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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, SAN DIEGO

The Dynamism of Small Spaces: Trends and Patterns of Political Participation and
Engagement in the Municipality of Villamar, Michoacán

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree Master of
Arts

in

Latin American Studies

by

Maria Guadalupe Ruiz

Committee in charge:

Professor Christine Hunefeldt, Chair
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Professor Max Parra

2016

The Thesis of Maria Guadalupe Ruiz is approved and it is acceptable in quality and form
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Chair

University of California, San Diego

2016

DEDICATION

Para mi abuelo, Adolfo Tolento Romero. Gracias por aportarme tu visión de la historia.

EPIGRAPH

Cuando es verdadera, cuando nace de la necesidad de decir, a la voz humana no hay quien la pare. Si le niegan la boca, ella habla por las manos, o por los ojos, o por los poros, o por donde sea. Porque todos, toditos, tenemos algo que decir a los demás, alguna cosa que merece ser por los demás celebrada o perdonada.

- Eduardo Galeano

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CONAPO	Consejo Nacional de Población
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina
CCT	Conditional Cash Transfer Programs
CMRDT	Confederación Revolucionaria Michoacana del Trabajo
DC	Democratic Current
DTOs	Drug Trafficking Organizations
IEM	Instituto Electoral de Michoacán
IFE	Instituto Federal Electoral
INE	Instituto Nacional Electoral
INEGI	Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Geografía
INAFED	Instituto Nacional para el Federalismo y el Desarrollo Municipal
ENCIG	Encuesta Nacional de Calidad e Impacto Gubernamental
ENCUP	Encuesta Nacional sobre Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas
ENVIPE	Encuesta Nacional de Victimización y Percepción sobre Seguridad Pública
MORENA	Partido Movimiento Regeneración Nacional
PAN	Partido de Acción Nacional
PANAL	Partido Nueva Alianza
PES	Partido Encuentro Social
PNR	Partido Nacional Revolucionario
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional

PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática
PRONASOL	Programa Nacional de Solidaridad
PROCAMPO	Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo
PROGRESA	Programa de Educación, Salud, y Alimentación
PT	Partido del Trabajo
PVEM	Partido Verde Ecologista de México
SAGARPA	Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación
SEDESOL	Secretaría de Desarrollo Social
SNIM	Sistema Nacional de Información Municipal

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The Dynamism of Small Spaces: Trends and Patterns of Political Participation and Engagement in the Municipality of Villamar, Michoacán

by

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Professor Christine Hunefeldt, Chair

This research takes the municipality of Villamar, Michoacán, México as a case study in the patterns of political participation that characterized the June 2015 legislative elections. Villamar, a municipality rich in social, economic and political dynamics, is taken as a microcosm of broader historical and political processes that have taken place in Michoacán. In qualitative interviews with 20 residents of three rural *ranchos* in Villamar, this study seeks to understand the local factors and characteristics of political participation, and the extent to which patterns may reflect context-specific cumulative

processes. Among these processes are the history of *agrарismo* in the region, local culture and sociopolitical infrastructure, economic changes, and the influence of parastate actors such as drug-trafficking organizations. The thesis provides a detailed description of Villamar's political landscape as described by participants, and highlights the following patterns: PRI party loyalty, low internal political efficacy, healthy participation rates of women, the centrality of immediate needs in political decision making, and overwhelming perceptions of government inefficiency. While the patterns found in Villamar are outcomes of national level political processes, they are more easily traced to their local counterparts. Participation, then, is influenced more by citizens' immediate needs and realities than national political concerns. This research discusses these findings in light of their implications for Mexico's endeavor towards democratic consolidation.

INTRODUCTION

On a mid-December afternoon, a crowd of middle aged women gathered around the entrance to the local church in El Platanal, Michoacán. For decades, this building has functioned as the nucleus of the town's social, and subsequently, political and economic infrastructure. It has become, like in many of the surrounding rural *ranchos*¹, a meeting place for religious, social, and political purposes. What could have easily been mistaken as a *posada* on this warm December day, however, was lacking the jovial and festive ring that usually accompany the aforementioned occasion. Rather than music and veiled women gripping the *rosario*, whispered chatter was the song, and the corners of official documents were starting to dampen from being shuffled between sweaty palms. The citizens of this local town were waiting to hear whether they qualified for a free flat screen TV from the Mexican government. They were being granted even to the deceased, they said, and folks scavenged through their belongings for their lost ones' identification cards so they, too, could redeem one. *El apagón*, or nationwide digital switchover, was scheduled in the following weeks, and to this end, every household in the nation was to be privileged with a television in their living room. In the case of this rural Michoacán *ranchito*, adobe walls were to be adorned with the black digital frame.

¹ This paper will refer to the rural communities that are the subject of this research as *ranchos* or *rancherías*, in order to avoid the historical and social connotations of terms such as "towns" or "villages." *Ranchos* and *rancherías* are the terms used by residents of Villamar.

Amongst the various salient aspects of this scenario is the presence of women in a transaction that fuses the domestic with the political. More pronounced, however, is that the crowd's collective act of 'waiting around' is perfectly characteristic of the ways in which these same citizens described their relationship with the municipal government of Villamar, Michoacán. According to some citizens, the most recent legislative elections in June of 2015 proved to be different from previous ones only in terms of the faces that represented the various political parties that are dominant in the region: the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), PAN (*Partido de Acción Nacional*), PRD (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*), and PANAL (*Partido Nueva Alianza*). While this relationship between local citizens and the municipal government takes various forms in the 47 *ranchos* that constitute Villamar, it is consistently shaped by the ways in which citizens believe their most immediate and basic needs are met (or neglected) by parties that seem to dress their campaigns in promises that rarely reach fruition.

This perception of government inadequacy or inefficiency seems to be the anthem of a nationwide political outcry against Mexican political and economic institutions with severely truncated interests. Recently, these institutions have been heavily criticized for the mishandling (or lack thereof) of numerous human rights cases: the death toll yielded by the war on drugs, the 43 missing students from Ayotzinapa, and the increasingly dangerous role of journalists in the country, to name a few. This sentiment has reached the rural pockets of Mexico, where many citizens' participation in the country's audiovisual information exchange was more limited before the *apagón*.

That this sentiment towards inefficiency is a common denominator in many citizens' relationship with Mexico's political institutions is generally agreed upon. Mexico's nascent democracy has remained stagnant at this stage of "emergence" and "development" for recent decades, and the current presidency under Enrique Peña Nieto has yielded nothing short of a state of general malaise amongst the populace. Likewise, on the international stage, Mexico is consistently presented as a prime example of how economic and private interests severely undermine the true democratic nature to which it aspires. This is certainly reflected in Villamar. However, to say that the political experiences of Mexicans in rural Michoacán are asymmetrical to those of the nation as a whole, is a statement worthy of inquiry and scrutiny. Political experiences at the local level, while perhaps conforming to broader national patterns in some aspects (perceptions of government inefficiency and party reputations, for example), reveal an intricate network of factors that inform citizens' political decisions.

Each Mexican state has a unique political and historical makeup that, though part of a relatively closely threaded national patchwork, flaunts characteristics of its own. In a similar vein, municipalities, and for the purposes of this research, the rural *ranchos* that constitute those municipalities, represent an even more unique microcosm of the factors and experiences that are witnessed at broader levels. By honing in on the experiences of these small rural *ranchos*, we see that the distance between local and national politics is highly nuanced and more complex than one might initially predict. This distance is primarily manifest in the centrality that local and municipal politics enjoy over national-level political concerns.

This ‘distance’ between local and national politics is somewhat of a parallel to the distance between local and national histories. Trevor Stack (2002) describes this difference in terms of ‘immediacy.’ Whereas history is experienced or felt more “immediately” in urban spaces, smaller settlements or rural communities are distanced from this immediacy. However, this is not to say that rural communities are devoid of history, but rather, that their history is manifest differently than that of the broader region, or nationally. For Stack, history, as understood by a finished past, is considered the property of *towns* (2002). Why, then, would the history of small rural communities worthy of discussion? Or, in our case, why would the political experiences of rural communities in Michoacán be worthy of investigation? While a rural community in Michoacán might not display the civic architecture and public spaces that are usually markers of national history in towns and urban centers, generations of citizens in these communities have nevertheless participated in the history of the nation as it is widely understood. And not only have they participated in the nation’s historiographical project, but they have also written their own.

Similarly, while these rural *ranchos* in Michoacán may not display the leadership figures, organizations, or political activity in large numbers that are usually markers of national politics, rural citizens are still directly participating in the nation’s politics. Like history, national and local politics seem at first to be merely two different manifestations

of the same underlying political current. But while the conversation about politics at the local level may seem disjointed from that of the national, and in some ways, it *is*, citizens of small rural *ranchos* are participating in the broader conversation that envelops the nation's collective experience. Studying these small rural communities reveals the pockets, dimensions, and pixels of their reality that are simultaneously 1) outcomes of national and regional historical processes, and 2) unique and context-specific manifestations of these processes.

In *Invitación a la Microhistoria* (1973), Luis Gonzalez y Gonzalez theorizes about the field of microhistory², a branch of the broader genre of history that is concerned with the local³, the mundane, and the concrete experiences of places, and the individuals in those places. It is in the value of microhistory, and in its ability to illuminate the differential evolutionary paths of history among places, that we find significance in studying the local politics of rural Michoacán's communities. González y González posits that in employing microhistory, it is not the size of the site that matters, but rather the size

² The field, though formally coined 'microhistory' by Gonzalez y Gonzalez, has been practiced by many historians as 'local history,' *petite histoire*, and other variants (1973).

³ To further illustrate this distinction between national and local history, he gives the example that national and universal histories are polluted with 'figures', important people, national heroes, and those considered influential intellectuals. Local history, however, boasts heroes of their own sort: heroes of the *patria chica* that don't end up in the national pantheon of heroes, but that do go from being a number in the realm of the macro, to being a name in the micro (González y González, 1973). One of the purposes of this research is precisely that - to polish the version of rural México that has become clouded by the state's version of history and current events. Inherent in this study is a grounded assumption that the state intends to fabricate a version of México that will appease its economically powerful class, its institutions, and the international community.

and cohesion of the group of individuals in question, and the minuscule nature of the things that are told about them, so that the vision with which the historian approaches a subject is myopic (1973). An assumption that underlies this research is that if one were to approach the political experiences of these communities from a far-sighted point of view, — that is, with national patterns, trends, and national representations of political parties as the foreground — one would lose sight of the intricate characteristics that make the local political experience different and unique.

Although the term ‘microhistory’ has lacked, and perhaps still does, concrete significance that effectively differentiate it from its more enveloping counterpart or ‘macrohistory’⁴, González y González renders it efficient in designating a history marked by minutiae and devoted to the *patria chica* (1973). He claims that it is possible to isolate the ‘parcel’ that corresponds to microhistory in the enormity of what we consider the historical past. The space that microhistory is concerned with, is precisely this *patria chica*, which is the manifestation or realization of its bigger counterpart. It is a unit that is culturally autonomous and economically self-sufficient, further characterized by the spatial and interpersonal proximity with which its inhabitants coexist, perhaps spiritually

⁴ Where macro history is concerned with broad patterns that repeat themselves across time, micro history is primarily concerned with that which is present in every moment, familial tradition, the modest and ‘*pueblerino*,’ which resist temporal decay (González y González, 1973). Gonzalez y Gonzalez attempts to demarcate the difference between the national and the local in a way that recalls Stack’s (2000) notion of immediacy. While the notions of nation and state are rooted in aristocracy, the institution of the Church, and the formation of cities, the local is rooted in the symbiotic relationship between the land and people. Most importantly, Gonzalez y Gonzalez claims that this relationship between land and populace leads to different results in each locale (1973).

or ideologically united in some way or another. The *patria chica* is “the small world of personal relations without intermediaries” of the universe in question (González y González, 1973). This research seeks to isolate the political goings-on of the ‘parcel’ in question, while, of course, recognizing the broader set of processes⁵ that have shaped it.

The state of Michoacán, a historical stronghold for the PRI, presents an opportunity to study a microcosm of political experiences in rural communities. In doing so, we see the intricacies of the relationship between national and local, and their differential evolution suggested by González y González, through a focused lens. This differential evolution is explored when we consider how regional specificities (political, social, and economic) interact with the national in a way that make this small universe of political experiences unique. Michoacán’s historical dependence on agriculture and

⁵ One of the main objectives of the microhistorical genre, and of this research, is to measure the distance between “general evolution and the particular evolution of localities” (González y Gonzalez, 1973, p. 59). Gonzalez y Gonzalez suggests that “each region has its own war,” alluding to the idea that each locality within a nation experiences their own version of the conflicts, events, and tensions that are foregrounded on the national stage (1973, p. 32). It is with this idea of localities’ ‘own war’ in mind that the topic of rural political experiences in Michoacán is approached. While politics is not the only theme worthy of research in the communities studied, it is of prime importance when considering the threatened and stagnant state of Mexico’s democracy. Additionally, through close study of these towns’ political life and experiences, there is an inevitable crossroads with other subjects that are important on the national front, such as the economy and gender relations. This crossroads and overlap between subjects helps us better understand why microhistory is a genre that is easily transferable to the description of local and national *political* experiences. The political is inherently historical, and the historical is inherently political in that both areas of study implicate processes of the other.

*campesinos*⁶ to work the land predisposes it to higher concentrations of rural populations dedicated to farm work and subsistence agriculture. The history of *agrarismo*⁷ in Michoacán, one whose long-term implications Boyer (2003) argues are still relevant today, is particularly palpable in the countryside, such as in the rural *rancherías* that are the subjects of this research.

The municipality of Villamar, nest of the late president Lázaro Cárdenas' *agrarismo* movement, was selected as the site for this research because of its strong historical precedent for PRIismo. Initially, this research sought to remap this historical precedence for the PRI in Villamar's contemporary social and political landscape. While this specific inquiry was not the primary substance in the interviews, Villamar did prove to be a site rich in historical and contemporary manifestations of Mexico's political processes. The municipality is also home to Guaracha (also known as Emiliano Zapata), which was the site of one of the region's most important *haciendas*. Though it now only functions as a school, the former *hacienda* is an important relic of the region and municipality's economic activity, and subsequent relationships between leaders and populace. This, in addition to other factors such as the region's massive outflow of

⁶ In *Becoming Campesinos*, Boyer (2003) sheds light on the formation of the *campesino* as a category in Michoacán, both culturally and politically. Specifically, he posits that the understanding of *campesino* as a social, class-like category stemmed from an interaction between modes of political participation that allowed *campesinos* to engage in the political domain.

⁷ *Agrarismo* here refers to the sociopolitical movement for just land redistribution led by Mexico's *campesinos* (Boyer, 1998). It will also refer to a general ideological and political tendency to defend the interests of this political class.

migration to the United States that has impacted local social and economic infrastructure significantly, make the site ripe for exploration of its multifaceted political landscape.

Villamar is one of 113 rural municipalities in the state of Michoacán, with a population of approximately seventeen thousand — the state population is a total of 4.6 million (INEGI, 2010). This research was conducted in three *rancherías* in Villamar, which will hereinafter be referred to as *P*, *C*, and *NR*. In 2011, the state of Michoacán was México's largest agricultural producing state (INEGI, 2010), leading in the production of avocado, corn and wheat. The state's natural and geographical endowment has favored the rural population's primary economic activity of subsistence agriculture, which becomes important in this research because of the social category of *campesinos*. Additionally, the state of Michoacán has recently become a target state in the fight against drugs and organized crime. The state has witnessed some of the highest rates of violence and crime — *La Familia*, a drug cartel born and operated in Michoacán, were the first in a series of recent organized crime groups that continue to have a strong presence throughout the state⁸. As a result, security issues have been foregrounded on the political stage as the conflict between local drug cartels intensifies and evolves.

Given the tense contemporary state of Mexico's politics and democracy, this research aimed to capture a pixel of what the June 2015 legislative election and campaign period looked like in Villamar, Michoacán. Capturing this local political experience in

⁸ The antecedents of *La Familia* and Michoacán's relationship with drug trafficking organizations are far deeper than the scope of this research allows for. The other dominant group that followed *La Familia* was *Los Caballeros Templarios* (Knights Templar), and more recently, *La Nueva Generación* (New Generation.)

three Villamar villages at the halfway mark of Enrique Peña Nieto's controversial presidency allows us to probe into the following question during this critical period in Mexico's political history: What are the local factors and characteristics of political participation within a municipality, and to what extent are they outcomes of regional or context-specific cumulative processes? Underpinning this main question are the following subquestions: What are the factors that influence political decision making at the rural and local levels? What do rural citizens of Michoacán consider when making political decisions? How do rural citizens view their relationship with local and national government (political leaders and institutions)? And with a penchant for microhistory in mind, what does the local social and political infrastructure of these rural towns look like, and how might this influence political participation?

The observations and interviews gathered offer insight into the aforementioned research questions, and illuminate our understanding of the impact of local and regional political processes. Further, they provoke the question of the potential continuity or discontinuity (the *distance* posited by González y González) of national and local politics. Insight into the daily lives and experiences of the participants offer substantial information about how factors specific to rural life (occupations such as subsistence agriculture, for example) influence political decision making. By carefully contouring these local political experiences that would otherwise be obscured by a discussion on political experiences at a broader level, this research is in accordance with microhistory's

aim of partaking in a more holistic and multifaceted version of events as manifested in the *patria chica*.

This research will discuss the questions previously mentioned, and attempt to answer them while engaging in an analysis of the most salient themes present in participant interviews. Though not limited to the following themes and patterns, this research will foreground them due to their consistent reference by participants. Of those interviewees who voted in the 2015 legislative elections, all voted for either the PRI or PRD, two of the three dominant political parties on Mexico's contemporary political stage. Participants' votes were reportedly influenced by factors including family voting trends, loyalty to a party (this was specifically the case for the PRI), their perceptions of the party leaders, previous assistance received from one party or another, and even minute details such as the image or logo employed by the political party. One participant expressed being so unsure of which party would earn her vote, that at the moment she had to check a box, her decision was based on which party logo she found most creative.

Among those who chose not to vote, the most cited reason for abstaining from the vote was the mistrust of government that seems to have evolved into complete estrangement from political institutions as a whole. These participants claimed that their decision to abstain from the vote was acted upon in hopes that it would impulse politicians to yield more 'results'. Participants described the promises made by politicians as unrealistic, and suggested they were usually an indicator of how *little* these promises would yield. Though voting participants did not cite this as a strategy to effect change in

political campaigns, this inverse relationship between promises made and perception of results yielded was also expressed by them. That is, even amongst those who voted, a politician who promised “too much” usually signaled little execution of those promises. Both voting and non-voting participants expressed the severe need in the region of more ‘realistic’ candidates, who actually nurture the proposals they entice voters with.

When asked to identify the most pressing needs in their communities - needs that can be addressed by politicians, that is - participants across the board mentioned that the paving of streets, improvement of communal spaces (the plaza, for example), and implementing sewage in every household were the most urgent. These needs cited by participants are examples of how rural citizens’ political demands are much more *immediate* than would be experienced in a non-rural setting. To clarify, the term *immediate* here is not used in the same way that Stack (2000) uses the term when describing the difference between national and local histories. Rather, when stating the finding that these citizens want a politician and a political plan that are more conducive to meeting their *immediate* needs, this study refers to those needs that are directly affecting the quotidian affairs of citizens: where they are able to engage in everyday social relations, or whether they have to worry about the risks posed by uneven walkways.

Another theme that surfaced from these interviews and observations is the active role of women in the town’s political life. While a majority of women in these towns generally work in the home (some work or have worked at the nearby *congeladora*, or Interfrut, processing and packaging fruits), most women participants described taking an

active role in politics. This is despite the reality that the male figure in the household generally assumes responsibility for anything outside the domain of the home. Women participants described instances in which they made trips to the municipal head to ask for governmental assistance with things such as household fixtures, medical attention, and their children's education. Participants agreed that at meetings during the campaign period, women's presence was not only sought after, but dominant. The role of women in rural politics is more active than would be generally predicted, and their engagement with this domain can be illustrated by the following scenario that was often described by the women interviewed: when politicians visit the local towns, they often visit the individual homes to talk to families, where their first encounter is always with women. In this way, women are the gateway to the family life that politicians appeal to and depend on for personal or political aggrandizement.

Finally, one of the most salient themes in the interviews reveals deep sentiments of mistrust and perceptions of government inefficiency, with both the national and municipal levels. Some interesting patterns within this finding are as follows: 1) negative evaluations of government coexisted with instances of party loyalty (towards the PRI, specifically), 2) reference to the national government was made only and consistently when reflecting on these sentiments of mistrust and inefficiency. While participants displayed substantial amounts of knowledge about their local municipal government, they did not express much concern with or knowledge about Mexico's national government until prompted to comment on its legitimacy. When asked about government and politics

at the national level, for example, they didn't have answers or were inclined to lead the conversation astray. The town *encargado*, or liaison between the town and municipal government, is undoubtedly of more importance to these citizens than president Enrique Peña Nieto.

On their local government, participants displayed a wealth of knowledge about historical and current political trends, and were able to articulate assertive opinions and descriptions about the local leaders that had come before. Interestingly, they elaborated very detailed responses about what these leaders were like as people, what their socioeconomic background was, whose houses they visited during the campaign period, whose houses they did *not* visit, and the personal encounters they had with them. This localized consciousness explains why examining local sociopolitical infrastructures became important, in addition to its being a factor in political action and engagement.

The implications of this research go far beyond the scope of local political experiences — while we accept that this experience is in some ways a manifestation of the national political landscape, what is revealed in this microcosm that is Villamar, Michoacán is also telling of more localized political currents. It is imperative that we ask, what do the findings of this research tell us about the state of Mexico's democracy, and that of Latin America as a region? In his work *La Democracia en América Latina*, Pablo González Casanova outlines the importance of tracking Latin America's democratic project, with narrowed attention to various countries (1995). He informs the reader on the political situation in various Latin American countries, and introduces us to the tensions,

challenges and advancements made on the democratic front. According to Casanova, a space infused with profound democratic content will display the following three characteristics, both in citizens and politicians: a capacity to express themselves, a recognition of negotiating strategies and forces, and options to articulate demands and convene in alternative power structures (Casanova, 1995).

We may ask, then, how well do the trends and experiences of citizens in Villamar, Michoacán conform to these democratic ideals? Exploring these questions with the patterns and theoretical map that Casanova has laid out in mind, we may ignite a discussion on the implications of Villamar citizens' experiences for democracy in the region. More specifically, we will discuss how the growing estrangement between citizens and Mexico's political institutions undermines the maturity of the country's democratic project.

In order to efficiently access the different paths that this research aims at exploring, the three chapters will attempt at providing a logical map of the main ideas gleaned from this research, all while making broader implications clear. After priming the reader with a literature review and theoretical framework of concepts that will be employed throughout this paper, this thesis provides a thorough description of the research setting and what makes it unique for political inquiry. The first chapter will then

begin by discussing elements of Villamar's sociopolitical infrastructure⁹. Using participant descriptions and ethnographic observations, it will describe these elements, in addition to previewing the political attitudes and party reputations held locally. The second chapter will provide a brief report on participation by demographics, and continue on to discuss some of the most pronounced patterns of participation. Among these are the participation of women, evidence of party affiliation, abstention from voting, and the prevalence of "immediate needs". Finally, the third chapter will address participants' perceptions of government mistrust and inefficiency, as evidence by allegations of corruption, low accountability, and generalized disillusionment with politics.

