented the effective participation of African Americans in the democratic process for a period of almost 100 years.

question, have provided answers that are not wholly satisfactory. For instance, Putnam has recently argued that variations in levels of subnational civic engagement explain differences in the effectiveness and responsiveness of regional governments (Putnam 1993). While many agree with Putnam's contention about the salutary affects of a dense civil society on government performance, his study has been criticized for its "society-centered focus" which downplays the impact of government institutions and political strategies in influencing levels of social capital (Levi 1996; Sabetti 1996).

Coppedge has also tried to provide an answer to this question, arguing that differing levels in party competition are the critical factor in explaining the uneven progress of democratic practices in different political systems (Coppedge 1993). However, while few would argue with the claim that a competitive party system provides for greater democratic accountability than a non-competitive one, party competition, by itself, does not offer a satisfactory, immediate explanation for the progress of reforms. This is evident in cases where competitive parties in a political system will cooperate in their efforts to exclude issues of democratic reform from the political agenda. Venezuela illustrates this point. This country has had relatively high levels of party competition since the Pact of Punto Fijo in 1958. However, despite this party competition, the country's two leading parties, Democratic Action and the COPEI, succeeded in preventing the advent of popular elections for governors and mayors until the electoral reforms of 1989 and 1993.

Yet another answer to the question of why democratic reforms progress unevenly within a political system points to varying levels of regional economic development. For example, Clark has hypothesized that the "greater the social and economic resources available to the local community, the greater its autonomy", and therefore the more autonomous and democratic its decisionmaking processes (Clark 1974). While there has not been much research done to test this claim within a country, on a cross-national basis, the relationship between democracy and levels of socio-economic development has been one of the most studied hypotheses in the democratization literature. While a number of scholars have recently demonstrated that levels of

development are strongly correlated with democracy, the notion of a direct linear relationship has largely been rejected (Huntington 1991; Diamond 1992). Huntington, for example, has argued that levels of per capita GNP were a "reasonably" good predictor of third wave democratizations. However, he goes on to add that this "is not to argue that democratization is determined simply by economic development" (Huntington 1991, 63). To make this point he contrasts the cases of India, a country widely recognized as democratic with a 1976 per capita GNP of \$250, with Czechoslovakia and East Germany, countries which had per capita GNP's over \$3,000 in 1976, yet remained under totalitarian rule until 1990. In short, the results of this research lead one to believe that macroeconomic factors are not sufficiently sensitive variables for explaining particular outcomes of democratic reform. Therefore, answers should be sought in more middle-range theories which analyze specific institutional settings, which provide the parameters within which coalitions of actors meet and contend for their objectives with their organizational resources and strategies.

As this sample of research suggests, there does not seem to be any simple, or readily apparent solution to the question of why democratic reforms progress unevenly in a political system undergoing a process of consolidation. Indeed, this question presents a puzzle which is both interesting and important. The puzzle is interesting not only because of its lack of an obvious solution, but also because the question has not received much scholarly attention. In the democratization literature, scholars have tended to discuss and analyze the consolidation process in very general, or overly-simplified terms. For instance, while most scholars writing in this area base their definition of democracy on Dahl's list of eight procedural criteria (Dahl 1971, 3)⁴, very few country studies have systematically employed these criteria to assess whether all eight have

⁴Dahl's eight minimal procedural criteria of a polyarchy include: "1) freedom to form and join organizations; 2) freedom of expression; 3) the right to vote; 4) eligibility for public office; 5) the right of political leaders to compete for support [and votes]; 6) alternative sources of information; 7) free and fair elections; and 8) institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference." (Dahl 1971, 3). Dahl's definition of democracy is the one that is adopted in this paper.

been met before labeling a country "democratic", or "consolidated".⁵ And since few studies have analyzed attempts to implement specific policies aimed at securing the minimal procedural criteria of democracy, the literature has few examples of studies which focus on the issue of the uneven progression of democratic reforms.⁶

Furthermore, oversimplification has been a problem with studies which focus almost exclusively on elections as the sole measure of democracy, a tendency Karl has labeled "electoralism" (Karl 1990, 14).⁷ For example, Huntington has proposed a "two-turnover test" as a measure of consolidated democracy (Huntington 1991, 266-267). According to this test a democracy would be considered consolidated if a ruling party lost an election and gave up power on at least two occasions. However, many would consider such a test problematic, because it fails to detect whether other essential procedural components of democracy have been secured in the system, such as civilian control over the military and the protection of basic political rights for all groups.⁸ This question of why democratic reforms progress at different rates is important, because the failure of a particular reform to advance, or the failure of a reform to be achieved in a particular region of a country, can have serious implications for the quality of democracy in that country. The lack of even one procedural criterion in a political system, or the existence of

⁵Schmitter and Karl point out that "Numerous attempts have been made to codify and quantify the existence of democracy across political systems. The best known is probably Freedom House's *Freedom in the World: Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, published since 1973 by Greenwood Press and since 1988 by University Press of America. Also see Charles Humana, *World Human Rights Guide* (New York: Facts on File, 1986)" (Schmitter and Karl 1993, 51). Nevertheless, I would argue that these surveys are not often considered by academics when evaluating regimes for classification. Moreover, one seldom sees in the literature detailed case studies which focus on how, and to what extent, reforms securing particular procedural aspects of democracy have been achieved.

⁶Some exceptions to this trend include Graham (1993), Shapiro Zacek and Kim (1993), Putnam (1993), Fox (1994), Rodríguez and Ward (1995).

⁷While "electoralism" has been an occasional problem in academic studies, Drake is correct to point out that, historically, this tendency has been particularly prevalent among U.S. policymakers (Drake 1991, 6).

⁸For a more in depth critique of these issues and the democratization literature see Chapter 2 of my dissertation (Barracca 1998).

"authoritarian enclaves" within an otherwise democratic regime, can become the catalysts for political instability which can, in turn, jeopardize the system as a whole.⁹

In sum, few attempts have been made to address the question of why democratic reforms progress unevenly in a consolidating regime. Moreover, studies which have addressed the question have done so in a rather ad hoc manner and have provided less than satisfactory answers. To date, no framework has appeared in the literature which allows scholars to evaluate this question in a systematic fashion, and weigh the importance of a range of variables which different studies have considered to be "*the* critical variable". What is needed is a framework of analysis that brings structure, coherence, and comparability to the analysis. The Issue Arenas Framework (IAF) is one approach that seeks to meet this need.¹⁰

This paper presents the IAF as a framework for addressing the question of why democratic reforms progress unevenly in a political system. This question is examined by looking at four areas of democratic reform in the state of Yucatán, Mexico. This case is particularly useful for two reasons. First, Mexico provides a clear example of a country undergoing a protracted period of democratic transition. The Mexican political system has been dominated by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) for 68 years. This system of one-party rule, which has proven to be the most stable inclusionary authoritarian regime in contemporary history has, over the past decade, been undergoing a period of accelerated democratization. Second, the case of Yucatán is particularly useful for examining the research question, due to the presence of a strong democratic opposition in the state, most notably, the National Action Party (PAN). The PAN's persistent efforts to democratize the state's political institutions and practices will offer an interesting backdrop for accessing why some reforms have advanced more rapidly

⁹This argument, that authoritarian enclaves within an otherwise democratic system can weaken democracy in the country as a whole, is illustrated in such cases as Israel, Sri Lanka, and South Africa, before its transition from apartheid.

¹⁰Chapter 1 of my dissertation provides a more thorough explanation of the features of, and assumptions behind the Issue Arenas framework (Barracca 1998).

than others, and why implementation of a single reform has varied across the state's municipalities.

The paper is organized into three main sections. The first gives a brief overview of the IAF, highlighting the main features of the framework, and in particular, those characteristics of issue arenas which most affect the outcomes of democratic reforms. Second, the paper will apply the IAF to four areas of democratic reform in the state of Yucatán to see how well the framework accounts for the unevenness of the reform process. These four areas of reform are 1) efforts to clean up the conduct of elections, 2) attempts to democratize the state's electoral law, 3) plans to devolve public services to municipal governments, and 4) initiatives to increase the financial capacity of municipal governments. The final section of the paper will offer some general hypotheses which emerge from the IAF that can be explored in other settings.

