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# Into the Void: The loss of governance in rural Mexico

César Suárez Ortiz

## 1 The governance structure of rural Mexico

Mexican rurality has experienced many types of land tenure institutions from the Pre-Hispanic era to the present day. The relationship between these institutions and the State throughout the years has shaped the life of rural Mexico. The rurality as a product of the Mexican Revolution permitted the establishment of an authoritarian regime that lasted until the end of the 20th century. However, despite the political transition towards a democratic regime, rural governance structure in Mexico has become the space where new forms of resistance, violence, wild capitalism, development and underdevelopment coexist, creating an environment for the maintenance of a type of populism that ruled the country during the last century. To understand why populism has remained an important political force within the country, we must assess the characteristics and changes of the rural structure in Mexico.

Although rural structure in Mexico is diverse and heterogenous, it has a long communitarian tradition. Since Pre-Hispanic times, communitarian land tenure was established in the figure of the *calputlalli* that societies used for collective and individual food production<sup>1</sup> (Florescano: 2009), (Méndez: 2016). In this way, Pre-Hispanic societies ensured that all their members could have a minimal level of wellbeing by providing the necessary land for subsistence. After colonization, the communitarian land tenure was overthrown making the King of Spain the total owner of the land with capacity to grant lands to privates. Nevertheless, communitarian land tenure was permitted by the Spanish government to certain communities as a mechanism of political control over the indigenous people while reproducing the main labor force of the colony. After independence, private property became the principal land tenure institution in the country through the figure of the *mayorazgo*. This land tenure institution consisted in the “adjudication by succession of the private lands to the eldest son, who could not circulate them but only to transfer them under the same condition. The *mayorazgos* and the clergy concentrated lands that were identified as dead hands, and to which they were not subject to the market” (Méndez: 3: 2016). Yet, the main problem with this land tenure institution was land unproductivity. In response to this problem, the government of President Ignacio Comonfort (1855-1857) expropriated those lands and distributed them to agricultural private producers through the Law of Disentailment of the Rustic and Urban Estates of the Civil and Religious Corporations of Mexico in 1856. In this period, however, communitarian lands owned by indigenous communities were also affected by the reform, due to its liberal favoring of private property.

At the end of the 19th century, President Porfirio Díaz fostered industrialization through investments on infrastructure and communications making the urbanization process a priority for Díaz's administration. Nevertheless, most of the population remained in rural areas and with a more unequal distribution of land due to the exacerbation of the large estate. In this period, the *Hacienda* became the principal land tenure institution which consisted in the accumulation of numerous hectares owned by one person or family. The *hacienda* lord hired workers who lived in the *hacienda* for agricultural production who had the right to work a small parcel for self-subsistence. This form of social exploitation was the main governance structure of rural Mexico at the beginning of the twentieth century which led to the Mexican revolution in 1910.

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<sup>1</sup> The *calputlalli* was classified in three types of land tenure: the *calpolli*, which was the common land, but the usufruct was individual; the *altepletalli*, which were the lands whose production was for the community expenses; and the land for hunting.

Land reform was one of the two main demands during the Mexican revolution (Katz:2004). The first demand was the establishment of competitive presidential elections, and the second was the distribution of land among all peasants. Emiliano Zapata became the leader of the land reform demand with the creation of the Plan de Ayala, which demanded the end of *latifundio* and the distribution of land to the peasants (Womack:2017). In the aftermath of the revolution, the new government institutionalized land reform in the 27th article of the Constitution. In this regard, the State obtained total control over the land, and the president was given with the capacity of land distribution and expropriation. With this constitutional change, among others,<sup>2</sup> the history of the authoritarian regime in the 20th century in Mexico had begun.

Three land tenure institutions came out from the Constitution. First, private property retained its right, but with certain limitations. Large estate was prohibited, so private owners could only have up to a certain number of hectares but with the complete rights to their lands for production or commercial transactions like selling or renting. However, the state had the right to expropriate the private land for public purposes with an economic compensation for the private owner. Second, the *comunidad* was created to restore land to all indigenous communities that had lost their lands in the past. The third institution created after the civil war was the *ejido*. This form of land tenure benefited most of the peasants who fought during the revolution and worked on the haciendas.

The *ejido* has a complete governance structure formed by three bodies. First, the assembly is the decision-making body within the *ejido*, which makes decisions on the basis of a majority where all *ejidatarios* are represented equally within the Assembly. Second, the *Commissariat* is the operative body of the *ejido* carrying out the decisions made by the assembly. Third, the over-sight *somitee* supervises the work of the *Commissariat* and enforces the assembly's will. Another characteristic of the *ejido* is its land composition formed by three types of land. First, each *ejidatario* has the right to own one parcel for their personal necessities. Second, the common lands are the space that all *ejidatarios* can use, primarily for cattle. Third, human settling lands were destined for house construction. All these rights come with certain restrictions. For example, *ejidatarios* were not allowed to sell or rent their land, and only they or their families were able to use it. Moreover, if a *ejidatario* did not use his land for a period of two years, his land tenure rights were withdrawn.

Due to the social conflict of the Mexican revolution, the post-revolutionary State was in the need for peace and stability in the rural areas that represented 70% of the territory in 1929 (Warman: 2001). First, in a local perspective the government assured the control over the *ejidos* through bureaucratic and clientelist mechanism of dominance (Gordillo: 1999). Second, corporativism became the instrument used by the State to control and pacify peasants and many other social groups. (Córdova:1972)<sup>3</sup>. In 1938, President Lazaro Cárdenas created the Peasant National Confederation (CNC) that became the main mediator between the rural sector and the State channelizing all demands coming from the countryside through this organization. With this, the Mexican Revolution Party (PRM acronym in Spanish)-later PRI- built an important loyal electorate army that helped the post-revolutionary government to govern during most of the 20th century (Carbonell: 2002).

Third, the government used “revolutionary nationalism” as the main ideology to bring together all social groups in the country towards the recently formed Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). The term “revolutionary family” tried to homogenize society into one single vision of nation to avoid any possible social conflict. Within this ideology, the countryside became an important symbol of the regime consolidation. Because the vast majority of the population lived in the countryside, the

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<sup>2</sup> To see the changes caused in the Mexican Constitution of 1917 see (Córdova:1972).

<sup>3</sup> The PRN later PRI became the only political party that could win elections in all level of governments. The party became the resonance box of the State that canalized the demands of the society. The party was also in charge to distribute the political charges of its members in order foster stability and discipline. In 1938, president Lazaro Cardenas institutionalized corporatism in the two major population groups of the country: the workers and the peasants. For the former, the government created the Mexican Workers Conference and for the latter the Mexican Peasants Conference. This two organizations organized and control this two major productive groups and canalized all its economic and political demands.

government put the peasants as the main guardians of the achievements of the revolution and as the ones responsible for national development. Land reform was the form the government recognized peasants as important actors for Mexico's growth.

Through these three mechanisms of control the authoritarian regime in Mexico was consolidated both in urban and rural areas, with the president being the cornerstone of the authoritarian regime (Carpizo:1978). These tools gave the regime the peace and stability needed for the economic reconstruction of the country.

