Accountability Politics

Power and Voice in Rural Mexico

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Transitions to Accountability: Disentangling State and Regime[1]

Changing Continuity

How can the seeds of accountability ever grow in authoritarian environments? Embedding accountability into the state is an inherently uneven, partial, and contested process. Campaigns for public accountability often win limited concessions at best, but they can leave cracks in the system that serve as handholds for subsequent efforts to open up the state to public scrutiny. This study suggests that the construction of public accountability is driven by cycles of mutually reinforcing interaction between the thickening of civil society and state reformist initiatives. Though such state–society synergy remains the exception rather than the rule in Mexico, the exceptions matter.[2] These processes tend to unfold outside the realm of national elections and political parties. As a result, explaining accountability requires disentangling states from regimes. This study analyzes two decades of rural citizens' struggles to hold the Mexican state accountable, exploring both change and continuity before, during, and after national electoral turning points. Though Mexican society is majority urban, 34 percent of the population lives in localities of less than 10,000 inhabitants—more than 35 million people (Zúñiga 2007).

The focus here is on *accountability politics*—defined as the arena of conflict over whether and how those in power are held publicly

[2] The state–society synergy approach seeks to identify the dynamics and impacts of the mutual empowerment of actors in state and society. See Fox (1992*a*), Evans (1997) and Migdal (2001) as well as Ackerman (2004*a*, 2004*b*, 2007), Borras (2001), Hochstetler and Keck (forthcoming), Houtzager (2003), Migdal, Kohli, and Shue (1994), and Wang (1999). This approach is consistent with Long's focus on actors and interface analysis (1989, 1999, 2001).

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responsible for their decisions. Accountability politics involves challenging who is accountable to whom, as clients become citizens and bureaucrats become public servants. Accountability politics can overlap with prodemocracy movements, but are not limited to them. Accountability campaigns often involve protest, but are not limited to contestation. Constructing accountability involves challenging the state, but also transforms the state. This umbrella concept treats the construction of public accountability as a process that is related to but distinct from electoral competition, as will be discussed below.

Accountability politics provides the conceptual lens through which this book explores the rugged landscapes of power and voice in late twentieth-century rural Mexico. The research strategy compares rural civil society–state relations across regions, branches, and levels of government, with a special interest in understanding how initiatives for change can scale up, down, and across, between the local and regional and the national and transnational. The subnational comparative method is pursued with institutional ethnography and quantitative indicators, both interpreted through a political economy lens that assumes that incentives matter.

To look for accountability in rural Mexico might seem puzzling, since it remains so scarce. Yet the weakness of public accountability reveals more about the power of those who enjoy impunity than it does about the aspirations of those citizens who try to change the balance of power between state and society. Mexicans' widely documented lack of trust in government reflects their actual experiences—which in turn indicate their limited capacity to hold those in power accountable.[3]

By the time of the 2006 presidential election campaign, national political rhetoric was peppered with newly obligatory references to transparency and accountability, as even old-fashioned politicians retooled by appropriating the discourse of good governance. While the term is new to national politics, in practice accountability has long been contested in Mexico, even in the countryside. Revolutionary Emiliano Zapata's landmark agrarian reform proposal concluded with the little-known slogan 'Justice and Law', calling for the rule of law to restore stolen lands (the well-known 'Land and Freedom' came later). The long-standing rural demand for the 'free municipality' challenged central control, trying to bring the government closer to the people. Mexico's postrevolutionary agrarian reform *ejido* communities were themselves designed to be governed by a system of checks and balances—after elections for leadership the losing slate became the *ejido*'s official oversight council (though this form of 'divided agrarian

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[3] See Craig and Cornelius' critique of the classic civic culture approach (1989).

governance' was eliminated in 1983). The students who led Mexico's 1968 democracy movement insisted on public negotiations with the government, in order to be able to hold their leaders accountable. Mexico's hallowed revolutionary principle of 'no reelection'—so puzzling to political scientists for whom reelection is the principal instrument of political accountability—reflects a still-widespread belief that politicians, once in office, have such impunity that citizens will be unable to use elections to hold them accountable.[4] Accountability principles are also embedded in Mexican folk wisdom; consider the proverb *quien paga manda*, which translates as 'he who pays the piper calls the tune'. This expression communicates a commonsense principal–agent understanding of accountability politics.

Meanwhile, new approaches to accountability are emerging in Mexico, both from above and from below. From below, the contemporary Zapatista social movement bridges indigenous accountability principles with late twentieth century mass organization through their principle of 'governing by obeying'—*mandar obedeciendo*. From above, in 2002, a coalition of media and civil society elites forged a rare consensus among Mexico's normally fractious political parties, persuading congress to pass a potentially powerful federal transparency law unanimously, backed by a hefty new agency with a bully pulpit.[5]

A remarkably clean federal electoral process in 2000, when the National Action Party (PAN) unseated the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) from the presidency, convinced many that Mexico had crossed a threshold to democracy.[6] But the momentum for institutional change quickly stalled. Once incoming President Vicente Fox proved unable to assemble a working majority in congress, the 'reform of the state' dropped off the priority list.[7] Regulatory agencies remained weak.[8] Democratic electoral change at the subnational level—widely heralded as helping to drive the national transition in the 1980s and 1990s—produced relatively little in the way of

[4] While the prohibition on reelection is grounded in concern about incumbent privilege, the perverse effect is to leave politicians more accountable to party leaders, who control future nominations, than to their current constituents.

[5] See, www.ifai.gob.mx, as well as Fox et al. (2007), Concha Cantú (2005), Sobel et al. (2006), and Villanueva (2006).

[6] See, among others, Domínguez and Lawson (2004).

[7] See, among others, Valdés Ugalde (2007) and Weldon (2005).

[8] According to a recent World Bank study, 'regulatory agencies are an important set of institutions that counterbalance concentrated power.... However, in Mexico, regulators lack autonomous power' (with the notable exception of the central bank). When combined with the judicial system's bias, 'the result is that the regulatory system is not a credible, independent threat to the behavior of large business interests' (Guerrero, López-Calva, and Walton 2006: 16, 18). The study suggests that this lack of countervailing public power is both cause and effect of inequality, which in turn slows economic growth.

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innovative democratic governance.[9] Meanwhile, both participants and observers in the 2006 presidential elections were surprised by a broad-based opposition challenge to the legitimacy of the process that served as a powerful reminder that electoral democratization is far from a linear process.