The analysis will guide us towards a concluding discussion on the overarching themes addressed in the review of the literature and theoretical framework: political participation, local government, rural politics, and Mexico's democratic journey. I will rely both on ethnographic observations about local political infrastructure and participant interviews to elaborate on these points, and culminate with suggested implications of these findings for the vigor of the country's democratic efforts and the feasibility of its aspirations.

⁹ The sociopolitical infrastructure refers to the local social and political factors that constitute the *ranchos*' political context. This includes local leadership roles or positions of political nature, events or specific issues that are foregrounded in the local narrative, and what is considered common knowledge about politics. In essence, any social or political characteristic that factors into the citizens' insertion into the political sphere.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature on Political Participation

Political voice in México, as in many places the world over, is expressed in myriad ways and has varied in its historical manifestations of dissidence and contention. A country that has always grappled with a fractured and fragile relationship between government institutions and the citizenry, México continues to mature out of an immediate association with corruption and flawed political institutions. On December 2, 2012, leaders of the three dominant political parties (the PRI, PAN, and PRD) and president Enrique Peña Nieto signed the *Pacto Por México*, a 64-page document outlining the axes and common ground through which they will nurture (and finalize) the country's democratic transition. Its opening paragraph states, "Mexico has a diversified society. Its political forces represent millions of Mexicans that have given them their vote with the mandate to represent their interests. In the chambers of Congress, in the federative entities and in the Municipalities, as well as in the Federal Executive Branch, diversity is expressed and must be recognized by everyone" (*Pacto Por México*, 2012, p.1). Two assumptions, endorsed by the political parties, are clear here: 1) a diverse populace will yield diverse interests, and 2) these interests, through electoral participation, are in the hands of the government. Voting, then, is the method encouraged and endorsed by the government as a primary means through which Mexicans can channel their political demands and engagement.

It is well understood that in mature and emerging democracies, political participation constitutes, vaguely, any action that the citizenry undertakes with aims to influence the government and its decisions (Somuano Ventura, 2005). Many scholars

have entertained variations of the term, though generally, it has evolved into one that is more inclusive of less “conventional” means of participation. The various terms mainly differ regarding what constitutes “influence” and in what realm this influence is meant to effect change (at the local or federal levels, for example). The overarching binary in the research on political participation is that of conventional versus unconventional forms, where conventional refers mainly to electoral participation, and unconventional refers to protest and other forms of direct or indirect action taken to influence political actors (Somuano Ventura, 2005). A variety of definitions, however, have expanded these meanings to envelop a wider variety of modes of participation. Additionally, recent scholars have abandoned the conventional versus unconventional terminology, and instead employed ‘institutional’ and ‘contentious’ (Crow, 2009).

Of the variations in narrowed definitions of political participation, Weiner’s definition has been widely accepted, perhaps because it envelops the binaries implied above in describing participation as such: any voluntary action, whether successful or not, organized or not, intermittent or continuous, that uses legitimate or illegitimate methods to influence public policy and/or the election of leaders at any level (Weiner, 1971). It is necessary to underline the importance of *voluntary action* in this definition, for it is a common denominator among the varying definitions out there — it implies that the participant is making a *conscious* and *intentional* advance at governmental apparatuses, as opposed to injecting influence passively. In addition to Weiner, Booth and Seligson (1978) offer an influential definition of political participation as well, where any behavior influencing or attempting to influence the distribution of public goods is classified as

such. While Booth & Seligson (1978) and Verba & Nie (1972), limited their definition to influence via selection of government officials and their decisions, Weiner (1971) encompasses a majority of the forms of political participation characteristic of México: voting, intervention or participation in electoral campaigns, community activities, participation or membership in a community organization, petitioning, and protest.

Scholarly work on political participation differs not only in broadly defining where influence is targeted, but also along the axis of participatory *methods*. While it can be agreed that voting is foregrounded as the primary method of participation in democracies, recent scholarship has added to the repertoire of participatory methods. In addition to strictly electoral participation, the following have come to be included: participation in community organizations, protest, engagement in electoral campaigns, petitioning, and other forms of direct action (Somuano Ventura, 2005). In Mexico more specifically, Klesner's (2009) analysis of the 2003 ENCUP results suggest that five modes of political participation were dominant: voting, communal activity, direct action on community issues, petitioning or approaching those who are believed to hold bargaining power, and membership in political organizations. Here, 'communal activity' refers to attendance at meetings and membership in community organizations, and 'direct action on community issues' refers to behaviors such as distributing political literature and attending demonstrations. Of these, voting was the most common mode of participation (ENCUP, 2003).

Though the factors that influence the modes of participation briefly discussed vary greatly from country to country, reflecting context-dependent and historical (as

much as contemporary) social processes unique to each place, scholars do tend to agree on four broad categories. These four broad categories are institutional opportunities and constraints, resources available to the population, political values, and engagement in social capital-yielding activities (Klesner, 2009). In the comparative perspective, it is understood that three institutional factors may play a big role in shaping Mexican political participation specifically: the centrality of electoral politics, Mexican society's deeply seated experience with clientelism, and the channeling of peasants' and workers' participation by corporatist organizations under the PRI.

Klesner (2009) posits that the centrality of electoral politics elevates the value placed on electoral participation, and that the history of clientelism predisposes Mexicans to approach government officials via petitioning behavior. Additionally, while scholars suggest that participation among those with fewer resources or a lower socioeconomic profile is dim in comparison to those of their resource-rich counterparts, specifically in Latin America (Kurtz, 2004), Klesner (2009) challenges this idea for the Mexican context. Predicting the participation of the Mexican peasantry, for example, based solely on socioeconomic indicators, underestimates the extent to which historical processes tied to their political identity might influence their political behavior.

Klesner (2009) suggests that the somewhat counterintuitive reality of relatively high peasant participation is one of three patterns of political participation that undermine the quality of democracy in Mexico. The first is that citizens with higher levels of educational attainment, and those in authoritative positions in workplace participate more often than those in industrial labor occupations and with lower educational attainment --

this pattern suggests the dangerous probability that social inequalities spill over into the political sphere, and may even continue to widen. The second pattern is that peasants participate beyond what would be expected considering their education and income levels — this finding suggests that the political involvement fostered during the PRI regime (Boyer, 2003) may remain intact even after the democratic transition. While participation of the peasantry is not what threatens democracy, it hints that mechanisms fostered by the hegemonic party might still be in place. The third pattern reported is that high levels of social capital are the strongest predictors of explicitly political participation -- here, social capital is defined as participation in the nation's associational life and in its charitable activities (Klesner, 2009). Access to social capital-generating activities, however, has long been associated with those in a higher socioeconomic bracket, and thus this limited access poses a challenge to equity in representation.

While these broader institutional patterns and factors are a crucial dimension when discussing political participation, demographic factors are equally important. Because these factors are more easily quantifiable, they are more easily and frequently studied. We know, for example, that individuals who are older, have higher levels of education, and higher incomes are more likely to exhibit higher participation rates (Klesner, 2009). In terms of gender differences, there is an observed lower rate of participation amongst women in places where women are poorly represented in high public offices (Burns et al., 2001). Women who self-classify as “homemakers” are more likely to be less active than women who are employed outside the domestic sphere (Paley, 2001). Additionally, a growing body of literature explores the role of social

capital and its link to political participation. Social capital is understood as “features of social life — networks, norms, and trust — that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives” (Putnam, 1955, p. 32). A positive relationship between the two variables is suggested (Verba et al. ,1995).

Though research and scholarship on political participation displays a breadth of patterns and trends that apply both to various political systems and Mexico specifically, it is not exempt of voids that need further probing. For example the discourse that dominates dialogue around the effectiveness of new democracies such as México is overwhelmingly centered on the status of *electoral* participation. Further, these analyses of electoral turnout focus on overall participation rates, and hone in on *positive* turnout — in other words, those who *did* vote. In rare cases do researchers focus on abstention from voting as a method of participation, and in even fewer cases is it done so qualitatively. Another void in the literature is participation at the municipal level — a plethora of research informs political literature on participation in federal or national-level elections or events, but few give accounts of municipal-level modes or turnout. In terms of factors that influence participation, institutional and demographic factors enjoy substantial attention, but historical factors tend to take a back seat. A historical factor would be, for example, the effect of PRI rule as a historical determinant of participation in areas in which it enjoyed adherence, or the historical antecedents of the *campesino* political identity which remains intact.

Finally, political interests are generally studied in terms of ideological adherence and broader markers of interest (employment, education, distribution of goods, etc.)

However, *immediate* interests such as meeting basic infrastructural needs and having sufficient food on the plate, constitute a minuscule share of the discussion. This research attempts to address these voids, and will draw on this broad distinction between institutional and contentious forms of participation in order to avoid the semantically loaded and inaccurate terminology of conventional versus unconventional.

Literature on Local Governance

Though the breadth of empirical political research is heavily oriented towards electoral and conventional forms of participation at the national level, the intricacies and dynamics of municipalities are discussed, albeit in more theoretical and conceptual terms. It is generally agreed, for example, that municipal governments in Mexico are charged with the responsibility of assessing and meeting citizens' most 'immediate' demands, such as accessibility to resources, public works and infrastructural needs. Because of this association with immediacy, the municipality is regarded as the political space in which researchers can measure political participation more clearly, at least when it comes to resolving issues of the public sphere; it is here that these problems are more prevalent, and therefore more frequently a shared political demand among citizens (Santos Zavala & Porras, 2012). Additionally, it is understood that the complexities and complications of political participation at the municipal level are the result of, primarily, one institutional pattern in Mexico: a discrepancy between the 'rationality' under which governmental agencies and autonomous social organizations operate (Arellano Gault, 2006). This, in addition to the commonly inefficient design of public programs and services concerned, further alienate the municipal from the federal sphere.

Bermeo Mendoza (n.d.) regards the municipality as an important political space, one in which three sociological relationships occur: 1) public relations between citizens and citizens, 2) public relations between citizens and territory, and 3) public relations between citizens and government. While these relationships occur at other levels of government and society, it is the third relationship we are concerned with. A citizens' relationship with government generally alludes to their relationship with a broader category of government, or a federal one. By establishing that there exists a different and unique relationship between citizens and government at the municipal level, Bermeo Mendoza (n.d.) suggests that the municipal space is also a valuable site for exploring political participation. Here, for example, one is able to gauge the degrees of harmony between the municipal, state, and federal political spaces.

It is important, however, to differentiate between different forms of municipal governments in México — while it is treated as one category, there have been efforts to typify the variations in its exercise. Four categories capture these variations: 1) Hierarchical governance, 2) Decentralized governance, 3) Cooperative governance, and 4) Social governance (Zarembeg, 2012). In *hierarchical governance*, the dominant form of interaction is between government agencies and individual citizens¹⁰. In *decentralized governance*, marked by low local government responsibility and low citizen participation, the solving of immediate public issues is a result of a high level of intergovernmental coordination. *Cooperative governance*, on the other hand, witnesses high levels of citizen participation yet is still characterized by low local government responsibility. Here,

¹⁰ Here, however, a vertical interaction is implied, one in which governmental actors with more power are able to control those with less (citizens).

public policy issues and their realization depend on organized forms of interaction.

Finally, *social governance* is characterized by high levels of both local government responsibility and citizen participation, again, specifically with regard to public policies and issues. Here, local governments exhibit high institutional capacity, allowing for an increased propensity towards solving issues in conjunction with its respective society.

While *decentralized governance* is a constant across municipal governments in México, it is *hierarchical governance* that represents the most dominant and classical form of municipal governance.

Scholars have agreed not only on broad categories of municipal governance, but also on the problems they tend to encounter. This profile of problems and inconveniences is fivefold: 1) unequal relationships with, and frequent subordination to national governments, further amplified by subnational heterogeneity, 2) gaps between amount of legislation and the quality of its implementation and execution, 3) limited financial capacity, usually a result of national-level resistance to the disbursement of more funds and resources, in addition to inadequate finance policies, 4) deficiency in the service sector, due to a lack of human resource policies and poor human resource management, and 5) limitations in the institutionalization of citizen participation (Berthin, 2012). The frequency and extent of these problems is, as expected, dependent on the form of municipal governance and myriad contextual factors that spill over onto the political domain. Their categorization and differentiation, however, are important in allowing scholars to draw conclusions about the patterns within countries or political systems.

Two qualitative studies on municipal governance in Mexico give us insight into how the aforementioned typifications and categories are manifest in specific case studies.

Castro Dominguez (2012) studied the municipality of Villa Guerrero in Mexico state, one of the only municipalities in the region to exhibit alternation in the election of political parties. Interviews with citizens in Villa Guerrero revealed that the only constant across electoral turnout was uncertainty. More specifically, citizens' ideas, values, and knowledge were more or less divorced from any institutional ideology — these ideas, of political nature, were more dependent on the present and quotidian rather than on adherence to ideology or party loyalty. Because of this reliance on the “present,” no party can guarantee its victory, and any party shares an equal probability of winning (Castro Dominguez, 2012)¹¹. In another qualitative study on municipal governance, Maldonado and Martinez (2012) explored local councils in Oaxaca. They interviewed members of CMDRS (Consejos Municipales de Desarrollo Rural Sustentable or *Municipal Councils of Sustainable Rural Development*), and found that the unidirectionality of resource transfer and programs was controlled by political parties, organizations, and leaders. Additionally, there was a widespread belief that these actors use resources and programs for political gain.

This latter case of Oaxaca, in highlighting the tendency for political entities and actors to appropriate resources and funds for political gain, reflects a broader sentiment of mistrust in all levels of government. While citizen trust in government has enjoyed attention at the national level of inquiry, Montalvo (2010) probed into a 2008 survey¹²

¹¹ Castro Dominguez refers to this logic as “egalitarian individualism,” which allows citizens to alternate freely between parties and make political decisions independently of any traces of group or party affiliation (2012, p. 12).

¹² In this 2008 LAPOP survey, 38,535 participants from 23 countries were asked the following question: “To what extent do you trust your municipality?” (Montalvo, 2010).

conducted by LAPOP (Latin American Public Opinion Project) which studied trust in Latin America's municipal governments, specifically. In previous studies, levels of trust were consistently low across the various political regimes in the region. In 2008, this still held true, with an average trust score of 49.9 (of 100 points). Cross-tabulations found that certain demographic and socioeconomic markers were correlated with different levels of trust. For example, lower levels of trust were positively associated with higher levels of education and negatively related to age. That is, the older and less educated the citizen, the higher the levels of self-reported trust. Most pertinent to the topic at hand, however, is the finding that geographic areas were differentially associated with levels of trust. While medium and large cities expressed lower trust in their municipalities, rural areas and small cities expressed higher levels.

Another important angle through which municipalities have been studied is whether the competitiveness of elections improves the performance of local governments (Moreno-Jaimes, 2007). Assuming the rationale that underpins theories of governmental accountability, which is that the more competitive elections are, the more responsive governments become, this study (Moreno-Jaimes, 2007) explored the performance of Mexican municipal governments during the 1990s. Specifically, it honed in on responsiveness with regard to the provision of sewage systems and potable water. The findings suggest that competitive elections may be a less influential factor than we believe it to be, and that municipal governments are more responsive to other influences, such as pressure from the citizenry. This insight sheds light on the potential danger of conflating democratic consolidation with electoral competitiveness — if other factors and

dimensions, such as citizen pressure and engagement are ignored, the state of Mexico's municipal governance will continue to flounder.

Literature on Rural Politics

The two threads of scholarship previously discussed, political participation and local governance, lead us to yet another sublayer of Mexico's political reality. Because Villamar is considered a *rural* municipality, it is imperative that we briefly consider the vast breadth of literature on rural politics in México. First, it is necessary to highlight some of the characteristics, both social and political, of this subnational context.

Mexico's rural countryside has long been plagued by disproportionate rates of poverty. In 2010, 61% of the population in rural areas was below the national poverty line (IFAD, 2014). In the two decades prior to 2014, while income inequality fell about 10% at the national level and in urban areas, rural Mexico witnessed a rise.

A monumental contributor to this high poverty rate is the limited accessibility to basic services, which is due to the geographic areas where rural localities tend to sit. Generally away from urban centers, access to health, education, sanitation, housing, and opportunities for economic diversification are scarce. According to a 2014 IFAD report, almost 33% rural household incomes come from agricultural economic activity¹³. Despite the rural population's propensity towards the agricultural economic sector, and the growing inequality between rural and urban, public spending is nearly 30 times less in

¹³ In this 33%, 14% represents paid farm work, 8% represents their own farming business income, 6% represents livestock, and 5% represents other natural resource uses (IFAD, 2014).

poorer states (which have a higher concentration of rural areas) than in the wealthier northern states (IFAD, 2014).

Rural Mexico's socioeconomic profile has also been marked by the concentration of two major government programs, *Oportunidades* (now PROSPERA)¹⁴ and PROCAMPO¹⁵. The two programs have employed a rhetoric geared not only towards Mexico's rural poor, but to *campesinos*, or the peasantry. The peasantry, which has been at the forefront of the political left in many of the world's developing countries, is perhaps Mexico's most historically contested social and political class¹⁶. In the Mexican context, the struggle for land has been the fundamental element of the peasantry's mobilization. However, one should be careful not to consider this struggle the *only* one implicated in our understanding of the peasantry as a class. Arturo Warman (1984), one of the most lauded scholars on Mexico's rural classes, offers a perspective in which the discussion of the peasantry as a class is ample and open for debate. It is with this in mind

¹⁴PROSPERA has operated under a few different names: SOLIDARIDAD, PROGRESA, and *Oportunidades* (in that order). It is a federally funded conditional cash transfer program (CCT) which targets populations that live in "extreme poverty". It offers families support in the fields of education, health, nutrition, and income. SEDESOL (*Secretaría de Desarrollo Social*) administers the program (<http://www.gob.mx/sedesol>).

¹⁵ PROCAMPO (*Programa de Apoyos Directos al Campo*), another federally funded program administered by SAGARPA (*Secretaría de Agricultura, Ganadería, Desarrollo Rural, Pesca y Alimentación*), seeks to complement the income of agricultural producers in Mexico. It was drafted on the eve of NAFTA's passing (<http://www.gob.mx/sagarpa>).

¹⁶ The Porfiriato (1876-1910) favored the dominance of a small class of landowners over land-deprived peasant communities, a tension that ruptured and manifest in the 1910 Revolution (Mijangos Díaz, 2008). While the Revolution was instrumental in redistributing land to the peasantry, capitalism continued to develop, a process that led to the recreation of the peasantry on the basis of agrarian reform. Roger Bartra (1982) refers to this recreation as "an impossible, ongoing annihilation," both because of the peasantry's centrality to the post-revolutionary project and the simultaneous destruction of their material basis for subsistence.

that the rural population of Villamar can be studied within the *campesinista* framework. According to Warman (1984), insofar as these citizen “producers,” or *campesinos*, are subject to a common set of political processes buttressed by exploitation and subordination, we are referring to a specific class.

There have been efforts, however, to contour the criteria suitable for the *campesino* category and how it ought to be understood. While the peasantry was previously treated as an isolated social entity due to its geographical remoteness and separation from other rural communities, the last 20 years have seen a rejection of this pristine isolation image by scholars (Spalding, 1988). What has prevailed, instead, is an image that acknowledges the peasantry’s very real, varied, and frequent interactions with what would be supposed as “external society.” Aside from this shift in de-essentializing and opening the *campesino* category, scholars have also attempted to subcategorize the broader grouping also referred to as the rural population. For example, in Crummett’s (1985) study of 211 rural households in Aguascalientes, she found that a tripartite breakdown was an effective way of framing the elemental class variation patterns present. Here, the three classes were as follows: commercial, subsistence, and landless. While the primary axis on which they differed was access to means of production, citizens’ level of participation in the labor market was also an important determinant.

The implications of the rural *campesino* as a category stretch far beyond the purposes of scholarly clarity and specificity. Particularly, the category within the broader context of the rural Mexican countryside became a key component of the PRI’s agenda, and this may have continued for longer than a democracy might call for. Bartra (1982), for instance, suggests that traditional corporatism evolved into neocorporatism in the

form of subsidies and programs such as PRONASOL¹⁷ and PROCAMPO. Whereas the CNC¹⁸ was the main vehicle for traditional corporatism under the PRI, neocorporatism is now being channeled through said government programs. According to Bartra (1982) and many other scholars, the distribution of cash to an estimated 3.5 million rural families on the eve of the 1994 electoral period was solely a reflection of the PRI's entrenched interest with this demographic.

After such a widespread reach from these programs, the PRI allegedly sought a response from its recipients in the form of a vote in their favor. Otero (2000) specifies that in the two weeks preceding the 1994 elections, ballot secrecy and campaign violations skewed the electoral turnout in favor of the PRI¹⁹. The government distributed PROCAMPO checks during those last two weeks, violating electoral policy. In addition to this signaling the ruling party's affinity towards the rural countryside, these violations also indicated an effort to make access to these programs conditional.

The two latter suggestions by Bartra (1982) and Otero (2000) illustrate a point important for this research: citizens, or *campesinos*, in Mexico's rural countryside do participate in politics, and there may be tendencies in their participation. Because the rural population is disproportionately associated with the socioeconomic factors that indicate low participation rates, they are often dismissed as politically inactive. In a

¹⁷ PRONASOL (*Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*) was the precursor to PROGRESA, *Oportunidades* and PROSPERA.

¹⁸ Founded in 1938, the CNC (*Confederación Nacional Campesina*) was the unifying entity of *campesino* organizations. For most of the 20th century, it was considered a branch of the PRI (Otero, 1999).

¹⁹ The PRI's candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, won 34% of the vote in 'very urban' areas, while receiving 77% of the vote in 'very rural' areas, where the distribution of these checks was concentrated (Otero, 2000).

survey of three rural communities, former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (PRI) explored the modes and extent of political participation of the rural population. He concluded that the Mexican peasantry exhibits higher participation than is expected and assumed, both in the form of active political engagement and interest (Salinas de Gortari, 1982).

In studying the political participation of the rural population of Villamar, this research not only acknowledges the very political nature of their socioeconomic and geographical profile, but also seeks to dispel the notion the peasantry is less politically active than other sectors of Mexico's population. Additionally, this research seeks to expand the dialogue on the Mexican peasantry, accepting Warman's (1984) invitation to leave the category "open" for discussion. To eschew the dominant association of rural and peasant politics with rebellion, revolution, and active mobilization, this research attempts to contribute to the conversation on more subtle and everyday forms of *campesino* participation and resistance. In this case, the site of contestation being the municipality of Villamar, and the mechanism being their participation in the 2015 municipal elections.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

One of the basic principles in political theory is the assumption that a working democratic government requires an “interested and engaged” citizenry (Somuano Ventura, 2005). Mexico, still considered by some a fairly “new” democracy, has for long suffered fissures in its political institutions that undermine the aforementioned goal. However, over the past three decades, the country has also undergone profound changes: with the removal of the one-party regime (PRI) emerged more competitive electoral politics, in addition to neoliberal economic reforms that dimmed the role of the state in society. Yet, the consolidation of Mexico’s democracy is not considered a *fait accompli*, but rather a fragile and daunting task that continues to be put to the test. Given its role in the government’s rhetoric, and the very tangible threats it has endured recently, it is imperative that every work on Mexican politics addresses the state of its democracy. This research, aside from the conclusions that attempt to answer the questions posed earlier, will also engage in a conversation about what these mean for Mexico’s democracy. We may ask, for example, whether citizen engagement and political experiences in Villamar represent either regressions or advancements in the country’s democratic project. For organizational purposes, what follows is a presentation of the main elements in the theoretical framework for this thesis and the rationale for the conclusions here presented.