The Issue Arenas Framework

Before analyzing the cases, it is first necessary to give a brief overview of the IAF. The approach can be summarized by discussing the concept of the issue arena and the general characteristics of issue arenas that shape the outcomes of the democratic reform process across different reforms and subunits of the political system. First, the IAF argues that it is useful to place issue arenas at the center of the analysis of democratic reform. An issue arena can be defined as the set of institutions and actors in society who have influence over the decisions concerning a particular issue.¹¹ One of the conclusions that has consistently emerged from

¹¹This definition borrows from Baumgartner and Jones' definition of "policy venues", which is another term for the same concept (Baumgartner and Jones 1993, 31). An excellent early study using the issue arenas construct is Lowi (1964). In a more recent study, focusing on similar questions, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith use the term policy subsystem to refer to the same idea (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). These authors distinguish between policy subsystems and the traditional concepts of iron triangles and policy whirlpools, pointing out that the latter terms are generally restricted to "interest groups, administrative agencies, and legislative committees at one level of government" (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 23-24). In contrast, policy subsystems would be expanded to include a wider range of governmental and non-governmental actors from different levels of government. I think this is a useful distinction.

studies which have assessed the effect of issue arenas on the policy process is that policymaking capabilities differ substantially across issue arenas within a single political system and that different issue arenas shape the political process and its outcomes in different ways (Barth and Johnson 1959; Dahl 1961; Lowi 1964; Skocpol 1985; Immergut 1992; Baumgartner and Jones 1993; Weaver and Rockman 1993). For this reason, it is suggested that the issue arenas construct will help provide leverage for exploring the question of why democratic reforms emerge in an uneven manner. In response to this question, the IAF postulates that the uneven advance of democratic reforms is a result of variation across issue arenas.

It is, of course, not very illuminating to say that issue arenas shape the outcomes of democratic reforms without specifying *what it is about issue arenas* that have this affect. Therefore, it is necessary to consider what some general characteristics of issue arenas might be that will shape outcomes of the democratic reform process. At least three factors can be suggested which would be expected to influence outcomes across all issue arenas. These are 1) the degree of centralization vs. fragmentation of the decisionmaking process, 2) who controls the effective points of decision in an issue arena, and 3) the degree of permeability vs. insulation of the decisionmaking process.

First, it is reasonable to posit that the degree to which the decisionmaking process in a particular issue arena is centralized or fragmented would influence outcomes in that arena. A perfectly centralized decisionmaking process would be one where the ultimate authority for deciding upon a policy, or reform would reside solely with one actor, body, or agency. In contrast, a fragmented decisionmaking process would be one where authority over the decision for approving a policy or reform would be in the hands of multiple actors, bodies, or agencies. A concept which helps clarify this discussion is Immergut's notion of "veto points" (Immergut 1992, 63-66). Immergut makes the useful observation that political decisions are not always "single decisions made at one point in time", rather they are very often "composed of sequences of decisions made by different actors at different institutional locations" (Immergut 1992, 63). In other words the policymaking process very often involves a "chain of decisions" which consists

of various "decision points" where actors can register either their approval or rejection of a policy (Immergut 1992, 63). These points of decision Immergut calls "veto points" (Immergut 1992 66). In light of this concept, a perfectly centralized decisionmaking process would be one where there is only one effective veto point, whereas a fragmented decisionmaking process would be one where there are multiple veto points.

To illustrate this idea, consider an attempt to implement a reform that would transfer responsibility for the provision of a certain public service from the state to the municipal level of government. The outcome of this reform would be greatly influenced by the rules of the game in this issue arena regarding where the decisionmaking authority lies. For example, if sole authority for approving the reform rests with the state congress (i.e., there is one veto point), and the state government wants to rid itself of the financial burden of providing the public service, one would expect this "reform" to be implemented. In this case, the "effective point of decision" resides with the state congress (Immergut 1992, 65). Conversely, if the decision regarding the transfer ultimately rests with the various municipal councils in the state (i.e., there are multiple veto points), and the majority of these councils do not feel that they have been given adequate support in terms of finances and training to provide the service, one would expect the reform to be blocked in various cases, and thus implemented unevenly. In this case the effective point of decision resides with the municipal councils.

A second general characteristic of an issue arena that would shape policy outcomes is the issue of who controls the effective point of decision. Again, Immergut points out that the probability of a veto in an issue arena "is not random", but that vetoes "can be predicted from the partisan composition of these different arenas" (Immergut 1992, 63). In the study of democratic reforms during a period of transition or consolidation, the critical factors would be whether the effective points of decision within an issue arena are controlled by hardliners (who would likely oppose reform), reformers (who would likely favor reform), and moderates (who might cast their lot either way). For example, if the effective point of decision regarding a state electoral reform was in the hands of the state congress, one could predict the likely shape of the approved reform

by knowing whether the majority of seats in the legislature were controlled by hardliners, or reformers. The IAF is particularly useful for this analysis of the partisan control over veto points, because the framework calls for all the actors in an issue arena to be identified, as well as their preferences regarding a particular issue (i.e., their goals).¹²

A final general characteristic of issue arenas that will influence policy outcomes is the degree of permeability or insulation of the decisionmaking process. In a permeable decisionmaking process, actors who control the effective decision point(s) are highly exposed and susceptible to the pressure of other actors within that issue arena. Conversely, in an issue arena with a high degree of insulation, the actors that control the effective decision points are not exposed or susceptible to the pressure of other actors in the issue arena. For example, returning to the case of the electoral reform, even if the congress is controlled by hardliners, if the decisionmaking process is opened up to hearings in which powerful pro-reform civic organization participate, and there is a great deal of awareness among voters about who is voting how, there may be sufficient pressure felt by the hardline members of congress to compromise with reform-minded members of congress. However, if the electoral system in this country was characterized by a high level of electoral fraud, such that the hardline members of congress were confident that their positions of power would not be contingent upon the approval of the electorate, the hardliners would feel they are insulated enough from political pressure to ignore the demands for a more sweeping electoral reform. Therefore, the degree of permeability or insulation of the decisionmaking process would influence the policy outcome.

A final important point of clarification needs to be made with regard to the issue arena concept. An area of reform may or may not be coterminous with a single issue arena. That is,

¹²Again, a more detailed description of the IAF appears in Chapter 1 of my dissertation (Barracca 1998). In this Chapter six features of the IAF are discussed: 1) the concept of the issue arena, 2) the general characteristics of issue arenas, 3) identifying actors in an issue arena and their goals and strategies, 4) the balance of power resources among actors in an issue arena, 5) a set of contextual variables which shape actors resources and strategies across issue arenas, and 6) a flow diagram of the democratization process viewed in light of the IAF.

some facets of reform consist of a single issue arena, while others consist of multiple issue arenas. In general, the determining factor is whether an area of reform involves one or more policy initiatives. An example of a single initiative comprising a single issue arena would be a state electoral reform. Here, a limited number of institutions have authority over passing the reform law, typically the office of the governor, the state legislature, and the state courts. Moreover, there would only be one set of actors involved in trying to influence the shape of the reform, such as the governor, legislators, political parties, and civic organizations. In contrast, complex reforms involving multiple policy initiatives typically comprise more than one issue arena. An example would be a municipal reforms designed to strengthen local governments. One component of a municipal reform might be a program to provide training in public administration to municipal employees. Very likely the institutional jurisdiction over this program and the set of actors involved in trying to influence policy outcomes would be different from another facet of municipal reform, such as efforts to increase the revenue generating capacity of local governments. In the cases examined below, elections and electoral reform consist of one issue arena each, whereas three distinct issue arenas are evaluated in the area of municipal reform..

Applying the Framework

Elections

The dominant feature of the electoral process in Yucatán is that it consists of a single issue arena that has traditionally been controlled by the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In the same way that the national PRI has controlled elections and government offices at the federal level since 1929, the state PRI has dominated the local electoral market.¹³ The ruling

¹³The PRI's dominance over elections at the federal, state, and local level has been achieved through several factors. First, is the consolidation of a one-party system in the 1930s which discouraged the formation of serious opposition parties. Second, was the party's establishment of a corporatist structure in the same decade, integrating labor, peasants, and the "popular sector" into officially sanctioned organizations. These corporatist organizations have traditionally been effective in mobilizing voters for the PRI, giving the ruling party a decisive electoral advantage. Third, the PRI's dominance over the branches of government at the state

party's electoral hegemony in the state up through the 1980's is made evident in the statistics for local and federal congressional elections in Table 1 in the appendix. The PRI/government's control over the electoral process in Yucatán has enabled it to engage in electoral fraud with relative impunity, which, in turn, has allowed it to maintain uninterrupted control over the governorship, the state congress and courts, and the vast majority of the state's 106 municipal governments. However, with the strengthening of the political opposition in the state over the past ten years, the central "game" in the issue arena of elections is characterized by efforts on the part of the opposition parties and civic organizations to clean up electoral fraud and have opposition victories respected. The primary means used by the opposition for achieving this objective has been to train and deploy poll watchers to monitor the conduct of elections to ensure the integrity of the process.