Even the most widely accepted national elections are blunt instruments for accountability, far removed from most of the interfaces between state and society. As Mexico's first democratically elected postrevolutionary presidency came to a close in 2006, few independent observers would claim that it had produced significant qualitative change in state–society relations—especially if one is concerned with the quarter of the population that continues to live in rural areas. As in so many countries, rural democratization lagged substantially behind urban political change. Evidence of continuity in state practices raises the question of how much PAN rule transformed the state, versus how much the state transformed the PAN. No doubt both trends unfolded at the same time, though a comprehensive assessment falls beyond the scope of this study.[10]

Several federal institutions have certainly changed. Mexico's Supreme Court has gained incremental autonomy, especially since a 1994 reform (predating the democratic threshold). The congress is clearly increasingly independent, especially following the ruling party mid-term electoral setback in 1997, also predating the first clearly democratic presidential elections.[11] For the first time, the congress then began to gain limited capacity to influence the federal budget. While the fraction of the electorate subject to clientelistic control mechanisms appeared to have shrunk, partisan efforts to manipulate low-income voters with vote-buying continued. Freedom of assembly improved in some tangible ways; it would have been difficult to imagine the open Zapatista cross-country campaign caravans in 2001 and 2006 if the presidency had not changed hands. The Chiapas conflict stabilized, though it remained unresolved. The Ministry of the Interior no

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[9] On state level political change, see, among others, Cornelius, Eisenstadt, and Hindley (1999), Rodriguez and Ward (1995), Chand (2001), and Shirk (2005). Comparative studies of state level governance in Mexico include Beer (2003), Beer and Mitchell (2004), Merino (2005, 2006), and Snyder (2001*b*).

[10] For a series of recent case studies that suggest more continuity than change, see Knight and Pansters (2005).

[11] See, among others, Finkel (2003, 2005), Magaloni and Zepeda (2004), Schatz (2000) on the Supreme Court and Nacif (2005), Ugalde (2000), Weldon on the congress (2004). For comparison of the political origins and trajectories of other key federal accountability agencies, including the Federal Superior Auditor, the National Human Rights Commission and the Federal Electoral Institute, see Ackerman (2006).

longer instilled widespread fear, though both federal and state police
continued to repress radical protesters.

Exclusionary political practices in Mexico, as in many postauthoritarian regimes, are widely associated with the notion of 'authoritarian enclaves.'[12] The term 'enclave,' however, may be imprecise insofar as the term implies that persistent authoritarian institutions are self-contained. Insofar as authoritarian practices persist nationwide, the term 'enclave' also understates their geographic scope. For example, while the long-ruling corporatist political party left the presidency, the new ruling party left the corporatist *system* in place, making de facto pacts with authoritarian unions and peasant organizations. As a result, workers continued to be denied the right to the secret ballot for union elections, and were not allowed to see the contracts that their bosses signed in their name (Alcalde 2006). The state's exclusionary relations with indigenous peoples changed little, as hopes for significant indigenous rights reforms went unfulfilled.[13] The rule of law remained remote for most people; 80 percent of the population believed that judges accept bribes (Méndez 2006). In addition, the federal government's human rights record showed a high degree of continuity with the past. Torture remained systemic and officially sanctioned, and the police were not held accountable (Human Rights Watch 2006). Even the generally timid federal National Human Rights Commission admitted that government protection of official torturers is systematic, and that only 2 percent of more than 8,000 complaints led to sanctions (Ballinas 2006). Rigorous comparison of the Fox administration with its predecessors in terms of human rights abuses is not possible because of the absence of reliable independent time-series data on violations, but it is clear that both PAN and PRI public officials continued to use violence against protesters with impunity, notably in the cases of the 2006 crackdowns in Lázaro Cardenas, Atenco, and Oaxaca.[14]

[12] Fox (1994d), Cornelius (1999), Lawson (2000), and Snyder (1999) address subnational authoritarian enclaves in Mexico. The use of the term 'authoritarian enclave' originated in Chile, with Garretón's discussion of redoubts of dictatorial rule embedded in the democratic regime, such as appointed senators (1989, cited in Lawson 2000, who uses the term to refer to both national and subnational arenas).

[13] See Assies et al. (2005) and Hernández, Paz, and Sierra, (2004). The one apparent exception to this generalization was the Federal Electoral Institute's little-known 2004 congressional redistricting process, designed to encourage indigenous political participation by creating 28 districts with 40% or more indigenous population, within the framework of the 2001 constitutional reform (González Galván 2006). However, reportedly only 15 elected indigenous candidates—largely because federal law continued to give political parties exclusive control over candidate nominations (personal communication, Nahua activist and former PRD congressman Marcelino Díaz de Jesús, December 3, 2006).

[14] A long-awaited official report was released that recognized the government's role in the 'dirty war' of the 1970s—though it was censored. The report did not address the killings of at least as many dissidents during the Salinas presidency (1988–94).

6 *Transitions to Accountability*

In one of the central arenas for voice—national elections—the rural poor remain underrepresented, not only in the presidency but in the congress as well. Following the 2006 presidential elections, a substantial fraction of the population lost trust in Mexico's hard-won electoral institutions.[15] The share of the electorate that did not trust the process remained significantly larger than the share that supported the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). Yet no single political party can claim the allegiance of the majority of the rural poor. The colors on conventional electoral maps create the impression that the PRD candidate dominated the elections in rural and southern Mexico, but he won only *pluralities* in Mexico's poorest states, not majorities. According to the most widely cited national exit poll, the PRD won only 36 percent of the rural vote nationwide (Reforma 2006). Moreover, whether or not a PRD presidency would have produced major changes in terms of accountable governance innovations for rural people remains a matter of speculation. More systematic analysis of rural accountability politics under PRD governors and mayors would provide important leads. So far, however, no independent research suggests that PRD electoral victories drive qualitative institutional change in rural state–society relations. Political parties across the spectrum continue to block the democratic representation of peasants and indigenous peoples, again reflecting continuity over change.[16]

Free and fair electoral competition in rural areas is also limited by the lack of access to independent broadcast media, which continues to be tightly regulated by federal authorities. Efforts to shield federal social programs from electoral manipulation made progress compared to the 1990s, but did not reach the entire electorate. A large-scale 2006 survey by Civic Alliance found that 5 percent of low-income voters reported efforts to buy their vote, and 7 percent reported efforts (by all

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[15] In spite of the opposition's rejection of the legitimacy of the 2006 process, a majority of Mexicans still reported *confianza* in the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) after their results were ratified by the federal electoral court. However, the share that trusted the IFE fell to 56%—from 74% before the elections (Galán 2006). The survey of 2,000 households was commissioned by the IFE and carried out by Parametría.

[16] A full discussion of this issue is beyond the scope of this study, but suffice to say that the PRD still lacked democratic candidate selection processes in the 2006 elections, and very few peasant and indigenous leaders won nomination or election to congress on the PRD ticket, in spite of its unprecedented 2nd place finish. In principle, the creation of new 'indigenous districts' for congress created the possibility of greater representation, but control over nominations continued to be monopolized by parties. For a critique by one of the few indigenous rights activists elected to congress with the PRD in 2006, see Ruíz Hernández (2006). In the Yucatan, one of the few regions where the PAN has extensive rural and indigenous support, PAN leaders accused rivals in state government social programs of vote-buying to influence internal party elections (Bofíl Gómez 2006).