Political Participation, Culture, and Identity

The first base on the theoretical front that merits further analysis in this thesis is that of political participation. When we factor the definitions and conceptualizations of Somuano Ventura (2005), Weiner (1971), Booth and Seligson (1978), Verba and Nie

(1972), Klesner (2009) and Crow (2009) into an encompassing understanding of political participation, we find that there are common denominators. The most important of these denominators are the conventional versus unconventional binary, the prerequisite of attempting to influence, and the necessity of *consciousness* in doing so. The definitions of political participation, and its modes and manifestations, put forth by the aforementioned scholars assume the participant is conscious of their participation, in addition to them recognizing their participation as political in nature. I argue, however, that abstaining from the electoral process or engagement with political entities during the campaign period, still qualifies as participation if the rationale is political. The participants who chose not to vote because of their level of discontent, for example, did not describe this as a political action, but did express the hopes that their abstention would bring about accountability.

Germane to the realm of Mexican political participation, and a recurring concept in literature about Mexico's political history, our second theoretical element is that of political culture. Political culture became an important concept since Almond & Verba (1963) contended that the functionality and durability of government institutions is meaningfully affected by the political values held by society. Their seminal work included Mexico as a case study, and it suggested that three factors in defining a country's political culture include political efficacy, interpersonal trust, and perceived legitimacy (Almond & Verba, 1963). The theory of political culture suggests, in its positive form, that societies exhibiting interpersonal trust and civic participation are likely to be capable of sustaining democratic norms and institutions. In its negative form,

the inverse manifestation of these values pose a threat to democratic sustainability. Additionally, three categories of political attitudes that influence political behavior have been agreed upon: political efficacy, political engagement, and the evaluation of an individual's political context (Almond & Verba, 1963)²⁰. For the sake of the regional specificity which this research regards as indispensable, we will consider the undercurrents of Michoacán's political culture²¹ proposed by Nava Hernández (1987). Of these, the most pertinent to this research is the idea that popular agrarian values, first mutated as *Cardenismo*, continue reappear in manifestations of the political Left, as seen by participants' preference for the PRI and PRD. I also argue that low levels of political efficacy (internal and external) and negative evaluations of political context permeate Villamar's political ambience, while leaving political engagement relatively intact.

²⁰ *Political efficacy* has two components: internal versus external efficacy. Whereas internal efficacy reflects a citizen's confidence that she can understand and therefore participate (and influence) politics, external efficacy reflects their belief in and trust of the government's ability to meet their demands. Of these two, internal efficacy is understood to have a bigger impact on Mexico (Craig et al., 1990). *Political engagement* refers to the level of interest and extent of the expression of this interest in politics. It is thought that political knowledge is also central to this category, where more political knowledge is likely to yield more participation. *Evaluation of political context* refers to citizens' understandings of the robustness of their political regime's democracy. If citizens believe their context is democratic, they are more likely to regard their participation as meaningful, whereas the contrary evaluation of their context will render their qualification of participation as meaningless (Almond & Verba, 1963).

²¹ Michoacán's political culture, according to Nava Hernández (1982), is influenced by five precursors: 1) the consistent renewal of *campesino* and indigenous movements, both with strong communal roots, which today revindicate cultural and agrarian causes while challenging the state; 2) the regional influence of the Catholic Church; 3) liberal *jacobinism*, which has made of El Colegio de San Nicolás and La Universidad Michoacána a home base; 4) radical popular nationalism, which stems from the Revolution and was channeled through *Cardenismo* in the early 20th century, only to reappear in different mutations usually in the left political spectrum; 5) emerging manifestations of a syndicalist and labor culture, concentrated in areas characterized by rapid growth and recent industrialization.

The third theoretical element integral to this research is that of the *campesinista* debate. While some scholars propose the conditionality of the *campesino* category, suggesting its dissolution at the hypothetical transition to socialism, self-identified *campesinistas* such as Gustavo Esteva and Arturo Warman defend the category's finite value (Spalding, 1988). *Campesinistas* see the continuous survival of the category, whether it is in mutations that reflect cooperativism in a different economic system, or as survivors of capitalism's incongruences. I argue that the *campesino* category remains relevant in Villamar, given participants' self-identification as such, but also their rationales for aligning with the PRI. I endorse Warman's stance on the *campesino* category was an open one, and suggest that the relationship we see between this category and the PRI (Bartra 1982; Otero 2000) is still a reality in Michoacán. Finally, I make an effort to highlight that the political participation of the *campesinos* in this research is higher than would be predicted by most political participation scholars.

Democracy

Though a more thorough conversation about democracy merits attention in the concluding remarks, the clarity of this research will benefit from a brief acquaintance with the concepts that will be employed. While this research and its conclusions assumes that Mexico's electoral and party systems do have democratic and political plurality mechanisms built into them, it is the *quality* of Mexico's democracy that needs attention (Becerra Chávez, 2014). Though the reversal of these democratic mechanisms seems improbable, their fragility in the face of national political crises and low citizen evaluation should not be ignored. To address how participants' experiences measure up

to Mexico's democratic aspirations, I employ Robert Alan Dahl and Giovanni Sartori's seven suggested institutional elements that define a democratic regime²². Here, electoral factors are considered elemental to the integrity of a democratic government (Torres Espinoza, 2014.) I suggest that, though these seven pillars legally and constitutionally bookended by Mexico's political system, the quality of three (corruption-free elections, access to alternative sources of information, and freedom of expression without retaliation) hinders the maturation of democratic expression in Villamar.

Another point that will be vital to this dialogue is the magnitude of one of democracy's biggest challenges: diversifying and expanding spaces for citizen participation. In the democratic equation, participation and representation are an insoluble unit, and it is in recognizing this that we can also see the municipality's instrumentality in overcoming the challenge. As the unit of government that is least distanced from rural citizens (and all citizens), the municipality is the source and receptor of citizen initiatives, expressions, and demands. An additional challenge, however, is the reality that municipalities are simultaneously dependent on the state government and plagued by financial instability which stymies the successful execution of its public functions

²² These seven elements include: 1) Control over governmental political decisions is constitutionally granted to elected officials; 2) officials are elected in periodic and legally exercised elections (free of corruption or fraud), where coercion is rarely part of the equation; 3) all eligible citizens have the right to vote in elections; 4) all eligible citizens have the right to participate as candidates for government positions; 5) all citizens have the right to freely express themselves, without danger of retaliation, about political issues (including criticism of government, government officials, the socioeconomic order, and prevailing ideology); 6) all citizens have the right to access and look for alternative sources of information (and these are made available); 7) to access their rights, including all those briefly mentioned, citizens have the right to form independent associations or organizations (including independent political parties and interest groups) (Torres Espinoza, 2014).

(González Casanova, 1975). Based on participants' accounts of their participation, I suggest that these two challenges confronted by municipal governments reflect undemocratic fissures in Mexico's political system, and that they sever the relationship between citizens of Villamar and their local government. This severed relationship further disengages citizens, revealing a fault in Mexico's democratic endeavor towards effective citizen participation.

RESEARCH SETTING: VILLAMAR, MICHOACÁN

The setting for this research, the state of Michoacán, is one of Mexico's 32 federal entities. The state is geographically divided into four zones, as follows: the northern Chapala and Bajío, the center plateau, Tierra Caliente, and the south (Ochoa Serrano & Sánchez Díaz, 2011). Michoacán is home to 113 municipalities, only one (Cherán) of which is declared an autonomous community governed by its own laws and customs. The aforementioned zones are further divided into 10 subregions, of which the region Lerma-Chapala stands out, for the purposes of this research. The Lerma-Chapala region is home to 17 of the 113 state municipalities, one of them being Villamar, where interviews and ethnographic observation were conducted. The municipality of Villamar, in turn, is home to 47 localities, whose characteristics will be described shortly. This research makes consistent use of the term 'rural' to refer to Villamar's categorization according to INAFED, but also uses the term to enhance the demographic, economic, and social appendages associated with it²³.

Michoacan's historically grounded relationship with the land and agriculture (and therefore, the *campesino* category) dates back to millennia, and has been foregrounded in scholarly work on the *Tarascons*, the mesoamerican society that resided in the state

²³ INAFED's classification system for municipalities includes 5 categories: *Metropolitan* (where more than half of the population resides in localities with a population of more than one million), *Big Urban* (where more than half of the population resides in localities with a population between 100,000 and one million), *Medium Urban* (where more than half the population resides in localities with a population between 15,000 and 100,000), *Semiurban* (where more than half the population resides in localities with a population between 2,500 and 15,000), *Rural* (where more than half the population resides in localities with a population of fewer than 2,500), and *Mixed* (where population is dispersed in such a way that one category does not constitute the majority) (<http://www.inafed.gob.mx>).

(Ochoa Serrano & Sánchez Díaz, 2011). Much like the rural population today, the *tarascans* relied on the land and consequently, agriculture, for much of their economic and social life. Suitable and ripe for agricultural activity and enterprise, Michoacán's geography has been instrumental in the construction of the *campesino* identity, a social and political category tied to individual's economic participation via agricultural activity. Today, along with tourism, agriculture is the state's primary economic activity (OURCO, 2012). While 43% of the state's surface is used for livestock, 27% is of use in forestation, and 24% in agriculture. The main agricultural products in the state are avocados, blackberries, guavas, strawberries, wheat, sorghum, soy, limes, tomatoes and onions. The state's, and subsequently, its population's specialization in agriculture can be further illustrated by the Bracero Program's²⁴ aim to make Michoacán a target region for the recruitment of labor.

As the state moved towards neoliberal economic policies since the implementation of NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), the population closely tied to agricultural economic activity (mainly in rural areas) has witnessed changes in their work lives. In the Lerma-Chapa region, where Villamar sits, the primary activities in terms of contribution to economic activity in the state are commerce (retail of groceries and food products) and conservation of fruits, vegetables and meals (OURCO 2012). This shift in economic activity is important for this research when considering that at least half of the participants are currently working or have worked at *la congeladora*,

²⁴ The *Bracero* Program of 1942 was an extension of the Mexican Farm Labor Agreement signed between the United States and Mexico. It allowed for the importation of Mexican guest workers into the United States for farm labor, to mitigate the domestic shortage effects brought on by World War II (Cohen, 2013).

or InterFrut, a fruit processing and conservation warehouse located in nearby Jacona. Though work at *la congeladora* would not be considered direct labor with the land, it still represents a link or association between rural Michoacan's populace and agricultural *products* as a primary economic activity. More interesting still, is that this regional employer has been the primary catalyst for women's economic participation in the region — economic participation beyond the household, that is. Not only has this marker of neoliberalism influenced modes of economic participation and rural michoacanos' relationship with the land, but it has also implied a significant change in the region's gendered labor patterns.

Villamar, formerly known as San Miguel Guarachita due to its being an extension of the regional *hacienda* in Guaracha, became its own municipality in 1831 (Ochoa Serrano & Sánchez Díaz, 2011). It wasn't until the early 20th century that it was renamed, and thereafter known as Villamar. Located in the northeast of Michoacán, Villamar is an economic and social arterial to the neighboring medium urban and semiurban localities of Jiquilpan, Sahuayo, Zamora, Santiago Tangamandapio, and Venustiano Carranza. Its landscape consists mainly of open meadows, where *huizache* trees and cactus are the most salient of flora. The soil in Villamar is used mainly for livestock and agricultural purposes (INAFED, 2010). According to the most recent population census conducted by INEGI in 2010, the total population of the municipality is approximately 17,000, with women outnumbering men by a mere 928. Nearly 40% of the population of the municipality lives in localities with a population size between 2,500 - 4,999. The rest or majority (60%) live in localities where population size is fewer than 2,500 — that is, the majority of the population of Villamar lives in localities considered

rural by INAFED standards. The 2010 census documented a total of 4,490 households in Villamar, with an average household size of 3.8. While a majority of households reported having access to a refrigerator, TV, and radio, less than half of households dispose of a telephone (cellular or home), and less than 3% have internet at home.

Of importance to this research, both because of political implications and participants' tendency to self-identify and self-classify their locality as "poor," "humble," and "disadvantaged," is Villamar's degree of marginalization. CONAPO has the following five classifications with regard to marginalization: very high, high, medium, low, and very low. As a whole, Villamar's classification is *medium*. However, it is notable that 60% (28 of 47) localities within it classify as *high* (INEGI, 2010), and 10% of the municipality's population is living in extreme poverty by the same institution's standards. An interesting calculation is that only 31% of the population is considered "economically active," while 46% is considered *not* "economically active"²⁵. Of those considered *economically active*, 80% were male, and of those considered otherwise, 77% were women. Additionally, of those *economically active*, 42% is actively employed with an income of up to two minimum salaries (minimum salary is 73 Mexican pesos a day). That is, a mere 13% of Villamar's population would fall under the former category.

²⁵ The remaining 23% is not factored into this calculation because of the criteria for the PEA (*Población Económicamente Activa* or *economically active*) and PNEA (*Población No Económicamente Activa*, or *not economically active*) categories. To be considered *economically active*, an individual must conform to the following: be over 12 years of age, and either worked or had a job but didn't work, or looked for a job during the week they were surveyed. To be considered *not economically active*, an individual must conform to the following: be over 12 years of age, retired, a student, dedicated strictly to work in the home, or have had a limitation that impeded their working ability (INEGI, 2010).

These numbers reflecting economic participation, marginalization, and poverty are directly relevant to our understanding of participants' consideration of their economic situation at the voting booth. Not exempt from this conversation on marginalization are the literacy and education rates of the municipality — the average individual in Villamar has an education level below that of the sixth grade, and illiteracy rates in those over 15 years of age reach 15%. When considering the 15-17 age range, only 52% of those within it are enrolled in school, and within the 18-24 range, a mere 85% is *not* enrolled in school. The municipality's enrollment rates reflect participants' concerns over stagnant and underdeveloped infrastructure, in addition to educational costs outside their margins of accessibility.

While statistical information is much less available for each locality within Villamar, I was able to find that for the three *ranchos* where interviews were conducted, the degree of marginalization is *high*, and all three classify as *rural*. *Rancho 1 (P)* has a population of 2,282, *rancho 2 (CC)* has a population of 657, and *rancho 3 (NR)* has a population of 391²⁶. The characteristics of these three *ranchos* are similar to those found in Dan Stanislawski's (1950) ethnographic study of eleven towns in Michoacán, and Stanislawski's anatomical sketch of these characteristics help us describe those of the *ranchos* consulted during this research. For example, the *plaza*, though not present in two of the three *ranchos*, is recognized as a place of social and economic prestige, a status that is also associated with those residing in its immediate vicinities — we will see how the absence of a *plaza* is one of the most pressing political demands of the two towns where

²⁶ Numbers of towns do not mark importance or any ordinal classification.

it is lacking. Additionally, small retail stores or “*abarrotes*” are very common, and like in Stanislawski’s (1950) study, are extensions of the home of the merchant, who enjoys significant prestige and respect within the *ranchos*.

Along with the plaza and the retail stores, the church and its contouring streets are a place where locals gather and convene, whether it is for daily conversation, town meetings, celebrations, or gatherings of political nature (especially during the campaign period). All three *ranchos* have at least one school and a mill, and both are sites charged with social activity in addition to being sites of informational exchange among locals. One last site that the three towns have in common is the *cancha*, or playing court, where the locals gather primarily to play basketball, but also for special events such as dances and political meetings. These spaces are supremely important in our discussion, for not only are they sites where political interactions take place, but they are also sites that were the subject of many participants’ political demands and concerns.

An important phenomenon present in the three *ranchos* is the massive outflow of migration to the United States, especially in the last quarter of the 20th century. Camp (2003) considers that these migratory experiences of citizens who have lived outside of México may have exposed migrants to the practice of democracy in a way that might tailor their political perspectives in their home country. Additionally, Goodman and Hiskey (2008) suggest that being away from the home country is a physical detachment from one’s community, which might encourage political disengagement. In the three *ranchos* in Villamar, an overwhelming majority of citizens have familial ties to the United States, and almost half of the participants in this research have had experience working or living in *el Norte*.

METHODS

The interviews for this research were conducted a few months after the 2015 elections in three *rancherías* in Villamar, Michoacán. Data was gathered using a mixed-methods approach that employed mainly qualitative methods in addition to quantitative and ethnographic methods. The timing of the data collection was important, since Mexico's legislative elections were held on June 7th of the same year, and the elected local municipal government took office on the first of September. Research was carried out both during this interim period (between elections and government change) and immediately after, which presented an ideal opportunity to gather information about local citizens' thoughts, concerns, and experiences regarding the recent election and campaign period. On June 7, 2015, citizens voted for representatives in the following positions: one state governor, 24 local deputies of majority status²⁷, 16 local deputies of proportional representation²⁸, and 113 municipal governments. The interviews primarily, but not in a strictly limited fashion, focused on voting tendencies with regard to the municipal governments. That is, more probing was done to extract experiences with and thoughts about local government rather than state and federal governments, with the intention of keeping the microscopic nature of the study intact.

Michoacán was selected, first because of earlier personal experiences with political parties in the state, which always sparked the curiosity inherent in the research question. Furthermore, it is a place where three different factors present a unique social

²⁷ "Majority status" deputyships are those elected by a direct majority vote.

²⁸ "Proportional representation" deputyships are those seats which are apportioned according to the percentage of votes won by each party in a congressional region composed of several states.

and political landscape: the predominance of agriculture as a primary economic activity (especially in the rural areas), the strong historical antecedents of the PRI in the state, and the recent foregrounding of security issues as a result of drug-related organized crime²⁹.

To lend perspective to the first of these factors, I considered the branch of economic activity that employs the largest number of *economically active* michoacanos (25% of those *economically active* are in the agricultural sector). However, its significance as a factor became apparent in previous observations about the population's dependence on subsistence agriculture. The second factor regarding the historical antecedents of two specific political parties, the PRI and PRD, is a well-known characteristic of Mexican politics whose contemporary implications have not been thoroughly studied. Finally, the presence of organized crime and its relevance to citizens' relationship to the government has been at the forefront of politics at the national level.

Narrowing it down a layer further to the municipality of Villamar was the result of a robust network of contacts in the area, which allowed for easier insertion into the research setting. Additionally, the location of the former *hacienda* of Guaracha³⁰ in the

²⁹ Michoacán has witnessed the dynamic tensions and interplay between government, self-defense groups known as *autodefensas*, and drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs), even long before former president Felipe Calderón launched his counter-drug crusade in 2006. With a long history of ties with DTOs, the state recently experienced an increase in violence and crime, along with a strong challenge to order, specifically in the state's Tierra Caliente region (Heinle, Molzhan & Shirk, 2015).

³⁰ Guaracha, now also known as Emiliano Zapata, was the center of a local power network which embraced a number of smaller estates in the north-eastern corner of the *ciénega*. Owned by a wealthy Guadalajara banking family with marital and political connections within the Porfirian macro-regional and national elite, Guaracha also encompassed some smaller landowning families in neighboring Jiquilpan. Differences in the class positions of different strata of the regional elite were complemented by variations in the class relations and systems of labour exploitation which characterized

municipality and its proximity to Jiquilpan³¹ made Villamar an ideal site for exploring how historical social and political structures may continue to influence political participation today. Selection of the three *rancherías* that are the main subjects of this research was, again, was done using a convenience sampling method. However, the variation of population size in the three *rancherías* was one of the methodological aims. Thus, from an initial pool of approximately seven *rancherías* in Villamar, the three were selected based on differential population sizes (*P*: 2,282, *CC*: 657, and *NR*: 391.)

A questionnaire (see Appendix A) was developed in order to have a skeletal framework from which to guide the interview questions, which differed on a case by case basis. The semi-structured interviews were conducted using a snowball sampling method, in which the following pattern of communication was dominant: the established contact in the *ranchito* would recommend a family or friend for participation in the research, and if successfully contacted and interviewed, that contact would then do the same for their family members or friends. In some cases, when prospects for participation came to a halt, a door-to-door approach was employed. In the latter case, I would dedicate the first interaction to an introduction of myself and my research interests, and then schedule an interview if the participant seemed sufficiently interested and willing. Of 20 interviews, 12 were audio recorded (provided the consent of the participant), and the remaining eight were hand-written due to participant discomfort with the recording method. The

different agrarian enterprises in the wider region of western Michoacán (Ramos Azirpe & Rueda Smithers, 1994).

³¹ Jiquilpan, which is its own municipality, was the birthplace and home of Lázaro Cárdenas. Consequently, it was a site in which his policies and rhetoric gained significant traction (Ramos Azirpe & Rueda Smithers, 1994).

following demographic information was collected for each participant: gender, age, number of children, occupation and level of education. For each participant, the following quantifiable information was also collected: whether they voted or not, and which political party they voted for in the recent June 7th elections. It is important to keep in mind that questions placed an emphasis on *municipal* electoral decisions.

Ethnographic observation was done within the various social institutions and community organizations in the three *ranchos*. Attendance to local masses, PROSPERA meetings, sporting events (basketball and soccer games), and *fiestas* became the primary way gaining acquaintanceship with the local citizens and their *ranchos*' cultural and social infrastructure. Though opportunities to attend meetings of political nature did not present themselves as often as would have been ideal, two instances of observation at such meetings did enrich the substance of this research. The first was the opportunity to observe a PROSPERA meeting, during which recipients of this government program showed the local program leader any necessary documentation, and briefly discussed the health and education of their children. The second opportunity was on the first day of September, when the new municipal government would take office and positions be put into effect. On this day, in Villamar proper (where the municipal government resides), the entire municipality was invited to the inauguration ceremony, where the new president Joel López Padilla (PRI) would give a short speech to be followed by *pozole*, dancing, and celebration. Ethnographic participation of these events and gatherings during this time period proved valuable, since both the election in June and inauguration in September bookended the saliency of citizens' recent political experiences.

The quantitative portion of this research will draw from preexisting surveys and public opinion polls conducted primarily through INEGI (National Institute for Geography and Statistics). Every ten years, INEGI conducts México's population census, which is why population data is dated at 2010. Information sourced from other agencies and entities such as INAFED (National Institute for Federalism and Municipal Development) and SNIM (National System for Municipal Information) use INEGI's census database for their calculations, and these sources were consulted for specific information at the municipal level (mainly demographic data and indicators of poverty).

