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The Political Enigma of *El Peje*: Taking Stock of Mexico's Populist Revolution Under Andrés Manuel López Obrador

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The landslide election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) as President of Mexico in 2018 reflected a major shift in Mexican politics. His victory was more than simply a reaction to the failed presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto—to whom López Obrador had lost in the 2012 Mexican Presidential election. Rather, it represented a civil revolution.

Recent historical context is fundamental to understanding what AMLO's victory means. For the majority of the twentieth century, Mexico was ruled as a one-party state by the authoritarian Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In 2000, the PRI's grip on power loosened with the presidencies first of Vicente Fox and then of his successor, Felipe Calderón. The party returned, however, under Peña Nieto. After decades of institutionalized one-party rule that had seen the PRI elite enjoy lavish lifestyles even as many in Mexico suffered from extreme poverty, the seemingly down-to-earth López Obrador—who has branded himself as a political maverick since his divorce from the PRI in the late 1980s—drew vast popular support.¹ In 2018 he was able to create a theretofore unheard-of coalition uniting the far left and the Christian right that allowed him to attain dominance in the Mexican political system.

Beyond his outsider reputation—which persists despite his decades in politics—three aspects of AMLO's political style validate his populist credentials. First, his discursive style fits well within the Manichean discourse employed by populists. Second, while not wholly ineffective, his political style is exceedingly performative. Third, his actions as President expose a hostility to those institutions charged with checking presidential power—a process that, in his mind, is tantamount to defending the “regime of corruption, anti-democracy, injustice and illegality” and inhibiting the implementation of the will of the people.²

Determining the extent of López Obrador's effect on Mexican politics requires a blended qualitative and quantitative approach. Due to the contemporary nature of its subject, this paper relies first and foremost on primary source data and analyses; these are supplemented by secondary source analyses. Primary source data, such as polling numbers provided by the Wilson Center and Oraculus, measure populist attitudes as represented in electoral outcomes and presidential approval ratings. Both primary and secondary source analyses are used to illuminate the character of Mexico's governing regime.

AMLO's Populist Credentials

What populist candidates—and parties—around the globe have in common is their appeal to popular legitimacy. Typically, populists defend their politics as reflecting the so-called will of the people.³ Yet because the will of the people can be interpreted in a variety of ways, and each national population is unique, once in power, populists often pursue radically different policy agendas from one another

and typically lack ideological coherence. What they lack in ideological coherence, however, populists make up for in clear messaging campaigns that relate every issue on the national agenda to the “Manichean discourse.”⁴ Transcending the traditional Left-Right political spectrum, their clear discursive distinction between “the virtuous people” and “the corrupt elite” unites populists of both the Left and the Right.⁵

Leaving aside the more nuanced differences between Left-populism and Right-populism, a prime distinction between these groups is the means by which each differentiates between the people and the nominal elite. Left-populists, drawing on the Marxist tradition, generally rely on the class distinction between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie—for example, the material exclusion of the economic establishment in favor of the economically disadvantaged in Venezuela under Hugo Chaves and Bolivia under Evo Morales.⁶ Right-populists, for their part, rely on such case-specific factors as the urban-rural divide, cultural or religious affiliation, ethnic distinctions, and native-immigrant identity—what Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Kaltwasser refer to as “national preference.”⁷

Is AMLO a populist revolutionary? If so, is his rise to power merely a rejoinder to Mexico City’s ossified political class or does it reflect a fundamental, grassroots shift in Mexican politics? Answering these questions, and understanding the extent to which López Obrador has changed Mexican politics, will help foreign policy theorists and practitioners outside Mexico prepare for future relations with the country. Moreover, given that Mexico is the second-largest economy in Latin America behind Brazil and a leader in the region, a better understanding of the trends driving Mexican politics will improve observers’ understanding of the trends driving Latin America as a whole.⁸

2018 proved a fateful year for Mexico. The general election registered a seismic shift in domestic politics: in a landslide election, AMLO defeated three other opponents by an historic margin.⁹ He cobbled together a remarkable coalition, Juntos Haremos Historia (JHH—Together We Will Make History), that brought incredibly ideologically disparate political parties together into a united movement. These included his center-left, populist political party, the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA); the left-wing Mexican Labor Party; and the Christian-conservative Social Encounter Party. What unites these ideologically dissimilar parties is a shared sense of disaffection among their supporters. Referring to López Obrador, Carlos Heredia, a professor at Mexico City’s Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas, argues, “For the first time in decades, there’s a president who talks to the vast majority of Mexicans who not only felt excluded but despised.”¹⁰ AMLO was able to harness disparate channels of popular discontent and transform them into spectacular electoral triumph.