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Regimes and States

Mexico's unsettled combination of continuity and change underscores the relevance of the broad conceptual distinction between the political *regime*—the set of public institutions that determine *who* governs— versus the *state*—the public institutions that govern society and the economy *in between* elections.[18] Most of the political science literature on democratic transitions and governance focuses on electoral and elected institutions, but public concerns about accountable governance are as much about states as they are about regimes. Within electoral regimes, relationships between voters and the elected are relatively direct and therefore subject to analysis in terms of principal–agent models. In the *rest* of the state, however, institutional behavior involves longer and far more indirect 'accountability chains'.

Accountability is an inherently relational concept, as Chapter 2 explores in greater detail. That is, X can be accountable only in

[17] See Alianza Cívica (2006a), Roig-Franzia (2006), and Vega (2006a, 2006b). Note that while reported levels of vote-buying and ballot secrecy violations dropped dramatically in the 2000 elections, some surveys suggest that they rose again in 2003 and 2006. One of the few surveys that addressed vote-buying in 2000 estimated that 2.8% of the electorate experienced serious vote-buying efforts—substantially less than in 1994, though far from insignificant (Aparicio 2002: 90–1; Díaz Santana 2002). Cornelius (2002b, 2004) and Schedler (2004) found a tendency among voters in 2000 to reject vote-buying attempts—a finding probably linked to higher levels of ballot secrecy. FLACSO's exit poll found that more 97% of voters reported that they voted in secret (Díaz Santana 2002: 110; FLACSO 2001). In the 2003 mid-term congressional elections, however, a survey funded by the Federal Electoral Institute found that 8% of voters reported their vote was coerced, and 4% voted because they needed their voting card marked, to show to political operatives (cited in Ramírez Cuevas 2006). After the 2006 presidential elections, Civic Alliance reported that the secret ballot was violated in 12.47% of polling places observed by their network of more than 2,000 activists (Alianza Cívica 2006b). At the same time, public campaigns in 2006 to encourage voters to defend their right to ballot secrecy appears to have had the unintended consequence of weakening the statistical validity of national exit polls, as the percentage of those surveyed who refused to reveal their vote tripled from previous rates to 14% (Univisión news report July 3, 2006).

[18] Cardoso's classic analysis made this distinction (1979: 38–40). Here, regime referred to the rules that link the political system, the party system and the citizenry, whereas the state refers to the underlying 'pact of domination' and relations between social classes. This framework also highlighted continuity in state–society (and state–economy) relations in the process of political regime change. For contemporary formulations, see O'Donnell (2004a, 2004b). On the question of whether the impetus for regime change comes from within the state or from within the regime, see Fishman (1990).

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8   *Transitions to Accountability*

reference to Y or Z. Only rarely are those in power accountable to
no one, the issue is to whom they are accountable, how much, and
for what. Principal–agent approaches address accountability relations
between actors that have formal authority over each other, such as
voters and elected officials, and elected officials and the state managers
to whom they delegate authority. However, the relevance of actors that
lack formal authority over ruling elites, such as the mass media, oppo-
sition parties, or public interest groups, significantly loosens the fit
between principal–agent models and real-world political conflicts over
accountability. Moreover, among elites, informal, behind-the-scenes
political commitments may overshadow formal accountability relation-
ships. The task of anticorruption campaigners, for example, is to *break*
the principal–agent relationship between public officials and those who
pay for their services.[19] To understand the relationships between those
who do the accounting and those who are held accountable, we need
dynamic analytical frameworks that can account for strategic inter-
action between multiple actors, including informal as well as formal
relationships.[20]

The concept of accountability is caught in a definitional tension—
is it a process or an outcome? Logically it involves both—as does the
concept of democracy. However, accountability and democracy do not
refer to the *same* processes and outcomes. Some analysts incorporate
accountability into their definition of political democracy.[21] Such def-
initions imply that democratic *processes* inherently generate account-
ability *outcomes*. Yet there are both empirical and conceptual problems
with conflating accountability with democracy. The assumption that
accountability is an inherent feature of democratic regimes is logically
analogous to the concept of 'substantive democracy', in which regimes
that fail to produce socially equitable policy outcomes are considered,
by definition, to be undemocratic. Both accountability and state pol-
icies that promote socioeconomic equity are examples of normatively
desirable *outcomes* of state actions that may or may not emerge

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[19] For applied approaches to anticorruption reform that are compatible with the
state–society approach, see Johnston (2005).

[20] Accessible, intuitive terms for the different parties in accountability relationships
remain elusive. Behn refers to 'accountability holders' and 'holders' (2001). Bovens
speaks of 'accountors' and 'accountees' (2005).

[21] Note, for example, Schmitter's explicit definition of political democracy as 'a regime
or system of governance in which rulers are held *accountable* for their actions in the
public realm' (1999: 59 emphasis in original, citing Schmitter and Karl 1991). More
recently, Schmitter retained his view of accountability as a defining feature of democratic
regimes while also casting it as a measure of the quality of democracy, and therefore
a variable (2004). Consider Rose-Ackerman's more bounded approach: 'full democracy
cannot be attained unless the policy-making process is accountable to citizens through
transparent procedures that seek to incorporate public input' (2005: 1).

from procedurally democratic *processes*. Just as the conditions under which political democracies may produce socially equitable outcomes need to be specified analytically, so does the question of when democratic processes generate accountable governance. This reflection leads to the proposition that the conceptual distinction between regimes and states is analogous to the relationship between democracy and accountability.[22]

O'Donnell showed how electoral democracy can fail to produce accountable governance, with his influential term 'delegative democracy', and his spatial metaphors that capture the unevenness of the rule of law (e.g. 1993, 2000).[23] In addition, a major set of theoretical arguments questions the assumption that there is a direct relationship between electoral competition, representative democracy, and accountable governance (Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin 1999). These authors show that electoral democracy is much more about voter choices than it is about the inherent accountability of politicians to voters. They argue that voters' decisions are more prospective than retrospective— that is, more concerned about the future than about rewarding or punishing past behavior.[24] They convincingly identify serious conceptual flaws in the widespread assumption that electoral competition *necessarily* serves to hold politicians accountable for their actions. For the *rest* of the state, beyond elected leaders, electoral competition is an even more indirect (and often ineffective) instrument for public accountability.