Opinion surveys employed, such as ENVIPE (National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Security) (2013, 2015), ENCIG (National Survey of Governmental Impact and Quality) (2013), and ENCUP (National Survey on Political Culture and Citizen Practices) (2012), which gathered information about citizens' perceptions of government efficiency and violence in the state, offer an empirically grounded backdrop to the qualitative information provided by the citizens of the three towns in Villamar. In addition to these nationally recognized databases and surveys, information about recent and historical voting trends were drawn primarily from the IEM, including the results of the June 7th elections. This institute's documental archive also provided historical and contemporary documents of each political party, including their most recent political platforms, but also their "Action Plans," statutes, and declaration of principles. The information obtained from these surveys and documents were used mainly to gather data on the country and state, in order to contextualize the findings at the municipal level in Villamar.

As with most, if not all, research, ethical issues are of utmost importance and were carefully considered when disclosing information about the research to participants. To ensure that participants understood what the interview entailed, and that they were willing to provide this information, an informed consent statement was given (in some cases, read) to all participants. Considering the possibility that participants may feel discomfort in talking about their political affiliations and preferences, all were reassured that they were free to terminate the interview at any time or skip through any questions they preferred not to answer. Another reason for potential discomfort was the fear that their political affiliations and preferences be disclosed to the extant drug cartel-affiliated informants in the rural localities. Additionally, participants may have felt that information about their political participation might jeopardize their participation government programs (PROCAMPO, PROSPERA, *70 y más*). Since these government aid programs have conditioned many citizens into a relationship with government officials characterized as participatory exchange (where they participate in order to receive something), it was necessary to clarify that the researcher was in no way affiliated with said programs or entities, and that no cash would be received as a result of participation in this research.

The three primary methods employed (qualitative, quantitative, ethnographic) are combined and embedded into the analysis of this research, with the qualitative and ethnographic data taking precedence over the quantitative. Ethnographic observations are used to give a detailed account of the research setting's sociopolitical infrastructure, illustrating how politics at the local level are unique and operate on individual-level and

context-specific factors. Qualitative interviews were carefully combed to extract any data of qualitative value, and these values are stated at the beginning of every section or topic in order to give the reader a numerical value through which to understand the analysis. Quotes from participant interviews are then used throughout the analysis to provide examples and add depth to the research. Pseudonyms are used for participants, and the names of the *ranchos* will remain undisclosed. Finally, the quantitative surveys used will serve to contextualize the experience of Villamar in the broader political landscapes of Michoacán and Mexico, particularly in Chapter 3.

Validity and Reliability Issues

As with much of the research on political participation, validity and accurate analysis of findings is largely dependent on sample size, timing of the questionnaire administration, and the questionnaire itself. The scope of this research, and the resources available to conduct it, limited the sample size to 20 participants. Internal validity was a fragile concept throughout the research because of its primarily qualitative nature — while I intended to measure certain things and obtain specific information about political participation, each interview differed greatly and varied in the extent to which participants answered the questions that were asked. However, this research recognizes the value of all qualitative data regardless of the questionnaire's aim, and thus its external validity is more pertinent than its internal validity. To gauge external validity, the surveys (ENCUP, ENVIPE, ENCIG) and data derived from the IEM were used. Even though the sample size ($n=20$) is far too small to truly assess external validity, comparing findings with those in the aforementioned surveys was a necessary research endeavor.

Much of the anticipated issues in reliability stem from the timing of the research. Though beneficial to the topic at hand, the research period's alignment with the inauguration of the municipal government (September 2015) present a scenario unique to its timing. During election periods, expressions of political participation are likely to be more evident, and more frequent, in addition to participants' memories of their participation being more accurate. The qualitative data collected in the interviews and ethnographic observations may have been, to some extent, state-dependent. That is, when asked at a different time (a year's distance from political campaign or electoral activity, for example), expressions of political participation might be different. However, the benefits of the research timing outweigh the potential pitfalls — aside from being a marker for accuracy of participant recollection of their participation, the information gathered is necessarily relevant to periods of high political activity, which was one of the aims of this research.

Finally, the data collected from the three *rancherías* in Villamar, Michoacán, may prove generalizable to other rural localities in the bordering southwestern states of Jalisco, Guerrero, and Guanajuato. Because these states share many characteristics with Michoacán compared to other states in the republic, there is a possibility that patterns of political participation in rural *ranchos* may be similar. More specifically, the claim that context-specific factors (or region as a variable) are important determinants of political participation is expected to bear significance in many parts of the country.

CHAPTER 1: ELEMENTS OF VILLAMAR'S POLITICAL CULTURE AND SOCIOPOLITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

At the peak of electoral campaign periods in México, the walls of rural Michoacán's villages are tainted with the promises offered by a nascent democracy's political parties. *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI), *Partido de Acción Nacional* (PAN), *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD), and *Partido Nueva Alianza* (PANAL) galvanize rural Villamar citizens into embracing political platforms that very few can relate to. As was seen one year, slogans such as “*si te dan cemento, di que sí, pero vota por el PRI!*”, or “if they offer you cement, say yes, but vote for the PRI!” exemplify the dangerous disconnect between parties' interests and those of the people they're meant to serve. The cement-for-vote relationship embodied by this slogan is characteristic of many participants' descriptions of their interactions with political parties during the campaign period, and it seems the parties both encourage and perpetuate this type of exchange. Participating in politics has, for many, become the prerequisite to receiving some type of aid or benefit — sometimes via licit means, and often not.

“It was around three o'clock in the morning. They put a thousand *pesos*, right there where your arm is resting, right there. Then they asked me for my *credencial*³².” Gael, a resident of *NR* who is the owner of one of the four corner stores in the *ranchito*, describes his interaction with members of the PRI on the eve of the June 7th, 2015 elections. This time, instead of offering sacks of cement, they offered him a tempting mound of cash in exchange for his *credencial* so that someone could vote for the PRI on

³² The *credencial*, or identification card, is a requirement at the voting booth. It will be referred to either as *credencial* or ‘ID card.’

his behalf the next morning. “Can you believe it?”, he laughs. The elections proceeded, seemingly with widespread tension regarding suspicions of vote-buying behavior. “But this has happened for a long time, it’s always been like this,” Gael remarks, as if reassuring that the consistency of vote-buying behavior eclipsed its impact.

Approximately three months after the eve of the elections, sound bites of trumpets and accordions emanate from the municipal hall in Villamar. Couples, young men grouped onto pick-up trucks, young girls, and children from the entire municipality begin to get ready upon hearing their favorite song. On this day of September, Villamar, usually discernible from a distance by the towering remnants of an old sugar mill, is marked by the flashing lights of a performance stage. After an afternoon of political speeches and celebration, the incoming municipal government closes the inauguration with a communal *birria* and *pozole* feast, and a regional band.

On September 2nd, the day after the inaugural ceremony, the municipal government is once again a distant place to the many *ranchos* that constitute it — for many, it is a site of political demand and engagement, but for most, it is just a stop on the commute to the marketplaces of Sahuayo and Jiquilpan. After almost three months of campaigns, slogans, and party propaganda, the local sociopolitical infrastructure of the *ranchos* in Villamar once again simulate the role of the state in the everyday lives of its citizens. To be clear, the role of the municipal government remains important, and to an extent, regulatory in terms of how the *ranchos*’ sociopolitical infrastructures run their course. It is, however, the local sociopolitical infrastructure of the *ranchos* that serves as a compass for citizens’ political engagement and relations, rather than the converse.

Local citizens' political experiences, then, are outcomes of multiple processes —social, historical, political— that are mapped onto this 'infrastructure'. This 'infrastructure' which we take to be of both social and political nature, refers to the traditions, values, social orders and roles, attitudes, and beliefs held by the citizens of *P*, *CC*, and , *NR*. We understand this sociopolitical infrastructure to encompass any factor (either social or political) that promotes or modulates citizens' insertion into the political sphere.

This first chapter attempts to prepare a response to the following questions previously posed: What does the local sociopolitical infrastructure of these *ranchos* look like, and how does this influence political participation? How would the factors that influence political decision making at the rural and local level differ from those present in different contexts? Here, I describe the elements of the political culture and sociopolitical infrastructure that are directly related to how citizens make political decisions or partake in the political sphere. By offering a detailed understanding of the context in which the research was done, a foundation is set, upon which subsequent chapters will discuss additional findings. This chapter will invoke the theoretical implications for political engagement and efficacy, in addition to outlining values placed on electoral participation. Finally, shared perceptions of political parties in the three *ranchos* will be discussed.

1.1 Local Sociopolitical Infrastructure

1.1.1 The Town *Encargado*

Nearly all participants (n=16) cited the importance of the role of the *rancho*'s *encargado*³³ not only in maintaining the "order," but also to modulate the relationship between citizens and the municipal government. This individual is always a resident of the *rancho*, and one whose family has resided there for generations. It is normally a male who enjoys some type of social or economic privilege in the *rancho*: in the cases of *P*, *CC*, and *NR*, the *encargado* was a male corner-store owner. In the past, it has been men whose amount of livestock and produce has allowed them to become a liaison between agricultural workers in the *rancho* and outside merchants. The main prerequisite, however, is that the *encargado* be capable of sustaining and mediating communications between citizens themselves, and between citizens and the municipal government. One participant, Mavel, explained how some *encargados* in *NR* have lasted about seven years. If people are happy with his role, they won't hold an election. Otherwise, people vote first for a role change, and then hold elections once two or three candidates have stepped forth. More often, however, the *encargado* steps down when he feels his time is up.

The role of *encargado* ranges from solving local disputes, to assisting the municipal government in the distribution of government aid or funds. In the past, they have also been in charge of collecting potable water dues. Alondra, whose father was the *encargado* for five years, explains that "if there was a fight, or any kind of dispute, he acted as the police. If you had a problem with your neighbor, you would let him know." As the designated person for a wide range of domestic and external relations, the

³³ The *encargado*, or "citizen in charge" is elected every three years. These elections are independent from governmental elections, and solely run by community members. It is a role present in all three sites.

encargado assumes a very important, and often, a very political role in the *rancho*'s affairs. Carlos, a 53-year old male who suffers from Parkinson's disease, describes how he sees the role of his *encargado*: "the same issue that I would go try and resolve in Villamar, at the municipal head, I can just go to the corner store and let him know. I can tell him, 'look, tell the president that such and such is going on with me.' He knows me, so he understands my needs. I trust him more, though I should trust the politicians more, but in order to get through to the politicians I need to talk to [him]." Here, we see that the *encargado* is the primary contact for this citizens' personal needs, in addition to his political inquiries and demands. Like Carlos, Mavel reports that she places more trust on the *encargado*, because of the social proximity she feels towards him. In addition, she feels she can count on this individual for furthering her political goals. When the town forms a committee, for example, [he] can be counted on to provide transportation to the municipal head, regardless of his involvement on the issue.

In some cases, however, the role of *encargado* is tainted with charges of corruption or vested economic or political interest. In *P*, for example, some participants expressed that their *encargado* paid more attention to the politicians than to the residents. Lidia, a resident of *P*, tells of a widespread rumor that the *encargado* appropriated half of the funds that had been allocated to the rebuilding of a bridge in her *rancho*. Gael, the same man who was offered 1,000 *pesos* in exchange for his vote, expressed a strong belief that when funds come in and are dedicated to the *rancho*, the *encargado* partakes in the distribution of the funds amongst political leaders. Other participants (n=5) expressed similar suspicions that the *encargado* was the beneficiary of some corrupt form

of money-shuffling. However, overall, participants were divided on whether this role was corrupt or inherently benevolent.

What most did agree on was that it is an integral role in the *ranchos*, and that it will always be a part of the local infrastructure despite its increasing exigencies. “A lot of people don’t want the role anymore, because everyone complains to the *encargado*. They’re the ones that have to be actively looking for funds. And then when the water bill is due, people ask why it is so much. And since people see that the municipality doesn’t help much, they don’t always support [him], that is why no one wants to be it,” explains Fausto, a goat-herder who believes the role’s future looks dismal. What can be gleaned from participants’ accounts of this role, however, is important in our analysis of citizens’ relationships with different layers of government. We have assumed three levels so far: federal, state, and municipal. After learning of the *encargado* role, however, it is indispensable to include it as a sublayer to that of the municipal government. Insofar as citizens express the role’s importance in mediating their political relationships, this role becomes integral to this research.

1.1.2 Administrators of PROCAMPO, PROSPERA, and Committees

The *encargado* is not the only local resident who assumes a leadership role, however. In the three towns, some residents stand out as unofficial leaders during the campaign period and in their role as administrators of the several government aid programs (PROCAMPO, PROSPERA, *70 y más*). Some of these leadership roles are more formalized than others. One of the more informal roles is that of strong supporters of a specific political party. These leaders take it upon themselves to go around and

promote the party amongst the rest of the citizens. “Some try really hard to convince you, saying, hey you should vote for this guy, or for that guy,” says Carmen, who did not vote because of a growing disinterest in politics. Another informal leadership role emerges when citizens form a committee. In *CC*, for example, a group of six residents united and went to talk to the municipal president about road improvements.

Other leadership roles are a lot more formalized, and as a result, can be more politically charged. These are usually roles related to the administration of government programs, where *rancho* citizens take the charge of signing people up and making sure they are meeting requirements needed to receive funds³⁴. In the past, rumors have circulated that reception of funds was conditioned on voting for a specific party, and though this was only a concern for a few of the participants who receive funding (n=5), there is a real association between these programs and politics. Lupe described how, “during the election, [they] said that anyone with a shirt with a party logo on it would have their funds suspended.” Additionally, it is a shared concern that once the local program leaders reveal their party affiliation (if they have one), recipients are pressured to follow suit in fear of jeopardizing their registration. In the case of Mavel, her fears materialized. When the local leader found out she was voting for an opposing party, she told Mavel and her husband, “we’ll see you at PROCAMPO.” “And we *did*, because we are no longer registered for the program,” she explains. It is in this way that these two

³⁴ Lupe, a woman who has been receiving aid from PROSPERA since the late 90s, explains that in order to receive funds, recipients must attend all program meetings. In these meetings, the program leaders facilitate conversations about nutrition and illness. On a monthly basis, women are also assigned the task of cleaning and maintaining some of the municipal government buildings.

modes of local leadership (informal and formal) can be instrumental to citizens' political engagement, in addition to serving as an indirect compass for citizens' political decisions.

1.1.3 The Municipal Town Hall as a Site of Power and Inquiry

While we recognize the precedence that local political infrastructure takes over the overarching municipal one, it is important to discuss the perceptions of citizens towards the municipal head of Villamar. One of the 47 localities within the municipality is the town of Villamar itself, where the *ayuntamiento*, or town hall, is located (and where the government officials work). Most participants expressed either of two common perceptions of this central governmental site: Villamar as a site of direct confrontation with the government (whether for inquiry or demand), and Villamar as the site that is also the source of corruption (n=9 saw it as a site of inquiry, and n=7 saw it as merely a site of corruption). Fausto explains how after the electoral period, citizens see Villamar as a place where they can go hold politicians accountable: "when they're in office, which is also when they don't do anything, that is when people go. They go there to demand that they follow through with the promises they made." In local jargon, citizens call this action "*arreglándoselas*," which more or less translates to "fix things ourselves". In addition to holding politicians accountable in Villamar, citizens also go there simply to ask for things when they're in need of something specific. Six participants shared instances in which they approached politicians at the town hall for the following things: help fixing a structural deficit in their homes, financial assistance for medications, and questions about their children's schooling. Not all of these inquiries were left unattended, and thus, for some citizens, Villamar is also a site of effective governance.

Villamar as a site of corruption was an equally important, and common, perception. Gael shared two instances in which he witnessed corruption at the municipal head. The first was a few years ago when three taxis were given to his *rancho*, clearly labeled with the name, but were instead sold by the local officials to other towns. The second instance was when he picked up a cousin from the town jail (inside the town hall), and after having paid the corresponding fine, was prompted by the police officer to give a tip in order for them to release his relative. Thus, while for some citizens, Villamar is a place where individuals have more direct access to the government, other citizens such as Gael see it as the nucleus of the local corruption they experience. Gael and Carlos agree that, in Carlos's words, "all the town hall is good for is to pretend that they have control over people, and that they're keeping order of things." As the site closest to the state and federal institutional apparatuses, it is imperative that we take these perceptions into account. The spatial and political proximity or distance perceived by citizens is telling of their sense of political efficacy, and whether they consider this a place of accessibility.

1.1.4 DTOs and *Autodefensas*: Regional Influences

On a Sunday afternoon in 2010, a group of armed men wearing bandanas around their lower face pulled up to a street corner in *NR* and proceeded to climb the roof of a house to carefully observe the neighboring dwelling. After examining their surroundings, with guns pointed, they shouted, "where is Teresa?" to which an elderly woman responded with a shriek of alarm. This scenario captures the presence of two parastate actors, inextricably linked, that have affected the quotidian affairs of Villamar citizens, and most importantly, tainted their notions of government and governability.

These two parastate actors are the *autodefensas*³⁵ (the armed men described above), and DTO members³⁶ (a romantic interest of Teresa, the subject of their search.) Native to Michoacán, the *autodefensas* took matters into their own hands when the government proved unresponsive to citizen demands of tempering the growing crime and violence brought by DTOs. While the influence of the *autodefensas* will be marginally addressed in comparison to that of DTOs, the importance of their inclusion in this conversation lies in Villamar citizens' exposure to alternative forms of governance or law enforcement.

According to Gael, that scenario was just one example of how innocent citizens of *NR* were subject to witnessing the growing tensions between these groups. As a result, for years, the word “*gobierno*” caused a wave of fear and uncertainty to Villamar's *rancherías*. When the government decreed a state-wide search for armed citizens, locals experienced the most hostile interactions with “*los federales*.” Gael describes these interactions:

You can't trust the government anymore. They would go into the houses at night, with their guns like this, pointing them at people. They took arms. Near Sahuayo, there is a *ranchito* where they took a lot of arms and money, and they didn't settle with that. They saw two girls they liked, and the soldiers raped them. Do you think those people, the parents of those girls, vote for the government? And in *P*, they say that three kids lost their

³⁵ Michoacán's *Autodefensas* or *Guardias Comunitarias* (Community Guards) are groups of armed civilians who organized in early 2013 as a response to governmental indifference towards DTO-related crime and violence in the region. After almost two years of unrest and confrontation with federal armed forces, a faction of the *autodefensas* regrouped into the federally endorsed *Fuerzas Rurales* (Rural Armed Forces). The Rural Armed Forces are under government mandate and supervised by Federal Police forces. However, a significant number of *autodefensas* remained illegally armed (Ley, 2015).

³⁶ Here we refer specifically to members of the Caballeros Templarios, or Knights Templar, who were the dominant group at this time.

minds. They were so traumatized by all the guns and soldiers, that they were left sick in the head.

Estela, a resident of *CC*, expressed a similar evaluation of the impact of these invasions. In her *rancho*, the government confiscated two sacks full of arms from the local mill. The woman who lived there and ran the mill, had hidden the arms for her brothers, sons, and nephews. “Poor woman, she was so scared, she is still terrified,” Estela mentions. These experiences, and this time period of sustained hostility (approximately 2008 - 2013) between the government and parastate actors in Michoacán, have unequivocally left a scar on citizen perceptions of government all over the state. Villamar was not exempt, as evidenced by these well-known anecdotes and the fact that more than half of participants (n=13) cited this period and hostility in their expressions of government trust. Their lack of trust was such that their apprehension towards interactions with local DTO members dimmed in comparison to those with *los federales*. In some cases, the role of DTO members replaced that of the state, in the sense that DTOs were perceived as maintaining an order that the government was unable to help foster. For example, a story circulated amongst the *rancherías* about a young drunkard who, after beating his wife, was “set straight” by the DTOs who took matters into their own hands and made sure he never misbehaved again.

While these government home invasions were regarded as unnecessary by most participants (n=13), it is worthy to note that most participants also reported having to demonstrate “respect” to the authorities. Gael, for example, wouldn’t charge the *federales* when they would make purchases at his corner store. The extent of the respect shown to the local DTO members, however, was exponentially greater. Most importantly, this

wasn't respect shown out of fear, as was in the case of the government. Rather, the DTOs were seen to have earned this respect. "Here in the *rancho*, they behaved well. They always said hi to people, even with their guns sticking out of the windows. They were all youngsters, around 16-17 year olds. Some that looked 15. Once they brought a truck full of bananas and gave them out. They felt comfortable here. On the day of the three wise men, they gave all the kids presents. New clothes and toys," explains Miguel, a resident of *P*.

In addition to the provoking reality that Villamar citizens express more trust and rapport with local DTOs than they do with government officials (in this case, federal government officials), these experiences and reflections are important for three reasons. First, they demonstrate that participants make differential evaluations of the distinct levels of government — in constant referral to the *federales*, they regarded the officials invading their homes as part of a more distant institution. Second, the deep resentment, fear, and mistrust towards the federal government reflect an estrangement from government institutions that inevitably spills over onto their own political engagement. Finally, considering that these experiences are unique to Michoacán (the only state, alongside Guerrero, to host tensions between *autodefensas* and DTOs), their effect on perceptions of government offer insight into how regional contexts are indispensable in exploring political participation.

1.1.5 Physical Infrastructure as a Primary Political Platform

One of the most consistently cited findings during this research was the frequency with which candidates (during the campaign period) promised to improve the

infrastructural needs of *ranchos* in Villamar. In fact, this was unanimously reported by *all* participants as the main topic which candidates touched on during their campaign visits. No participants reported having heard proposals on education, employment, security, or any other domains of public interest. Rather, all proposals put forth by candidates were regarding long-awaited infrastructural improvements. Keeping in mind that all three *ranchos* classify under the *high* marginalization category, it is not hard to see how the poverty experienced there is accompanied by poor infrastructure in important public spaces. One of the local government initiatives in 2015 that gained a lot of attention, for example, was a SEDESOL initiative that offered metal sheets for the roofs of adobe homes in Villamar, which are in abundance. These metal sheets are meant to cover perforations in the poorly covered roofs, which lead to extreme leakages during the rainy season, and unwanted animals in homes. However, the most cited proposed improvements are those of street paving and coverage of sewage systems. Antonio, a young resident of *NR* reported, “they all say the same thing. All of them proposed that, *if* we voted for them, they would fix our streets and sewage systems.”

It seems that these promises, however, are not necessarily a one-way proposal imposed by candidates. Rather, citizens themselves cite infrastructural improvements as their most pressing political demands. When asked what needs were at the forefront of their political decisions in the June elections, all (n=20) participants agreed that infrastructural and beautification projects were vital. At the time of this research, one specific project was of particular interest to Villamar residents: the building of a road that started at *NR* and continued to the towns bordering the neighboring state of Jalisco. This road, which also cut through *P*, was in the middle

phases of construction, and projected to become one of the region's main arterials. For locals, this not only represents future opportunities for economic growth, but also an opportunity to measure the reliability of the different political parties and the municipal government more generally.

Lidia worries, “one [candidate] said he would make the plaza, another one said the main street. Another one promised the drainage on three streets. And to pave all the roadways. Another one said they would fix the school, because our bathrooms aren't serviceable. But then the PRI came along and we don't have anything! We'll see if they actually finish building this road.” While a more thorough analysis is dedicated to this topic in subsequent chapters, it is important to anchor two essential implications of these findings: 1) both citizens and candidates partake in the political dialogue around infrastructural improvements as a political platform, and 2) the completion or lack of attention to such projects (the new road, for example) are used by citizens as determinants of their evaluations of government reliability.