Once the pacification and control over the rural area was achieved, the post-revolutionary government focused on the modernization and growth of agriculture in Mexico (Warman:2001). To achieve this, the State created an institutional framework in charge of many aspects of production, commercialization and consumption. Irrigation systems, development banks, agricultural extension, fertilizers and insecticides companies and control of food prices were the main economic activities that defined the participation of the State in the country's agricultural economy during the 20th century (Warman: 2001) (Méndez:2016) (Moguel: 1988). Most of the infrastructure investment was made between 1940 and 1970, where the agricultural sector presented its major growth in the history of the country.<sup>4</sup> The development strategy followed by the government during this period consisted in using agriculture for earning valuable foreign exchange through the export of agricultural products, providing cheap products to urban areas and mobilizing rural labor force to the cities (Moguel: 1988). This strategy built a bimodal development of agriculture in the country where most of the technological investments were made in the north of Mexico on big private owners. Irrigation systems, better interest rates credits and other incentives were focused in these lands that produced products mainly for exportation. On the other hand, the south of the country, where most of the ejidos and comunidades resided, received subsidies and guaranteed prices for the production of basic products, in order to satisfy the internal market and help industrialization to develop.

The period of bonanza (1940-1960) reached its limits at the end of the sixties, when international food prices increased and internal production stagnated (CEPAL:2016). Furthermore, the high cost of the State's intervention increased over time, making it a high cost for the government's finances. Moreover, the undemocratic social and political control of the peasants started to lose its strength, and new democratic movements surge from the ejidos (Gordillo: 1988) (Basáñez:1981). The response of the subsequent governments to this economic and political crisis was more public spending, land distribution and social repression. To maintain calm in the rural sector, the State invested more in public companies, distributed more land and violently repressed all groups outside the CNC that defied the State authority. Before 1992, the rural landscape in Mexico was desperate. Productivity was stagnant, poverty increased and social tensions were rising within the ejidos and comunidades. The demands for a democratic system and better life conditions were rising all around the country. Under this context of economic and political crisis, the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari reformed for the first time Article 27 of the Constitution, radically changing the rural governance structure of Mexico.

The 1992 reform to Article 27 represented a major political and economic transformation in rural areas in Mexico (Gordillo et al: 1999). First, land distribution came to an end. The President resigned its power to distribute land to the peasants. Second, the government decreased significantly its economic participation in agriculture. This represented the withdraw of public companies in charge of commercialization, the end of food prices control and investment on infrastructure. Third, ejidatarios and comuneros fully acquired rights on their lands. This gave them the right to participate in commercial transactions such as renting, selling and using their lands to receive credit and loans. With these changes, the rural sector underwent the economic liberalization that the government began during the last decade of the 20th century. On the other hand, the reform diminished social and political control of corporativism by ending the CNC electoral control of the peasants.

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<sup>4</sup> In this period of time agriculture represented around 5 to 6 percent of the GDP.

A major change in the rural structure of Mexico consisted in the vision of the State with regards to agricultural producers. On one hand, big producers received help in order to compete in the international market through economic compensations, subsidies and macroeconomic stability. On the contrary, small producers were considered unproductive and subjects of social programs only. The goal of this strategy was to concentrate agriculture production in the more productive producers, import cheap food from abroad and increase migration from rural to urban areas. The government's vision for this reform was to strength the agroindustry sector under a free market economy, while fostering urbanization around the country. However, after 25 years of this reform, the objectives were not accomplished.

According to INEGI, 24 million people in Mexico live in communities under 2,500 habitants, which are categorized as rural by the government. This population represents 24% of the total population of Mexico.<sup>5</sup> From this rural population, 58.2% live in moderate poverty conditions and 17.4% experience extreme poverty according to official information.<sup>6</sup> In contrast, in urban communities 39.2% of the population live in moderate poverty and 4.7% in extreme poverty. The poverty situation gets worse in indigenous communities where 7 out of 10 live under poverty.

The negative socioeconomic landscape in rural Mexico corresponds to a negative production in the agroindustry. Despite the surplus that the sector has experienced since 2015 with annual earnings of 5,246 dollars, the history of this industry since 1992 is of constant shortage. Furthermore, in the last two years only certain products like tomato, pepper, melon, watermelon and papaya have increased its productivity (Banco de México: 2017). These products, however, are concentrated in few national and transnational companies absorbing all the profits.

Since the 1992 reform, the government has focused its resources on the productivity of big rural farmers. According to the Ministry of Agriculture, Mexico has between 5.3 and 5.4 million rural economic entities, distributed among 6 types of producers.<sup>7</sup> Only 10% of the economic unities are considered by the government as economically productive, while 78% of the unities are classified as not productive. This productive structure designed by the government has important impacts on the distribution of public programs. For example, the first decile of the producers in the country only receive two to three percent of funds distributed by PROCAMPO.<sup>8</sup> On the contrary, the farmers with more than 100 hectares receive 32.62% of the program's funds. The states that obtain most of the subsidized and productive programs are Sonora, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Sinaloa and Tamaulipas. All these states have a smaller presence of ejidos and comunidades and a larger presence of private owners.

Despite this negative outlook for most of the smaller producers in the country, ejidos and comunidades have remained throughout time. According National Agrarian Registry (RAN), this communitarian type of property owns 99.9 million hectares that represent 51% of the total national territory. Furthermore, since 1992 only 4.8% of total ejidos and comunidades have changed its land tenure to private property. The persistence of communitarian forms of land tenure could be interpreted as a mechanism of resilience of many peasants against the negative politic and economic circumstances of the country in order to ensure their self- subsistence and resist against the forces of the market.

Aside from this unequal rural governance structure in Mexico, rural areas in the country have experienced two major issues in the last years. First, ejidatarios and comuneros have defended their

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<sup>5</sup> If we consider the OECD definition of rural community of 15,000 habitants the people living in these communities rise to the 38% of the total population.

<sup>6</sup> See (Coneval:2016)

<sup>7</sup> The Ministry of Agriculture in Mexico classifies the rural units in six groups: 1) subsistence family without connection to the market, 2) subsistence family with connection to the market, 3) Transition, 4) business with fragile profitability, 5) thriving business and 6) business dynamic (Sagarpa-Fao: 2014).

<sup>8</sup> Procampo is a public program which objective is to complement the economic income of producers in the Mexican countryside, to contribute to their individual and country's economic growth through the granting of monetary support per surface registered to the program.

lands against the interests of energy and mining companies that try to exploit ejidos and comunidades for extraction purposes. This has caused the resistance of many communities against transnational companies and the government. Second, the violence that has spread throughout the country has an important expression in rural areas. For example, most of the vigilante groups that have arisen in recent years come from rural communities. Other rural communities have had not the same luck, and many of them are controlled by organized crime. The cases of the 43 students disappeared in Iguala is an example of this.