The widespread failure of new electoral regimes to consolidate accountable governance encourages analysts to look beyond the conventional institutions of political accountability (competitive elections

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[22] Consider also multilateral organizations as examples of the distinction between public accountability and political democracy. They do not claim to be governed by democratic principles, but they can be subjected to accountability politics, as civil society organizations hold them accountable to international human rights and environmental standards. For cross-national, cross-sectoral comparisons of accountability campaigns targeting the World Bank, see Fox and Brown (1998) and Clark, Fox, and Treakle (2003). Multilateral development banks are formally governed by boards of directors that represent the finance ministries of national governments. Civil society campaigns pressure the banks to both comply with and raise their standards of institutional behavior, both through direct pressure and through board members from nation-states in which they have leverage.

[23] One could go further and question the conventional assumption that democracies necessarily govern through the rule of law. Brazil offers a powerful example of this contingent relationship, since official human rights abuses *increased* after the transition to democracy (Ahnen 2003; Pereira 2000). In practice, this dimension of the relationship between state and regime appears to be highly contingent (Bailey and Dammert 2006; Maravall and Przeworski 2003; Ungar 2002).

[24] Samuels recently tested their claim empirically, based on a definition of accountability limited to voter disposition to reelect the ruling party (2004).

and the separation of powers).[25] If electoral democracy does not necessarily produce accountable governance, or coexists with highly uneven and inconsistent degrees of accountable governance, then it may be useful to think in terms of *transitions to accountability*. Such transformations of the state are analogous to but distinct from transitions to democratic regimes.[26]

The systematic study of transitions to democracy was marked by comprehensive explanatory frameworks for prodemocratic regime change (e.g. Anderson 1999; O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986). Conceptually, these approaches were based on the interactive integration of structure and action. In contrast, the study of 'transitions to accountability' is today where the analysis of transitions to democracy was in the late 1970s or early 1980s—still lacking comprehensive, dynamic explanatory frameworks. Przeworski, Stokes, and Manin cleared the agenda by showing that elections do not necessarily produce accountability, though they did not show where it *does* come from (1999). New research explains the institutional origins of specific intrastate accountability agencies (Ackerman 2006; Isunza and Olvera 2006). Yet broad explanatory frameworks for how accountable governance becomes *stronger*, or how it *spreads* from enclaves across entire state apparatuses, or how accountability *expands* vertically, from the local to the national or vice versa—are still lacking. The problem goes beyond formal institutional design, hence the focus here on voice and power. This book does not claim to offer such a comprehensive explanation, but it does open a series of windows on different dimensions of how public institutions transition from complete authoritarian impunity to uneven combinations of responsiveness and accountability.[27]

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[25] See, for example, Rose-Ackerman's study of postauthoritarian Hungary and Poland (2005).

[26] For example, more accountable states are not equivalent to consolidated democracies, a concept that refers to the stability of regimes. On the limits to the concept of democratic consolidation, applied to the Mexican case, see Barracca (2004).

[27] Some analysts suggest that failures of political accountability basically reflect failures of electoral accountability, and therefore the problem does not warrant a distinct set of explanations or a focus on other state or nonstate institutions (e.g. Moreno, Crisp, and Shugart 2003). Leaving the narrow definition of political accountability aside for the moment, this point holds in the case of specific features of electoral systems that block accountability, such as Mexico's prohibition of reelection. But if one wants to explain the limits of electoral accountability more generally, one would have to address the undemocratic impacts of related nonelectoral institutions, including the social programs used for vote-buying (as in Mexico) or the court systems that fail to prosecute human rights violators (as in Colombia). In such cases it would be inappropriate to speak of the 'weakness' of the institutions of electoral accountability, since their undemocratic nature may be the result of their *strength*. In other words, to explain why electoral competition may fail to generate political accountability, one must look beyond the

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The concept of 'transitions to accountability' can help formulate
questions that would address the extraordinary variation in the degree
to which proaccountability institutions actually manage to limit politi-
cal power and to sanction its abuse. Empirically, whether or not demo-
cratic processes produce public accountability varies widely—across
states, within states, and over time. Many consolidated democracies
also experience extended periods and deep pockets of weak checks and
balances. For example, the USA, Japan, Italy, and Germany are known
for tolerating long-term, systemic political party corruption during
much of the second half of the twentieth century.[28] In Latin America,
the Colombian experience, with its combination of long-established
electoral institutions with systematic impunity for officially sanctioned
mass murderers, offers one of the most extreme cases of the distinction
between electoral democracy and accountable governance.[29]

The proposition that transitions to democracy and accountability
are distinct is supported by the fact that the seeds of accountabil-
ity can *predate* electoral transitions, just as the roots of authoritar-
ian rule can survive regime change.[30] Analysts have long observed

failures of electoral competition. Thanks to Andreas Schedler for his suggestion to make
this point more explicit (personal communication, March 1, 2007).

[28] In the USA, perhaps the most vivid disconnect between electoral democracy and
public accountability involved the institutional failure to address the US government's
systematic mass murder of hundreds of thousands of civilians in the Indochina War.
In only one case was an officer found guilty, after the exposé of the 1968 My Lai
massacre. This low-ranking officer served less than four years under 'house arrest' on
a military base, for the murder of approximately 500 civilians. He was carrying out a
strategy planned at the highest levels of military and civilian authority; the difference
in this case was that a military whistleblower and journalist provided incontrovertible
evidence.

[29] In this case the apparent disconnect between regime and state can be resolved by
recognizing that the government's consistent failure to protect citizens' freedom of associ-
ation and assembly means that the regime falls short of the most basic criteria for politi-
cal democracy. For details, see the annual reports of Human Rights Watch (www.hrw.org)
and the reports of Colombian human rights organizations http://colhrnet.igc.org/.

[30] Historically, several major accountability innovations predate electoral democracy.
England is a well known case, where the Magna Carta was a founding moment in the
history of checks and balances (Whitehead 2002: 92). Parliament gained countervailing
powers long before electoral democracy. Going back to ancient Rome, the Tribune of
the Plebs dates from 508 BC and was empowered to protect plebeian rights, especially
from abuses by magistrates (See www.romanempire.net and www.bartleby.com/65/tr/
tribune.html). China's Imperial Censorate oversight agency was consolidated in the Han
period, third Century BC, and also inspired Sweden's innovations (Ackerman and San-
doval 2005, 2006). On China's history of imperial oversight institutions, see Mung-Shing
(n.d.). Sweden's ombudsman office, dating from 1719, was inspired when King Charles
was in exile in Istanbul by the thousand years of history of the Islamic 'board of griev-
ances' known in Turkey as Diwan-ul-Mazalim. On the history of the Islamic ombudsman,
see Pickl (1987), cited in Machacek (2001). The Iroquois Federation's system of checks
and balances is widely credited as an inspiration for the US Constitution (Johansen
and Grinde 1993; Johannsen 1992). Even in the extreme case of Chile's military regime,

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that authoritarian actors and institutions can remain embedded in regimes that have passed electoral democratic thresholds (e.g. Hite and Cesarini 2004). The converse pattern is less well known; innovations in accountability and participation can also emerge *before* democratic regime transitions, and their legacies also shape subsequent possibilities for accountability-building. For example, proaccountability actors that often predate electoral competition include human rights groups, independent media, and environmental campaigners. Many Latin American experiences show that even under authoritarian regimes, opportunities for autonomous collective action can permit the emergence of counterweights that bolster the social foundations of democratization. This book explores an analogous process: *the construction of the social foundations of accountability*. While the intellectual consensus on the importance of social foundations for democracy reaches back to de Tocqueville, the question of where those social foundations come from has not generated a similar analytical agreement. Similarly, analysts are just beginning to look for how the social foundations for accountability are built.