What are the general factors that characterize the issue arena of elections and how might these factors affect the efforts of opposition forces to make elections more transparent and honest? First, the electoral system is highly fragmented. Numerous official bodies are involved in administering and qualifying elections in the state, including some 1,500 precinct staffs, 106 Municipal Electoral Councils (*Consejos Municipales Electorales*, CMEs), fifteen District Electoral Councils (*Consejos Distritales Electorales*, CDEs), one State Electoral Council (*Consejo Electoral del Estado*, CEE) , two state-wide electoral courts, and an electoral college in the state legislature. The key point is that all these various bodies represent decision points, where rulings can be made which affect election results.

Not only are the effective points of decision in the electoral system numerous, but many are also highly permeable. For instance, until the most recent reform in 1994, the state's electoral laws gave opposition parties representation on the state, district, and municipal electoral councils--organizations which are in charge of organizing, administering, and qualifying

and federal levels has allowed them to implement electoral laws which favor the ruling party. Specifically the electoral codes have historically allowed the PRI to staff the institutions that are in charge of administering and qualifying elections with party sympathizers. Finally, control over the electoral institutions has enabled the PRI to engage in electoral fraud when necessary.

elections.¹⁴ Adding to their permeability, the meetings of these electoral councils have also open to the press, and they often tend to be the target of popular mobilizations aimed at influencing the decisions these bodies make. Creating additional points of access for the opposition are provisions in the electoral law which allow for opposition party representatives and the members of registered civic organizations to deploy poll watchers to monitor voting at the precinct level.

The final characteristic of the issue arena is who controls it. Prior to the 1994 reform, the state's electoral apparatus was controlled by the PRI/government, and more specifically, the state's governor and members of the congress. Legislative and executive control over the issue arena stems from the electoral laws which gave the governor and the legislative majority (always the PRI), the power to select a majority of the officials for the State Electoral Council.¹⁵ These officials, then designated officials for the district and municipal electoral councils (DDY 2/28/89, 1L, 9L). As a result of this staffing mechanism, these institutions have tended to sympathize with, and protect the interests of the ruling party.

How do these characteristics of the issue arena affect the process of cleaning up elections? While the issue arena of elections has been controlled by the PRI/government through the electoral apparatus of the state and their corporatist organizations, the fragmented and permeable nature of the institutions in this issue arena have permitted opposition forces to

¹⁴In December 1994 the state passed its most recent electoral reform, the Electoral Code of the State of Yucatán (CEDEY). Reflecting changes made to the federal electoral code, the CEDEY changed the previous method of integrating the CEE, CDEs, and CMEs with "non-partisan" officials and representatives from each of the registered political parties. Under the current law the CEE now consists of seven citizen councilors, chosen by the legislature, with names suggested by the registered political parties and civic organization that have been in existence of at least five years. Each of the CDEs and CMEs consist of five citizen councilors. Members for the district councils are chose by the CEE and members of the municipal councils are chosen by the CDEs, both from a list of candidates proposed by the political parties and civic organizations (DDY 12/15/94, 1L, 18L).

¹⁵The 1994 electoral law has made it more difficult for the PRI to control the staffing of the State Electoral Council. The law now requires the seven citizen councilors on the commission to be approved by the vote of four-fifths of the state legislators. If the congress can not produce this super-majority, then candidates are chosen by a lottery system (DDY 12/15/94, 1L, 18L). In the May 1995 state election, the PAN won twelve of the twenty-five seats in the state legislature, thus denying the PRI the ability to staff the CEE unilaterally.

have a significant impact. A channel of access that has made a substantial difference in electoral outcomes has been the ability of the opposition to deploy poll watchers at the precinct level. Opposition parties in the state, particularly the PAN, have always made efforts to "defend the vote". However, prior to 1985, these efforts were ad hoc. In contrast, in 1985 the PAN adopted a nationwide, coordinated campaign, involving organized recruitment of activists and training sessions to carry out the strategy. This organized strategy, which has continued in subsequent years, allowed the PAN to extend its monitoring of precincts significantly.

The fruits of the PAN's labor are revealed in the electoral data from the 1988 federal elections presented in Tables 2 and 3. The analysis shows that electoral fraud, in the form of inflated turnout rates, was much more extensive in precincts not covered by poll watchers than in those that were covered. Clearly, the presence of poll monitors has made it more difficult for precinct officials sympathetic to the PRI to perpetrate fraud. The success of this effort, however, depends on the ability of the opposition and non-partisan civic organizations, to deploy poll watchers. Factors affecting coverage would include the number of monitors that can be trained and mobilized, and the number of precincts in the state that need to be covered. The PAN, for instance, has had a more difficult time deploying poll monitors in the more remote rural areas of the state. As a party with the majority of its support coming from urban areas it is often difficult to find a sufficient number of trained rural residents who can perform this function. It is also difficult to get trained party activists who live in urban areas to go out to remote rural locales.

In light of these findings, one would expect that the process of cleaning up the electoral process in Mexico will occur unevenly, with more rapid gains being made in heavily populated urban areas, and slower gains in more lightly populated, remote rural areas. When one considers Mexico's most recent elections, this expectation appears to be born out. In the mid-term elections held on July 6, 1997, the consensus among political observers was that recent federal electoral reforms helped to make these elections some of the cleanest in Mexican history. For instance, the comments of the President of the citizens' coordinating committee, *Coordinadora Ciudadana*, reflected a commonly held view when he stated that the 1997 mid-term elections

were, in general, "clean and tranquil" (Jornada 7/10/97). Yet while underlining the advance of democratic elections, observers have also been quick to qualify their praises by noting that anomalies existed, and that many of the anomalies are concentrated in rural areas. For instance, elections in the predominantly rural states of Colima, Sonora, San Luis Potosí, and Campeche were marred by allegations of fraud (Faesler 7/15/97). Nayra Ledezma, an observer of the 1997 elections for the international organization Global Exchange, commented that democratic normalcy "has not yet arrived in rural Mexico." While lauding the electoral process in urban areas as a "civic fiesta", Ledezma stated that "in rural areas, the poverty, the militarization, the violence, as well as the old coercive practices, left thousands of campesinos and indigenous peoples excluded from the party" (Jornada 7/10/97). This climate of militarization and violence characterizes the state of Chiapas, where paramilitary groups still threaten peasants who organize to protest the status quo, the military has engaged in questionable human rights practices, and the Zapatista rebels burned ballot boxes on election day (Jornada 7/10/97).

Expanding on this theme, Alejandro Encimas Rodríguez, a member of the National Executive Committee of the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), maintains that

the states of the [rural] Southeast still live in the political past...with an electoral dynamic distinct from the rest of the country, defined by inequality, a lack of clean elections, and the operation of electoral institutions in favor of the PRI (Universal 7/14/97).

Here Encimas has in mind states such as Chiapas, Campeche, Tabasco, Yucatán, and Quintana Roo, where hardline PRIísta Governors still rule their states with the old authoritarian practices, engaging in electoral fraud, intimidating voters, and undermining the impartiality of the state's electoral tribunals. The persistence of these old practices were manifest in the November 1994 state elections in Tabasco, where supporters of PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo engaged in extensive electoral fraud to win the Governorship of the state. In the wake of the election and a heated post-electoral conflict, a report from the Federal Attorney General's Office confirmed

allegations by the opposition that Madrazo spent fifty times the legal limit for his campaign. Moreover, an independent commission found that significant electoral irregularities occurred in 70 percent of the polling booths (Eisenstadt 1996, 3). The old ways were also evident in the May 1995 state elections in Yucatán, where civic organizations reported widespread incidence of coercing voters and buying votes in rural areas, in addition to other typical forms of electoral fraud (Armesto 6/6/95). More recently, old style electoral practices were seen in the July 1997 state elections in Campeche, where both the PRD and the PAN have accused the PRI of orchestrating electoral fraud, denying the PRD of the Governorship and the PAN the mayorship of the capital. The opposition also has made allegations that the PRI appointed officials to the state's electoral tribunals who are PRI sympathizers (Faesler 7/15/97).