In summary, during the 20th century, the rural structure of Mexico shifted from paternalistic and authoritarian state intervention, to a free market economy under a political transition to democracy. Unlike in the past, when agriculture was an important element for economic growth, the governments after the reform saw no potential in agriculture aside from the agro- export industry. With a stagnant economy and an underdeveloped democracy, the rural part of the country has become an ungovernable space where poverty, corruption and violence converge. The overlook of the government to most of the rural sector has created a vacuum of power where external actors, such as energy and mining companies and criminal groups, have taken advantage of many ejidos and comunidades. Under these conditions, populism in Mexico has been able to survive, despite the economic and political changes of the last 25 years.

## 2 Populism in Mexico

Populism is a political category that has been used to classified certain types of regimes, political parties or political candidates since the 20th century to the present. However, during the last decades, populism has been associated with pejorative elements in its relationship to democracy, human rights, freedom of speech and economic development. Under this paradigm, the analysis of populism is simplified, making no distinction among “populist” political leaders like Perón in Argentina, Cárdenas in México or Donald Trump in the United States. This result in a misunderstanding of history and of populism as a political category capable of important and different transformations. In this regard, populism must follow Laclau’s idea of an empty concept capable of being used for many purposes defined by a specific context (Laclau:2005). Therefore, populism must be a concept described by its inherent characteristics and their interaction with a specific context. Delimiting populism with specific characteristics can make it a useful category of analysis and possible element for social change.

Mudde and Kaltwasser define populism as a “thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite,’ and which argues that politics should be and expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde and Kaltwasser:6: 2017). This definition of populism focuses on the antagonism that it creates within society using two main bodies: the people and the elite. In this paradigm, populism is an ideology in which society is divided into two main groups in constant confrontation.

The antagonism created by populism is represented by specific concepts. First, the concept of “the people” is created to distinguish itself from the “elite.” Different characteristics can be used through populism to define the people. Depending on the context, the people can be created through nationality, social status, ethnicity or political power (Buttler:2017). The form in which these ideas are used will depend on the specific context where populism develops and the categories that will provide populism the legitimacy and power to achieve its aims. It is an important characteristic of populism to see the people as the only body with the unique right for social change and the political party or leader as the only vehicle where the general will of the people is expressed. Once the people are defined, populism must create a narrative that describes the main problem that the people suffers and propose a specific solution (Bordieu:2017). It must be highlighted that under populism, either the problem and

the solution must be framed in a simple form to be easily understood despite the complexity of the situation (Mudde and Kaltwasser: 2017).

The second element used by populism is the concept of “the elite” or “the other.” Within this concept, populism distinguishes the elite from the people through moral terms, such as the good and the bad, the pure and the impure or the legitimate or the illegitimate. Like the concept of the people, the elite are categorized and delimited by the criteria used on the people, but in the reverse. Therefore, if the people are powerless, the elite are powerful; if the people are poor, the elite are rich, and so on. This notion, however, does not only represents a power imbalance but also a threat. In many contexts, the concept of the elite has been replaced with the concept of “the other” or “the illegitimate.” Despite these differences, populism will always frame the social problem as an antagonistic relationship between two groups.

Finally, populism is based on the idea that the general will is the only political force capable of social, economic and political change. For populism, the will of the people means “join[ing] together into a community and legislate to enforce their common interests, the latter denotes the simple sum of particular interests at a specific moment in time” (Mudde and Kaltwasser: 16: 2017). This perception of the general will- most of the time- implies a rejection of any form of political representation (e.g. Congress, the Supreme Court, et cetera) and the preference of direct methods of political representation (e.g referendum, plebiscite, et cetera) (O’donnell: 2011) (Zakaria: 1997).

Through these characteristics, populism cannot be related either left or right, but it must be considered as a form of politics. Concepts like the people, the elite and the general will can be used by either left or right groups. Furthermore, populism is not necessarily antidemocratic if a procedural definition of democracy is used. According to authors such as Norberto Bobbio and Adam Przeworsky, democracy is a political regime where people chooses their representatives on electoral basis. Using this definition, democracy and populism are not necessarily two antagonistic concepts, but they can even complement each other (Bobbio:1987) (Przeworsky:1995). On the other hand, a more liberal perception of democracy leads populism into an antidemocratic category. This results from defining democracy as does Robert Dahl or Giovanni Sartori, where democracy is not only the election of representatives by the majority, but also the establishment of check and balances around those representatives. For Robert Dahl, any democratic regime has two main elements: the independence of public contestation and political participation (Dahl:1989). For Giovanni Sartori, the main distinction of a democratic regime is respect for minority groups and the establishment of institutions to avoid the *tyranny of the majority* (Sartori: 1997). This liberal definition of democracy clashes with populism in two main aspects. First, it envisions politics as leading to pluralism and consensus, rather than conflict. Second, the general will in a democratic regime is limited through institutions and laws, while in populism the people exercises power without limits.

Despite the significant differences between populism and liberal democracy, in certain contexts, the former can lead a political system to the latter. Populism can be used as a vehicle to dismantle the *status quo*, helping with the creation of something new. For example, when political systems are not democratic, populism can foster a political transition that could end in a democratic regime. Many democratic transitions have used populism to overthrow dictatorships or authoritarian governments and implement more competitive and democratic governments (O’donnell & Schmitter:1988). For example, Lech Walesa in Poland, Mandela in South Africa, Vicente Fox in Mexico, Alexis Tsipras in Greece and Podemos in Spain are some examples of how populism can lead to more democratic political systems. Under certain contexts, however, populism can foster not a democratic regime but a democratic regression. When a political system has established a system of check and balances, representative institutions, and respect for civil freedoms, populism can represent a threat (Mudde and Kaltwasser: 2017),. In most developed countries where populism has emerged, democratic institutions and civil freedoms have been threatened by characters such as Donald Trump, Marie Le Pen, Geert Wilders, Viktor Orban and Norbert Hofer. In synthesis, populism is not democratic or antidemocratic per se. Depending on the circumstances of a specific conjuncture, populism can lead to different outcomes.



Another important aspect of populism is the context where it emerges. During the 20th century, populist parties and movements arose for many reasons, such as national independence, national construction and geopolitical survival. For example, many populist leaders were of great relevance in the independence of many countries in Africa, where the concept of the people versus an imperialist elite was the main discourse for rebel groups during their process of independence (Badiou:2017). In Latin America, countries like Mexico used populism as a form of national transformation where the concept of the Mexican people was used to create a coalition of political forces capable of modernizing and industrializing the national economy. In Europe, populism appeared as a survival mechanism under a context of ongoing war within the region. Forging the perception of the French or British people was an important factor of defense against Nazism.