AMLO has always positioned himself as an outsider and renegade. He began his political career in 1977 under the aegis of the PRI, Mexico’s authoritarian catch-all party, when he supported the Senatorial campaign of renowned Mexican poet Carlos Pellicer.¹¹ Disenchanted with the PRI’s authoritarian tactics, however, he joined the PRI’s populist subsidiary, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), in 1988.¹² López Obrador led the PRD for four years (between 1996 and 1999) before being elected as Head of Government of Mexico City in 2000.¹³ AMLO ran for president in 2006 under the aegis of the PRD, but suffered a devastating defeat.¹⁴ Unwilling to concede, he charged that the election was fraudulent and gathered one million supporters who “resolved to ignore the electoral result, reject the simulated Republic and proclaim López Obrador as Legitimate President of Mexico.”¹⁵ He ran for President again in 2012, as the standard-bearer of the PRD, and was defeated again, this time by Enrique Peña Nieto of the PRI.¹⁶ Following this defeat, López Obrador resigned from the PRD and transformed MORENA, at that time a social movement advocating relatively progressive policies, into a new populist political party fighting for “regime change” in the face of the “Mexican oligarchy.”¹⁷

Peña Nieto proved to be a deeply unpopular president. Describing his approval rating in the latter years of his presidency, Professor Carolyn Gallaher of American University's School of International Service argued that "[the rating] simply cannot go much lower."¹⁸ Peña Nieto's dismal ratings cost the PRI dearly. In 2018, AMLO ran a third campaign for President of Mexico, now under MORENA's standard. This time, he was successful.¹⁹

Since the institutionalization of the PRI relatively early in the twentieth century, Mexican progressive populist movements had typically been crushed or incorporated into the PRI to temporarily reinvigorate the decadent and authoritarian political behemoth. As Joy Langston notes of this period in Mexican politics, "To remain within the confines of the party...would always bring higher payoffs than challenging the regime from the ranks of the opposition...it was in almost no politician's interest to exit, and the opposition had little to no chance of winning elections."²⁰ Vicente Fox's right-wing populist campaign finally dislodged the PRI in 2000, but until AMLO's election, progressive-populist movements could achieve success only as subsidiary movements within the PRI, one example being the leftward lurch of the PRI under Lázaro Cárdenas.²¹ AMLO's movement was revolutionary in the sense that it was the first progressive and *anti-establishment* campaign to succeed in Mexico in over a century.

To a large degree, the success of MORENA and the JHH is a direct result of López Obrador's personal popularity and reputation as an anti-establishment desperado. Throughout the campaign, AMLO's rivals derided him as a left-wing populist.²² His opponents further compared him to Bolivarians and revolutionary Latin American leaders like Hugo Chavez of Venezuela, Evo Morales of Bolivia, and Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.²³ Nor was the derision limited to his challengers in the Mexican presidential race: the foremost editorials in the U.S. press also deemed him a dangerous authoritarian populist.²⁴ As for being an authoritarian, AMLO's actions could be interpreted as evincing a dissembled penchant for autocratic tactics.²⁵ As a populist raging against "institutions created to serve self-dealing elites," AMLO's credentials are clear and unimpeachable.²⁶

Cas Mudde has defined populism as an "ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite.'"²⁷ Echoing Mudde, Israel Solorio, Joel Ortega, Raúl Romero, and Jorge Guzmán write, "AMLO has developed a discursive strategy consisting of dividing the political field into two antagonistic parts: 'the people', whose demands and interests are supposedly defended by his popular project and 'the conservatives', the corrupt elite that infringe upon the interests of the people."²⁸ Testifying to the success of AMLO's populist, Manichaean discursive strategy, on the night of his election, crowds of a size previously unseen in Mexican political history gathered in Mexico City's Zócalo chanting such populist slogans as "The people united will not be defeated."²⁹ This kind of popular response to López Obrador's message demonstrates the salience of the populist "Manichaean discourse" in modern Mexican politics.