1.2 The Campaign Period: Hats, Promises, and *Campañas Con Estilo*

The official campaign period, from April 3rd to June 3rd, 2015, is a critical time interval for the political parties that try to gain constituents all over Villamar. For citizens, it is also an important time, and one during which they enjoy an influx of “favors” from the visiting candidates. To better understand the context in which the elections and political decisions unfold, participants were asked about ways in which information was diffused, types of dialogue between citizens and candidates, and some of the materialistic “favors” that marked the campaign period in Villamar. Consistently,

three characteristics stood out: direct contact with citizens in public and private discourses, the words “aid” and “need” as buzzwords in political rhetoric, and the centrality of “favors” that marked each party’s *style*. Understanding the intricacies of the campaign context allows us to better frame and understand citizens’ perceptions of the electoral period and their evaluation of its efficiency.

According to most participants in the three *ranchos*, parties and candidates set up their campaign base and delivered speeches in the spaces where locals commonly congregate: the church and the basketball courts. But candidates’ direct contact with citizens extended into the private realm when they made their door-to-door rounds and visited a majority of the homes, sometimes going inside and eating with families. According to Mavel, each party had designated days when they could visit the *rancho*. If the PRI announced its visit one day, it was a message to the PRD and the PAN that they couldn’t visit at the same time — rarely did the parties cross paths, in a mutual understanding that this distance was meant to avoid political tensions. It is during these visits that parties and candidates diffuse their platform information and proposals, either in their public conversations with people, or by posting portable-sized flyers on respected buildings, such as the church wall. It is their direct contact with citizens, however, that participants seem to give more significance to. For most participants (n=17), it is the parties that they interacted with in their homes that were their primary choices in the election. In the case of Estela, the PRI candidate came into her home, and after sharing a meal with her family and talking about his proposals, left with a gesture of “we count on your vote!”

Participants hinted that candidates' discourses and rhetoric are adorned with an excessive use of the words "aid" and "needs". While most participants state that the candidates are friendly and approachable, their descriptions of dialogue communicate a sense that candidates inject their words with exaggerated and unrealistic promises and self-flattery. "They come, very nice and say hi to *everyone*. They ask, 'What do you need? What are your principal needs?' And, well, all of them talk like that, *bonito*. We will do this, we will do that. But at the end of the day, they forget," describes Lidia, who continuously refers to candidates' rhetoric as "*hablar bonito*," or "sweet talk," to indicate that the intentions masked by words are detected by locals. Carmen observed that, "They all say, 'anyone who wants aid, come forward!' Some people are shy, but others do respond and say, 'we need such and such.' Then [the candidates] say, 'of course, just vote for us!' They promise *everything*, they may as well promise us that they're giving us a maid in every home." The frequency of the buzzwords "aid" and "needs" in participants' descriptions of candidate discourse, as well as their own expression of their political needs, is telling of the local political culture. It indicates that these words are part of the lexical repertoire from which candidates draw, and with which citizens respond and address their demands. It is important in the field of citizen participation because it highlights the role of government as a mere distributor of basic resources or "aid," instead of an entity that addresses structural-level changes for citizens.

Finally, the last characteristic of the campaign period that surfaced in participant interviews involves the material "favors" offered by candidates and parties. T-shirts, hats, umbrellas, drawstring bags, food, and music adorn the streets and homes of Villamar's *rancherías*. They become common accessories for citizens, and the bigger offerings such

as food and music tend to leave a long-lasting impression on locals. Once, at a campaign closing ceremony in Villamar, one party brought the popular band *Pequeños Musical*, and it was the talk of town for days. In another instance, the PRI organized a *pozole* feast, and people from all over the municipality flocked to the town hall to get their portion. Carlos observes that, “they make their campaign with *style*,” alluding to the unnecessary and superfluous favors that erode the integrity of campaigns. Like Carlos, many citizens share that though they partake in this favor distribution, an excess of it taints politics with dishonesty and distracts citizens from the main objective of political participation.

Alondra laughs and states, “yes, I’ll go to campaigns, to eat!”

Gael claims that “people go when there is *gollete*,” a word he uses to describe some type of convenience or benefit. Sometimes, he claims, “they’ll kill cows to make feasts, they offer beer, bottles of liquor, even money so that people will give them their vote. It is then that people go to the campaign events.” Based on these observations and reported experiences, it becomes clear that the campaign period is a time of dialogue and information diffusion, but also a time during which parties and candidates taint their reputation as false harbingers of hope. Citizens’ perceptions of the campaign period are integral to this research — this time is often the epicenter of perceptions of unrealistic promises and low standards of expectation for the municipal government.

1.3 Attitudes on Voting and Engagement

Three primary patterns emerged with regard to values placed on electoral participation, political efficacy, and engagement in Villamar. The first of these is the coexistence of abstention from voting and very low levels of political efficacy and

engagement. The second of these is the expression of low political efficacy (internal) and simultaneous electoral participation stemming from hopes for increased external efficacy. Finally, the third pattern is characterized by low levels of efficacy and engagement, yet participation in electoral practices for non-political reasons. In the first category, n=4 did not vote and expressed low levels of efficacy (internal and external) and engagement. That is, they didn't believe their vote could effect change, nor that the government would respond to their participation. The four participants who didn't vote cited this (low efficacy) as the main reason they abstained from practicing their suffrage on June 7th. They expressed a shared sense of disillusionment with the unfulfilled promises of politicians, in addition to the belief that they did not see the value in electoral participation. Alondra described it as a *relajo*, or a "hassle." Fausto, the goat-herder, explains how this disillusionment has led to a complete disassociation from government or politics:

They pocket everything. That's why people don't even know who to vote for. They throw their vote away. We're not inspired to vote. That's why I don't get involved in politics, and instead I focus on what I do. I can eat without having to ask the government for aid. I know we need aid, but why overwhelm ourselves with politics when they don't do anything? Everyone has to fend for themselves. Voting could be good, but we live with the uncertainty that they will actually do something. Here, we have to defend ourselves, because we can't rely on the government. Why am I going to give them my vote, only to make them rich!

Similarly, Carmen expresses her belief that external efficacy starts and ends with "words" — the promises made during the campaign period are never brought to fruition. For both participants, the perceived futility of their suffrage was more influential than the traces of hope for external efficacy. Despite Fausto's complete disassociation from politics, for example, he recognizes that "voting could be good." This hint of hope that

the government will become more responsive is the main reason that participants in the second category decide to vote. This second pattern of simultaneous low efficacy and moderate hope for external efficacy, characterized 14 participants, all of which voted in the elections. For Lidia, despite a long history of empty promises and rhetoric, it is important not only to vote, but to “know how to vote.” According to her (and another 7 participants), many local citizens vote without really considering what is best for their *ramcho*. Only two participants expressed moderate levels of internal efficacy, in saying that their party’s chances of winning were significantly dependent on their vote. Antonio, who votes for the PRD, adds the following perspective: “on TV they say that if you don’t vote, you’re not a true Mexican. Isn’t that right?”

However, these two expressions of internal efficacy were not enough to make the claim that this sentiment is shared on a larger scale in Villamar. The dominant behavior, embodied in the second pattern, is that in which citizens vote because they hope for a change despite low levels of efficacy. The third pattern, in which participants voted but for non-political reasons, was exhibited by n=6 participants. Here, “non-political” is meant to capture reasons outside the realms of efficacy. To illustrate this “non-political” influence, we consider the two reasons for which six participants decided to vote: to get their identification card validated, and out of fear that there would be repercussions. Of these six participants, five expressed the belief that their identification cards would show whether they voted or not. According to them, in the case that they didn’t vote, their card would not be “validated,” which would render them unqualified for certain services or government benefits. For Gael, the repercussions could go beyond that. “The government

is harsh. They'll see your identification card and ask why you didn't vote. And they'll make it a big deal, maybe even beat you up a little. That's why you should vote," he says.

In addition to the dominant pattern of low efficacy amongst participants, there was also a shared sense of limited political knowledge or understanding of how political institutions work. N=14 participants expressed that this was part of the political culture of their *ranchos*, one accompanied by fear or apprehension when approaching institutions or authorities. Lidia describes a time in which she overcame the limitations of this culturally ingrained fear:

I went to Villamar once, when Cuauhtémoc Cardenas was running for governor. They gave us little pieces of paper to write what kind of aid we needed. So I wrote that they should be more honest and help those of us in the *ranchos*, because we're the ones with needs and we're the most distanced. And one day, they came to look for me, to say that my little paper had caught the attention of the governor, and that they would help us fund the bridge reparations. So it worked. Not long after that, I had to go to Morelia for some paperwork. Since it was the capital, I made a long list of questions and doubts, because I have so many! Everyone has so many but no one dares to ask, they're scared. But one of the politicians told us that they wouldn't listen to us. He said that in Morelia it was hard to get help, and that sometimes they put people in jail just for asking.

For many participants who expressed this fear of approaching institutions or authorities, their low level of formal education was an important factor. For them, lack of political knowledge, low levels of literacy, and even "the way we talk," were cited reasons for not approaching government officials with more frequency. Specifically, this fear is in effect when concerning higher levels of government or institutions, such as the government offices in the capital city of Morelia. This aspect of the political culture in Villamar cannot be dismissed in our conversation about political participation, especially if this fear is being fomented and instilled in vulnerable populations by government

officials themselves. In considering the levels of political efficacy and engagement expressed by participants, this research recognizes the centrality of political culture and values in Mexico's democratic process.

1.4 *Los Meros Meros*: Party Reputations of the PRI, PRD, and PAN

This research considers these three political parties because, despite the PRI and PRD being the only elected parties in our sample of participants, the PAN is repeatedly cited with reference to previous municipal governments and current reputations. A breakdown of how participants voted for these parties will be presented in the next chapter, in addition to a broader focus on the frequency of party affiliation. Here, I will focus on the consistently reported³⁷ local reputations held by local citizens about these parties. Participant perceptions of each individual party shed light on a deep conceptual distance between ideals³⁸ that the parties have branded themselves with, and what they represent to local citizens of Villamar.

³⁷ Only those reputations that have been cited by more than five participants will be considered here.

³⁸ These ideals, goals, and principles are found in each party's official document database. A careful review of the PRI's *Programa de Acción* (Action Program), the PRD's *Plan de Acción* (Action Plan) and *Plataforma Electoral* (Electoral Platform), and the PAN's *Programa de Acción Política* (Political Action Program) and *Plataforma Electoral* (Electoral Platform) demonstrates the monotony and similarity between programs (IEM Archivo Documental, Documentos Básicos de Partidos, 2015). If we divorced the party names from the documents, each document could correspond to any of the three at random, and still preserve the message contained in its original. In other words, the rhetoric and language employed by each party is so generalized and universal, such that these documents which are supposed to outline the intricacies that make parties unique, actually reinforce the emptiness of their message. Common to all three parties' documents are clauses on the integrity of Mexico's democracy, the eradication of

1.4.1 The PRI

The PRI, whose motto is “democracy and social justice,” brands itself as “Mexico’s great transformative agent” and employs a rhetoric that capitalizes on its historical stronghold on the country’s political institutions³⁹. For most participants (n=17), the party is associated both with its historical stronghold in the region and its popularity in association with Lázaro Cárdenas’ land redistribution policies. A further exploration of these associations will be elaborated in subsequent chapters, where I discuss the agricultural workers’ affiliation and sense of loyalty to the PRI. Of importance to the topic at hand, that of local reputation, we see three dominant narratives regarding the PRI: the party that helped redistribute land (narrative that will be discussed later), the party that introduced aid programs such as Prospera, and the party that perpetuates corrupt practices such as vote-buying.

Froylan Zambrano López, Villamar’s former municipal president who finished his term with these elections in 2015, was moderately favored by participants. N=12 were relatively content with his presidency, even though a majority (n=15) agreed that he

poverty, the fight against corruption, justice, an innovative economy, and the consolidation of international relations (mainly with Europe and Asia).

³⁹ The PRI carefully executed what many consider “the perfect dictatorship,” in which the party controlled Mexico’s institutions from 1929 to 2000. After a gradual evolutionary trajectory, first as PRN (Partido Revolucionario Nacional) and PMR (Partido de la Revolución Mexicana), it became the PRI in 1946. Different emblematic leaders gave the PRI slight changes during its 70-year course, among the most notable being Lázaro Cárdenas, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and Ernesto Zedillo. After decades of robust dominance and tactics likened to pendulum politics, the PRI saw its monopoly threatened and finally defeated by the PAN’s Vicente Fox in 2000. After a 12-year (two terms) PAN governance, Mexico regressed to PRIismo with the election of Enrique Peña Nieto in 2012 (Becerra Chávez, 2014).

avored other *ranchos*, especially *P*, over their own. For many (n=14)⁴⁰, despite an evolving fatigue with the presence of the PRI and its growing association with corruption, there is a sense that the party is owed some type of respect. In the case of Ana, a mother of five who always considers government aid in her political decisions, a preference for the PRD does not keep her from showing a degree of allegiance for the remnants of the revolutionary party: “I can’t say much about the PRI, I have to respect it, because it is *the* party, the green one, and they say that they’re the ones who started [PROSPERA]”.

For almost every participant who shared any degree of allegiance to the PRI (whether they voted for them or not), however, there was a participant who expressed a deep aversion to the PRI due to charges of corruption and vote-buying behavior. N=12 participants mentioned the allegations of vote-buying by the PRI on the eve of the June 7th elections. For most of these participants, corruption was the main reason they did not vote for the party. Gael, who was offered the 1,000 in exchange for his vote, complains, “all those people who accepted the money...that is why the PRI won. How was it not supposed to win? And it always has. Why am I going to vote for them if the only thing they bring me is fear?” For him, the reasons for his antagonism towards the ruling party stem from the party itself, while for others, the reasons involve a more comparative evaluation.

Lidia, for example, remembers that when the PAN was in the municipal seat, clinics had more medications and aid in general. According to her, the PRI’s return

⁴⁰ This does not reflect the number of participants who felt they themselves owed the PRI some type of respect, but rather those who felt that *either* themselves *or* other citizens shared this view.

brought a significant decrease in resources and aid. At least eight other participants shared her disappointment with the SEDESOL initiative of providing metal sheets for the roofs, and attributed the initiative's failure to the PRI's weak reliability. Interestingly, while some participants seemed to latch onto historical representations of the party, those who expressed a deep aversion to it made reference to its evolution over the years.

Antonio, who is an adamant supporter of the PRD, claims that "many people say this isn't the same PRI, that they have changed, that they're not corrupt anymore. But it is the same party. The same."

1.4.2 The PRD

Founded in 1989, the PRD's motto "democracy now, for everyone" almost sounds like a spinoff of the PRI's. Not incidentally⁴¹, the PRD also includes the *R*, symbolic of the residual energy of the Mexican Revolution. Like the PRI, it was the most popular party among participants in this research. For those participants who voted for the PRD, half reported that they did so as a reactionary effect of the PRI's failed promises. That is, their reasons for favoring the PRD also involved a comparative evaluation of the parties. For Antonio, who was involved in the PRD's campaign as a

⁴¹ The conceptual and ideological proximity of these two parties owes itself to very close ties at the time of the PRD's incipient formation. This proximity also helps us understand why both parties have historically had a stronghold in Michoacán. In 1986, members of the PRI, including Cuauhtémoc Cardenas (son of Lázaro Cárdenas, one of the PRI's founders) created a faction called the Democratic Current. The DC urged the ruling party to mature its democratic aims. After a contentious election in 1988, in which Carlos Salinas de Gortari (PRI) defeated Cárdenas (who ran as an independent candidate), electoral fraud was confirmed. The DC, primarily Cárdenas, formed the PRD as Mexico's sole left-wing party. The PRD gained much traction in Michoacán, given the state's historical allegiance to the Cárdenas family (Mossige, 2013).

local leader, the PRD is “the party of the poor,” an association that was shared by other PRD enthusiasts. Some of the comparative evaluations of the PRD included the idea that, while the PRD retained some of the “good qualities” of the PRI, it was a more “honest” party.

In addition to comparisons to the PRI, those who voted for the PRD all cited the projects that the party completed in their *rancho*. Ana, who voted for the party, supports them because “the road that was built, was built by the PRD. The PRD. The water source, that was the PRD. The sewer system that was needed, the PRD. The concrete floors installed in those humble homes...the PRD.” The completion of these specific projects was corroborated by other participants. Only one participant expressed the sentiment that the PRD did not deserve their vote due to weak governability. The most interesting finding we can gather from the local reputation of this party is that, while comparative and reactionary evaluations against the PRI were central to participants’ decision to side with the PRD, the inverse was not seen. In other words, participants did not report voting for the PRI because the PRD had failed them. In light of the two parties’ close historical proximity, this finding sheds light on how spatial and temporal political processes influence political participation at the local level.

1.4.3 The PAN

Founded in 1939, the PAN⁴² is the furthest to the right on the political spectrum of the three parties in question. Its motto, “for an ordered and generous country, and a better and more dignified life for everyone” is not far off from the core message of the other two. In Villamar, the PAN’s reputation has been largely shaped by the presidencies of José Canela and Manolo Ceja, both who preceded López from approximately 2005-2011. Because this party was not represented in the electoral decisions of the participants in this research, less attention will be allocated to it in subsequent discussions. However, it is still important to consider its local reputation amongst citizens of Villamar.

All participants who commented on the PAN (n=15) gave negative evaluations of Canela, and moderate to positive evaluations of Ceja. A salient aspect of Canela’s evaluations is the fact that he is from Guaracha, the former *hacienda* turned town, which is known to have dominated the presidency consistently over the last two decades. According to most participants, Canela’s presidency was characterized by highly skewed resource distribution that favored his town. Estela expresses her negative evaluation of him: “That one from Guaracha, Canela of the PAN. He did not help at all. He even said that to [this *rancho*], he wouldn’t even give a glass of water. And many didn’t vote for him because he had already been president.” Of Manolo Ceja, however, she said, “But Manolo, another one from the PAN...even though he didn’t win here he said he would

⁴² The PAN, known as the most conservative of Mexico’s political parties, has been the principal opposition party to the PRI since its founding. The only party other than the PRI to rule Mexico since 1929, the PAN held office from 2000-2012 under the presidencies of Vicente Fox and Felipe Calderón. On the national front, the PAN’s governance and reputation has been marked by three things: 1) its role as principal opposition to the PRI; 2) its dominance on the right political spectrum of Mexican politics; and 3) Calderon’s 2006 decision to crack down on DTOs, which yielded an exorbitant death toll that continues to be attributed to this decision (Becerra Chávez, 2014).

support us. And he built some houses, chimneys, and installed concrete flooring. He was fair.”

Estela’s evaluations, which were shared by those who commented on the PAN, demonstrate that for parties who have not enjoyed the same historical antecedents in Michoacán (such as the PRI and PRD), reputation is largely dependent on individual leaders. Additionally, evaluations tend to vary more. For example, amongst participants, evaluations of the PAN involved the following: low reliability in association with Canela’s presidency, charges of vote-buying behavior, and completion of projects such as *Piso Firme*⁴³ and ecological kitchen installments during Ceja’s presidency. While it can’t be argued that there is an absence of PANismo in the region, in the case of this party in Villamar, one can suspect that isolated examples of leadership might take precedence over party affiliation.

1.5 Chapter Conclusions

This chapter explored the question of how rural political culture and sociopolitical infrastructure may affect political participation, and considers how some characteristics (such as party reputation) illustrate a distance between local and national level politics. Here, with a microscopic eye, we explored specific elements of Villamar’s sociopolitical infrastructure, levels of and attitudes towards political efficacy, engagement, and knowledge, and finally, local political party reputations. That these elements were

⁴³ *Piso Firme* was a 2005 SEDESOL initiative that aimed at replacing dirt floors with concrete floors in the millions (approximately 13 million) of Mexican homes without them.

explored with a penchant for detail is part of this research's methodological aim to highlight the importance of contextual specificity in analyzing a population's political participation. We can also turn again to microhistory, which validates this scholarly investment in minutiae. In exploring the local political contexts of the three *ranchos* in Villamar with the myopic eye, this research contributes to González y González's (1973) valuation of the *patria chica*. Villamar, and these *ranchos*, are a *patria chica*, and a microcosm of its bigger counterpart, which in this case is Mexico's historical and contemporary political processes and institutions. Collectively, the details here gathered give us a clearer picture of the political context being studied.

It follows, then, that the rural *ranchos* are sites worthy of political inquiry. By studying and observing the intricate dynamics that result from its local political infrastructure, this chapter explores the possibility of another level of government that lies beneath that of the municipal level. Informal positions such as the *encargado* and local administrators of government programs, citizen perceptions of the municipal town hall, local relations with parastate actors such as DTOs, and the physical infrastructure of the places, are all part of a unique universe that has its own political culture and practices. As we saw, each of these elements affects how and whether local citizens are able to penetrate through that microcosmic layer and extend their participatory practices onto the municipal sphere or beyond. Recalling Zarembek (2012), we can also cautiously characterize Villamar's municipal government as *cooperative governance*, where low local government responsibility coexists with relatively high levels of citizen

participation⁴⁴. While it is difficult to confidently characterize Villamar under one of the four forms of municipal governments proposed by Zaremborg (2012), an approximation can be made.

An important part of this chapter addressed the following aspects of political culture in Villamar: political efficacy and engagement. Additionally, the topic of political knowledge surfaced in participant interviews as an organic byproduct of the conversation. The three *ranchos* in Villamar exhibited three patterns related to political culture, of which the most significant was that of low political efficacy (internal and external.) Here, despite moderate to high levels of engagement (as measured by participation in campaigns, government programs or organizations, and electoral participation), low efficacy prevailed. In light of reported perceptions of low political knowledge, efficacy levels are likely tied to characteristics that are specific to Mexico's rural countryside: low levels of formal education, and high rates of extreme poverty. In Villamar, these characteristics were associated with negative evaluations of political knowledge and little incentive to participate in higher levels of governance.

Finally, the local reputations of the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD were part of the microscopic evaluation of Villamar's political context. Here, we saw that party reputations, though they *may* follow broader patterns of political traction, are also largely divorced from their national platforms. In addition to this, we found that historical and regional processes (such as those that favor the PRI and PRD's stronghold on Michoacán) may continue to affect the reputations of these parties at the local level, and

⁴⁴ Here, political engagement is a better determinant than electoral participation of Zaremborg's definition of "participation".

therefore also affect citizen participation. Manolo, Froylan, Canela, and Joel, for example, are much more prevalent in the political consciousness of Villamar's citizens than the governor of Michoacán. Aside from illustrating the distance between local and national politics, this reality reflects a highly nuanced map of Villamar's political determinants.

CHAPTER 2: PATTERNS AND FACTORS OF PARTICIPATION: DEMOGRAPHICS, PARTY AFFILIATION, AND IMMEDIATE NEEDS

Having explored the research context in detail, an analysis of the patterns of participation is now more feasible. This second chapter attempts to further pixelate our understanding of this context, more specifically in terms of the patterns and factors of political participation in Villamar. Whereas the previous chapter relied more heavily on ethnographic observations in the research sites, this chapter engages closely with the participant interviews and salient patterns found amongst them. By combing through these patterns and factors highlighted in the interviews, this chapter aims at answering the following questions introduced earlier: What do rural citizens of Michoacán consider when making political decisions? To what extent are these considerations outcomes of historical processes in the region, or country? Particularly, this section focuses on the participation of women, the potential relevancy of the PRI's historical stronghold in the region, and the precedence that "immediate needs" take over ideological ones in participants' electoral decisions.