In the 21st century, two main causes are responsible for the rise of populism: democratic disenchantment and inequality. All around the world countries have experienced a democratic breakdown. For example, in many Latin American countries, democracy has lost support through the years. According to the Latinobarometro survey, in 2015 only 57% of the people in the region supported democracy (Latinobarometro: 2016). Although this represents a majority within the population the support to democracy was higher in 2010 with 63.3% of the population supporting democracy within the region. Moreover, the people that prefer an authoritarian government to democracy has increased from 14.2% in 2010 to 15.6% in 2015. In Latin America, this democratic disenchantment might come from an increase in inequality and violence. According to Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), around 167 million people in the region lived under poverty in 2015 and more than half of that population experienced extreme poverty (ECLAC: 2016). Furthermore, in a 2016 document published by Oxfam, Latin America was defined as the most unequal region in the world, where 48% of the region's wealth was concentrated within 1% of the population (Oxfam: 2016). On the other hand, Latin America has experienced an increase in the level of violence in recent years. According to UNODC, despite the region having 8% of the world's population, it hosts 34% of the total homicides in the world (UNODC: 2017). The negative outcomes experienced from the economy and security in this context have a negative impact on democracy diminishing its legitimacy and opening the door to populist forces.

In developed countries, unemployment has been high in the last years, especially after the economic crisis of 2008. According to World Bank data, the U.S unemployment rate passed from 4 in 2000 to 9.6 in 2010. Another problem that has increased in the United States is inequality. The Gini Index in this country has risen from 37.5 in 1983 to 41 in 2013. These negative economic effects have had an important impact on the U.S democracy. According to SurveyMonkey, 40% of the American population said in 2016 that they have lost faith in their democracy. Under this context, characters like Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders arose importantly in the U.S political scene.

The European Union has experienced similar problems as the U.S. The unemployment rate in the European Union went from 11 in 2012 to 8 in 2016. Despite this reduction, unemployment rate in the region has not been below of 7 since 2006. Furthermore, in countries like France and the United Kingdom inequality has increased lately. For the former, the Gini Index moved from 30.6 in 2006 to 32.3 in 2014. For the latter, the Gini Index passed from 32.3 in 2012 to 34.1 in 2014. These negative outcomes have had effects on how Europeans perceive democracy. According to the Atlas of European Values, 30% of the population in western Europe in 2015 claimed that democracy is not good at maintaining order.

The sum of this negative outcomes is the result of a neoliberalism that has reached its limits (Fraser:2017) (DellaPorta:2017). The idea that neoliberalism would provide societies with the tool for economic growth, equality and wellbeing is no longer a common belief either in developed or developing countries. However, the population's rage against the economy's performance has democracy as the main guilty party. The scenario comes from the strategy that many parties followed at the end of the nineties (Fraser: 2017). This political-economic vision, where the free market economy coexists with democracy, has been called by Nancy Fraser "progressive neoliberalism." This consisted in the establishment of a de-regulated economy with certain democratic values such as rule

of law, accountability and inclusion of minority groups. Nevertheless, this strategy has led to the social breakdown of today, where different types of populism have developed. Despite that recent attention has been focused on the right-populism in developed countries with the cases of United States, France, United Kingdom, Germany or the Netherlands, in other places the populism has appeared differently. Although the economic crisis and democratic disenchantment are two variables that both developed and developing countries share, populist movements do not always play out in the same way. In the case of Mexico, populism has existed through most of Mexico's modern life, mutating through the years in different forms.

The political system that emerged in Mexico after the civil war in 1910 could be described as populist. First, it shaped a single people, composed of different characteristics where tradition and modernity were both included. The educative system was the main tool that the government used to shape a national identity through the creation of a common people identified by many cultural elements. Furthermore, indigenous communities through the pre-Hispanic history and culture were assimilated into Mexican identity (Bonfil:1987). This formation of a national identity permitted the revolutionary government to build a "people" that help it to consolidate its authority. On the other hand, the government constantly changed the vision of the "elite" or the "other" throughout the years. Foreign imperialism represented by the United States and the Soviet Union were common enemies that strengthened the populist government of the 20th century. Nevertheless, these "enemies" were not seen as an external menace but an internal one. Rather than directly blame the USSR or the US, the Mexican government focused on national groups that either supported one or the other of these nations.

The main achievement of the revolutionary government was to institutionalize populism through certain institutions, such as the presidency and a political party (PRI) that supposedly represented the Mexican people's will (Carpizo: 1987). Another important institution in post-revolutionary populism was Mexican corporativism. Through mass-representation organizations that represented the peasants and the proletariat, the government was able to control the demands of these groups (Carbonell: 2002). Instead of using representative institutions such as the congress, Mexican populism of the twentieth century used the presidency, the political party and corporativism as the main channels between the president and the people. This period of Mexican populism can be traced in what Mudde and Kaltwasser call the first wave of Latin American populism; "during this period of time, Latin American countries experienced a crisis of incorporation: the increasing migration of rural people to urban areas and the implementation of economic reforms leading to industrialization paved the way for the rise of demands for political and social rights (Mudde and Kaltwasser: 28: 2017).

Despite the control that the PRI had over the country, its hold did not last forever. After the 1968 student massacre in Tlatelolco, revolutionary populism went into crisis (Woldenberg et al: 2000). From 1970 to 1982, presidents tried to intensify populism by increasing governmental expenditures and repression. However, after the international oil prices crisis, the PRI mutated into a new form in order to survive. Since 1982, presidents in Mexico diminished corporativism's power and permitted major political participation to other political parties. Despite these structural changes, populism in Mexico was able to survive as economy changed from a state controlled economy to a free-market economy). The people were no longer seen as a traditional-modern society as they were in the lenses of the revolution. Mexican society was seen as globalized and western, in the transition to becoming a developed country. The enemy was perceived as the political and social forces that fought against Mexico's modernization. In this period of populism, "the alleged corrupt elite (or the other) was depicted as those political actors who favored the existence of a strong state and opposed the development of a free market (...) this second wave of populism was characterized by the implementation of anti-poverty programs targeted at the informal sectors and the extreme poor (Mudde and Kaltwasser: 31: 2017).

Notwithstanding this change in the PRI, the democratic opening to other parties diminished the control of the pos-revolutionary government. Surprisingly, the political force that was able to foster a political transition in the country in 2000 was a populist leader. Vicente Fox Quesada of the National Action Party (PAN) was a populist candidate that used the antagonistic formula of "the corrupted elite,"

represented by the old regime, and the “good people.” With the promise of incarcerating all PRI politicians, Vicente Fox was the first president of Mexico from a different political party in winning a presidential election. Nonetheless, after six years of government Vicente Fox did not radically change Mexican institutions and made a pact with the PRI to maintain governance in the country. In 2006, a new populist leader arose from the left-wing party the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD). López Obrador, from the Revolutionary Democratic Party, used a similar formula to Vicente Fox—the “mafia” in power versus the “good people” —as he competed in the 2006 presidential elections. The PRD candidate was part of the third wave of populism in Latin America whose characteristic that the “appeal of this populist leftist discourse is related to the social grievances stemming from the neoliberal reforms that were implemented in Latin America during the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (...) by politicizing the issue of inequality and condemning the elites in power, third wave populist actors have been able to become salient” (Mudde and Kaltwasser: 31:2017). However, even though the great performance of Obrador in 2006, the PAN, with Felipe Calderon, won the elections. After an administration that brought the war on drugs increasing the violence in the country -from a homicide rate of 8 in 2006 to 23 in 2011-, in 2012, the presidential elections were a competition between López Obrador and the PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto. However, a weaker Obrador with a populist discourse did not have the same electoral power than in 2006. As a result, the PRI obtained the presidency just 12 years after its first loss in presidency election.