Performative Politics: AMLO Playing the Part

Under AMLO, Mexican politics has adopted a distinctly "plebeian and anti-oligarchic flavor."³⁰ While his critics claim it is altogether performative, AMLO's focus on popular sovereignty has set this plebeian tone.³¹ One of the more radically populist ways in which his government has promoted this plebeian perception is through the frequent staging of public consultations. According to the Mexican Constitution, public consultations are a "citizen participation mechanism that serves to exercise the constitutional right to vote on issues of national importance so that its will, binding as the law dictates, can influence the debate and decisions taken by the representative organs of the State."³² What differentiates AMLO's public consultations from those of the past is their scope and frequency. The Mexican government now holds popular consultations on most federal-government projects, even those that are large and complex. Through these consultations, the people are given carte

blanche to voice their approval or disapproval of the project. AMLO has emphasized the importance of these public consultations as the means by which to manifest the people's will.³³ Solorio et al. write with respect to AMLO's public consultation on the *Proyecto Integral Morelos* energy project: "AMLO maintained his rhetoric on the need to accomplish 'the people's will'... and that the 'citizens' would decide."³⁴ In López Obrador's view, these public consultations serve a necessary political end: they allow him to present himself as Mexico's champion of popular sovereignty and to act as an intermediary between the people and their government.

Since nearly all of the projects that come under popular scrutiny are resoundingly approved—with the dramatic exception of the Mexico City airport project—critics could argue that the President's consultations are primarily political exercises that serve no legitimate purpose as a governing tool.³⁵ The effectiveness of AMLO's public consultations, assuming effectiveness is measured by the number of those policy proposals submitted for popular scrutiny that are ultimately implemented, is of only secondary importance. Germane to this paper is the role these consultations play in demonstrating AMLO's use of populist political methods to get, and maintain, popular support.

AMLO claimed record-high levels of approval upon assuming office in 2018.³⁶ His utilization of popular consultations as a primary means of policy formation, whether in fact motivated by a genuine commitment to popular sovereignty or by a desire for good political optics, has only augmented these numbers. According to current polling data from Mexico's premier polling firm, Oraculus, AMLO's approval rating as President peaked at 81% in early 2019 and has rarely dipped below 60%.³⁷ He has a reputation for being a political entrepreneur, and these numbers evince the success of his populist gamble and political methods.³⁸ His broad popular support among Mexican voters has given the President extraordinary political confidence: he asserts that he "is introducing participatory democracy" to Mexico.³⁹

More than any policy stance, it was this commitment to direct democracy that garnered AMLO his mandate in 2018 and continues to buoy his approval ratings. This harmonizes with the theory, proposed by Benjamin Moffit, that populism is not so much an ideology of any coherent sort as it is a political style.⁴⁰ The populist political style is inherently performative: the leader dutifully plays his role as the human manifestation of the will of the people before his audience, the people themselves.⁴¹ This genre of political performance has seen numerous instantiations in Latin America: the Peróns of Argentina, Chavez in Venezuela, Bolsonaro in Brazil, and others. As Diego von Vacano writes, "The performative populism model emerges most clearly through the lineages of Latin American political thought."⁴² In this context, AMLO is just another leader in a long tradition of Latin American populist political performers.

AMLO: A Threat to Mexican Democracy?

AMLO recently gave one his most striking populist performances. On April 10, 2022, Mexicans went to the polls. Unlike past elections, this one was an unprecedented referendum on the President's performance. Under the Mexican constitution, which calls for elections every six years,⁴³ AMLO, elected in 2018, was scheduled to remain in office until 2024. Just past the halfway point of his term, however, voters were asked to vote to either "recall" AMLO or "ratify" his presidential mandate.⁴⁴

The referendum has shocked the Mexican political system. The president himself, and his MORENA colleagues, argue that the referendum is a means of revitalizing Mexican democracy. Luis de la Calle of the Wilson Center's Mexico Institute writes, "AMLO and his allies had been some of the main promoters of this type of voting as a means to broaden the arsenal for democratic participation."⁴⁵ Others criticize it as a cynical ploy to consolidate political power. Quoting Carlos Bravo Regidor, a critic of AMLO's administration, Natalie Kitroeff of the *New York Times* writes, "[The referendum is]

an instrument of political propaganda... [MORENA] wants this to be a show of force, of muscle, and capacity to bring people into the streets and make explicit their support for López Obrador.”⁴⁶ Indeed, echoing the sentiments of Bravo Regidor, the united opposition to AMLO and MORENA instructed their supporters to boycott the referendum. This contributed significantly to the relatively low turnout of the referendum. Nevertheless, among those who turned out to vote, AMLO was able to garner an astounding 91.9% approval, some 15.16 million votes.⁴⁷