Before discussing the aforementioned patterns and factors, the first part of this chapter offers a brief snapshot of participation and electoral results in both Villamar and Michoacán. This numerical representation of participation and results has two purposes: to contextualize Villamar within broader participatory patterns in Michoacán, and to provide a statistical basis from which to propel the qualitative findings. The second part of this chapter discusses the two primary patterns found regarding participation by demographic: women's high levels of local political engagement, and low interest in politics among the younger generations. The third part discusses, first, why this research

hypothesized the PRI's popularity in Villamar, and second, how vestiges of *agrarismo* in Michoacán may still lead to party affiliation in the region. In this third part, I also discuss the incidence of one particular voting behavior, abstaining from the vote. Finally, the fourth part is dedicated to the centrality of “immediate needs”⁴⁵ in participants' political decision making. Three main conclusions are drawn from these findings: 1) high levels of participation among women are a reflection of a paradigm in which “the personal is political” (Rodriguez, 2003), transforming women's traditional roles into politically charged ones; 2) regional historical processes *are* a factor in voting decisions, as is the political category of *campesino*; and 3) participants demonstrate political decision making strategies that involve both immediate personal needs, and in many cases, a tendency of party affiliation to modulate those decisions.

2.1 A Brief Statistical Snapshot of Participation

Of 24 electoral districts in Michoacán, Villamar is located in the fifth electoral district of Jacona⁴⁶. The IEM (2015) calculated a 53.84% participation rate in Villamar, with a total of 8,257 votes emitted for the *ayuntamientos*⁴⁷. The following political parties are accredited by the general council in the state: PRI, PAN, PRD, PT, PVEM, PANAL, PES, MORENA, and Movimiento Ciudadano. In Villamar's municipal election, the PRI

⁴⁵ “Immediate needs” will refer to those needs that remain within the individual's spatial, temporal, and personal proximal space. For example, whether they have a kitchen, a roof, access to clean water, sewage systems, health care, etc. These “immediate needs” are considered as opposed to ideological needs or needs that fall into the realm of the more distant national space (the handling of Mexico's external debt, for example).

⁴⁶ There are 7 localities in the electoral district of Jacona (IEM, 2015).

⁴⁷ This first calculus is based solely on votes for the local municipal government of Villamar.

and PRD rounded up the highest number of votes, with the PRD just about 400 votes shy from the PRI. Following these two favored parties, the PAN and PANAL were also approximately 400 votes shy from each other, with the PAN being favored. The PT, MORENA, PVEM, and PES each received no more than 305 votes. Only two coalitions (PRI/PVEM and PAN/PT) ran for office, and received no more than 207 votes each. A small number of votes (253) were nullified⁴⁸. The winning political party, the PRI, is currently represented and led by Joel López Padilla, whose name is a common household utterance in the three *ranchos* in Villamar.

The results for governorship, both at the local and state level, were a close reflection of the results for municipal government in terms of the order in which parties were favored. In Villamar's electoral district (seven municipalities under Jacona), the PRD led the PRI by 800 votes for the position of state governorship. Like in the municipal electoral results, the PRD and PRI were in a very close race to the top, only this time the order was inverted (for governorship, the PRD took the majority of votes, while the PRI did for the municipal government). The PAN was the third favored (at the district level) in the race for governorship, followed by Movimiento Ciudadano, PVEM, MORENA, PT, and PANAL.

At the state level, the PRD took almost a third of the vote (29.9%), followed by the PRI (24.5%), and the PAN (23.8%). The PT, PVEM, Movimiento Ciudadano, PANAL, and MORENA collectively represented less than 17% of the votes for

⁴⁸ A vote is nullified when an individual a) checks two or more parties that are NOT part of a coalition, b) marks two or more of the emblems with different candidate names, c) marks every checkbox in the entire ballot, or d) does not mark any checkboxes on the ballot (IEM, 2015).

governorship. The three different spatial levels for which electoral results were just presented are as follows: municipal (strictly for municipal government elections), district (total data for seven municipalities in the governorship election), and state (also only for governorship). At all three levels, there are three political parties that consistently make their way to the top three favored: the PRI, the PRD, and the PAN. While the PAN is in third place at all three levels, the PRI and PRD alternate between winner and runner-up — the PRD is favored at both the state and district levels, and the PRI is favored in Villamar at the municipal level (albeit by a narrow margin).

Before discussing voting tendencies for our sample, it is necessary to discuss a few demographic variables that might offer angles through which to interpret the results of this research. Of $n=20$, 12 were female and 8 were male, with an average age of 45 (age range is 20-65). Nearly half of participants ($n=9$) were over the age of 50, and the majority (three-fourths, or $n=15$) were over the age of 30. The average household size was 4 (with a range of 1-11), and the average education level was 2 (the second grade). Most participants ($n=15$) participated in some type of government aid program, mainly PROSPERA and PROCAMPO. However, *all* participants have experienced some type of government aid, whether it was *Piso Firme* or the ecological kitchen initiative by SEDESOL.

Four different responses were recorded when asked about the participant's occupation, among them: household work, agriculture, *la congeladora* (InterFrut), store owner, and unemployed. 8 participants, all women, reported being primarily dedicated to household work, usually described as *ama de casa*. Observations indicate that 'household work' includes, but isn't limited to, taking care of children, grandchildren, or elderly

relatives, in addition to cooking, cleaning, and keeping domestic affairs in order⁴⁹. Also worthy of noting is that of the eight women who reported ‘household work’ as their primary activity, *all* have previously worked in *la congeladora*. Only one participant, a female, reported *la congeladora* as their primary occupation. 7 participants (two females and five males) reported ‘agriculture’ as their primary occupation, and all described a seasonal change of agricultural activities⁵⁰. Three of the seven participants who are dedicated to ‘agriculture’ are remunerated by outside economic actors, in this case, the contractor for the onion fields, and a regional milk distributor who buys goat milk from one participant. Two participants are owners of the town corner stores, where locals buy everything from water, eggs, *Takis*, to cell phone recharges. Only one participant reported being ‘unemployed,’ due to a nearly decade-long struggle with Parkinson’s disease. N=9 participants have either lived or worked in the United States, for an average of 3 years.

At a more microscopic level, and one pertinent to the research question at hand, we can see that the tendency for the two dominant parties (PRI and PRD) to receive the majority of votes holds true. Of the 20 participants described above, 16 voted in the June 7th election, while 4 chose *not* to vote. Of those who voted (n=16), 10 were women and 6 were men. 80% of participants (n=16) voted for either the PRI or PRD, and these two parties scored equally among the population in question (eight votes for the PRI, eight

⁴⁹ In four cases, this ‘household work’ was complemented by agricultural work performed in assistance to the spouse (taking livestock to feeding areas and helping with the harvest of maize).

⁵⁰ In Villamar, agricultural workers (or those dedicated to subsistence agriculture) experience a change in their primary economic activity depending on the season. The maize season is the busiest, and once it is over, many locals work for a regional contractor in the nearby onion fields. The care for and maintenance of livestock is a year-round activity.

votes for the PRD). Considering gender breakdown, five women and three men voted for the PRI, with the exact pattern for the PRD. No significant pattern was observed between occupation and voting behavior; among those who reported 'household work' as their occupation, n=4 voted for the PRD, n=3 voted for the PRI, and n=1 abstained from the vote. Among those who reported 'agriculture' as their occupation, n=3 voted for the PRI, n=2 voted for the PRD, and n=2 did not vote.

2.2 Participation of Women and Older Folks

The participation of women in Mexican politics has, as in much of the world and other realms of society, been a trajectory marked mainly by marginalization and lack of opportunity. In Mexico, women weren't granted suffrage until 1947, and this represented only a minimal victory, for their suffrage was limited to the municipal level. It wasn't until 1953 that Mexican women could participate in electoral decisions at all levels of government (Barrera Bassols & Aguirre Pérez, 2003). As any feminist scholar might predict, suffrage by no means translated to equal opportunities for women, nor did it usher in high rates of participation. Despite women playing the most important role in Mexican civil society, institutional and structural mechanisms of oppression have continued to stall the consolidation of their political power. Scholars of political participation have suggested a positive causal relationship between participation in civil society and participation in the political sphere (Rodriguez, 2003). The reality of women across the globe, however, reflects a paradox that is the inverse of that relationship, and one from which Mexico is not exempt: while women are consistently the most active

members of civil societies, they remain on the margins of participation in myriad civil institutions.

While this paradox is one that will require attention for many years to come, Mexico has recently been a host to domestic structural changes that began to unbuckle the paradox from its grip on women's political future. One structural change in particular is pertinent to this research: the increase of both women's economic participation and number of households headed by women as a result of Mexico's economic crisis of the 1980s (Rodriguez, 2003). This monumental change in Mexico's traditionally gendered economic landscape was further amplified by the massive outflow of male migration to the United States. Collectively these two events led to increased participation of women in economic activities outside the realm of the domestic sphere, and in the long-term, exposed men to a new "household democracy" that placed a premium on female decision making. This rationale helps us better understand the high levels of participation and engagement of the women participants of this research. Of the 12 women who participated, n=8 reported that their spouse had migrated to the United States for some time in the last two decades. During this time, they were prompted to diversify their means of income and further reinforce their role as primary decision maker in the household.

The diversification of their economic activity during this period also coincided with the neoliberal project just a few kilometers away from their *ranchos*, in Jacona: InterFrut, or *la congeladora*, began employing a significant number of women in Villamar and the surrounding municipalities. While eight women participants reported their main economic activity as "household work," *all* eight had previously worked in *la*

congeladora. Because the majority of women participants in this research were directly affected by both structural changes referred to above, we can assume they were also subject to the changes in the political realm. In fact, four women reported that during this time period (the economic crisis that coincided with their spouse's migration), they took over the agricultural activities traditionally practiced by their husbands, and continue to partake in this role. Lidia, whose husband worked in Indio, California for years, describes how she started to take over his role as manager of their small plot of land:

I went to Morelia because my husband...here they gave a lot of people aid for their land. For the harvest. And they hadn't given us any. They told me the plot had to have a beneficiary, and then they realized it was my husband. In order to receive anything, my husband had to be there. So when he came back, I told him we had to go. And he didn't want to. So I told him, you are going. We will somehow find the money to get back to Morelia. I convinced him, and I took advantage of the trip to the capital so that I could settle some more doubts with PROCAMPO.

Lidia considers herself the household manager, despite acknowledgement that her husband continues to contribute significantly. When it comes to confronting political issues and institutions, however, she takes the reins. Like her, most women participants had experience approaching government offices to address a political demand. In fact, when asked about their perceptions of the town hall in Villamar, n=9 participants reported they saw it as a site of inquiry, and n=6 had previously approached the municipal president there.

Aside from a history of assuming part of their spouse's economic role, the women participants in this research also reflect the paradigm shift embodied by "the personal as political" (Rodriguez, 2003). All twelve women participants have either school-aged children (n=9) or dependents (parents or grandparents) that are factored into their

definition of “household work.” Amongst the responsibilities that constitute this category are providing care for dependents, cooking, cleaning, in addition to administering funds received from government programs. Scholars agree that the transformation of the “personal to political” has its institutional component via government programs such as PROSPERA (previously PRONASOL, PROGRESA, and *Oportunidades*) (Rodriguez, 2003). Because these programs have required the participation of the women head of the household, they have served as a vehicle for Mexican women’s participation in politics. This is further illustrated by the presence of women in local managing groups of these groups. Among those who mentioned the SEDESOL initiative of providing metal sheets for roofs, all reported that women were at the forefront of spreading updates about the initiative.

The channeling of women’s traditionally personal concerns (the household and family) into the political realm is not limited to the government programs mentioned. Women participants reported that a government program a few years ago would allocate five to six thousand *pesos* to the maintenance and beautification of the schools, a budget and project that they took ownership of and executed. Women also reported the following reasons for being interested in local politics: concerns about their children’s nutrition and education, dependence on government aid programs in meeting their family’s nutritional needs, and the importance of improving household fixtures (kitchen, latrines) that are central to the carrying out of their daily economic activities. For Lupe, it is these personal concerns related to her household work that have propelled her initiative to confront government officials: “I asked Froylan for four sacks of cement, and 60 meters of hose so I can fix the house. Manolo helped me when my mom had cancer and we didn’t have

money for her medicine or exams. I also asked them to install the *Piso Firme*. And once, I asked the PRI for some carton to put on the roof.” In the initiatives and engagement evident in the examples here cited, we can see that women in Villamar to an extent see political participation as a strategy to express their gendered interests. Most importantly, it is these practical, personal concerns that are mapped onto the political sphere in which they participate with high levels of interest and enthusiasm. This finding is consistent with an overall national pattern of the domestic role’s transformation from one of “private nurturance” to one of participation in public and political spaces (Rodriguez, 2003).

Though the most salient demographic pattern that surfaced from these interviews was high levels of women’s political participation and engagement, it is worthy to explore the implications of one particular challenge in carrying out this research: the tapering interest of younger generations in politics. Though these interviews are not enough to substantiate a claim that Villamar’s young citizens are disinterested in politics, their lack of engagement was repeatedly referenced. Careful not to interpret an unwillingness to participate in this research with a lack of political interest, the importance of this pattern relies on participants’ expressions regarding the topic. A total of n=18 participants reported that young citizens are disengaged with Villamar’s political life. This is, perhaps, why it became more difficult to interview younger citizens. The youngest participant interviewed was 20, and three-fourths of the participants were over the age of 30. It occurred frequently that when approached about participating in the research, young individuals delegated the task to their parent or any older person in the household.

The most frequent explanation participants gave for young citizens' low participation rates was a combination of immaturity and "distraction" with other matters. Antonio, one of the youngest participants who considers himself politically active, explains "We are few, the young ones who are into it. They like other things more than politics. The day of the election, I told some that we should go vote. Instead, they grabbed two beers and left. And of course, didn't vote." Like Antonio, the 18 participants who observed young citizens' disinterest in politics juxtaposed it against their interest in alcohol, parties, and other activities. This finding is consistent with scholarly literature on political participation of youth around the world, which highlights the following: the tendency of young people to be less likely to vote than older people, a decline in youth membership in political parties, and low internal efficacy associated with younger age (Quintelier, 2007). A deeper discussion of this trend is beyond the scope of this particular study, but worthy of probing.

2.3 The Politics of Party Affiliation, and Not Voting as a Strategy

2.3.1 Party Loyalty: The Case of the PRI

In previous sections of this thesis, I attempt to validate the research setting's appropriateness for exploring the possible historical determinants of participation patterns and trends in Villamar. Briefly, the case has been made for the significance of studying political participation in the rural space, and why the *campesino* category is considered influential. To advance this dialogue, however, it is necessary to map certain events in Michoacán's political and historical timeline. Understanding these events will allow for an improved understanding of their possible long-term reverberations. Though both the

PRI and PRD registered equal popularity among the participants in this study, the case of the PRI is foregrounded because only this party was associated with expressions of party affiliation. However, in our discussion of how historical processes influence participation, the PRD factors into the equation due to its ideological proximity to the PRI.

The dominance of the PRI and PRD, much like in other parts of Mexico, is easy to point out in Michoacán. The current governor, Silvano Aureoles Conejo, belongs to the PRD, and his predecessor, Fausto Vallejo Figueroa⁵¹ belonged to the PRI. Prior to their governorships, the PRD enjoyed two more terms of Michoacán's gubernatorial seat under Godoy Rangel and Lázaro Cárdenas Batel. Likewise, the PRI preceded them with two terms under Tinoco Rubí and Chávez Hernández. Despite relatively low levels of electoral participation in the state of Michoacán (52.5% in 2012 and 60% in the 2006 federal presidential elections), this participant poll does send one loud and clear message: Michoacán is the state of the green and yellow.

The PRI since the early 20th century, and the PRD in the later half of it, have been known to control a group on Mexico's rural vote, and this has been especially true for Michoacán. This grip, however, is not incidental. It owes itself both to the Cárdenas family dynasty⁵² and its legacy over the state's political apparatus, and the (related)

⁵¹ Figueroa resigned in 2014 amid accusations of associating with the local DTO, the Knights Templar, and was replaced by interim governor Salvador Jara (Archibold, 2014).

⁵² Before becoming president of Mexico in 1934, General Lázaro Cárdenas del Río (from Jiquilpan, a few short kilometers away from Villamar) governed Michoacán. The family's political dynasty advanced with the governorship of the General's son Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1980-1986, and later his grandson Lázaro Cárdenas Batel in 2005-2008 (Mossige, 2013).

history of *agrarismo*⁵³ and the *campesino* identity. It is a shared belief among Michoacán scholars that the political class encompassed by *agrarista* and *campesino* identities underwent a process of institutionalization when governor Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-1940) fabricated his post-revolutionary project around the incorporation of this class into his political organization (Boyer, 2003). Cárdenas is thought to have capitalized on Michoacán's delayed revolutionary fervor in order to advance his political agenda — after all, the revolutionary energy that ran through Michoacán's rural arterials was an ideal way to channel popular activism. This was in the early 1900s, almost nine decades before this research was conducted. Participant accounts of party affiliation, however, in addition to scholarly corroborations of this tendency, suggest that there may be vestiges of this time period in Mexico's current political landscape (Boyer, 2003).

Boyer (2003) illustrates how these vestiges have manifested in relatively recent political events in Michoacán. For example, *campesino* mobilizations in the 1990s⁵⁴ are interpreted as modern mutations of post-revolutionary ideals. Thus, it is understood that

⁵³ The emergence of *agrarismo* is of particular interest when considering that the Mexican Revolution's main activity almost entirely bypassed the state of Michoacán. Scholars are intrigued by the somewhat spontaneous emergence of this revolutionary identity amongst Michoacán's peasants and rural laborers in the early 20th century. This group became known as *agraristas*, and the marker of their identity involves three characteristics: 1) a willingness to accept government offers of *ejido* plots, 2) consent to state's use of power to redistribute land, and 3) ardent reverence towards revolutionary ideals (Boyer (1997).

⁵⁴ The early 1900s witnessed a series of mobilizations primarily in the states of Michoacán, Durango, Morelos, Guerrero and Oaxaca. These were the result of president Carlos Salinas de Gortari's announcement in 1991 that Mexico's land reform program would be terminated. In addition to introducing legislation that would repeal the "promise of land" guaranteed by Article 27 of the Constitution, Salinas prohibited the establishment of new *ejidos* and created a process through which these communal lands were to become privatized. (Boyer, 2003.)

contemporary forms of rural citizen unification, and the culturally meaningful category of *campesino*, are two of the most resounding echoes of *agrarismo* and other residual effects of the Revolution. These “echoes” are also manifest in some of Michoacán’s government’s structural characteristics and electoral tendencies. For example, the dominant structural characteristic of Michoacán’s municipal governments since 1935 was that of an *agrarista* nucleus centered on organizations such as the CRMDT and the PNR. The state’s dominant political forces were organized around these, which caused other regional parties to lose relevance in the face of such a fixed structure. As a result, the PRI monopolized the polls for decades, only to be moderately threatened by the PRD in the later half of the century. In fact, 1989 marked the first time in Michoacán’s history when *all* municipalities registered at least two candidates from different parties (the PRI and the PRD, primarily). Prior to that, the PRI monopolized a majority of municipal candidacies in the state (Calderón Molgora, 1993).

The suggestion that these vestiges are still present in Michoacán is accommodated by the findings of this research. First, it is necessary to clarify why the *campesino* category is applied to the population studied. Most participants (n=17) made reference to the *campesino* identity. Furthermore, we rely on Warman’s invitation to take *campesino* as an open category, which allows us to apply this identity to research participants despite them not being associated with the affiliated political organizations. Boyer (1997) also chooses to open up the *agrarista* category to include those citizens who weren’t necessarily a part of the political class — this identity was validated by their social memory of multiple forms of confrontation with leaders and institutions that threatened

their mobilization. It is through these open spaces that we are able to situate Villamar's rural population in the context of the *agrarista* and *campesinista* dialogue.

While one of the dominant narratives that emerged in participant interviews was the widespread allegations of PRI vote-buying behavior (reported by n=12), this narrative coexists alongside an equally strong presence of party loyalty towards the PRI. Of the two political parties who participants voted for (PRI and PRD), only the PRI was associated with expressions of party loyalty and allegiance. That this loyalty towards the PRI exists despite strong antagonism makes this finding all the more interesting. Almost all participants (n=17), not considering their electoral decision, reported that they associated the PRI with both its historical stronghold in the region and popularity associated with Lázaro Cárdenas' land redistribution policies. The eight participants who voted for the PRI shared a sense of allegiance to the ruling party. For Estela, whose family has always voted for the PRI, there is no chance of her changing her mind: "I vote for the red and green. For the flag, of course. I have always voted that way. Not one way or the other, always loyal. It is just always what my heart feels. It feels right...I don't think of any other party, only in that one. I'm not really sure why, but I always end up voting for it. In the past I have thought, maybe I should switch it up...but it feels strange, like i'm imposed on being with this party. With another party I would feel...like i'm betraying it."

Estela's expression of loyalty also shows traces of nationalism, by her reference to the "flag" and the colors associated with the party's logo. While she wasn't able to pinpoint the *reason* for her loyalty beyond a visceral affinity for the party, other participants explicitly referred to the historical processes this research hypothesized

about. Fausto and Evaristo, both primarily dedicated to subsistence agriculture, explain why the PRI and PRD retain such traction in the region. Fausto explains, “It’s all in Salinas and those other presidents...that is why people vote for the PRI. Because of those presidents who were here before. And because there are a lot of things we have because of the PRI. Humble people from *ranchos*, we know who did more for the country. And that is why people say they’re with the PRI, the PRI, the PRI.” Evaristo adds, “This campaign period, Silvano came, and all of Michoacán congregated in Jiquilpan. He knew that is where people were going to support him, because that is where Lázaro Cárdenas was from. A great governor of Mexico. He knew that only there could he grasp Michoacán’s vote. He latched onto that. He wanted to be like Cárdenas’ shadow.”

This research also considers the tendency of the PRD to maintain traction in Michoacán because it involves the same processes through which the PRI’s antecedents continue to echo. This tendency in the PRD is not divorced from the conversation about party affiliation with the PRI because of the parties’ conceptual and historical proximity. Additionally, the scope of this research limits our discussion of this finding to the possibility of region as a factor in political decision making. PRI affiliation, regardless of whether the participant was conscious of their reasons or not, was a salient pattern in Villamar citizens’ accounts of participation. This was not only expressed by PRI loyalists themselves, but even by other participants who voted differently. Though a deeper exploration of party loyalty and affiliation in the region merits a different research strategy, these findings do reveal the inquiry is worthy and that PRI affiliation in Villamar is certainly rooted in more than the party’s contemporary political platform.