With already 6 years of Peña Nieto’s administration, the problems in the country are deepening. Poverty has poorly decreased, inequality has remained extremely high, corruption cases affect many high-level politicians and violence has reached a peak. In this context, Mexico will hold presidential elections in 2018. Populism will be present in the election, as has happened in every Mexican election since the end of the revolution. In fact, this election could become the competition with the most populist candidates in the history of Mexican politics. First, López Obrador will try one more time to win the elections with his populist discourse, this time within a new political party called Morena. Second, PRI is already using a populist discourse antagonizing radical actors like López Obrador against the continuity of Mexico’s “modernization”, following the discourse used by the PRI during the nineties. Third, the PAN has created a coalition with the PRD and a regional party Citizen Movement. This front is using a discourse of the political elite versus good citizens to achieve more votes. Finally, this election could host three independent candidates: El Bronco, Margarita Zavala and Mary Chuy. All these candidates are using a discourse of politicians versus citizens to accumulate followers in their movements.

Mexico has had a long populist history since the beginning of the 20th century until today. This ideology has permitted the installation of a State after the Mexican revolution, the development of a capitalist economy and, at the end of the century, a political transition. Nevertheless, the emergence of Morena has not concentrated populism in only one candidate. On the contrary, all political parties in Mexico have used populism in different manners to achieve victory in political elections. This comes from the tradition and past of Mexican politics and its particular contexts. For the 2018 presidential elections, there are many populist expressions with different visions in the country. First, the PRI is still using the populist strategy used in the nineties, assuring voters that the program they initiated during Peña Nieto’s administration is the one that will lead to development and modernization. They posit that any candidate that would dismantle it represents a menace to the Mexican people. Second, the Citizen Front is dichotomizing the elections between elites, both corrupt and populist, and citizens. They claim to represent citizens’ needs against the corrupt PRI and the populist Morena. Third, Lopez Obrador has been addressed as a populist by all his opponents. Since his first electoral participation in 2006, Obrador has spoken about the mafia in the power versus the true people. However, since then, Lopez Obrador has not been able to win the presidential election, and he will try in his last chance in 2018. Finally, there might be independent candidates in 2018 that will not be promoted by political parties. All these candidates are using a strategy of citizens versus politicians to obtain votes. In summary, 2018 elections in Mexico will represent a variety of populist strategies to win the presidency. Furthermore, in a context of economic depression, where the economy has not grown in the last 12 years, obtaining an overall GDP lower than 2%, and where 49% of the population lives under some type of poverty, where 6 out of 10 working people work in the informal market, where violence has

risen to more than 130,000 deaths since 2007 and more than 30,000 persons are missing, populism has a fertile ground to expand and establish. Nevertheless, not until 2018 will we see what sort of populism will obtain the necessary support for winning the elections.

In conclusion, populism is a political category that can be traced in all countries as long as it represents an antagonistic vision within society between two contradictory bodies shaped accordingly to the specific context. Furthermore, populism cannot be pre-associated to any political value either right or left, because it fosters different outcomes depending on the political and economic conditions where it surges. Mexico is a good example of how populism varies over time, as it has produced several outcomes including constituting a nation state, controlling the population through authoritarianism and fostering a democratic political transition. Despite living in a more democratic political system, populism in Mexico still is a strong force used by most political parties and candidates. Following this logic, the issue that will be treated in the next chapter will be what kind of populism primarily affects rural communities in Mexico and why.

### **3 Populism in Mexico's rural areas**

Mexico's rural structure has gone from a paternalist and authoritarian State control to an unarticulated and weak governance. This shift came from the entrance of the market economy and the political transition in the country at the end of the twentieth century, through the withdrawal of governmental policies related to agriculture productivity and the appearance of new parties in the political scene. The actual governance situation in rural areas has permitted the appropriation of the rural territory by private groups such as organized crime, mining and energy companies and new caciques. Furthermore, these changes have happened with a continuing relationship with different types of populism, from the revolutionary nationalism of the PRI to the neoliberal populism of the PAN and the left populism of the PRD-Morena. Therefore, it is important to explore what effects populism has had in rural areas and vice versa.

In this chapter we will explore the outcome of 200 interviews made during 2015 and 2016 to ejidatarios in 20 states of Mexico over the 19 agroecological zones regarding the effects of the 1992 reforms.<sup>9</sup> The interviews consisted of in-depth interviews classified under different topics such as ejidos' internal governance, productivity, government aid received, challenges and personal future perspectives. Interviews were made either to the Commissariat or to members of the general assembly. Gender equality was considered in the process, as male and female ejidatarios were interviewed equally when possible.

In the north of Mexico, 100 interviews were made in 30 different ejidos in the states of Sonora, Sinaloa, Coahuila, Zacatecas, Chihuahua, Guanajuato, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa and Jalisco. Despite the differences found in these ejidos, there are some similarities that must be highlighted. Ninety percent of the interviewed people still work their lands for agriculture purposes, with an average property of 5 acres per person. The main crops produced in the ejidos are wheat and corn, and in some cases, ejidatarios have livestock. More than 50% of those interviewed rent part of their lands to third parties, most of them to bigger producers. The states visited where most of the land rent is concentrated are Chihuahua, Coahuila and Jalisco. The main causes for land rent are the presence of big dairy product companies close to the ejidos and bigger agricultural producers in the region who have the technology and economic resources for production. In combination with this, most ejidatarios' lack of resources for agricultural production increases the land rent in ejidos. Land rent does not benefit most ejidatarios due to the cheap cost of their lands; 60% of ejidatarios that rent their land affirmed that they have not improved their living conditions, due to the low prices of their lands.

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<sup>9</sup> The interviews are part of a project called "El ejido y la gobernabilidad territorial rural" coordinated by Dr. Gustavo Gordillo.

All the interviewees argued that the withdrawal of the state in support of small and medium agriculture has affected them enormously. Even though there are some programs, like Proagro,<sup>10</sup> that subsidize agricultural production, the resources coming from this program are not enough for ejidatarios to compete in the market. In some cases, ejidatarios use the money received for agricultural production from the government for their household necessities such as the cases in Zacatecas, Sonora and Sinaloa. It was interesting to perceive that aging ejidatarios remembered nostalgically the past when the government intervened in agriculture in activities such as production, agricultural extension, grain containers and subsidies in commercialization. After the 1992 reforms, ejidatarios have seen a decrease in their lifestyle as peasants, forcing them to work in nonagricultural jobs, rent or sell their lands and foster migration to the cities in younger generations. In Zacatecas, for example, young people migrate to the United States for better jobs, leaving the community with older people incapable to work the lands.