The opposition, and many Western observers, argue that the results of the referendum were a foregone conclusion.⁴⁸ It is worth noting that MORENA employed relatively dubious tactics leading up to the referendum: despite legal prohibitions on such conduct, numerous MORENA officials, most notably AMLO himself, publicly promoted the referendum and spent public resource profligately to do so.⁴⁹ These suspect tactics have sounded alarms among liberal democrats around the globe. Some observers go so far as to predict that the referendum was the first step toward the impending institutionalization of MORENA, much like that of the PRI in the early 1900s. De la Calle writes:

President López Obrador showed little regard for the rule of law and for democratic institutions—a willingness to accept the use of financial resources to support him in an election no matter their legitimacy. There is only one possible conclusion: the President and his allies are no democrats, not very different from former PRI presidents that manipulated vote counting and tilted the electoral process to guarantee winning. In this case, it was particularly unnecessary as the result was never in doubt.⁵⁰

In these assessments, both from AMLO’s domestic opposition and foreign observers, the specter of the PRI and Mexico’s authoritarian twentieth century looms large.

One of the main criticisms faced by AMLO and MORENA as a result of this snap referendum is that the President and his party are undermining the nascent Mexican democracy, and the constitution on which it rests, much as President Lázaro Cárdenas did in the 1920s by sowing doubt in Mexico’s democratic institutions and manipulating democratic processes.⁵¹ In particular, much has been made of AMLO’s criticism of the Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE), the public institution that is constitutionally charged with implementing, regulating, and otherwise overseeing Mexico’s municipal, state, and federal elections. The INE was created by the Constitutional Reform of 2014 to transform the relatively impotent Instituto Federal Electoral.⁵² The INE, in contrast to its successor, was granted broad oversight and regulatory authority.⁵³ In challenging the INE, AMLO is threatening Mexican democracy by undermining the only institution that has ever—even nominally—had the authority and resources to ensure the integrity of Mexico’s elections.

AMLO openly criticized the INE for discriminating against him during the referendum. He publicly accused the INE of acting dishonestly by not promoting the vote publicly, something that would have been in violation of a Mexican supreme court ruling barring such action. (It is worth noting that the ruling did not seem to dissuade any MORENA officials from publicly campaigning, nor did it prevent AMLO from accusing the INE of “putting polling booths as far away as possible.”)⁵⁴ The President went on to argue that the INE “[is] openly against us, against me.”⁵⁵ His hostility to the INE bears the hallmarks of populist antagonism to establishment institutions, particularly those charged with upholding the constitution against the so-called “will of the people” in cases where the two are in conflict. Complicating the narrative presented by AMLO, the INE argued that it did not receive the required funding from the central government to implement the referendum to the President’s standards.⁵⁶

Lorenzo Córdova, who directs the INE, believes that this is all part of a concerted effort by López Obrador to undermine the INE and neutralize its capabilities as a watchdog.⁵⁷ Reflected in these actions, many see the specter of the authoritarian PRI.⁵⁸ De la Calle, for his part, laments what he sees

as a substantial threat to Mexican democracy, namely AMLO's words and actions concerning the INE. In de la Calle's estimation, López Obrador has abused his office by using his moral authority to cast doubt on the INE and disparage its impartiality.⁵⁹ In the process, according to de la Calle, AMLO has sought to engender popular support for constitutional reform that could be manipulated—as was done under the PRI.⁶⁰ He concludes that “the stakes for Mexico's democracy cannot be higher.”⁶¹ Whether or not the prognostications of AMLO's critics materialize, AMLO's criticism of democratic institutions that oppose his will—and therefore, in his mind, the will of the people—testifies to his status as a populist. The future success of AMLO's movement will depend on how much of AMLO's populism has been infused into Mexican political culture and society since he launched his third presidential campaign.

Despite the vociferous criticism and accusations of corruption and venality from the opposition and outside observers, many Mexicans went to the polls in April to express their genuine support for the President.⁶² Describing her interview with Alan Pozos in Mexico City on the day of the election, Kitroeff writes:

[Pozos] hoped the exercise would “set a precedent” so future leaders could be kicked out if needed.⁶³ This time, though, he just wants the president to know he's loved.⁶⁴ “It's to show Andrés Manuel that he has the strong backing of the people...Andrés often feels alone, because he has to go against an entire system and doesn't have support.”⁶⁵

Whether these sentiments are broadly salient is critically important to gauging the longevity of AMLO's movement. If so, it would provide evidence that AMLO's populism is deeply rooted in Mexican society and not merely a phantasm of AMLO's creation or a happenstance reaction to the failures of the Peña Nieto administration.