2.3.2 Individual Leaders: Absence of Party Affiliation

While PRI party loyalty and an apparent, yet less pronounced affinity towards the PRD were salient aspects of the research findings, n=8 participants (all of whom either voted for the PRD or abstained from voting) stated that individual-level factors were what most determined their party vote. For them, another important factor determined who they *didn't* vote for, therefore indirectly influencing their electoral decision: a brewing resentment towards the PRI. Scholars of Mexican party affiliation generally agree that both prospective and retrospective evaluations of government can influence an individual's party affiliation (Guardado Rodriguez, 2009). In the context of the broader Mexican political landscape, two patterns stand out: 1) the extent to which an individual identifies with a party is dependent on their retrospective evaluation of their governance, and 2) a growing oppositional identity, born from negative sentiment towards or evaluation of certain parties (the PRI especially). The latter pattern assumes that oppositional identity, or the idea that an individual won't vote for a certain party at all costs, is responsible for many changes in Mexicans' party affiliations, and that this was an important determinant of the 2000 presidential elections (Guardado Rodriguez, 2009.)

As previously stated in the first chapter, an interesting finding was that while participants' primary reasons for voting for the PRD were related to their opposition towards the PRI, the inverse was not seen. Rather, the primary reasons for voting for the PRI were strong feelings of allegiance towards "el tricolor." Thus, the second of the two patterns above stated was highly visible in the case of Villamar. The first pattern was also present, but a consistent expression of prospective in addition to retrospective evaluations makes it difficult to make hasty conclusions about which was more important in

participants' political decisions. For example, many participants who stated that their decisions were largely based on how the party had previously governed also reported that the individual candidate's charisma and personality were influential. Lourdes, who has voted for both the PRI and the PRD previously, states that for her, "the party is not important, what is important is the leader. This guy from the PRI, he seems more honest. All candidates say, 'when I win, I will do this', and you know what he said? He said, 'if God wills it, and I win, I will do this'. He thought about God, so I voted for him. I'm not for the PRI, or for the PAN, or whatever party. As long as he is a good person and seems honest."

For Lourdes, the simple fact that this candidate referenced his religious credence in his political rhetoric was enough to make her vote for him. For others, it was important that a candidate could relate to citizens on a personal level. Yola, for example, explains that "humility" and familiarity with poverty were the main determinants of her prospective evaluations of candidates, even though she abstained from the vote. Another less prominent, yet interesting pattern of voting determinants was that of local leaders as mediators of political decision making. In the case of Carlos, who suffers from Parkinson's and is primarily concerned with his health, his vote always matches the vote of whomever is most instrumental in helping him access medical care. In the previous election, he voted for the PAN because the local administrator of DIF⁵⁵ benefits voted for the PAN — he hoped this would allow him to better navigate the system he depends on.

These considerations of individual-level factors, in addition to tendencies towards

⁵⁵ *Sistema Nacional para el Desarrollo Integral de la Familia* (National System for the Development of the Family).

oppositional party affiliation, and a niche of loyalty towards the PRI were the primary strategies used by participants in their electoral decisions on June 7th. Collectively, they indicate that while Michoacán's electorate may have a robust long-term memory, recent democratic apertures will continue to diversify voting tendencies in the region.

2.3.3 Abstention from Voting: A Strategy

Literature on political participation assumes that electoral participation, engagement in organizations of political nature, and activities meant to influence policy or distribution of goods are the primary modes employed by citizens. An underlying assumption in political participation literature is that an individual is conscious and intentional about their political activity. It is rarely considered that a lack of engagement in the aforementioned ways could be a political act in itself. In participant interviews in Villamar, however, though only reported by a small number of participants (n=4), abstaining from the vote was considered a strategic political act. Fausto, for example, chooses not to vote because he believes his vote would be a contribution to a political system that “makes the rich richer” — thus, in abstaining from the vote, he believes he is furthering his own political ideas. Victor, a middle aged resident of *P*, never votes because he hopes that if enough people decide to abstain, the government will be forced to respond to citizens' needs more directly.

Though only a small sample of participants reported abstention from the vote as a strategy, this becomes of more interest when considering the relatively low electoral participation rates in the region (a 53.84% participation rate in Villamar's 2015 elections, and 52.5% in Mexico's 2012 presidential elections). Further research on the reasons why

people decide to abstain from electoral participation could shed light on whether abstention reflects fissures in Mexico's democratic platform. On the theoretical front, a further exploration of this 'strategy' invokes a revision of the activities that populate the 'institutional' and 'contentious' binary (Crow, 2009) of participatory methods.

2.4 The Centrality of Immediate Needs

The *ranchos* of *P*, *CC*, and *NR* are generally made up of small adobe dwellings and brick and mortar homes built with remittances from the United States. Most of the adobe dwellings have makeshift roofs that combine materials such as wooden logs, metal sheets, ceramic tiles and carton. Many of the brick and mortar homes are considered "phantom houses" because owners are migrants who reside in the United States and can't return — their home can represent both the extent of their prosperity abroad, and an unfulfilled longing to return to Mexico. The houses are lined up along streets of mixed sophistication: while some are paved, most streets are peppered with big to medium-sized rocks and uneven breaks that interrupt the continuity of their path. Two of the *ranchos* (*P* and *CC*) have a central plaza, and all three have some type of sports court. While all three *ranchos* have schools, they are limited to the primary education level (up to 6th grade) and all have significant infrastructural deficits. If students want to continue past the 6th grade, they must travel to neighboring localities, and eventually must travel to Villamar for completion of high school. These transitions up the educational ladder become difficult for many citizens due to the poor state of connecting roads, and unreliable options for transportation.

All participants (n=20) in this research agreed that infrastructural and beautification projects were 1) their *rancho*'s most pressing political demands, and 2) the primary criteria through which they retrospectively evaluated governance. Yola and Salvador express these demands. Salvador believes, "we need to have paved streets so that there isn't so much mud. All the streets are flooded, just little trenches on the path that make it hard to walk. And the school needs a lot of work. There are still six streets here with no sewage system." In a similar vein, Yola expresses that "the school always has leaks. There are two classrooms with metal roofs, and when it gets hot, the kids are sweating and sweating like crazy. You can barely stand the heat. When I was in charge of school maintenance, we had more funds to install little gardens and plant flowers, and fix the bathroom. But that all stopped with the last government, and for years we haven't been able to do anything."

For Salvador and Yola, improving these public spaces should be the first thing on each candidate's to do list. For Yola, a lack of attention to these demands has led to a negative evaluation of previous governance. Other "immediate" demands reported by participants as a priority on their political agenda were as follows: a nearby clinic, improvements to deteriorating adobe homes, improved transportation for students, and access to internet. One participant remembers that his uncle voted for Froylan (PRI) because this candidate promised that he would help him fix a one-room appendage to his home that was falling. After ignoring this promise during his presidency, the uncle reportedly became disillusioned with politics and now abstains from voting altogether.

These demands for infrastructural improvements, together with the "personal turned political" interests of women previously discussed, represent the tools Villamar

citizens use to measure government responsibility and reliability. The precedence that these political demands take over others (no participant cited any national, state, or municipal-level concerns) are also indicative of a distance between local proximal needs and broader national ones. Aside from these expressions being telling of the factors involved in political decision making, their consistency encourages a conversation about whether poverty and marginalization rates (which are associated with poor infrastructure) distract from citizens' democratic aspirations. For example, does the prioritization of paved streets distract a family from being concerned with the state of Mexico's educational system? Broader issues more apparent at the national level seem to be divorced from the local political contexts in Villamar. A positive interpretation of this "distance" might suggest that infrastructural demands may be vehicles through which rural populations become politicized, but there is a more ominous implication that merits attention. That these public works are at the forefront of Villamar's citizens' concerns is a reflection of long-standing poverty in the region, and the deepening of Mexico's rural-urban divide.

2.5 Chapter Conclusions

The analyses outlined in this chapter illustrate the predominance of three undercurrents in Villamar's local political context. The first is the robust participation and engagement of women in political life, usually through channels inscribed in their traditional roles as caretakers and homemakers. The second is twofold: the relevance of the *campesino* category for this population, and its memory of the regional ramifications of *agrarismo* manifested in contemporary political tendencies. Finally, a set of political

decision making strategies that involve primarily “immediate” and personal needs, in addition to abstention from voting. In some cases, party affiliation tendencies are a modulating agent of these decisions. Whether these undercurrents are representative of Michoacán or Mexico merits further inquiry, but their generalizability to other rural pockets of the state and country is a likely scenario.

Regarding the first undercurrent, findings on women’s participation join recent scholarship in challenging the long-standing belief that women are less likely to participate. Though this belief is substantiated in many countries, there is a need to diversify the activities that constitute participation in order to acknowledge the presence of women in Mexican politics. Most women in this study experience multiple layers of oppressive factors, including their gender identity and condition of poverty (as measured by the degree of marginalization in their *ranchos*). These women are also subject to two variables that have been associated with low rates of participation: residence in places where representation of women in high public offices is low⁵⁶ (Burns et al., 2001), and self-classification as “homemakers” (Paley, 2001). Despite being predisposed to factors that limit their participation, the women interviewed in Villamar demonstrated healthy rates of participation in the following ways: voting, participation and leadership positions in government aid programs, the diffusion of political information within their social spheres of influence, and informal leadership positions in their *ranchos*. Though this

⁵⁶ In 1998, one of the first years in which women municipal presidents held office in Michoacán, only three of 113 municipalities were headed by women (Barrera Bassols & Aguirre Pérez, 2003).

represents only two of the five organizations thought to involve women politically⁵⁷, we can't dismiss this as a weak participatory profile. Women in Villamar are participating politically, in some cases more than their male counterparts, and their tendency to participate via demands that are personal and local is a contribution to a tradition that foregrounds their marginality.

The second finding on party affiliation and historical determinants first encourages us to embrace the reality of a Mexican peasantry that coexists with processes and factors outside of their geographical limits (Spalding, 1988). This research does not treat the *campesino* category as one characterized by remoteness and isolation, but rather one subject to a syncretism between rural and urban exchanges. It does, however, emphasize the low socioeconomic profile of participants, a variable believed to yield low participation rates (Kurtz, 2004). This variable is emphasized to provide a demographic angle for analysis, but also to partake in the challenging of this association (between socioeconomic status and participation) for the Mexican context. Instead, this research grants visibility to the reality that rural Mexican citizens do participate (Bartra, 1982; Otero, 2000), and they do so in ways that are telling of possible historical determinants. We saw that participants, both PRI loyalists and PRD affiliates (in addition to the state's electoral history dominated by these two parties), exhibit the strand of Michoacán's political culture that leaves Cárdenas' legacy intact (Nava Hernández, 1987). In positing this explanation for party affiliation (where affiliation is a result of regional historical

⁵⁷ The five types of organizations generally believed to encompass women's political participation are as follows: 1) traditional service-oriented, 2) political party, 3) worker-based labor organizations, 4) grassroots organizations, and 5) research organizations (Sen & Grown, 1987). The first two are represented in our sample.

processes), this research contributes to the emergence of region as an influential factor in citizen electoral decisions.

The final pattern discussed in this chapter is that of what we call “immediate” needs as primary factors in participants’ electoral decisions and evaluations of governance. It was evident that in Villamar, concerns of relevance to citizens’ quotidian affairs (infrastructure, resources, health care) take precedence over concerns that are ideological or more pertinent to the national domain (where citizens stand on the left-right political spectrum, or the national economy). While the issue of education did surface as an important concern, and only referenced by mothers of school-aged children, its prominence was dim in comparison to the unanimous reference to infrastructural projects. The primacy of these “immediate” needs is an invitation to reflect on the implications for the population and political system. It may suggest, for example, that the state of marginalization and poverty experienced in the *ranchos* is deterring rural citizens from engaging with different levels of political concerns. Additionally, these “immediate” needs may also prompt the government to fixate their responsiveness to rural citizens on meeting those needs. While this scenario carries positive undertones, it comes at a cost: in the course of this fixation, the government further strays from addressing the structural and institutional factors that enable the endurance of infrastructural deficits in rural citizens’ lives.

These three patterns collectively probe the conversation of Mexico’s democratic project and whether the patterns found in Villamar either undermine or elevate its legitimacy. It is thought that in well-established contemporary democracies, turnout patterns favor healthy participation rates of the more affluent and “politically engaged”

(Klesner, 2001). Some scholars (Klesner, 2001) have suggested that Mexico is transitioning into this pattern and abandoning an old one, where participation rates were higher for the rural poor (considered “less informed”) who stood vulnerable in the face of political tactics from the ruling party. The results from this case study in Villamar, however, demonstrate that this may not be the case. While it may be true that Mexico’s affluent and “politically engaged” may have experienced an increase in participation in the last decades, this doesn’t seem to have signaled a decrease in participation for rural Villamar’s population. In fact, we find that despite what the electoral rates might tell us, the political experience of Villamar’s citizens is injected with a dynamism that integrates local, historical, and contemporary processes.

CHAPTER 3: BURNED OUT: PERCEPTIONS OF MISTRUST AND GOVERNMENT INEFFICIENCY

We could hear the bullets all the way over here. They were going at it for about an hour. They all had the finest guns. It rained bullets over there by Los Chirimoyos. The guy they call [the Apple], he was nearby, said he had the biggest lump on his throat. They left about 30 people dead. It was a desmadre, it was an ugly thing. But it's a little more calm nowadays. You know who calmed everything down? The group that organized in Apatzingán, the Comunitarios, the Autodefensas. Well, now they're the Rurales. But yes, they're probably the most efficient government in all of México right now. El más perrón.

- Pedro

Pedro, a 67 year old subsistence farmer and resident of CC, describes his memory of the time during which altercations between DTOs and government forces shook the region, permeating through Michoacán and reaching the rural valleys of Villamar. In his description, he implicates Mexico's federal government in a war against organized crime, but also in a war against its own citizens: Pedro suggests this violent unrest was founded on flawed institutions that created a void filled by the parastate actors known as the *autodefensas*. Most significantly, he claims the *autodefensas* were (and are) more efficient than the government itself, a comparison that is likely to have enjoyed more proponents across the region. By suggesting that the government's legitimacy and efficiency dimmed in comparison to that of the *autodefensas*, Pedro echoes a sentiment shared by many Mexicans — rural and urban, poor and rich, educated and uneducated. The government's legitimacy and accountability are meager. He also partakes in a dialogue about negative perceptions of government that we have already visited in this thesis: the widespread allegations of vote-buying behavior among Villamar citizens.

More than half of participants cited the aforementioned cases in their expressions of government mistrust (n=12 referenced rumors of vote-buying, and n=13 referenced the

period of hostility characterized by regional conflict with DTOs). However, these are only two of the many ways in which participant mistrust and negative evaluations of government, both at the municipal and national level, were manifest. What makes these findings all the more interesting is that *only* in their expressions of mistrust and perceptions of inefficiency did they make a reference to the national government. Otherwise, their reflections on political participation — and Mexican politics more generally— remained localized, within the parameters of their municipality or state (though far less at the state level).

It was not surprising, then, to notice that “La Tuta⁵⁸” and “El Chapo⁵⁹,” both leaders of parastate actors, were more common household names than Enrique Peña Nieto, the president of Mexico. Though it is premature to suggest that this reflected a lack of “political knowledge” in participants, it is worthy to note that n=9 participants, when prompted to impart their knowledge about the national government, responded with “I don’t know” or the like. Lupe, who considers herself politically active, answers: “I don’t know...I have no opinion on that because I don’t know anything. I don’t even remember the president’s name. It’s been about 6 years that I don’t watch the news, so I don’t know anything. Who was it...it just slipped my mind. Something like Peña? That’s all I’ve got.”

⁵⁸ “La Tuta,” also known as “El Profe,” or Servando Gómez Martínez was the leader of the *La Familia* Cartel and later the leader of the *Caballeros Templarios* (Knights Templar) (Pérez Salazar, 2015).

⁵⁹ “El Chapo Guzmán,” or Joaquín Guzmán Loera, leader of the Sinaloa Cartel, is the world’s most infamous drug lord who has also managed to escape from Mexican federal prisons three times.

Lupe, however, is able to provide copious details regarding local municipal politics and the most recent election period in June of 2015. Like many other participants, her knowledge (or perhaps simply interest) about national-level politics seemed limited to those names and “rumors” that are sensitive to mass-media diffusion. That is, names and rumors whose affinity towards social media outlets reaches the rural pockets of the country. When similarly prompted about the national government, Enedina, a 47 year old resident of *NR* mentioned the rumor that the first lady⁶⁰ lavished in expensive shopping trips abroad. “And she still cheers to Mexico...that’s stealing. How is that fair? What good does it do for Mexico to have money in the bank?” What these reflections (prompted or unprompted) on the national government had in common, however, was that they were bookended by expressions of mistrust and government inefficiency.

Scholars on institutional legitimacy would have no trouble contextualizing this association: Mexico has for long suffered an inability to secure conditions of legitimacy in its institutions (Aguirre Ochoa & Herrera Torres, 2012). In fact, it is well sustained that a majority of Mexico’s population feels vulnerable and unprotected in the face of multiple government actors — authorities, officials, police, and the justice system (Aguirre Ochoa & Herrera Torres, 2012). Among the far-reaching ramifications of this reality is citizen desensitization towards a culture of corruption and institutional violence that corrodes the integrity of Mexico’s democracy. While “desensitization” suggests

⁶⁰ Angélica Rivera, wife of president Enrique Peña Nieto and known as “La Gaviota” due to one of her roles as a Mexican soap opera star, has received abundant criticism for her lifestyle.

unresponsiveness, it is meant instead to highlight a morose acceptance that governance is synonymous with corruption.

This final chapter addresses a pattern that threaded through every single participant interview and one whose implications merit a focused conversation: a generalized mistrust of government, and perception of government inefficiency. Though this research was too rudimentary an investment in this particular inquiry, making it difficult to assert its effects on political participation, this chapter attempts to answer the following broad question: How do rural citizens view their relationship with local and national government, including leaders and institutions?

First, a brief literature review on institutional trust and perceptions of legitimacy and insecurity in Mexico will offer contemporary insights and survey data through which to analyze findings. Second, the three most common manifestations of mistrust and perceived inefficiency reported by participants will be discussed: 1) allegations of corruption, 2) low accountability, and 3) a sensation of being “burned out” or fatigued by government unresponsiveness. To substantiate these manifestations, I will draw from a pool of themes that surfaced in participant interviews, including, but not limited to: vote-buying behavior, the presence of parastate actors, and transference of trust to nongovernmental figures and entities. Finally, in its concluding remarks, this chapter will attempt to address the provoking contradiction of simultaneous political engagement and mistrust. It is precisely this puzzle that makes the topic of perceived inefficiency worthy of addressing, as it both illuminates the case of Villamar and probes areas of future research.

3.1 On Citizen Evaluations of Government: A Brief Literature Review

The breadth of scholarly inquiries and contributions to the field of institutional legitimacy reflects the global community's varied degrees of trust in government and institutional apparatuses, but most importantly, it signals a shared aim towards democratic maturity. Scholars agree on three theories⁶¹ through which to understand institutional trust in nascent, emerging, and established democracies (Newton & Norris, 2000). The theory most pertinent to this research is that of *institutional efficacy*, which holds that political trust and institutional performance are inextricably linked. Here, high institutional efficacy would reflect close alignment between citizen expectations and their perceptions of results yielded. Because the questionnaire employed for this research lacked measures with which to gauge the applicability of the other two theories, the concept of institutional efficacy will be foregrounded.

Among the plethora of quantitative research on citizen trust is a meta-analysis carried out by *AmericasBarometer Insights Series*, which dissected the findings of various 2008 LAPOP surveys (Montalvo, 2010). What makes this meta-analysis valuable, in addition to its broad regional scope in Latin America, is that it narrowed its query down to trust at the municipal level of government. The findings are both intriguing and suggestive of reflections for this research. First, as previously mentioned in our literature review on local governance, overall trust in the region fared dismally with

⁶¹ In addition to the *institutional efficacy* theory, the *cultural-environmental* and *socio-psychological* theories are a part of this cohort. The *cultural-environmental* theory assumes that levels of trust are contingent upon citizens' degrees of participation in "communitarian activities", and stimulated by interpersonal and social mechanisms. The *socio-psychological* theory suggests an association between institutional and interpersonal trust, where the quality of the latter compromises that of the former (Newton and Norris, 2000).

an average trust score of 49.9 on a scale of 100 (Montalvo, 2010). The report also highlighted the high degree of determinance of the following factors: satisfaction with municipal services and incidence of victimization. While higher levels of trust were associated with high levels of satisfaction with municipal services, trust and victimization were inversely related: participants who had experienced corruption or crime at higher rates tend to exhibit lower rates of trust and reliance on institutions. While this research did not inquire into participant victimization, suggestions of satisfaction with municipal services were a direct byproduct of the method of inquiry.

While this research can engage in a discussion about only one of the variables previously mentioned, the *AmericasBarometer* report also tested the relationship between trust and three other variables that are at our disposal. The report cross-tabulated trust and the following socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of participants: age, level of education, and size of geographic area of residence (Montalvo, 2010). While trust was positively related to age, it was negatively related to education. That is, the older and less (formally) educated individuals exhibited the highest levels of trust in municipal governments. Of particular interest to this research is the relationship between trust and size of geographic area of residence, which this report establishes as one in which rural areas and small cities express more trust than medium and large areas. Considering that n=17 participants in this research responded negatively to the question of whether they trusted their municipal government, a few challenges to the generalizability of the LAPOP 2008 results can be made. The only consistency we may find is with regard to the age variable, since our average age is 45. However, since there is no quantifiable measure for levels of trust, our analysis must remain within the qualitative realm. The

average education level of participants in this research (the second grade), would indicate the probability that some degree of trust was demonstrated, but the overwhelming demonstration of mistrust challenges LAPOP's suggestion. Additionally, the rural classification of the three *ranchos* in Villamar should have predisposed the population to higher levels of trust, but again, that was far from the reality for the participants in this research.

That the relationship between these variables in the 2008 LAPOP surveys is reflected differently in the findings of this research in Villamar is perhaps a matter of methodological inconsistency. This does, nonetheless, invoke further research and encourages us to explore interpretations of this difference. For example, one explanation for this inconsistency could be that these variables fare differently under times of political crisis. We can easily assume a state of political crisis in Mexico, and Michoacán specifically, when considering that fissures in the institutional order have recently given way to parastate actors in a process that has taken a violent course⁶². In an attempt to engage in theoretical exploration, we can consider the democratic dissent hypothesis, which is one of three hypotheses⁶³ regarding citizen support of emerging democracies

⁶² In Michoacán, civilian manifestations have cut two governorships short, and parastate entities continue to act outside legal and institutional frameworks (Aguirre Ochoa & Infante Jimenez, 2012).

⁶³ The three hypotheses, all of which assume a condition of political crisis, are as follows: 1) The instability hypothesis, which posits that support for government and political systems is decreased by civil involvement (due to the unrealistic feasibility of citizen demands); 2) the social trust hypothesis, which suggests the opposite (involvement with civil society increases support despite feasibility of demands); and 3) the democratic dissent hypothesis, which holds that civil involvement increases support, but not for the government in power. Instead, support increases for the political system due to the

(Boulding & Nelson Nuñez, 2014.) This hypothesis may help explain the contradiction found in the simultaneity of mistrust and political participation: how can we explain continued participation (electoral, engagement) in a political context marred with mistrust?