The ejidatarios that still produce do it mainly for their own consumption, and the small surplus is sold in the local markets. However, the presence of intermediaries affects the capacity of ejidatarios to insert their products directly in the markets. The lack of resources for trading make ejidatarios an easy prey for intermediaries that obtain most of the economic benefit from ejidatarios' products. This was the case of ejidos in Sinaloa, Jalisco and Coahuila where the few profits left by their relationship with the intermediaries have made them leave agriculture activities and rent or sell their lands.

In terms of organization, 70% of ejidatarios interviewed no longer work ensemble for productive and commercialization purposes. Most of the meetings they have in the general assembly correspond to land limits issues and processes of ejido privatization. Beyond the abandonment of the ejidos by the government, the 1992 reform was responsible for the weakness of ejidos' organization. In places like Sonora and Coahuila, land titling was seen as the main cause for ejidatarios division, because everyone preferred selling their lands to working them. This internal division has affected ejidos' governance. For example, many assemblies are suspended for lack of quorum, forcing the Commissariat to postpone important decision-making processes. Despite these negative cases, in Chihuahua, the ejidos benefited from land titling. The two ejidos visited in Chihuahua no longer use their lands for agricultural purposes, but they have used them in economic transactions for household construction. These ejidos have inserted their lands into the urbanization process by becoming a sort of real estate agency. The money obtained is used by the ejidatarios for investments in businesses like hair salons, restaurants and vegetable stores. The best practices experienced in these ejidos are related to two main elements: a mindset change that agriculture was no longer the main activity of the ejido, and the collective action of ejidatarios that resisted construction companies' stalking and facilitated dialogue with the local government.

In general, most ejidos visited in the northern part of Mexico experience an abandonment of governmental support. Most of the programs that they receive are social programs, and the few productive programs they obtain are not enough to increase their productivity. Furthermore, the governance mechanisms inside the ejidos are getting weaker from the lack of resources in the ejido. Even though the Commissariat no longer possesses the main decision-making power in the ejido, the general assembly has a limited power in comparison to the Commissariat under the ancient regime, due to the division of ejidatarios within the ejido and the lack of opportunities to work on their lands. The precarious conditions of the ejido have permitted to other actors take control over the ejidos. For example, in ejidos visited in San Luis Potosí and Sonora, organized crime has overthrown assemblies' authority to take control over the lands. More specifically, in San Luis Potosí, organized crime force ejidatarios to sell their lands to private entities through threats and violence. In Sonora, organized crime groups rent ejidatarios' lands for money laundering, producing wheat but with very low productivity rates. Another actor that has benefitted from the lack of governance are commercial intermediaries. In all ejidos visited, intermediaries are an actor with an important presence in detriment of the ejidos. Moreover, political parties also benefit from this vacuum of power. In Jalisco, for

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<sup>10</sup> Proagro es the continuity of Procampo with certain modifications related to the conditionality for receiving the program.

example, a local congressman has infiltrated the general assembly by bribing the commissariat to force the ejido to sell their lands to a construction company.

For the south of Mexico, ejidos in the states of Hidalgo, Veracruz, Oaxaca, Chiapas, Yucatán and Quintana Roo were visited. In comparison to the ejidos in the northern part of the country, where agriculture is or was the main economic activity, forestry is the main occupation for many ejidatarios in the south. This was the specific case of the communities visited in Oaxaca and Hidalgo, where wood products production is the main activity of the ejidos. However, the performance of the ejidos in each state are quite different. In Hidalgo, ejidatarios do not receive forestry programs but agricultural. Despite most of the land in the ejido not being used for agricultural purposes because of the land conditions, the government provides them with seeds and fertilizers. On the other hand, the ejidos visited in Oaxaca had flourishing economic activity from the wood. These ejidos had many cooperatives in charge of the production of wood furniture and ecotourism. There are certain elements that made the Oaxaca ejidos more productive than the Hidalgo ones. First, the land extensions of the ejidos in Hidalgo are much smaller than the ejidos in Oaxaca. Second, the number of ejidatarios in Oaxaca were almost the triple than in Hidalgo, and third, the close relationship between ejidatarios and the local government in Oaxaca permitted the former to have better access to governmental programs.

Other two opposite scenarios under a similar context were the ejidos visited in Yucatán and Quintana Roo. In the former, ejidatarios are prey of energy companies that are taking control of ejidatarios' lands through governmental corruption. As in most of the ejidos visited, ejidatarios in Yucatán do not receive governmental programs to increase the productivity in their lands. On the contrary, ejidatarios have suffered the harassment of energy companies that seize their economic disadvantage and offered them lower prices for their lands.

Only aging ejidatarios in this ejido produce crops like corn for self-consumption. For this reason, ejidatarios must migrate to other cities to find jobs in factories or in private sawmills. During the interviews, ejidatarios spoke of the need for training and subsidies for working the wood that surround the ejido, as they did not have any training for using their natural resources. Most of the crops they produce are for self-consumption and the local markets, and some ejidatarios sell to intermediaries. Despite the differences regarding the natural context of the ejido, such as in Hidalgo, ejidatarios do not have the necessary resources to produce on a larger scale. Most ejidatarios have to work in communities around them in nonagricultural industries like factories, construction and service. Aging ejidatarios in these states normally subsist on social programs and, in some cases, from the remittances that family members send from the United States. However, most of these remittances are not used for productive activities but for the household needs. In Yucatán, due to the lack of aid programs for production, ejidatarios have been the prey of energy companies. Companies are obtaining ejidos' lands at cheap prices due to corrupt practices with local governments and governmental institutions, such as Procuraduría Agraria taking away most of their lands. Moreover, the precarious conditions of ejidatarios make them accept land prices below the market. In the case of Quintana Roo, ejidatarios have used their extensive lands for ecotourism, with the help of governmental programs and NGO training. This ejido has benefited from the flourishing tourism in the state in places like Cancún, Playa del Carmen and Tulum, an important element that differentiates ejidos in Quintana Roo and Yucatán. While in the former the assembly has recognized the commissariat for its good work, in Yucatán the assembly has accused the commissariats of corruption.

In synthesis, the ejidos visited in the southern part of the country experience different situations. While ejidos in Oaxaca and Quintana Roo are extremely well organized, receive the correct governmental programs for their productivity and have close connections with the local governments, ejidos in Yucatán and Hidalgo have low productivity and present isolation from the markets and ejidatarios have precarious life conditions. Collective action has been an important variable to understand the success of certain ejidos. The strength of their internal governance has allowed certain ejidos--regarding historic and natural context--to develop their land productivity. This collective action, however, does not come inherently from these ejidos, but is forged by different factors such as governmental support and good

governance. Where these factors are not present, ejidos experience a vacuum of power that diminish ejidos' life and foster the appearance of external actors trying to control ejidos.