This book explores this process through the lens of the state–society synergy framework for understanding how public institutions *change*.[31] In this view, the most relevant cleavage is not between an ostensibly dichotomous state and society. Instead, driving forces for institutional change can be found in the conflicts between contending forces embedded in *both* state and society. It matters when the forces for and against public accountability can be found on both sides of the state–society divide. Based on this approach, which is spelled out further in subsequent chapters, the rest of the book addresses the following analytical puzzle: when proaccountability societal actors and policymakers *both* start out with limited leverage over the actors embedded both in state and society that *oppose* public accountability, the result is a chicken-and-egg problem that requires deliberate strategies to crack. To put the question another way, how can diverse actors that favor accountability, often separated by the state–society divide, break out from a relatively static 'low power equilibrium' in which they lack leverage?

In summary, the argument here goes beyond the now widely accepted proposition that electoral democracy is not sufficient for public accountability. The idea here is that the determinants of transitions

institutional checks and balances mattered (Barros 2003; Policzer, forthcoming). The emergence of accountability institutions across such disparate cultures suggest that their relationship with Western-style representative democracy should not be assumed.

[31] See note 2.

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to democratic regimes are distinct from 'transitions to accountability' involving the rest of the state. Explanations of such transitions remain incipient. This does not mean that electoral politics are irrelevant, but until we have a comprehensive approach for explaining the determinants of how state actors are held publicly accountable, it will be difficult to determine the relative weight of electoral politics and how party competition matters. In rural Mexico, at least, electoral competition remains low on the list of channels for accountability of the state to the citizenry. Both contemporary innovations with participatory power-sharing in governance and old-fashioned protest matter more.

Previewing the Book: Accountability Politics in Rural Mexico

This book explores accountability politics through the lens of a limiting case, the relationship between the rural poor and Mexico's still-authoritarian regime of the 1980s and 1990s. The findings suggest that even small increments of freedom of association can matter a great deal. The book's empirical chapters show how a series of reformist antipoverty programs allowed the disenfranchised to engage in autonomous collective action, leading in turn to partial shifts in the state–society balance of power in some regions. The scaling up of autonomous mass membership organizations turned out to be key, and both their power and voice were amplified by coalitions with allies both in society and the state. In the discourse of social capital, both bonding and bridging social capital are needed and can be mutually reinforcing.

Though both the reform openings from above and organizational consolidation from below often did not survive authoritarian backlash, those experiences left legacies that could serve as resources for subsequent campaigns, along the lines of Hirschman's 'Principle of Conservation and Mutation of Social Energy' (1984). Less often, autonomous grassroots organizations scaled up without even tenuous partnerships across the state–society divide, as in Chiapas—where societal allies were most important. Throughout the countryside, however, pathways to change were forged by coalitions between community-based organizations that managed to scale up to gain regional clout. In summary, the social foundations of accountability politics in rural Mexico were built through iterative cycles of conflict and coalition-building between state and societal actors *before* national regime change.

Specifically *rural* accountability politics are distinct for two main reasons. First, the availability of potential coalition partners from the

national political arena is limited. At the national level, the key actors that are central to accountability politics include the independent mass media, antiauthoritarian political parties and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Yet they have been and still are either absent or weak in most of the countryside. In terms of potential national coalition partners for rural grassroots movements, their sustained mobilization for a political solution in Chiapas was the exception rather than the rule.

Second, scaling up rural civil society from below is especially difficult. The external constraints on autonomous collective action beyond the most local level are clearly daunting. Obstacles include: spatial dispersion, social and cultural subordination, lack of access to mass media (especially broadcast media), intercommunity rivalries, limited access to transportation, and most importantly, extreme vulnerability to reprisals from elites (Fox 1990; Kurtz 2004). Regional elites are often deeply embedded in the state apparatus and control the electoral machinery, the police, and the judiciary, as well as the prices of production inputs (including credit), basic commodities, as well as the purchasing and processing of crops. Regional bosses still derive much of their clout from their control over these mutually reinforcing strategic economic and political interfaces between rural regions and the rest of the country (Fox and Gordillo 1989).

As a result of these constraints, the creation of the political space needed to increase the density and capacity of civil society has been especially challenging and uneven in authoritarian rural Mexico. By the time the ruling party was voted out of the presidency in 2000, in some rural regions these pro-accountability 'virtuous circles' challenged the usual 'vicious circles' of impunity and disenfranchisement. In regions of Chiapas, de facto dual power has persisted for more than a decade. Yet in many rural areas, national regime change was not followed by tangible changes in state–society relations.

The point of departure starts three decades ago, under a postrevolutionary authoritarian regime that was world-famous for its capacity to maintain stability. Efforts to build broad-based, autonomous organizations of the rural poor had been repeatedly frustrated by the postrevolutionary state's combined strategies of cooptation and repression. Since then a rural civil society has emerged, composed of a contested patchwork of socially and politically distinct regional civic transitions. Especially since the 1980s, campesinos and indigenous peoples have managed to build their own autonomous, scaled-up civic and social membership organizations. Their main goals usually combine community-based economic development with struggles to hold authorities accountable over a wide range of issues of public interest.

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Though many have survived in their regional arenas, most efforts to sustain coalitions that would give them national level clout have fallen short. These social and civic actors tend to be wary of all political parties, and to the degree that state actors become more publicly accountable to the rural poor, it is these membership organizations rather than political parties that drive the process.

Drawing on this diverse tapestry of subnational rural politics, this book brings together studies of different dimensions of changing state–society relations to draw out broader analytical lessons. Most of the chapters pursue a comparative research strategy—some compare different national government programs, while others compare the same programs across different regions and localities. Most look at both state and societal actors, drawing on the interface between institutional and ethnographic data to construct indicators of change that are specific to the process of accountability-building. The breadth and depth of each chapter's empirical foundation varies, depending on available data, but the main goal is to open a series of analytical windows on accountability politics, with the hope that the whole will be greater than the sum of the parts. Chapters 2 and 3 continue the discussion of conceptual issues involved in 'transitions to accountability'. The subsequent chapters each ask a different set of empirical and analytical questions about different dimensions of accountability politics, making bounded causal claims regarding specific sets of actors and levels of analysis.

