Conclusion: Effective Rules, Economic Inclusion, and Political Stability; Lessons for Young and Unequal Democracies

Sources of Political Factionalism and Cohesion in the “Two Mexicos”

This comparative analysis of the “two Mexicos”—characterized by the states of Oaxaca and Nuevo León—represents an attempt to explain the presence or absence of uncivil modes of political action in young and unequal democracies. This study of contentious politics in Mexico focused on the effects of two main explanatory factors (socioeconomic and institutional) and provided an explanation of the specific mechanisms through which these variables operate and interact with other factors to generate the relevant phenomena. This research indicates that subnational variations in APF and cohesion are more related to matters of institutional (in)effectiveness and divisions and pacts among political elites, rather than to socioeconomic factors.

Evidence also shows that there is no simple economic or political explanation of the presence or absence of uncivil modes of political action in this young and unequal democracy. According to Rosa Nida Villalobos, former head of PRI Women, massive popular rebellion in Mexico has to do with “fights to gain access to power and money. This phenomenon is also related to the problem of poverty…It is a monster with a thousand
heads and a thousand interests” (Lacey 26). As indicated by De la Torre, “Neither socioeconomic conditions, the repression of peasants and indigenous populations, nor the external influence of [certain] groups and political activists per se elucidate the complex interplay of factors that lie beneath the causes of organized rebellion” (“Economic Polarization and Governability in Mexico” 6). In fact, a series of institutional, structural, contextual, and agent-related factors account for the presence or absence of political factionalism. Institutional limitations, ideology, class, and economic expectations are all relevant to understanding serious political divisions and patterns of massive political conflict in the Mexican states.

**The Key Role of Institutions in the “Democratic Era”**

Basic evidence provided here shows that the roots of major political conflict and factionalism in Mexican states in the first six years of the twenty-first century had less to do with leftist ideology or economic exclusion than with electoral exclusion, political patronage, corruption, and old political rivalries. In fact, contemporary manifestations of violent political conflict and massive antigovernment protest essentially have an institutional origin. Notwithstanding the great relevance of structural economic factors (such as the economic exclusion of certain groups or economic inequality) in any explanation of political factionalism, the rules of the political game and other political conditions seem to have a greater impact on the incidence of political violence and major civil strife in today’s Mexico. The present research shows that the political context and political-territorial structure of the different states, the “political repertoires” of the decision makers, and the essential rules of the political game are key in accounting for the presence or absence of political factionalism in the country.

Contemporary political developments in Mexico take place in an era of democratic change and democratic consolidation in certain parts of the country. Analyzing this context is crucial to understanding subnational institutional development and its impact on contentious politics in Mexico. In Mexico’s current democratic era, there seems to be a real gap between the relatively developed, democratic, and more equal North and the poor, unequal, authoritarian, and divided South, where traditions of clientelism and patronage often persist despite national and local elections. Democratization and democratic consolidation in northern Mexico apparently reinforced patterns of political cohesion and promoted social peace in this region of the country, until 2006, when new dynamics of transnational organized crime changed the whole social-political-economic panorama in Mexico. In contrast, weak democratic institutions, as well as authoritarian