Considering the socio-economic conditions of Mexico's rural areas it is not unexpected that the practices of vote buying, coercion of voters, and other forms of electoral fraud persist. In these zones, the majority of voters exist in an environment characterized by poverty, economic dependence, and the persistence of clientelism. This places campesinos in a position where they are easily manipulated by political bosses who are not committed to democratic principles. These same conditions, which characterize much of rural Yucatán, provide fertile ground for illegal/and or immoral electoral practices. However, this analysis has shown that when civic and political organizations mobilize to defend the vote in rural areas, they can make a significant contribution in curbing the incidents of electoral fraud. As these organizations gain resources and expand their ability to monitor elections, the incidence of electoral fraud can be expected to decline. However, while this coverage remains incomplete, or efforts to monitor elections are resisted in particular areas, regional political bosses will still take advantage of local socio-economic conditions and political structures to help maintain their power

Electoral Reform

Like elections, the area of electoral reform also consists of one issue arena. However, they differ in that the arena of electoral reform is centralized and insulated, as opposed to fragmented and permeable. The issue arena of electoral reform is centralized because it contains

only two effective points of decision: the governor and the state legislature. Electoral reforms are passed or approved on the basis of two factors: whether the governor approves of the reform, and whether the legislature approves of the reform. In other words, both the governor and legislature are veto points. However, given that the executive and legislative majority have always been of the same party (the PRI), and the legislature has traditionally been submissive to the governor's will, the decisionmaking process is even further centralized, giving the governor great influence.

The issue arena of electoral reform is also insulated. This is due to informal rules of candidate selection within the PRI, whereby candidates for office are generally chosen by elected officials immediately above them in the hierarchy. For instance, state governors are often chosen by the president and the candidates for the state congress are typically chosen by the governor. These rules, combined with the PRI's corporatist electoral machinery which mobilizes votes for the PRI, prohibitions against elected officials serving consecutive terms, as well as the party's use of electoral fraud, create a situation where the governor and members of congress feel more responsible to the interests of the officials who selected them than they do to the voters. This insulation creates an environment where the negative consequences experienced by these officials for not responding to the demands of the political and civic community are minimized, thus the governor and members of congress are able to ignore societal demand to a great extent.

Given the monopoly of the PRI over the executive branch and the party's maintenance of its majority in the legislature, the PRI/government has controlled the issue arena of electoral reform in the state. From this one might assume that there has been little or no progress made in democratizing the state's electoral code. However, it would be misleading to imply that the attitudes and perceived interests of the state's governors and congressional deputies are uniform with regard to democratic reform. As is the case with the ruling party throughout the country, the state PRI in Yucatán is not monolithic. The party is split into factions which typically organize around two main factors. First, factions tend to organize around political cliques,

known as *camarillas*, which are headed by leading political figures from the state.¹⁶ These figures may be representing the state at the federal level as senators, deputies, members of the president's cabinet, or as heads of bureaucratic agencies. *Camarillas* also tend to form around the state's governors, past and present, who almost without exception have held federal-level offices and have significant political experience and contacts in Mexico City.

Groups in the PRI at all levels also tend to organize into hardline and moderate factions. The former are characterized by members who want to maintain the PRI's corporatist structure and the party's monopoly on political power. Therefore, they are willing to make few concessions to opposition demands for democratic reforms. In contrast, there are moderates in the PRI who recognize that trends toward greater party competition and political pluralism are inevitable. In response, moderates tend to favor a two-track strategy of gradually democratizing electoral law, while at the same time modernizing the party so that it can successfully compete under the new rules of a democratic game. To illustrate, the most powerful *camarilla* in the state of Yucatán is headed by the current governor Victor Cervera Pacheco (1995-2000). Cervera has a long and impressive political career in the PRI, serving as mayor of the state's capital Mérida, federal deputy, federal Senator, head of the National Peasants' Confederation and its state affiliate, and finally as the Secretary of Agrarian Reform in the cabinet of President Carlos Salinas. Cervera and the members of his *camarilla* (*erveristas*) are known to be hardliners when it comes to the issue of democratic reform. Another hardline *camarilla* in the state is organized around Dulce María Sauri, who is an ally of Cervera Pacheco and was interim governor from 1991 to 1993. In contrast, two moderate *camarillas* have been influential in the state over the past decade. The first was headed by Victor Manzanilla Schaffer, who was governor from 1988 to 1991. This *camarilla* weakened and dissolved in the wake of Manzanilla's forced resignation from office in 1991. The second, which is still intact, is headed

¹⁶Cornelius describes *camarillas* as "vertical groupings of several different levels of patron-client relationships" (Cornelius 1996, 40).

by Frederico Granja Ricalde, a long time member of the PRI who has served in many state and federal positions, and who held the post of governor from 1994 to 1995.

How do these characteristics of the issue arena affect the progress of electoral reform in the state? Since 1984 the state of Yucatán has had four major revisions to its electoral law. These reforms occurred under four different governors in 1984, 1989, 1993, and 1994. A central trend that was evident over the ten year period of reform was that the opposition, represented by civic organizations and political parties, emerged and intensified their efforts to influence the shape of the state's electoral laws. However, while these efforts had some success in achieving opposition demands, the overall impact has been limited.

This period of reform began in 1984, when the hardline Governor, Victor Cervera Pacheco, introduced a revised electoral law in the congress. There were few civic groups in the state at this time who were actively engaged in trying to democratize the political system. Those that did support democratic change, such as the Catholic church and some business chambers and professional associations, mainly participated in a reactive way by using the press to criticize the reform when it passed. Two of the three genuine opposition parties in the state, the PAN and PSUM, had expressed their views regarding electoral reform in the press, but the Governor and PRI-dominated legislature discouraged them from airing their proposals directly before the government. In the end, Cervera's reform was presented to the congress as a *fait accompli* and the reform was roundly criticized by the opposition for not adopting any of their suggested revisions. In fact the new law was seen as a step backward because it increased the number of officials directly appointed by the governor on the State Electoral Council, thus further ensuring the control of the PRI/government's over the electoral apparatus.

Four and a half years passed between the promulgation of the 1984 electoral reform and the passing of the 1989 reform. During this period three significant changes took place in this issue arena that would affect the reform process. The first was increasing electoral support for opposition parties during the late 1980s, which allowed them to expand their number of seats in the legislature from two to five (see Table 1). Second was the increasing presence and activity of

pro-democracy civic organizations in the political community, such as the Family Civic Front (FCF). Third, Victor Manzanilla Schaffer, a political moderate was elected governor.

Manzanilla promised to pass a more democratic electoral law and encouraged the political community to participate in developing it. While Manzanilla did not make good on the first of these promises, he did on the last. In stark contrast to the closed 1984 reform process, in 1989 the state congress created a special multiparty commission to hold hearings on electoral reform. This commission held nine months of "popular consultations" and preside over some three hundred talks that were presented by members of the political parties, legal experts, and civic associations, such as the Family Civic Front, the Business Coordinating Board, and the Federation of Professional Associations (DDY 3/7/89, 1L; DDY 12/5/89, 1L, 7L).

While the opposition's proposals varied on the details of the electoral reform, they shared three common demand. First, that a new mechanism be chosen for staffing the state's electoral councils, so that the PRI/government would no longer be guaranteed control over the electoral apparatus. Second, that the PRI-dominated Electoral College in the legislature no longer be given the ultimate authority for qualifying elections. And three, that the state's congressional electoral districts be redrawn in such a manner to end the partisan gerrymandering that was keeping the opposition from being represented in the state legislature in proportion to its electoral support. While the process of making room for popular consultations represented a great improvement from the closed process that was used during the 1984 reform, in the end it appeared that the involvement of civil and political society had little affect on the outcome of the reform. Although the PRI/government made some small concession, in the end the opposition failed to achieve any of its three principal objectives.

The level of interest and mobilization of opposition parties and civic organization in the issue arena of electoral reform only increased during the early 1990s. However, the open negotiation process established in 1989 did not continue into the 1993 reform. The principal reason for this change in the government's approach was that Governor Manzanilla Schaffer was replaced in office by a hardliner, interim-governor Dulce María Sauri. Despite opposition

demands to begin reform talks in 1992, the Governor put off the task until April 1993, eight months before state elections were to be held. When the talks finally began, proposals for electoral reform were submitted by the PAN, the Family Civic Front, the Association of Lawyers, and the business chambers. However, when the PRI majority in the congress presented its final draft of the reform, it did not incorporate the suggestions of the opposition in any significant way. In fact, the 1993 law was considered to be a step backward due to the fact that it gave the governor more control over appointing officials to the electoral councils than given under the 1989 law. In addition, the code still made the Electoral College the ultimate authority in qualifying elections and failed to do anything about redistricting (DDY 3/12/93, 1L, 7L; DDY 9/26/94, 1L, 13L).