Chapter 2 explores the conceptualization of accountability. This chapter poses some of the explicit conceptual choices that need to be made in the process of defining accountability, exploring some of the reasons why defining accountability turns out to be quite challenging. To begin with, accountability is not synonymous with democracy. In hierarchical private organizations, staff accountability flows upward toward managers who are in turn accountable to owners. Nor is accountability necessarily synonymous with the rule of law—the concept has only recently become linked to democracy (Pérez-Perdomo 2006). Meanwhile, dictators can be held accountable by angry mobs, or self-appointed assassins. At the broadest level, accountability refers to the process of holding actors responsible for their actions (Fox and Brown 1998). As Schedler put it, accountability 'embraces three different ways of preventing and redressing the abuse of power. It implies subjecting power to the threat of sanctions; obliging it to be exercised in transparent ways; and forcing it to justify its acts' (1999a: 14).

While civil society influence on public accountability is widely recognized, the specific patterns and causal pathways of impact remain underspecified. To identify pathways of civil society influence on the state, the approach developed here distinguishes between

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accountability relationships within and among state and civil society actors, rather than treating state and society as implicitly monolithic. The framework further 'unpacks' accountability politics by recognizing the interaction between local, national, and international arenas. Building on O'Donnell's distinction between vertical and horizontal dimensions of accountability (1999, 2003), the chapter emphasizes the mutual interdependence and interaction between them.

Chapter 3 looks at the iterative process through which the rural poor were able to take advantage of cycles of partial openings from above to build the autonomous regional membership organizations that embody the social foundations of accountability. Originally written as a contribution to the more general discussion of state–society synergy (Evans 1997), this chapter engages with the broad debate over where social capital comes from, questioning the 'historically determinist' explanation proposed by Robert Putnam in his classic comparison of Italian regions (1993). His approach can be summed up, in his phrase, as 'them as has, gets,' leaving no room for either agency or policy. This study proposes an alternative conceptual framework to account for how, over much shorter periods of historical time, strategic interaction between pro-peasant actors in state and society could create the political space for 'social capital accumulation' under authoritarian conditions. In Putnam's framework, this was not supposed to happen. In other words, in the historical-determinist approach, if Mexican rural civil society started out generally 'thin' before the 1970s, in terms of capacity for autonomous self-representation, then it should have either remained thin or gained thickness in similar increments by the 1990s. Yet the outcome was regional variation, with some regions generating dense, vibrant, scaled-up, autonomous associational life and others remaining thin. The explanatory framework brings politics in by combining political opportunity structure and strategic interaction approaches.[32] The argument is illustrated by a comparison of the regional impacts of three successive reformist rural development programs in Mexico from the 1970s through the early 1990s. The analysis emphasizes the critical role of uneven reformist openings for allowing the partial degrees of freedom of association needed to make collective action possible.

Chapter 4 contributes to the broad literature on the social foundations of democracy by focusing on the internal dynamics of building

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[32] Encarnación's comparison of Brazil and Spain comes to similar conclusions, noting 'the argument that political institutions matter to the production of social capital has received scant empirical attention in the civil society literature' (2003: 41).

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scaled-up, democratic counterweights under authoritarian rule. Social movements can often have democratizing *impacts*, but whether or not they are *internally* democratic is a different question. Analysts often conflate these two dimensions of democratization, and most studiously avoid the question of whether and how social organizations are themselves internally democratic. This study takes up the challenge posed by Roberto Michels' classic political sociology puzzle of 'Iron Law of Oligarchy', asking which factors make it possible for members to hold their leaders accountable. The case study traces the history of a broad-based regional agrarian membership organization over a decade and a half to identify what turn out to be ebbs and flows of leadership accountability. An inductive, ethnographic, and longitudinal approach documents how the power relationships between leaders and members change over time. Though the organization held regular elections, in which elected agrarian community leaders voted for regional representatives, the electoral process was not the principal determinant of leadership accountability. Instead, the existence of other kinds of checks and balances—participatory subgroups and pro-democracy external actors—turn out to be more important factors in favor of leadership accountability. The original study is updated with an epilogue that explains the organization's eventual decline and collapse, largely due to lack of leadership accountability.

Chapter 5 analyzes persistent exclusionary practices in the countryside, using quantitative indicators of access to the secret ballot in Mexico's 1994 presidential election—widely hailed for being the country's freest until that time. While the opposition expected a rerun of the repertoire of fraud and manipulation that characterized the 1988 race, the state effectively deployed a range of levers of intervention in rural economic and social life that, in combination with the systematic lack of access to the secret ballot, reduced the ruling party's need to resort to fraud by inducing a widespread 'fear vote'. This study draws on two complementary data sets to estimate the degree of rural voter access to the secret ballot in the 1994 presidential elections. The first key indicator is whether or not officially registered opposition poll-watchers were present at polling places in key rural states. The second set of indicators draws on the national survey findings of the Civic Alliance's election monitoring campaign, which found ballot secrecy violations in a substantial number of rural districts. The Civic Alliance concluded that the 1994 elections involved two very different processes—one urban and largely free and fair, and the other primarily rural and unfree. This chapter resonates with the increased

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recognition by electoral analysts that free and fair voting is easier said than done.[33]

Chapter 6 explores the relationship between rural democratization and decentralization. Participatory budgeting in large cities both drives and reflects a deepening of democracy in Brazil and elsewhere. In Mexico, the government promoted deliberative citizen participation nationwide in rural municipalities, well *before* national electoral democratization. Mexican decentralization empowered municipalities, but it turns out that municipal governance systematically *excludes* millions of rural people who live outside of the town centers that usually control municipal affairs. Those villages are most directly governed by *submunicipal* authorities, which constitute an invisible 'fourth layer of government'. In some states and regions these truly local authorities are chosen democratically, representing villagers to the municipality, in others they are designated from above, representing the mayor to the villagers. This chapter explores how rural citizens have attempted to hold local governments accountable by analyzing the contested balance of power between town centers and outlying villages, with significant implications for the recognition of indigenous rights. The study pursues three different comparative research strategies: analysis of resource allocation decision-making processes in a representative sample of local rural governments in the state of Oaxaca, comparison of changing municipal–submunicipal power relations in four rural states (Oaxaca, Guerrero, Hidalgo, and Chiapas), and a nationwide comparison of the state level laws that govern this invisible 'submunicipal regime'.