In this context of weak governance, politics in rural México have changed since the 1992 reform. As mentioned in chapter I, during most of the twentieth century, rural areas were paternalistically controlled by the State, making the peasants' movement an important political support for the authoritarian regime. This political control over rural areas had a break point at the end of the eighties, when the authoritarian rural control collapsed. The 1992 reform represented the end of the revolutionary rural governance structure through the entry of free market economy and a more democratic political system. Since then, the political power of the PRI has decreased in rural areas, permitting the strengthening of other political parties (Janvry et al: 2013). With the changes in the constitution, ejidatarios were able to obtain full rights on their lands, making them shift their political preferences towards pro-market parties like the PAN. The main outcome of this political shift from rural areas was the victory of Vicente Fox in 2000. According to de Janvry et al, during the 2000 election, the PAN obtained 6.8% of its total votes from rural areas. Even though this represent a very small portion of the party votes, considering that Fox won against the PRI candidate with 6 points of difference, rural vote could have represented the difference between the PRI and PAN. This political shift in rural areas followed a new populism represented by Vicente Fox. The PAN candidate in 2000 was the expression of the second wave of populism in Latin America that blamed "the elite for the dramatic situation of the country and by proclaiming that the people had been robbed of their rightful sovereignty. Most of these leaders did not develop clear programmatic stances on how to confront the economic situation, and once in power, they opted to cooperate with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to implement harsh neoliberal reforms" (Mudde & Kaltwasser:30:2017). In this case, certain parts of rural areas declined in favor of Fox's discourse which blamed the elite represented by the authoritarian PRI for the economic crisis of the country. Nevertheless, despite Vicente Fox winning the election and receiving important votes from rural areas, the PRI still kept a monopoly on rural politics in the country (Klesner: 2001).

In 2006, PAN obtained the victory once again in the presidency elections in a close competition against the left-wing candidate López Obrador.<sup>11</sup> In this competition, the PAN obtained 35.91% of the total votes and the PRD 35.29%. In this election, Calderón obtained most urban and rural votes, receiving 43.8% for the former and 35% for the latter. On the contrary, López Obrador obtained 33.6% of the rural vote and 32.6% of urban zones. An interesting aspect of this election is that while PAN and PRD obtained most of their votes from urban areas, the PRI had a major presence in rural areas, obtaining 26.6% from them and only 14.4% from urban areas (Klesner:2007).

The predominance of the 2006 rural vote to the PAN supports the idea that after the 1992 reforms the rural vote was liberated and the hegemony of the PRI in this area decreased (Janvry et al: 2013). It must be highlighted that in 2006 López Obrador was labeled as the populist candidate. The PAN accused him of being part of the wave of populism that was rising in Latin America at that moment represented by Hugo Chávez, Evo Morales, Nestor Kirschner and Rafael Correa. The PRD candidate was attacked during the campaign by the former president Vicente Fox and the private sector through a negative campaign accusing him of trying to dismantle all the progress made during the first six years of the PAN administration. Television spots saying that Obrador would take away all the properties of the society were part of this campaign. In this logic, many peasants that obtained their land titles could have seen Obrador as a menace.

In the 2012 presidential elections, the race for the presidency was between López Obrador and the PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto. Compared to the latest election, López Obrador experienced a decline in votes, going from 35.29% of the total vote in 2006 to 31.57% in 2012. On the other hand, Enrique Peña Nieto obtained 38.20% of the total votes. Despite this election not being as the one in 2006, the distribution of the vote among the territories provide an important insight into the rural vote. The urban

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<sup>11</sup> Felipe Calderón, the PAN candidate won over the PRD candidate López Obrador with less of 1% of difference.

vote remained highly competitive between the first and second place, where the PRI obtained 35.6% and the PRD 34%. However, in rural areas, the difference increased in favor of the PRI candidate. Enrique Peña Nieto obtained 43.4% of the national rural vote while Obrador had just 26.8% (Cayeros et al 2012). The 2012 electoral results could be read as the strategy followed by the PRD that focused mainly in urban areas, underestimating the rural vote. On the other hand, the PRI tried to be competitive in urban areas but consolidated its presence in rural areas.

The 2017 State of Mexico elections have consolidated the tendency of rural votes since 2012. This election is extremely important because this is the wealthiest state after Mexico City and the most populated. Furthermore, this state has never experienced a political transition, and it is the state where Enrique Peña Nieto was governor between 2006 and 2011. This election was different from what Mexico experienced in 2012 because there were five competitors for governor. Nevertheless, the PRI and Morena candidates obtained most of the votes, where the former had 33.72% of the votes and the latter 30.81%. An important similarity between this election and the 2012 process is that the PRI once again obtained the majority of the votes in rural areas while losing urban areas, though competitively. While Morena won in urban districts with less than 10 points of differences versus the PRI candidate, in rural areas the PRI defeated its adversary beyond the 20 and 30 points. The percentage of rural votes won by the PRI is 1.69%, which represents the total difference between the first and second place. Once again, the PRI followed an electoral strategy of dividing the urban electorate and monopolizing rural votes.

An important element perceived in the State of Mexico elections is the use of clientelism used over rural areas in favor of the PRI candidate. The social program “Mujeres que logran en grande” (Women who achieve great) is implemented by the local government that was accused to be used to buy votes for the PRI.<sup>12</sup> In 2016, before the governor elections, the number of beneficiaries of this program was 133,939 women. This represents an important increase of people in the program considering that in 2013 only 60, 875 women were registered. Furthermore, it should be noted that this increase of beneficiaries in the State of Mexico also occurred in the 2012 governor elections. For example, while in 2010 the program's register was of 95,969, in 2011, one year before the governor elections, the number of beneficiaries increased to 293, 752. This implies at the same time an increase in the budget of the program where again there is a decrease in non-electoral years and an increase in the election date. When in 2013 the program budget was only \$ 382,500.00 pesos, for 2016 the budget went to \$ 582, 062,582.62 and in 2017 to \$ 894,000,000. Rather than a corporativist relationship, clientelism might be the new form of control that the PRI exercise over rural areas.

Considering that 2018 presidential elections in Mexico might experience a “State of Mexico” effect where five candidates will compete for the presidency, rural votes become extremely relevant for the victory of any candidate. The urban vote will be highly competitive among all candidates, giving the rural vote the power to tilt the scale to any candidate, despite the small percentage that rural vote represents. Nevertheless, if clientelism continues the PRI could have an advantage over their opponents.

## 4 Conclusions

Populism and Mexican rural areas have had a strong relationship since the end of the Mexican revolution. The post-revolutionary government institutionalized a national revolutionary populism, which led to an authoritarian regime through a president with metaconstitutional powers including the power to distribute land; a hegemonic political party that allocated political charges; and a peasant organization that monopolized political representation. These mechanisms formed a type of populism that ruled the rural areas in the twentieth century, changing according to national and international conditions in order to preserve PRI control over the country. During this period, rural areas experienced both a golden age and a crisis due to international and national economic and political

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<sup>12</sup> For more information see: <https://nexos.com.mx/?p=32653>



circumstances. However, at the end of the 20th century this form of political control clashed with the increasing demand for democracy from society and the economic crisis of the welfare state, causing the PRI to put an end to the rural structure created after the revolution. The 1992 constitutional reform undermined the political and economic control of the PRI over the peasants by finishing with the corporativism model of control and allowing the entrance of the market economy. Through these changes, political parties like the PAN and the PRD spread their influence to rural voters, creating a more competitive political party system in Mexico, leading to the political transition of 2000.