The November 1993 election brought a moderate to the governorship, Frederico Granja Ricalde. Like Manzanilla, Granja expressed a desire to revise the electoral law taking in to consideration the views of the political community. The Governor backed up his rhetoric by putting forward his own reform proposals, which the opposition believed contained important advances (DDY 11/26/94, 1L, 13L). Appearing to follow the Governor's reformist overtures, the Congress initially opened up the process by establishing a "table of consultation" to receive and listen to the different reform proposals of political parties and civic organizations (DDY 11/26/94, 1L, 13L). Among the groups submitting versions of electoral reforms were the PAN, the Association of Lawyers, the Business Center of Mérida, and the Family Civic Front. While the Congress provided for an open process of hearings at first, in the end the negotiations came down to a closed discussion between the PAN and the PRI, the only two parties with seats in the legislature. With the PAN holding seven of the twenty five seats in the Congress, and the PRI holding the remaining eighteen, the ruling party, lead by its reform-minded governor, decided it would try to diffuse some of the opposition's pressure for political change by cutting a deal with the state's strongest opposition party (DDY 12/18/94, 1L, 21L)

The fact that the PRI and PAN had cut a deal agreeable to both was evident in the provisions of the reform. With respect to the rules for composing the state's electoral councils,

opposition groups other than the PAN expressed disappointment that the Congress did not listen to the majority of proposals that called for an end to government involvement in designating officials. The opposition wanted electoral officials chosen by lottery from names agreed to by the political parties and civic groups. In contrast, under the new law members of the CEE would ultimately be selected by a four-fifths vote of the Congress (DDY 12/15/94, 1L, 18L). Given the composition of the legislature at that time, this meant that the PRI and PAN could work in collaboration to select these officials. The opposition also criticized this mechanism for leaving open the possibility that one party could dominate the selection process (DDY 12/20/94, 1L, 15L). With respect to the qualification of elections, the 1993 reform took two steps forward and one step back. The improvements were that the opposition got the government to agree to dismantle the Electoral College and establish that the magistrates on the State Electoral Court would be chosen by lottery from a list of consensus candidates. The step back was that the law created a second electoral court, the Superior Electoral Court, as the ultimate authority for resolving elections. The magistrates on this court were to be chosen by the Superior Court of Justice, a body widely acknowledged to be staffed with partisans of the PRI (DDY 12/17/94, 1L, 13L). A final advance for the opposition was that the congress agreed to have new state congressional districts drawn.

What conclusions can be drawn from applying the IAF to the issue arena of electoral reform in Yucatán? A central trend that was evident over the ten year period of reform was that the opposition, represented by civic organizations and political parties, emerged and intensified their efforts to influence the shape of the state's electoral laws. Civil and political society went from playing a largely reactive role during the 1984 reform, to a proactive posture beginning with the 1989 reform, continuing through the most recent reform in 1994. This proactive strategy involved efforts by political parties and civic organizations to educate and mobilize the public, to develop reform proposals of their own, and to engage the PRI/government in a dialogue over the issue of electoral reform. What is most notable, however, about the intensified efforts of the opposition forces was their limited impact. As the four cases of reform illustrate,

the greater efforts of the opposition to bring about desired changes fell short in a number of key areas. The modest advance that did occur, took place under the leadership of moderate governors. In contrast, in the face of a highly mobilized opposition, the reform process took a step backward in 1993, under a hardline governor. This suggests the importance of leadership and the factor of who controls the effective decision points in an issue arena.

The failure of the opposition to achieve some of its most important goals can be attributed to the centralization and insulation of the issue arena's decisionmaking process. Four major factors provide this insulation. First, the PRI's hierarchical system of candidate selection, which gives elected officials more of an incentive to obey their political superiors than the electorate. Another factor is the formal rules in the Mexican political system which prohibit most elected officials from serving consecutive terms. Term limits also work to disconnect elected officials from the voters. A third factor is electoral fraud, which undermines the principal mechanism that citizens have to keep a political party accountable. Related to this is a final factor, the formal rules for comprising the electoral institutions. These rules have enabled the PRI to staff electoral institutions in the state with partisans, therefore enabling electoral fraud to be perpetrated with relative impunity.

What implications do these findings have for the pace and scope of electoral reform in Mexico as a whole? If these hypotheses are correct, one would expect to see the overall rate of electoral reform occur unevenly across the country's thirty-one states. In those states controlled by hardliners in the PRI, one would not expect to see great progress in electoral reform. An exception to this rule would be states like Chiapas that are experiencing unusually high levels of political conflict in the form of a guerrilla uprising. In these instances, increased scrutiny from national-level and international actors have forced members of the state PRI to adopt reforms that they would not have accepted absent the pressure. Conversely, in those states controlled by more moderate factions of the PRI, prospects for reform would be better.

Tentative confirmation for these hypotheses comes from Crespo's comparative analysis of state electoral laws (Crespo 1996). In this analysis Crespo uses the 1994 Federal Electoral

Law as a standard against which he compares state electoral laws that were passed between 1992 and 1995. His method assumes, not unreasonably, that the Federal laws in Mexico are often at the vanguard, and set the standard which the state's try to emulate. Crespo compares Mexico's thirty-one state electoral laws to the Federal code across twenty-three different provisions of the law. He finds that six states have electoral codes that are more advanced than the Federal law, eight states have codes which lag behind the standard set by the Federal law, and seventeen have laws which are similar to the Federal law (Crespo 1996, 155-157). The six state's with the most advanced electoral laws are Chihuahua, Baja California Norte, Aguascalientes, Chiapas, San Luis Potosí, and Tamaulipas. This list includes two states, Chihuahua and Baja California Norte, which are governed by the opposition PAN. This is not surprising since, upon coming to power, the PAN administrations passed electoral reforms with many democratic advances. The list also includes one Northern state (Tamaulipas) and two states from the Central region of the country (San Luis Potosí and Aguascalientes), where moderate factions of the PRI have governed. The one apparent anomaly on this list of states is Chiapas. However, an explanation for this case was provided above. The eight states which have the most retrograde electoral laws include Baja California Sur, Hidalgo, Guerrero, Colima, Oaxaca, Campeche, Mexico, and Quintana Roo. Five of these states (Hidalgo, Guerrero,, Oaxaca, Campeche, and Quintana Roo) are located in the poor, Southern region of the country; areas which have tended to have their state politics controlled by hardline political factions of the PRI. Again, Crespo's analysis only provides a tentative confirmation of the hypotheses postulated in this chapter. In order to have greater certainty, one would need to conduct a detailed study of the politics of electoral reform in these various states, focusing on whether hardline or moderate political factions of the PRI had greater influence. Crespo's work does not offer this type of analysis, and such a study is beyond the scope of this present research.

Municipal Reform: Devolving Public Services

Unlike elections and electoral reform, municipal reform is a multifaceted initiative that consists of several distinct issue arenas. In 1984 the Mexican government implemented a

municipal reform designed to strengthen the administrative and financial capacity of local governments. To achieve this goal the initiative made two principal reforms to Article 115 of the Federal Constitution.¹⁷ The first was to clearly designate in the Constitution which municipal services were to be performed by the municipality and to provide municipalities with the legal authority to initiate the transfer of any of these services that they were not performing. This first component of the reform consists of one issue arena that will be the subject of this section. The second component of the municipal reform, initiatives aimed at strengthening the financial capacity and autonomy of the municipalities, consists of its own distinct issue arenas. These will be taken up in the next section.

The impetus for the 1984 Municipal Reform was a growing consensus among policymakers in Mexico City that decades of administrative and fiscal centralism were hindering the economic, social, and political development of the country (CNEM 1985, 30). By 1982 the centralization of public revenue reached the point that the federal government controlled ninety-one cents of every dollar that the government collected in taxes and fees, leaving only eight cents for the states, and one cent for the municipalities (Ortega 1988, 339). This distribution of public revenue also meant that municipalities lacked the resources they needed to adequately provide the public services that they had been designated. Often times, responsibility for the provision of these services, such as road construction, potable water, and sanitation, would be taken over by the state governments with the justification that the municipalities did not have the administrative, technical, or financial resources to handle them. Centralization of service provision at the state level also weakened democracy at the local level. Simply stated, the less control that municipal governments have over the territory that they govern, the less influence the citizens of that municipality have over the direction of policies that more immediately affect their lives.

¹⁷Article 115 is the section of the Mexican Constitution that deals with the municipality.