And indeed, the results of the referendum suggest that AMLO's popularity is genuine. Nearly 92% of eligible voters voted to retain AMLO in office.⁶⁶ AMLO's self-presentation—and reputation—as a political maverick undoubtedly contribute to his high popularity. Kitroeff writes, “[AMLO's] high favor with voters is also a tribute, supporters and critics agree, to his relentless broadcasting of an official narrative in which he portrays himself as a lone warrior for the people, going up against a corrupt establishment.”⁶⁷ He is popular with the Mexican electorate because of his renegade populism and anti-establishment stance. The consensus that AMLO's popularity corresponds to the vigor of his opposition to the political establishment is indicative of Mexico's conscious efforts to disassociate itself from its twentieth-century past. From 1924 until 2000, the PRI dominated Mexican politics and—despite its nominal support for “Cardenismo” and social democracy—formed a governing elite that enjoyed fabulous wealth and privilege.⁶⁸ Even today, Mexico struggles with extreme inequality.⁶⁹ AMLO's success in winning high levels of popular support would suggest that the Mexican electorate has truly turned a political corner and become significantly more populist in the 22 years since the PRI first lost control of what had become, over the course of the twentieth century, an elite-driven one-party state.

Conclusion

Like many of his Latin American populist predecessors, AMLO led a revolution. Unlike many of those revolutionary populists, however, his revolution was bloodless. Nevertheless, the ensuing dramatic shifts in Mexican policy, institutional composition, governance structures, and (most notably) political culture suggest that AMLO's platform as a candidate, and later as a victor, were no less transformative. After a century of domination by the PRI—with the brief interlude presidencies of Vicente Fox and his successor, Felipe Calderón, of the conservative National Action Party (PAN)—AMLO's election was revolutionary insofar as it was a successful grassroots left-populist movement.⁷⁰ In a review of López Obrador's presidency two years on, Darcy Tetrault writes, “AMLO has outlined

a political course that seeks to...curb corruption from the top down. His goal is to realize a profound transformation of Mexican society comparable to those that accompanied the War of Independence (1810–1821), the War of Reform (1858–1861), and the Revolution (1910–1917), only this time peacefully.”⁷¹ It remains to be seen whether AMLO’s legacy will be truly revolutionary in the sense that his movement, political party, policy stances and priorities, and personal popularity will outlive his presidency. It is likely, however, that they will.

¹ Azam Ahmed and Kirk Semple, “A New Revolution? Mexico Still Waiting as López Obrador Nears Half-Year Mark,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/10/world/americas/amlo-mexico-lopez-obrador.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>.

² Andrés Manuel López Obrador, “Programa del Movimiento Regeneración Nacional: Por Qué Luchamos,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://lopezobrador.org.mx/programa-del-movimiento-regenarcion-nacional/> (translation my own).

³ Cas Mudde, “The Populist Zeitgeist,” *Government and Opposition* 39, no. 4 (2004): 543.

⁴ In this context, I use the term “Manichean discourse” to refer to the narrative—espoused by populists around the world—that a governing elite is working to subvert the will of the people. This idea comes from Cas Mudde’s definition of populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite.’” Mudde, 543.

⁵ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, “Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America,” *Government and Opposition* 48, no. 2 (2013): 153.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁸ The World Bank, “GDP (Current US\$) – Latin America & Caribbean,” last Updated 2020, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?locations=ZL>.

⁹ Presidente de Gobierno de México, “Biografía: Lic. Andrés Manuel López Obrador,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://presidente.gob.mx/biografia/> (translation my own).

¹⁰ Ahmed and Semple, “A New Revolution?”

¹¹ El Gobierno de México, “Andrés Manuel López Obrador: Presidente Constitucional de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://www.gob.mx/presidencia/estructuras/andres-manuel-lopez-obrador> (translation my own).

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ Nick Miroff and William Booth, “Peña Nieto is Winner of Mexican Election,” *The Washington Post*, July 1, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/the_americas/mexico-presidential-election-underway/2012/07/01/gIQAyd96FW_story.html.