Populism in rural areas did not end with the transformation of the PRI's rural governance structure in Mexico, but rather it adapted to the new circumstances. The lack of a new form of governance in rural areas after 1992, fostered the presence of new types of populism that developed over the next years while maintaining the ghosts of the ancient regime. For example, the populism stirred by the PAN in 2000 affected some rural areas that were crucial to defeat the PRI for the first time in its history. In 2006, the votes towards the PAN from rural areas increased, giving Felipe Calderón the necessary votes to defeat Andrés Manuel López Obrador. While in this election the rural vote experienced a significant fragmentation among the PAN, PRD and the PRI, it is important to highlight that the PRI was strongly dependent on the votes coming from rural areas. In 2012, the PRI strengthened its presence in rural areas, giving them the votes to defeat Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The populist discourse of the left-wing party--as in 2006--did not have a strong impact on rural communities but only in urban areas. The rural vote division observed in 2006 changed- into the three main political parties in Mexico-, now with a larger concentration of votes going to the PRI candidate. The election in the State of Mexico continued with the trend where the PRI has the strongest presence in rural areas in comparison to the left and right-wing parties. Thus, 25 years after the 1992 reform's transformation of the rural structure in Mexico, the PRI still has major political control over rural areas.

In conclusion, rural areas have experienced an important political transformation since the 1992 reform, making their vote more competitive among different political parties. However, with regards to the different types of populism in Mexico, the populism developed by the PRI has bigger impacts than the ones promoted by PAN and PRD-Morena. The reason that the PRI still controls most of the rural areas, despite the rural structure transformation in Mexico, might have several answers. First, because of the rapid urbanization process<sup>13</sup> in the country, political parties focused their electoral strategies in urban areas, underestimating rural communities. In the case of the PAN and PRD-Morena, their electorate profile is more urban than rural. The number of votes that provide urban areas make them more attractive to political parties than rural areas. Thus, parties deploy their electorate strategies in more populated and urban places. This is the case of the PAN and PRD-Morena whose average voter profile is between 26 and 35 years old with college education. In contrast, the PRI voter profile includes people above 56 years old without college education who earn the minimum salary. Considering that in Mexico 6 out of 10 people under poverty live in rural areas, and that 60% of peasants are more than 60 years old, the PRI voter profile is closer to the demographic characteristics of rural communities. Second, the rural structure change in 1992 did not bring any other form of governance in rural areas that could foster their development. Therefore, nostalgia plays an important role for rural voters, who remember the corporativist model as a better deal than what they have today. Regarding the 200 interviews, most of the ejidatarios remembered the "old times" positively. Many of the peasants lived under the paternalistic control of the PRI that favored small and medium producers through state intervention in agriculture. For example, since 2002, government support to producers has decreased from 27% of gross farm receipts to 13% in 2013. Therefore, many peasants who shifted their vote to the PAN, believing that things could be better, are now disappointed in the party. Third, the PRI changed its mechanisms of control over rural areas from a corporativist model to clientelism. Social programs are now the way the PRI obtains the loyalty of the rural population. Moreover, local governments play a major role through local social programs that are not as accountable and transparent as federal governments. Despite the difficulties in tracking and exposing clientelism, the

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<sup>13</sup> Rural population in Mexico has passed from being 49% of the total population in 1960 to 20% in 2015. (World Bank: 2016).

State of Mexico elections could help to understand this practice. Even though this strategy is not exclusive to the PRI, this party might prioritize clientelism in rural rather than urban areas.

The control that the PRI still has over rural areas could represent an important danger for the Mexican democracy. First of all, any country that calls itself democratic cannot have part of its population electorally constrained by clientelism practices. Furthermore, a democratic regime cannot exist in a country where several states have not experienced a political transition. As in the case of the State of Mexico, much of this democratic reversal might depend on the control of the PRI over rural communities. Finally, to have a major transformation in the country, a political and social coalition is needed in which urban and rural areas work together. If rural areas are not clientelist-free, a major change in the country will be complicated.

Rural areas have been underestimated by politicians in the last decades in Mexico. The urbanization process that the country experienced and the low share of agriculture in the GDP have placed rural communities outside electoral agendas. However, rural communities might have the key for either an important change towards a more progressive way of politics, or the maintenance of a particular status quo that affects any form of democracy and economic development. It is important that politics turns to the rural before other types of non-democratic forms of politics spread, not only in rural communities but throughout the entire country.

The Mexican case of populism varies from the populism that is rising in Europe or the United States. First and most important, Mexican populism has not developed a sense of xenophobia. Second, the nationalist political movement that rises in these parts of the world has born in a more strong and consolidated democracy. Despite these differences, the Mexican experience could bring important insights on what elements must be considering when analyzing the rise of populism, either right or left, in the countryside.

The land tenure system could be an important element of analysis to understand *demand side of populism* regarding peasant organization. For example, in the cases where peasants have communitarian forms of land tenure, they become more resilience to populism harassment. The strong organization of ejidos in Oaxaca, Quintana Roo and Chihuahua make ejidatarios a strong political actor in the local context, forcing the government to negotiate with them in more equal and democratic terms. On the contrary, ejidos where private property has become predominant, organization among ejidatarios decrease, making them an easy target for populism and clientelism.

On the supply side of populism, an important element to be considering when analyzing populism in rural areas is the relationship between the countryside and the State. The rural governance structure could be determinant in the rise of populism. In Mexico, the governance structure developed after the Mexican revolution led to the construction of an authoritarian populism that ruled the country for more than 70 years. The end of this type of governance through the 1992 reform did not bring a new institutional framework capable to rule- democratically- the rural areas. This has permitted the maintenance of PRI populism through clientelism and the rise of other types of populism represented by Vicente Fox and Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

Therefore, the land tenure system and the rural governance structure are two forms strongly connected between populism and the countryside in Mexico. These elements could be considered and analyzed in other countries to understand how populism could rise and how it could be stopped. Many peasants had followed populist leaders and parties due to the abandonment of the government and political parties. To end with the right-wing populism, politicians, government and academia must focus on what changes rural areas have been through in the last decades to understand what factors could drive peasants to populist leaders or movements.

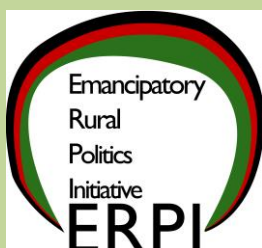
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**The Emancipatory Rural Politics Initiative (ERPI)** is a new initiative focused on understanding the contemporary moment and building alternatives. New exclusionary politics are generating deepening inequalities, jobless 'growth', climate chaos, and social division. The ERPI is focused on the social and political processes in rural spaces that are generating alternatives to regressive, authoritarian politics. We aim to provoke debate and action among scholars, activists, practitioners and policymakers from across the world that are concerned about the current situation, and hopeful about alternatives.

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