Chapter 7 continues the emphasis on cross-regional comparison, but brings in the role of both transnational and national actors by focusing on World Bank-funded rural development projects. The question is to what the degree the World Bank's ostensibly new-style projects actually contributed to the 'enabling environment' that most would agree is key to permitting poor people to consolidate their own representative organizations. The term 'enabling environments' refers to the institutional context that either facilitates or blocks the collective action that is critical to providing leverage and voice to underrepresented people. The study 'operationalizes' whether enabling environments were in fact created by assessing the degree to which the projects complied with the World Bank's own policy reforms involving public information

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[33] See Bjornlund (2004), among others. On the growing category of electoral semi-authoritarian regimes, see Diamond (2002), Fox (1994a, 1994b), Ottaway (2003), and Schedler (2006).

disclosure and informed participation by indigenous peoples, testing a deductive proposition about the conditions under which compliance is most likely. The study documents varied outcomes in detail, both across projects and across regions within projects. With few exceptions, the projects did not significantly improve the enabling policy environment for the organizations of the rural poor.

Chapter 8 documents whether policy reforms that formally permit participation by organized poor people actually led to power-sharing in practice. The Mexican state has more than two decades of experience with national rural development programs that convene ostensibly participatory regional and municipal councils. This chapter maps patterns of regional variation in pro-poor institutional change in rural Mexico by comparing seven programs, including the Community Food Councils, the Regional Development Funds, the Municipal Development Funds, Rural Development in Marginal Areas, the Protected Natural Areas, the Municipal Councils for Sustainable Rural Development, and the Regional Sustainable Development Program. The state–society councils' practices varied widely, across programs, across regions, and over time. There is no independent evidence that the majority of regional councils were pluralistic and participatory in any of the national programs studied.

Chapter 9 pursues a more in-depth comparison of innovations that encourage voice for accountability within two large-scale antipoverty programs, Mexico's flagship welfare program, Oportunidades (formerly known as PROGRESA), and the subsidized rural food store network supplied by Diconsa. Oportunidades was designed to break the cycle of poverty by offering material incentives to mothers to encourage them to keep their children in school and to follow basic preventive health measures. Based on the program's impressively tangible positive results for beneficiary families and its substantial coverage of the poorest fifth of the population, Oportunidades has become a widely hailed international model for what are now called 'conditional cash transfer' programs. The program's emphasis on individuals' 'co-responsibility' with the state contrasts with the state–society council approach detailed in the previous chapter and embodied in the Diconsa program's Community Food Councils. Unforeseen 'cross-institutional disincentives' built into Oportunidades appear to discourage pro-accountability initiatives. However, program leadership recognized the program's lack of transparency and accountability mechanisms, and in response launched a new 'Citizen Attention' initiative for registering complaints and information requests. This chapter compares Oportunidades' channel for the expression of individual voice

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with the Diconsa food supply program's system of regional council oversight.

Chapter 10 asks where migrants fit into the debate over how rural citizens can encourage public accountability, drawing on Hirschman's framework of 'exit, voice and loyalty'. Mexico's sharp increase in rural out-migration rates during the 1990s was not simply a continuation of long-term structural trends, but was also accelerated by specific national policy choices. This chapter suggests that many of those who left the countryside to seek a better future in the USA turned to exit partly in response to their lack of voice. Yet many later found a collective voice as migrants—both in their home communities and in the USA. Though migrants are still widely described in Mexico as having 'abandoned' their homeland, some continue to express loyalty by exercising voice in their home communities, as well as by constructing a multifaceted public sphere that now warrants the term 'migrant civil society.' This chapter explores this new concept by exploring how migrants have forged collective civic, social, and political identities, transcending kinship networks and microlevel transnational communities. A new generation of organized Mexican migrants is engaging with both US and Mexican states and societies at the same time, constructing practices of 'civic binationality' that challenge the pressures from both national political systems and cultures to oblige them to define their engagements in terms of mutually exclusive nation-states. The empirical discussion compares a range of organizations that emerge from different migrant collective identities, including territorial, religious, worker, and ethnic-based forms of membership.

Chapter 11 explores several more general conceptual propositions, in an effort to contribute to future research that will 'map' accountability pathways with greater precision. Empowerment is distinguished from rights, defined in terms of enforceable claims. The chapter also details the problems of 'low accountability traps' and the 'positioning' of accountability agents in terms of their relationships to state and society. The difficulty of launching pro-accountability 'virtuous circles' is addressed with the proposed concept of 'accountabilities of scale', drawing on an analogy with 'economies of scale.' The 'vertical integration' of civil society actors takes into account the challenge of scale, followed by a questioning of the 'power of sunshine' to leverage accountability outcomes. These concepts offer analytical tools for understanding when voice can change the balance of power by embedding accountability reforms into the state. Meanwhile, millions of Mexican citizens are weighing the decision of whether to pursue exit instead.

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Annex: Methodological Note[34]

This note makes explicit some of the methodological principles shared by chapters that follow. Most deploy a combination of four mutually reinforcing methodological strategies: the subnational comparative method, institutional ethnography grounded in political economy, the unpacking of collective identity formation, and the aggregation of qualitative indicators of institutional behavior.

1. The Relevance of the Subnational Comparative Method

Within the field of comparative politics, analysts have long noted the risks of 'whole-nation bias' in studies that rely on national averages that mask sharp variation (Rokkan 1970). A focus on subnational variation allows comparisons to control for social, political, and economic differences, which in turn allows analysts to focus on relationships between specific institutional changes and social actors. As Snyder persuasively explained, subnational comparison addresses the classic problem of 'many variables, small N' by increasing the number of observations (2001*a*: 94). George and Bennett stress the importance of 'structured, focused comparisons', as well as the potential of comparative case analysis to go beyond correlations to understand causal mechanisms (2005).

The spread of decentralization has increased interest in the subnational comparative method. The relevance of this comparative strategy is not limited to distinct subnational actors or governments, it can also be applied to nominally national campaigns, movements, or programs that in practice experience significant regional variation. Institutions or movements of national scope are rarely homogeneous. To the degree that the autonomy and capacity of civil society is a key variable influencing public accountability, subnational variation across regions, sectors, and social groups is a given.

For example, one recent study applied the subnational comparative method to Amartya Sen's classic proposition that the existence of a free press encourages accountable governance, focusing on responses to famine. Besley and Burgess test this proposition at the subnational level, comparing different Indian states in terms of their responsiveness to food crises. The relative strength and penetration of independent local media turns out to be a key variable. They conclude: 'The formal institutions of political competition (such as open elections) are not sufficient to deliver a responsive government unless voters have

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[34] This section expands on sections of Fox (2004*a*). For discussion of relationships between normative and analytical dilemmas, see Fox (2006*b*).

the real authority to discipline poorly functioning incumbents. This requires effective information transmission to voters' (2002: 1446). Consider that in Mexico, independent broadcast media, notably radio, are lacking in almost all indigenous regions.