Municipal governments, particularly those controlled by the opposition, have been the principal proponents of the initiative to transfer public services. This is because they see reforms aimed at expanding their functions and budgets as necessary for improving the delivery of public services at the local level and as a means of increasing municipal autonomy vis-à-vis the state and federal levels of government. In contrast, state governments have been more ambivalent about transferring public services, showing support in some cases and resistance in other, depending upon the interests involved in a particular case. The primary reason given by state governments for opposing the reform in certain circumstances is that municipal governments do not have adequate human, technical, financial, and administrative resources to deliver many of the services granted to them under the Article 115 reform. In addition to technical reasons, state governments have also had political motivations for not wanting to affect the transfer of public services. Specifically, when the transfer of a public service entails the loss of a significant source of political patronage--in the form of budget and jobs--state officials have resisted devolving the service.

In contrast to the arena of elections, where there are multiple decision points, in the issue arena of transferring public services there are, in principle, two decision points. According to the law, municipal councils have to reach a bilateral agreement with the state government before any services can be transferred. Therefore, both the municipal councils and the state government can exercise a veto over the reform. However, three factors have effectively centralized the decisionmaking power in the hands of the state governments. First, municipal governments have seldom resisted the idea of having services transferred to them as long as they are given the budget and the necessary technical and administrative training that will enable them carry out their responsibilities. For this reason, decisions to proceed with implementation have tended to rest with the state government. Second, the administration of President de la Madrid, which authored the Municipal Reform, did not establish specific rules or timetables to guide implementation. Moreover, they failed to create an agency with the authority and power to carry

out the initiative. Without this leadership from the federal level, the primary responsibility for implementing the Reform fell on the state governments, and the governors in particular.

A final factor has to do with the way state governments have interpreted the language of the Municipal Reform. The role of the states is spelled out in Section III of the Reform declaring that "The municipal governments, *with the assistance of the states--when it is necessary and the law requires it--* will be in charge of the following public services" (CNEM 1985, 65; italics mine). Governors have tended to interpret this clause of the Reform to mean that whenever the state government deems it necessary, they will assist municipal governments in delivering a public service. This provision opens a loophole that allows the state executives to block the Reform, because they are left to judge *which* municipalities need continued assistance in providing a service and which do not. Moreover, the state can decide how extensive this assistance should be. For instance, the role taken on by a state government in delivering a service at the municipal level could be so extensive that the municipal government is only responsible for a negligible part of the activity. In this way, the objectives of the Reform--strengthening the capacity of municipal governments--is not achieved.

Not only is the issue arena of municipal reform centralized, it is also insulated. This is because the main actors in the state governments with authority over the reform are the governor and the bureaucrats who administer the public services. As noted above, the governor is insulated from political pressure. The bureaucrats are similarly insulated, because they are appointed to their posts by the governor and maintain their positions as long as the executive is happy with their performance.

I have evaluated the implementation of the reform in four municipalities in the state of Yucatán.¹⁸ These four municipalities are Tetiz, a rural municipality, with a population of 3,444; Progreso, a semi-urban municipality, with a population of 37,806; Tizimín, also a semi-urban municipality, with a population of 54,544; and Mérida, the only urban municipality in the state,

¹⁸For a more in depth analysis see Barracca (1998), Chapter 5.

with a population of 556,819.¹⁹ Municipalities of varying size were chosen to explore the hypothesis that the state government would more likely transfer services to larger municipalities due to their superior administrative, technical, and financial capacity. Interestingly, the research showed that the small municipality (Tetiz) and the two medium-sized municipalities (Progreso and Tizimín) had been transferred an important public service that had not been devolved to Mérida. This was the service of potable water, a function clearly specified in Article 115 as pertaining to the municipal level.

What explains this counter-intuitive result? A number of sources point a finger at partisan politics. Specifically, a member of the PAN delegation in congress has suggested that the Board of Potable Water and Sewerage of the State of Yucatán (JAPAY), as a state agency which employs approximately 320 workers and has an annual budget of N\$28 million pesos, is a source of valuable political patronage for the state government (Sauma interview). In Mexico, as in other political systems, the ability to offer jobs and control where an agency's budget is spent is a valuable political resource that is not easily given up. Support for the idea that patronage is a factor obstructing the transfer of the JAPAY also comes from the local media. One reporter suggest that the agency has been used as a "political trampoline" and as a way of giving political prizes or punishment to officials (DDY 4/24/94, 1L, 12L). These political prizes include employment and contracts for jobs and materials supply. This reason alone would be sufficient for state officials to decide that the transfer of the JAPAY is not something in their interests. Moreover, the PAN and other critics of the official party suggest that the state government does not want to transfer the JAPAY because the state government uses the agency's budget as a "little cash box" to finance the political campaigns and activities of the PRI (DDY 4/24/94, 1L, 12L). While the PAN offers no proof in support of this specific accusation, it is difficult to see how

¹⁹These population statistics come from the 1990 Census (INEGI 1990a, 110-113). Officials in Mérida complain that the census undercounted the population in Mérida and suggest that the capital's actual number of inhabitants is closer to 700,000. The 1995 population estimate from the *Consejo Estatal de Población* put the municipalities population at 651,925 (DDY 7/10/95, 11L).

they could since the financial records of the JAPAY are guarded closely by the state government and opposition deputies in the state congress have not been given access to the agency's budget records despite repeated requests (Sauma interview). The reluctance on the part of PRI deputies to give opposition deputies access to these records adds to suspicions about how the agency's budget is actually spent.

In contrast to the case of Mérida, the potable water agencies in the three smaller municipalities do not represent as great a source of patronage, and therefore, the state government has been willing to transfer them. These findings suggests that devolution of public services under the Municipal Reform will progress unevenly throughout Mexico, with the outcomes determined by two primary factors. First, state governments will likely resist transferring municipal service to small municipalities that do not have adequate resources to handle them. While the three smaller municipalites in this study were allowed to take over the administration for potable water, this does not imply that they are capable of carrying out all the functions necessary for delivering that service to their residents. In fact, Tetiz, Progreso and Tizimín do not have the resources necessary to deliver this service in an autonomous manner. In all the municipalities in the state, the administration of potable water only includes the functions of planning public works, billing and collecting fees, and making minor repairs. It does not include the ability to finance major public works projects, the ability to make extensions to the potable water system, or even make large scale repairs. Only Mérida has the economic, technical, and operational capacity to participate in a significant way in these activities. In contrast, all the other municipalities in the state depend on the state and federal government and private sector firms for the necessary financing and equipment to undertake these aspects of delivering the service. In this light, it is ironic that administrative functions have not been handed over to the municipal government of Mérida. As state governments consider the transfer of services to the municipal level and see barrier like these, they may chose not to implement the reform. A second factor influencing a state government's decision to transferring public services is the extent to which the service provides an important source of political patronage. The case

of the JAPAY in Mérida suggests that this obstacle to reform would be more probable in urban areas. Confirmation of both these hypotheses requires further research in other states.

Reforming Municipal Finances

The second component of the municipal reform was aimed at strengthening the financial capacity and autonomy of the municipalities.²⁰ The two policy instruments employed to achieve this goal were the 1980 revision of the *Ley de Coordinación Fiscal* (Fiscal Coordination Law, LCF), an initiative designed to increase federal revenue sharing (*participaciones*) to the municipalities and the 1984 revisions to Article 115 of the Constitution transferring the collection of the property tax (*impuesto predial*) from the states to the municipalities.

The first aspect of the reform to be considered is the revisions to Mexico's system of federal revenue sharing, the Fiscal Coordination Law, or LCF. Constituting its own issue arena, the decisionmaking process in this area of reform is centralized and insulated. It is centralized because under the rules of the LCF, the state governments have been designated as the sole distribution channels for disbursing federal *participaciones* to the municipalities in their territory. More specifically, this task is carried out by the governor, in conjunction with his Secretary of Finance and the Finance Committee of the State Congress. While federal guidelines restrict to some degree how states must distribute *participaciones*, state officials have been given a significant degree of control over the formula they use for determining how much of the total each municipality in the state will receive. In other words, they can alter the percentage of the total they distribute to each municipality by making adjustments to the criteria used in the formula. The issue arena is also insulated, because the governor, the Secretary of Finance and the Finance Committee of the State Congress are removed from political pressure. This is due to the formal and informal rules of candidate selection, reelection, bureaucratic appointment, and conducting elections that were discussed above.

²⁰For a more in depth analysis see Barracca (1998), Chapter 6.