¹⁷ López Obrador, “Programa del Movimiento Regeneración Nacional.”

¹⁸ Jordan Bazak, “¡Qué Pena! Enrique Peña Nieto’s Terrible Approval Ratings,” *Washington Report on the Hemisphere* 36, no. 17 (2016): 3.

¹⁹ Presidente de Gobierno de México, “Biografía: Lic. Andrés Manuel López Obrador.”

²⁰ Joy Langston, *Democratization and Authoritarian Party Survival: Mexico’s PRI* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 36.

²² Brian Hanrahan and Paulina Aroch Fugellie, “Reflections on the Transformation in Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 28, no. 1 (2019): 115.

²³ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 115.

²⁵ Mariano Sánchez-Talanquer and Kenneth F. Greene, “Is Mexico Falling into the Authoritarian Trap?” *Journal of Democracy* 32, no. 4 (2021): 59.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 59.

²⁷ Mudde, 543.

²⁸ Israel Solorio, Joel Ortega, Raúl Romero, and Jorge Guzmán, “AMLO’s Populism in Mexico and the Framing of

the Extractivist Agenda: The Construction of the Hegemony of the People Without the Indigenous Voices,” *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 15, no. 2 (2021): 251.

²⁹ Massimo Modonesi, “México: El Gobierno Progresista ‘Tardío’: Alcances y Límites De La Victoria De Amló,” *Nueva Sociedad* 276 (2018): 5 (translation my own).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

³¹ Solorio et al., 260.

³² Secretaría de Gobernación, “Sistema De Información Legislativa,” accessed July 14, 2022, <http://sil.gobernacion.gob.mx/Glosario/definicionpop.php?ID=252> (translation my own).

³³ Solorio et al., 260.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 260.

³⁵ Jude Webber, “Mexico’s López Obrador Shores Up Popular Support Ahead of Inauguration,” *Financial Times*, November 26, 2018, <https://www.ft.com/content/9addcad4-f18e-11e8-ae55-df4bf40f9d0d>.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Javier Marquez, “Aprobación Presidencial,” *Oraculus*, last updated July 4, 2022, <https://oraculus.mx/aprobacion-presidencial/> (translation my own).

³⁸ Solorio et al., 255.

³⁹ Webber, “Mexico’s López Obrador Shores Up Popular Support.”

⁴⁰ Benjamin Moffit, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, and Representation* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² Diego von Vacano, “American Caudillo: Princely Performative Populism and Democracy in the Americas,” *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 45, no. 4 (2019): 421.

⁴³ Oscar Lopez and Natalie Kitroeff, “Despite Low Turnout, Mexico Voters Back President to Stay in Office,” *The New York Times*, April 11, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/11/world/americas/mexico-president-recall-election.html>.

⁴⁴ Luis de la Calle, “Lessons from Mexico’s Recall Vote,” *The Wilson Center*, April 12, 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/lessons-mexicos-recall-vote>.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Natalie Kitroeff, “The Biggest Promoter of Mexico’s Presidential Recall Election? The President,” *The New York Times*, April 8, 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/08/world/americas/mexico-president-recall-election.html?action=click&module=RelatedLinks&pgtype=Article>.

⁴⁷ de la Calle, “Lessons from Mexico’s Recall Vote.”

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Instituto Nacional Electoral, “Reforma Constitucional 2014,” accessed July 14, 2022, <https://portal.ine.mx/sobre-el-ine/reforma-constitucional-2014/> (translation my own).

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Kitroeff, “The Biggest Promoter.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ de la Calle, “Lessons from Mexico’s Recall Vote.”

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Kitroeff, “The Biggest Promoter.”

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ de la Calle, “Lessons from Mexico’s Recall Vote.”

⁶⁷ Kitroeff, “The Biggest Promoter.”

⁶⁸ Ahmed and Semple, “A New Revolution?”

⁶⁹ Frederic Lambert and Hyunmin Park, “Income Inequality and Government Transfers in Mexico,” IMF

Working Paper (2019): 1.

⁷⁰ The movement that brought AMLO to power is a “grassroots left-populist movement” insofar as it stands in direct contrast to the PRI, which institutionalized leftist movements.

⁷¹ Darcy Tetrault, “The New Extractivism in Mexico: Rent Redistribution and Resistance to Mining and Petroleum Activities,” *World Development* (2020): 8.