Another application of the subnational comparative method used statistical techniques to explore variation in human rights violations in Mexico across states (Beer and Mitchell 2004). Controlling for variables such as economic development and ethnicity, they found that higher degrees of electoral democracy, measured by indicators such as competition and turnout rates, are correlated with lower levels of human rights violations. Another example is Hiskey and Bowler's study of municipal democratization which finds that Mexican 'citizens are more likely to participate in politics if they think the process is fair' (2005: 57). This suggests that it is not clear which way the causal arrow goes between human rights and political participation—hence the importance of institutional analysis, to unpack actual decision-making processes.

2. Bridging Institutional Ethnography and Political Economy

Analysts often treat both government agencies and social organizations as implicitly homogeneous, unified actors. The goals of both kinds of actors are often 'read' off of their public appearances, and their internal decision-making logics are often imputed from deductive assumptions rather than treated as questions that require explanation. This methodological strategy makes the opposite assumption, treating institutions as crosscut by different interests, goals, and strategies. The main rationale for 'getting inside them' empirically is that their internal logics may be driven by factors that are not obvious from the outside. For example, the internal logics of movements can only be understood by 'unpacking' them, rather than imputing leadership perspectives to rank-and-file participants.

A political economy approach to institutional change suggests looking for how incentive structures might shape decision-making, while taking unequally distributed power resources into account. Incentives can be intangible as well as tangible, and they can also have very different implications for different actors in the same institution. An ethnographic approach involves documenting key actors' actual practices, exploring both how they understand their own goals and their external environment. To bridge ethnography and political economy involves 'unpacking institutions' by looking inside them to see how their component actors perceive incentives, as well as how they engage and conflict with each other and outsiders. This strategy is especially relevant for explaining variation across similar-looking institutions. As will be seen in the empirical chapters, in most cases where pro-poor

institutional change occurs, it reaches at most a modest subset of the national agency that is contested. The patterns are difficult to measure with precision because formal indicators of change often hide informal patterns of continuity. The general pattern, however, is that efforts at propoor institutional reform initiatives lead, at best, to intrainstitutional variation. While actors throughout that institution may appear to face similar incentive structures, in practice they behave differently, which underscores the need to document their actually existing *internal logics*—as well as to identify the specific factors that block the spread of change within and across organizations. Such an approach is just as valid for analyzing organized social movements as it is for public institutions.

3. Scaled-up Collective Identities Require Explanation

The proposition here is that scaled-up collective action is associated with scaled-up collective identities, though which comes first is a difficult question. The classic analytical literature on collective action shows that whenever people come together in large numbers, beyond their immediate social networks, explanation is required. As class analysis suggests, the fact that people may appear to share certain 'objective' interests is not sufficient to explain why they come to *experience* shared interests. In the case of rural social actors, the classic Marxist assumption is that because of the dispersal of rural life and the individualized production process, peasants are *inherently* unable to develop the broader class identities needed to sustain large-scale collective action for transformative goals. Indeed, rural people do face distinct obstacles to collective action. Isolation does matter, and local identities do not automatically scale-up—yet throughout the twentieth century, revolutionary leaders managed to confound Marx's assumption by inventing strategies to overcome these obstacles to larger-scale rural collective action (usually facilitated by external threats).

Nonrevolutionary strategies for scaling up rural collective action, such as electoral campaigns and mass direct action, have received much less research attention. Few studies have directly addressed the impact of the countryside on democratization or the impact of democratization on the countryside (cf. Fox 1990). Varshney shows for India how rural political power is constrained by crosscutting cleavages across economic interests and noneconomic identities (1998). Kurtz's study of Chile and Mexico argues that neoliberal policy reforms increase the obstacles inherent in scaled-up rural collective action (2004). Lapp's comparative study of Latin America finds that the extension of voting rights to the rural poor often coincided with land reform (2004). She notes, however, that this is not necessarily evidence of a

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state response to pressure from below, but rather 'politicians sought political power by extending the right to vote while redistributing land' (2004). This book's findings suggest that analysis of how collective action scales up should focus on regional levels, addressing both on how local actors come together within regions, and on how regional actors come together across regions.[35]

4. Aggregate Qualitative Indicators of Institutional Behavior
When do indicators actually indicate what they are supposed to indicate? There is an emerging package of policy reforms associated with enabling institutional environments for transparency, accountability, and social participation, as discussed in Chapters 2, 7, and 8. To measure progress and identify bottlenecks, reform-specific indicators are needed to measure the inherently uneven degree to which they are actually carried out. These policies can be seen as intervening variables in between more easily quantified economic investment inputs and social indicator outputs.

These indicators need to measure two distinct dimensions of institutional change. One involves its scope—to what degree are they *actually implemented* across a given public agency, or agencies. The other involves the depth, or intensity of reforms—institution-specific indicators are needed to capture the difference between 'lite' reforms and those with greater leverage. For example, official 'pro-participation' reforms range from information dissemination to consultation to shared deliberations to power-sharing to actual devolution of decision-making to social actors (e.g. World Bank 1996).

Since participation has become widely accepted in official development discourses, vast numbers of meetings are held with stakeholders, usually without systematic monitoring of the degree to which they were actually participatory. Officials often describe social organizations' attendance at meetings, or membership in 'consultative' bodies as 'participation', though in practice such venues often do not involve actual sharing of power. Meaningful indicators would address the breadth and depth of participation, including autonomy, ethnic/gender/class composition, scale, and especially its actual potential for impact on institutions. Conventional, easy to quantify indicators of participation, such as frequency and attendance at meetings, mean little without complementary indicators of the enabling factors that make free and informed participation possible—such as information access. Indicators of transparency reform implementation might include measures of the quality, reliability, quantity, practical

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[35] For analysis of how locally circumscribed collective identities scale up to regional, ethnic, and pan-ethnic identities in the case of Oaxacan migrants, see Fox (2006c).

accessibility, and social relevance of the information disclosed. Accountability indicators might include both attempts and outcomes of enforcement efforts. Clearly, most of these indicators are not easily quantified, but that does not mean that they cannot be measured.

One classic problem with indicators is that those that are easily measured are more likely to be measured. Ethnographic evidence whose generalizability is difficult to assess is often relegated to the category of 'anecdotal'. Yet the classic debate between quantitative and qualitative evidence is based on a false dichotomy. Qualitative data on institutional performance and decision-making can be collected on a large scale, from representative samples (e.g. Fox and Aranda 1996). Positive synergy between quantitative and qualitative methods can reveal patterns of variation that would not otherwise be apparent.