The ability of the state government to adjust the distribution formula used in their state, along with the centralized and insulated character of the issue arena, have an important affect on the outcome of this reform. Specifically, the use of varying formulas in different states has meant that certain types of municipalities in a particular state are favored over others, and that the treatment of municipalities with similar socio-economic profiles varies across states? This is revealed in Rodríguez's analysis of the bias in distribution of federal allocations in eight of Mexico's poorest states (Rodríguez 1997). Using correlation coefficient calculations between *participaciones* per capita on the one hand, and size, percentage rural, and the poverty index on the other, she arrived at the following conclusions. In three states (Chiapas, Veracruz, and Guerrero) the state governments distribute *participaciones* in a way that favors large municipalities and in three other states (Hidalgo, Michoacán, and Zacatecas) the bias in allocation favors small municipalities (Rodríguez 1997, 108). These findings suggest that the impact of the revised LCF in strengthening the financial capacity of municipalities would vary across these states, with the small municipalities in the first group lagging behind those in the second group, assuming other factors are equal.²¹ My own analysis comparing per capita distribution of *participaciones* in urban, semi-urban, and rural municipalities in Yucatán is presented in Table 4 in the appendix. These findings, while not definitive due to the small number of cases (4 of 106) and the lack of a complete data set, suggest that there is also a bias toward smaller municipalities in Yucatán. In this case, Tinum, a small, rural municipality receives over three times as much in per capita *participaciones* as Tizimín and almost twice as much as Progreso, the two semi-urban municipalities. Since variations in distribution formulas are common across states, one could expect that reform outcomes would vary nationwide.

Another troubling aspect of fiscal centralism in Mexico is that municipalities have been very dependent on the federal level of government for their revenues. From 1983 to 1991 *participaciones*, on average, accounted for almost 56 percent of total municipal income (INEGI

²¹Differences in the amount of *participaciones* received by municipalities could be offset by the receipt of other federal transfers such as Pronasol funds and special project funds.

1990b, 1991, 1994). This figure, however masks the more extreme cases of small rural municipalities which typically receive 80 to 90 percent of their revenues from federal *participaciones*. This lack of fiscal autonomy for local governments was the impetus for the second component of the municipal financial reform, the transfer of the property tax. Traditionally, the property tax had been collected by the state governments, which then distributed the funds to the municipal level. However, often times the state governments did not distribute the funds to their municipalities in very equitable manner, and in some cases did not distribute the funds at all (Rodríguez 1997, 133). Therefore, it was thought that transferring this function to the municipal level would help local governments achieve a greater degree of financial independence.

The federal government gave responsibility for implementing the transfer of the property tax to the state governments. Given that the tax represented an important source of revenue for the state government, one might expect that the government of Yucatán resisted implementation of the reform. After all, they resisted the transfer of a public service that constitutes an important source of patronage. The research suggests, however, that this is not the case. In fact, the devolution of the property tax has been successfully carried out in the state, with all the municipalities being transferred the tax. The success of this program in Yucatán and in other states raises an important question. Why did this facet of the Municipal Reform succeed when other components of the initiative, such as transferring public services to Mérida, failed? In answering these questions two factors seem to offer the best explanations. The first is differences in the issue arena's formal rules for implementing various aspects of the Reform. While Section III of Article 115 provided a loophole for the state governments to prevent the transfer of public services to the municipal level, Section IV--covering the transfer of the property tax--provides no such loophole. Instead, it is unambiguous in stating that "in all cases" municipal governments will collect the property tax (CNEM 1985, 66). While Section IV does go on to say that "the municipalities are able to enter into agreements with the states so that they can take charge of some of the functions related to the administration of [the property tax]"

(CNEM 1985, 66), the language of the provision makes it clear that municipal governments, at the very least, will collect the tax. The clause about state-municipal collaborative agreements allows municipal governments to structure the way in which the property tax will be transferred, however, it does not give the state government the legal grounds to obstruct the transfer. Instead, Section IV mandates the states to take action regarding this policy, and leaves them with no discretion as to whether they will do it or not. In this sense, the formal rules of Section IV centralized the effective point of decisionmaking in the hands of an insulated federal government that strongly supported the initiative.

The second factor which, no doubt, helps account for the successful transfer of the property tax relates to the feasibility of the transfer. Very simply, the task of collecting the property tax does not require as much administrative, technical, and financial capability as providing a public service such as potable water. Therefore, state governments contemplating the transfer, had to be less concerned about the potential of devolving a function that local governments did not have the capacity to perform. Similarly, municipal governments, in most cases, would not hesitate to take over responsibility for the task, since it would not pose as great an administrative and financial burden on their operations. There have, however, been exceptions to this rule. Rodríguez points out that in several states, municipalities have not wanted to take on the responsibility for the collection of the property tax due to a lack of adequate administrative infrastructure. In these instances, local governments have entered into collaborative agreements with their state governments so that state officials will continue to collect and distribute the tax (Rodríguez 1997, 133).²² The important point, however, is that formal rules in the issue arena give the municipality a choice as to whether it will perform the function, while at the same time denying state governments control over a veto point that would enable them to obstruct the implementation of the policy.

²²Chiapas is an example where the state government continues to collect the property tax for all its municipalities (Rodríguez 1997, 133).

Conclusion

This concluding section offers some general principles or hypotheses that can be taken from the analysis and applied to other cases of democratic reform. It was suggested that three characteristics of an issue arena have an important affect over the outcomes of the reform process. These are 1) the degree of centralization vs. fragmentation of the decisionmaking process, 2) who controls the effective points of decision in an issue arena, and 3) the degree of permeability vs. insulation of the decisionmaking process. It can be helpful to depict these three characteristics, with centralization vs. fragmentation and permeability vs. insulation as two dimensions of a table. Doing this, Table 5 comes up with eight possible contexts in which implementation of reforms can occur.

Table 5--Determinants Affecting the Outcomes of Democratic Reforms

Issue Arena Controlled by Non-democratic Regime

Issue Arena Characteristics	Insulated	Permeable
Centralized	I	III
Fragmented	II	IV

Issue Arena Controlled by Reformers

Issue Arena Characteristics	Insulated	Permeable
Centralized	V	VII
Fragmented	VI	VIII

Box I represents an issue arena that is centralized, insulated, and controlled by the non-democratic regime. This scenario characterized four of the five issue arenas discussed in this paper: electoral reform, the devolution of public services in Yucatán, and the two components of municipal financial reform. For instance, the analysis of electoral reforms in the state revealed that reform did not advance when the governor and legislative majority represented hardline factions, whereas reforms progressed at a very gradual pace when the governor and legislative

majority were from moderate factions of the PRI. This findings suggests the following hypotheses:

In issue arenas characterized by centralization, insulation, and control led by hardliners, reforms will not progress. Conversely, in issue arenas characterized by centralization, insulation, and control led by moderates, reforms will progress slowly.

Moreover, it was the centralized and insulated character of the issue arena that allowed decisionmakers of the non-democratic regime to adopt their electoral law without significant modification, despite the mobilization of the opposition. From this one could hypothesize that

in issue arenas characterized by centralization, insulation, and control led by hardliners or moderates, the probability that pressure from reformers in political and civil society would influence the outcomes of the reform process is low.

Box IV in Table 5 describes the issue arena of elections in Yucatán. Although the electoral apparatus in the state is controlled by the non-democratic regime, the fragmented and permeable character of the issue arena has enabled opposition poll watchers to have a substantial impact on cleaning up the electoral process in those locations where they are deployed. In those areas not covered by poll watchers, electoral fraud has persisted to a large degree. These findings give rise to the following hypotheses:

Where an issue arena is fragmented, permeable, and contains a mobilized opposition, democratic reforms will progress at a more rapid pace. Conversely, where an issue arena is fragmented, permeable, but does not contain a mobilized opposition, democratic reforms will progress at a slower pace.

What can be said about Box II? Depending on the level of analysis one chooses to study the reform process, the Box I issue arenas mentioned above could also be viewed as representing Box II scenarios. For instance, if one looks at reforms to the system of federal revenue sharing from the viewpoint of municipalities looking up to the state level, then these issue arena would

appear centralized. That is, power over the distribution of *participaciones* is centralized in the hands of the state government of Yucatán. However, if one were looking at this same reform from the perspective of the federal level looking down to the state level, the issue arena would be fragmented, with decisionmaking power over implementation in the hands of Mexico's thirty-one state governments. The analysis of this component of financial reform showed that the centralized and insulated process of decisionmaking over the formulas for distributing *participaciones* resulted in varied criteria being used to disburse federal allocations to municipalities across states. This, in turn, resulted in municipalities in different states that share the same socio-economic profiles, receiving varied levels of assistance under the reform. While the implications of Box II scenarios will vary depending on the type of policy involved and the particular balance of power of the actors in the issue arena, the findings of the case presented in this paper suggest the following hypothesis:

When an issue arena is fragmented, reforms will progress unevenly.

These two levels of analysis have their associated advantages and disadvantages. From the perspective of the municipal level, one would be in a good position to evaluate variations in the implementation of democratic reforms across municipalities in one state. However, they would not have a good vantage point to access the reform process in other states. In contrast, analyses starting from the federal level would allow a researcher to evaluate variations in the reform process across states. However, a drawback to this approach would be that the work load would make it very difficult to examine the impact of reform on municipal governments. The size of the task is not so great a problem with studies that focuses on the municipalities within one state, or that compare a limited number of municipalities across states.

Box III represents a final setting in which reform occurs under the control of a non-democratic regime. While none of the issue arenas studied in this paper fit into Box III, it is not difficult to think of an example of an issue arena of reform that is centralized yet permeable. For

instance, one can imagine an authoritarian regime in which policymaking is highly centralized in the office of the executive. This regime might be in the not uncommon situation where they are faced with the issue of how to sequence economic liberalization and democratization. They do not want to democratize, but their commitment to economic liberalization has made them susceptible to pressures for political reform coming from world financial institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank, and their most important trading partners, the United States and Canada. Under these circumstances, while the effective decision point for democratic reform policies might be centralized, the issue arena would be permeable, due to the significant impact foreign actors have on the decisionmaking process.

Boxes V through VIII are issue arenas that are controlled by reformers. These reformers might include reform-minded members of an incumbent non-democratic regime, members of the democratic opposition in a nondemocratic regime, or even reformers who are elected officials in a new democracy. Due to the fact that the issue arenas examined in this paper do not fit into any of these scenarios, this research cannot shed much light on these four scenarios. However, intuitively one would expect that democratic reformers in insulated issue arenas would have greater autonomy to implement their policies (Boxes V and VI) and less autonomy in permeable ones (Boxes VII and VIII). Of course, reform outcomes would also be shaped by the specific balance of power in an issue arena between the coalition of actors in support of the reform and the coalition opposed to it.

To conclude, this paper has presented the Issue Arenas Framework (IAF) as an alternative for addressing the question of why democratic reforms progress unevenly within a regime undergoing a process of democratic transition. The issue arenas construct is useful because it helps bring structure and coherence to the analysis of democratic reform. It does this by providing a realistic picture of the policymaking processes, its dynamic and the relevant factors that shape policy outcomes. The IAF also offers comparability to the analysis, because the framework can be taken and applied in varied settings.

Appendix

Table 1--Percentage of the Vote Received by Parties In Local and Federal Congressional Elections in Yucatán, 1967 to 1995

Year	Election	PRI	PAN	Others
1967	Local	83.4	16.3	0.3
1967	Federal	86.0	10.6	3.3
1970	Local	93.3	6.1	0.5
1970	Federal	84.1	15.5	0.5
1973	Local	100	-	-
1973	Federal	79.3	6.4	2.6
1975	Local	98.2	-	2.0
1976	Federal	96.4	-	3.5
1978	Local	95.3	-	4.7
1979	Federal	89.2	6.7	3.0
1981	Local	78.6	16.7	4.7
1982	Federal	79.7	18.0	2.7
1984	Local	78.4	16.2	5.4
1985	Federal	83.5	13.1	2.0
1987	Local	82.9	10.8	6.3
1988	Federal	67.9	29.2	1.3
1990	Local	63.8	29.8	6.0
1991	Federal	58.9	34.4	2.0
1993	Local	58.0	36.5	2.6
1994	Federal	53.0	40.0	4.7
1995	Local	48.5	44.0	4.5

Source: Consejo Electoral del Estado de Yucatán; Registro Nacional de Electores; Instituto Federal Electoral; Registro Federal de Electores; Sierra, Paz, y Huchim (1986). I would like to thank Guadalupe Huchim Koyoc of *Cambio 21*, Yucatán for sharing his electoral data with me.

Note: Federal elections are for the Chamber of Deputies. All results are using relative majority vote. As an expression of protest, the PAN did not participate in the local elections of 1973, 1975, and 1978, nor in the federal election of 1976.

Table 2--Analysis of Electoral Fraud by District Demonstrated by Inflated Turnout Rates in Precincts not Covered by Opposition Poll Watchers: 1988 Federal Elections.

First District (80% of the territory of Mérida)	
Number of Precincts	124
Precincts with Opposition Poll Watchers	124 (100%)
Turnout	47.5%
Percentage of Vote for the PAN	63.1%
Percentage of Vote for the PRI	33.6%
Percentage of Vote for Other Parties	0.3%

Second District (Mostly Rural)	Precincts with Poll Watchers	Precincts without Poll Watchers
Number of Precincts	107 (49.7%)	108 (50.3)
Turnout	31.6%	91.6%
Percentage of Vote for the PAN	28%	3.3%
Percentage of Vote for the PRI	70%	96%
Percentage of Vote for Other Parties	2.0%	0.3%

Third District (Mostly Rural)	Precincts with Poll Watchers	Precincts without Poll Watchers
Number of Precincts	117 (50.6%)	114 (49.4%)
Turnout	31.9%	80%
Percentage of Vote for the PAN	37.1%	2.3%
Percentage of Vote for the PRI	61.6%	97.1%
Percentage of Vote for Other Parties	1.2%	0.5%

Fourth District (Mostly Rural)	Precincts with Poll Watchers	Precincts without Poll Watchers
Number of Precincts	127 (64.8%)	35.2%
Turnout	38.5%	95.7%
Percentage of Vote for the PAN	45.5%	2.6%
Percentage of Vote for the PRI	52%	96.7%
Percentage of Vote for Other Parties	2.5%	0.7%

Source: Frente Cívico Familiar 1988.

Note: For a precinct to be considered covered by poll watchers, it means that at least one official opposition party representative (i.e., those authorized under the electoral law) is present, or that at least one unofficial poll watcher (i.e., those not authorized under the electoral law) is present. A precinct is considered uncovered if there are no official or unofficial poll watchers present.

Table 3--Analysis of Electoral Fraud In Five Rural Municipalities Demonstrated by Inflated Turnout Rates in Precincts not Covered by Opposition Poll Watchers: 1988 Federal Elections.

Municipality and Precinct Number	Election Monitors at Polls?	Total Votes Cast	Number of Registered Voters	Percent Turnout
Conkal				
1	yes	117	322	36
2	yes	205	583	35
3	yes	229	1031	22
4	no	476	477	98
5	no	52	51	102

Bokobá				
1	no	509	579	88
2	no	557	653	85

Hocabá				
1	yes	60	338	18
2	yes	92	475	19
3	yes	97	541	18
4	yes	63	409	15
5	no	506	552	92

Dzemul				
1	yes	236	879	27
2	no	754	838	90
3	no	421	582	72
4	no	93	103	90

Source: Frente Cívico Familiar 1988.

Note: For a precinct to be considered covered by poll watchers, it means that at least one official opposition party representative (i.e., those authorized under the electoral law) is present, or that at least one unofficial poll watcher (i.e., those not authorized under the electoral law) is present. A precinct is considered uncovered if there are no official or unofficial poll watchers present.

Table 4--Per capita *Participaciones* in Four Municipalities, 1976-1994 (new 1994 pesos)

Year	Mérida (urban)	Progreso (semi-urban)	Tinum (rural)	Tizimín (semi-urban)
1976	58.21	n/a	n/a	13.29
1977	56.76	17.40	n/a	11.20
1978	47.56	n/a	n/a	9.05
1979	44.58	11.58	n/a	7.60
1980	60.30	9.32	n/a	6.18
1981	58.13	14.04	n/a	9.36
1982	46.59	37.33	n/a	17.85
1983	85.53	83.93	61.04	61.72
1984	79.76	56.99	220.85	63.50
1985	161.47	106.75	138.79	78.33
1986	124.99	65.33	75.96	55.18
1987	125.47	95.39	91.82	64.07
1988	101.96	129.59	70.39	58.53
1989	73.12	n/a	n/a	n/a
1990	80.02	n/a	n/a	n/a
1991	102.80	n/a	n/a	n/a
1992	98.54	n/a	n/a	n/a
1993	89.69	n/a	n/a	n/a
1994	105.13	n/a	n/a	n/a
Average	84.24	57.06	109.81	35.07

Source: Compiled with data in INEGI (1990b, 1991, 1994); and *Ayuntamiento* de Mérida (1995)

Note: Data adjusted for inflation using the Indices Nacional de Precios al Consumidor. Banco de México, *Indicadores Económicos*.

Note: n/a means data not available

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