This inquiry into support (or lack thereof) for governments, which is assumed to be closely related to perceptions of trust and legitimacy, is validated by scholarly acknowledgement that “attitudinal support” is an essential component of democratic consolidation (Boulding & Nelson Nuñez, 2014). This type of support is of particular urgency to Mexico, whose democratic fragility continues to be threatened by widespread sentiments of *malaise* amongst the citizenry. This claim is corroborated by recent survey data from ENCUP (2012), ENCIG⁶⁴ (2013), and ENVIPE⁶⁵ (2013, 2015). Collectively, the surveys illustrate how Mexican citizens have perceived government efficiency and legitimacy along measures of perceptions of insecurity and the extent and frequency of corruption. Both ENVIPE (2013, 2015) and ENCIG (2013) found that insecurity is considered the biggest national concern among citizens: in 2013, 57.8% of the national population reported this as the primary concern for the country, and 80.3% of Michoacán residents considered this the primary concern for the state (ENVIPE, 2013). When factoring crime into the equation, 70.4% of the national population considered these two (insecurity and crime) the most concerning national issue, followed by unemployment

accessibility of participatory means, regardless of negative evaluations of government (Boulding & Nelson Nuñez, 2014).

⁶⁴ This survey interviewed only citizens 18 and older.

⁶⁵ This survey interviewed only citizens 18 and older, and had a sample size of 95,561 households around the country.

and corruption (ENCIG, 2013). This research considers security in the conversation of perceived inefficiency, both because it is a sector whose legitimacy is attributed to government institutions and because of participant reference to the issue.

On the issue of corruption, reported frequency was even more pronounced. ENCIG (2013) found that 88.3% of the national population considered corrupt practices to have occurred “very frequently” or “frequently,” and 92.2% of Michoacán residents felt the same at the state-level specifically (the highest rate of all states). The national population considered corruption at these frequencies to be highest among the following entities and groups: police (89.7%), political parties (84.4%), public ministries (78.4%), and municipal governments (75.8%) (ENCIG, 2013). Furthermore, ENVIPE (2015) found that 77.9% of the national population considered traffic police corrupt, while 66.5% considered the municipal police corrupt. Similarly, ENCUP (2012) found lower reports of corruption at the municipal level, finding high levels of corruption at the three governmental levels, with the municipality registering the lowest degrees of reported corruption. When juxtaposed against these survey findings, we can make sense of the fact that n=17 participants in this research responded negatively to the question of whether they trusted the government. Additionally, it contextualizes the frequency with which participants expressed fear or apprehension about approaching institutions or authorities (n=14). Overall, rates of reported mistrust, corruption, and insecurity underline Mexico’s dire need to find support for its democracy amidst evidence of generalized discontent.

3.2 Manifestations of Mistrust

3.2.1 Allegations of Corruption

The most prominent of three themes that surfaced in participant expressions of mistrust and inefficiency was that of corruption. N=19 participants referenced corruption in their reflections of both the municipal government and the national government. While all of these participants mentioned corruption was a big determinant in their evaluation of government, only n=7 participants mentioned having first-hand exposure to corrupt practices by politicians, police, or government officials. These 7 participants would fall under LAPOP's (2008) "victimization" category. Among the 19 participants who upheld allegations of corruption, the most common practices of corruption mentioned were as follows: vote-buying and other types of political fraud, the pocketing of money allocated for public use, government affiliation with DTOs, and solicited bribery from traffic police. These practices were commonly cited, regardless of whether the participant had experienced them first-hand. However, in the majority of cases, there were only one or two degrees of separation between participants and those who had told them about their first-hand experience. What is most important here is that participants expressed feeling that corruption was an expected and inevitable part of their political experiences, and that they were able to operationalize the term by providing specific examples of what this looked like.

As mentioned in the first chapter, allegations of vote-buying (especially by the PRI) were a pronounced aspect of the June elections, both on the days and weeks preceding election day and in the immediate aftermath. N=12 participants mentioned that they believed vote-buying behavior occurred on the night of June 6th, and all twelve implicated the PRI in this act. Lupe, whose son was blamed for partaking in vote-buying on behalf of the PRD, explains that she believes the PRI affiliates were the real culprits:

“The new president is from the PRI, and one from the PAN was supposed to win, but they cheated. They put the PRI there, but they didn’t win, win. Who knows how they were able to cheat. But they cheat, they cheat. Even the taxi driver told us, that the PRI didn’t win.”

Though it is implied that vote-buying may or may have not been the method of “cheating,” its presence in the conscience of Villamar citizens speaks volumes about their perceptions of electoral illegitimacy. The experiences reported by participants, such as Gael’s being offered 1,000 *pesos* in exchange for his voter ID card, differ from those cited in literature on clientelistic practices in that they involve direct cash-for-vote exchanges. Generally, vote buying is thought to involve other monetary or material exchanges, such as “handouts” or gift cards. However, the case of Villamar tells us that a more raw form of vote-buying may have tainted the June 2015 elections, one in which citizens were offered unadulterated money in exchange for their vote.

According to participants, corruption in Villamar goes beyond the electoral campaign period and marks the everyday lives of citizens by money-pocketing practices and forced bribes at all levels of government. Politicians, government officials, and traffic police were the most implicated in this type practice of corruption by n=16 participants. Additionally, n=5 participants expressed a strong suspicion that the *encargado* role entailed being the willing beneficiary of illicit money-shuffling. Most participants who mentioned corrupt money-shuffling at the different levels of governance also believed this practice came at the cost of citizens’ well-being. According to Antonio, only about 20% of the “aid money” that makes it into the municipal town hall is actually used for its allocated use. Though this estimate was a mere reflection of this participant’s

negative evaluation of government reliability, it was a common sentiment — citizens felt that “aid money” allocated towards public benefit was voluntarily transferred into the wrong hands. Carlos explains:

Whoever is working at the town hall in Villamar knows how much money they're going to make, how much money is coming in, and how much of that they're going to pocket. They are good accountants, they can figure out how much money will go into their pocket, and the pockets of their cronies. If some type of aid comes in, they'll get together with the *encargado*, the president, and distribute it amongst themselves. You get some money, you get some money, you get some money, and the rest can stay in the town hall. And the aid? It stays there.

It is with this example in mind that we can recall participant responses to the question of how they viewed the municipal town hall in Villamar. While $n=9$ saw it as a site of inquiry, $n=7$ saw it as merely a site of corruption, and of the sort exemplified by Carlos and Antonio's reflections. This rate is enough to assume that corruption in the form of money-shuffling is a predominant aspect of citizen perceptions of their municipal government and how they handle monetary responsibilities. What also stands out about these allegations is that they seem to claim that this corrupt practice permeates through different levels of governance and leadership, implicating politicians and *encargados* alike. That these experiences were paired with negative perceptions of the municipal town hall demonstrates that these perceptions directly impact how citizens perceive it (Villamar): it is understood to be the sole source that has the power to remedy the community's problems, but also the tools to mismanage them.

Money-shuffling in the form of solicited bribery was another common experience, and one especially associated with traffic police. Participants who referenced this type of corruption agreed that solicited bribes are just one of the many ways through which

public officials go out of their way to extract money from citizens. Antonio describes one of multiple encounters with traffic police who have elicited cash from him: “Once I was headed to Morelia with my cousin. And in the tolls near Parandícuaro there was a federal police roadblock. And they said they wanted our truck. They told us that they were 8, and with 50 each the problem would be solved. That is 400 *pesos*. They told us to put the money there, inside a notebook. Then they wished us a good day. Money buys everything. And I think they’re all like that, the political parties too. They’re all corrupt.”

After the recent wave of DTO-related crime and violence in the state called on measures to further regulate the roadways and tolls, participants felt that this actually imposed an indirect tax on them due to the frequency of solicited bribes. This type of corruption was just one example among other practices that seem to contribute to a generalized sense that the government capitalizes on any opportunity to act on its vested interest: money. Though most allegations of corruption were attributed to the municipal government and local-level officials, this was also the only topic that produced evaluations of the national government.

When the national government was implicated, it usually involved associations with corruption-charged entities such as DTOs. Victor, for example, mentions how the case of El Chapo’s recent escape from prison had corruption written all over it: “The president was with him! The government has everything in their power to do whatever is convenient. That tunnel he supposedly built...he didn’t build that. There were powerful people behind the construction of that tunnel, how the hell not?” Like other participants, Victor believes DTOs are synonymous with government actors. At the same time, allegations of corruption at the national level of government were highly generalized, as

if corruption were intricately embedded into the nation's very core. Fausto asserts, "This is the country where first-class corruption is carried out. We're number one. It is everywhere. You're out on the street, and corruption is everywhere. We live in uncertainty and mistrust."

In addition to clientelistic practices such as vote-buying, money-shuffling and generalized charges of corruption seem to be commonplace amongst citizen interactions with government officials in Villamar. Mexico is not the sole nest of corrupt practices in Latin America, a region whose wave of emerging democracies has witnessed even graver cases, such as the incidence of clientelistic practices during elections in Argentina and Venezuela (Auyero, 2009). Nonetheless, the examples of corruption in Mexico are widespread, such that in the 2012 presidential elections it became well-known and expected among Mexicans of lower social strata to expect a *Soriana* gift card in exchange for their vote in favor of Peña Nieto. These allegations of corruption become even more interesting a phenomenon when considering that a majority of citizens can detect their potential for undermining legitimacy: one study in Latin America found that almost three-fourths of participants (70%) *opposed* clientelistic practices (Auyero, 2009). Participants' reflections in this study suggest that, similarly, they oppose all practices of corruption reported, even when there was a benefit for them. Vote-buying, money shuffling, bribery, and negative associations with corrupt entities are all indicators of institutional performance, and thus their widespread practice indicates that trust and institutional efficacy are compromised.

3.2.2 Low Accountability

Another of the prominent themes that arose in participant expressions of mistrust and inefficiency was that of their municipal government's (and national) lack of accountability. One interesting aspect of participants' perceptions of accountability is that it was contrasted with the decorous and "exaggerated" nature of the electoral campaigns and candidate discourse. While these were generally described as "stylish," ripe with materialistic favors, and the characteristic *hablar bonito*, the results they yielded were far from the abundance the campaign seemed to foreshadow. N=16 participants expressed feeling that there was a dangerously low level of accountability on the part of the government, in addition to a sense that government and political parties are not to be counted on. For those who decided not to vote (n=4), their low internal efficacy was a direct result of repeatedly low demonstrations of accountability. Carmen mentions, "that is why I'm not interested. Why am I going to even go listen to someone who promises aid, who promises everything, with this, with that...but at the end of the day doesn't help with anything?"

Many participants consider that during the campaign period, favors and promises only signal the imminent lack of attention and resources to the *ranchos*. Fausto explains:

Man, they tell you they'll bring down the stars and the moon...everything. But in the end, they don't bring anything. Little by little, they say. That little by little they'll be doing and fixing things. But we never see that. The only thing that is happening little by little is that they're becoming richer and we're becoming poorer. When they make it to the municipal town hall as elected presidents, they have power. You can't approach them anymore. The only response they'll have is that there are no funds. But the funds do make it, at least to Morelia. They just get lost on their way down that road over there.

For Fausto, the campaigns and votes that politicians acquire from citizens are only instrumental for them for the time being. Gael shares this sentiment, claiming that when

people approach politicians about the promises they made, “they don’t remember, they say they have never seen you.” When considering that at least n=6 participants (all women) have directly approached the municipal town hall to inquire about aid or the rendition of promises, this perception of accountability helps us understand the degree of estrangement citizens feel towards government. And despite the reality that citizens partake in the campaign festivities and events with enthusiasm and eagerness, mistrust prevails. Political participation and engagement of this kind, then, is not an indicator of trust or support, but rather a reflection of the normalcy with which political processes incorporate the contradiction. Furthermore, the repetition of this pattern (stylish campaigns and low accountability) has contributed to a mentality among Villamar citizens that marginalization and poverty are inscribed in their futures.

3.2.3 *Quemados*

A final, but no less interesting, theme that emerged in participant reflections of government inefficiency is a culmination of the previously discussed allegations of corruption and low accountability. The sensation of being “burned out,” or *quemados* by the consistent predominance of these practices and patterns was expressed by n=16 participants. In these expressions of generalized fatigue and mistrust, participants emphasized the following: estrangement from government institutions and officials, feeling taken advantage of by politicians, predictions that their socioeconomic future looks ominous, and disillusionment with politics. Collectively, these sentiments also seem to have contributed to a shared mentality of “fending for ourselves”. That is, participants shared the idea that their survival and well-being depended solely on

themselves, and that government presence (even in the form of aid) was superfluous to their means of subsistence. It is precisely this mentality that provokes the question of whether this perceived absence of state, better described as an institutional void, has facilitated the presence of parastate actors such as *autodefensas* and DTOs.

To answer the previous question, a different research objective and strategy would be necessary, but we can elucidate the present findings by considering what is known already. It is commonly held and well-substantiated that a lack of institutional legitimacy is prone to facilitating citizen tolerance towards parastate actors as authoritative entities (Aguirre Ochoa & Herrera Torres, 2012). If we recall that participants commonly cited (n=13) the period of hostility during which the government invaded homes in search for arms, only to positively evaluate the efficiency with which *autodefensas* handled the situation, it becomes evident that the government's role is often associated with ineptitude. If we factor in the evaluations of local DTOs as order-preserving actors, we come to better understand the "burned out" sensation that characterizes the political vision of Villamar citizens. Additionally, the common allegation that the Mexican government is associated with DTOs contributes to the belief amongst participants that they are a low-order concern to the government and thus, any positive interaction with politicians is a matter of convenience. Evaristo and Gael express feeling "burned out" along with disillusionment towards the politics of convenience:

Evaristo: Ultimately people have become disillusioned because, well...since they're involved with the drug traffickers, the situation is becoming worse. That's why a lot of people lose their trust. And as always, the *ranchos* come last. And that is where they should invest more. We, the *campesinos* are the ones that sustain this country. We are the poorest, and most screwed. That's why some people are frustrated, that's why sometimes we have resentment towards the political parties. And we

think, well...we're not getting any richer, our situation isn't getting any better, so we have to fend for ourselves. We can't live by or depend on the government.

Gael: Just like people only ask for food when they're hungry, politicians approach you when it is convenient for them. First they hug you, they shake your hand, almost like family, but after that, you're lucky if you get a military greeting. They're corrupt, and they sell out. That is why people are spent. And they know who they approach when they buy votes...they approach people who can't even afford to buy a soda or a taco. They're skilled at this, at tricking you.

The reflections of Evaristo and Gael are injected with everything from class consciousness to predictions of their socioeconomic future. Most importantly, they exhibit perniciously low “attitudinal support” for their government and political system, a scenario that threatens Mexico’s democratic consolidation (Boulding & Nelson Nuñez, 2014). Aguilar Rivera (2013) suggests that an underlying factor is at play in Mexican citizens’ evaluation of government: their image of democracy itself, which he also argues is idealized, unrealistic, and characterized by the principle of equity and a yearning for “civic order.” It is this image’s unfeasibility that yields negative evaluations of government, he argues, and these evaluations are too heavily attributed to a simple calculus of expectations and results (Aguilar Rivera, 2013). However, I argue that while citizen image of democracy is surely of influence to their evaluations of government, Villamar citizens are engaging in a very rational and practical calculus of how well the government is servicing their demands. In fact, this calculus of expectations and results yielded is perhaps a safeguard to the little dignity they feel in the face of political actors.

Finally, these widespread and deep sentiments of mistrust and inefficiency don't seem to significantly dent electoral participation or political engagement. In fact, one of the most interesting findings in this research is that this mistrust coexist with relatively

robust rates participation and engagement. This contradiction is puzzling, and provokes a flurry of questions that future research awaits: Why do citizens still vote? Why do we see the coexistence of deep mistrust on the one hand, and robust party loyalty on the other? Does participation in a sea of mistrust and negative evaluations merely signal healthy levels of hope towards democratic maturity? While we can't entertain these questions in this thesis alone, we can consider that n=9 participants gave a peculiar rationale for this contradiction. Lidia's reflection exemplifies this rationale: "They buy people, they're corrupt. But there has to be someone, we can't stay without a municipal president. So we have to choose, vote for who is the least...the least corrupt." This rationale seems to indicate that a degree of internal efficacy is intact, that citizens who feel this way still maintain a sense of agency in their political decisions. Furthermore, it reflects a very low standard by which citizens measure the quality of governance. One thing remains clear, however: insofar as Mexico's flawed institutions continue to perpetuate the instance of corruption and low accountability, this culture of fatigue will hinder the mending of a fractured relationship between the government and its citizenry.

3.3 Chapter Conclusions

In an attempt to explore the question of how rural citizens view their relationship with local and national government, this chapter explored one of the most salient themes in the findings of this research: mistrust and perceptions of government inefficiency. An exploration and discussion of this theme relied on participant interviews as well as survey data that illustrate a similar trend throughout Latin America and Mexico more broadly. It can be agreed that both in Mexico and the Latin American region, mistrust towards

government, perceived corruption, and high rates of insecurity obscure citizens' visions of legitimacy (Montalvo, 2010; ENCUP, 2012; ENCIG, 2013; ENVIPE, 2013, 2015).

Ultimately, these negative evaluations point to the robustness of Mexico's institutional efficacy (Newton and Norris, 2000). In this chapter, we attempt to operationalize these negative evaluations and reported mistrust by discussing the incidence of the following among participants' reflections: perceived corruption (money-shuffling, vote-buying or clientelistic behavior, bribery), low accountability, and a sentiment of being "burned out". Finally, these findings bring forth a contradiction that merits further inquiry — while this thesis argues that political participation and engagement levels are healthier than would be predicted, it puzzles the reality of overwhelming mistrust in government. This thesis encourages further inquiry into this contradiction, and hopes to ignite a conversation about its implications.

It is important to consider how these findings align with, challenge, or elucidate elements of the theoretical framework previously proposed, as well as other commonly held ideas regarding citizen mistrust of government institutions. One pattern that stood out was that participant expressions of corruption at the municipal level were specifically related to the mishandling of funds and resources, in addition to bribery and clientelistic electoral practices. On the other hand, expressions of corruption at the national level reflected deeply seated negative evaluations regarding institutional flaws that permeate everyday life in Mexico (the government's inability to effectively curb DTO-related crime, for example). While it is helpful to recall that national survey data places the municipal level of government at lower levels of reported corruption than the national (ENCUP, 2012; ENVIPE, 2015), our findings reinforce the centrality with which municipal-level

corruption should be regarded. Similarly, scholarly suggestions that rural areas and small towns predispose citizens to higher levels of trust (Montalvo, 2010) are inconsistent with this research's findings. While it is tempting to hypothesize that perhaps the proximity between municipal government and citizens in rural areas yields more trust, the almost unanimous (n=17) expression of mistrust towards the municipal government challenges this suggestion.

Where these findings are of most value is in their place within the conversation of institutional efficacy and political attitudes more generally. It is useful to recall Almond & Verba's (1963) three categories of political attitudes that are thought to influence political behavior: political efficacy, political engagement, and the evaluation of an individual's political context. In the first chapter, it was established that low internal efficacy coexisted with moderate hopes for external efficacy in Villamar citizens. These claims can be furthered when considering the category of *evaluation of political context*, which refers to citizens' understandings of the robustness of their political regime's democracy. It is safe to assume that participants' widespread expressions of mistrust and inefficiency indicate a negative evaluation of Mexico's democratic maturity. According to Almond & Verba (1963), this would then lead to an evaluation that renders political participation meaningless. This was definitely the case for those participants (n=4) who didn't vote, and other participants who saw their electoral participation as a mere formality, even when it coexisted with party loyalty.

Scholars have offered suggestions for explaining findings we observed: expressions of mistrust and inefficiency both at the federal and municipal levels. Cejudo (2009) argues that the recent advances towards democracy in the last few decades have

failed to effectively diffuse transparency and efficiency at other levels of governance. Rather, a client relationship with citizens at the local level has prevailed as a result of “immediate” political interests both on the part of citizens and parties (Cejudo, 2009). This is closely aligned with what was observed in Villamar, where many participants expressed a concern for the “immediate” and detected the limited instrumentality of the campaign period. This, in turn, also tainted their evaluations of legitimacy. LaFree (1998) offers a model of legitimacy in which the concept’s robustness is dependent on whether citizens view institutional patterns as rules to follow. Because we see a negative manifestation of this in Villamar (where corruption and low accountability are considered unacceptable by participants), a low regard for legitimacy is assumed.

The clearest aim this research suggests is the improvement of institutional efficacy at all levels of governance, such that citizen needs are met in a satisfactory manner. Participant reflections indicate that this aim, however, is not being fulfilled and has a dim outlook. Recalling Dahl and Sartori’s (Torres Espinoza, 2014) seven suggested institutional elements that define a democratic regime, we can see that all seven elements are considered weak in participant reflections of government trust and efficiency. What, then, does this say about the state of Mexico’s democracy? It seems that perhaps citizens and politicians partake in a vicious cycle — one in which a culture of clientelism and corruption on behalf of politicians also leads to simple “favors” being what citizens seek in their political engagement, which then reinforces this political practice. Nonetheless, it is a vicious cycle that corrupts the country’s democratic project.

In the *Pacto por Mexico* (2012), one of the three axes through which the agreement claims to deepen the country’s democratization process is as follows: “the

participation of citizens as key players in the design, execution and evaluation of public policies.” It involves a buzzword present in most political rhetoric: citizen participation. Is this part of the relationship citizens in Villamar view with their local and national governments? This relationship, though not exempt from variations, is one in which mistrust takes center stage, often making political participation a matter of formality. While we recognize that this doesn’t mean citizens aren’t effectively engaged, this does tell us that the relationship has ample room for improvement.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The June 7th, 2015 legislative elections in Mexico were no less contentious or convoluted with tensions than almost all electoral periods in the country's long history. Despite brewing discontent with deeply seated institutional flaws and weak responsiveness to national crises by president Enrique Peña Nieto, the ruling party (the PRI) remains in power. The party controls approximately 250 seats in Mexico's Chamber of Deputies, hardly tilting the balance of power that existed prior to the 2015 midterm election period. In addition to this PRI stronghold, another element of these elections is not a novelty for the Mexican citizenry: the role corruption plays in shifting the political compass in favor of entrenched interests. During the campaign period, seven candidates were murdered, ballots were destroyed, and clientelistic practices continued to mark the trajectory of the electoral race.

Amidst political havoc, it is imperative that we consider how Mexican citizens are participating in the country's political life, whether through electoral behavior or political engagement. It is even more urgent to consider the political participation of rural Mexican citizens, who, on the margins of the government's political and economic agenda, suffer the reverberations of electoral outcomes the most. This research's approach to political participation in rural Mexico involved a central question whose main query is twofold: 1) what are some of the local factors and characteristics of political participation in rural municipalities (in this case, Villamar)? 2) to what extent do these factors reflect the relevancy of region-specific cumulative processes in contemporary citizens' political decision making?

The regional processes considered include the history of *agrарismo* and *campesino* political values, the influence of parastate actors in the state, economic changes, and the local sociopolitical infrastructures of rural localities. The first two processes were considered prior to the conduction of the research, while the last two emerged as their significance became apparent in participant interviews. This research considers local sociopolitical infrastructure a regional process because it has evolved as a result of Michoacán's social, economic, and political history. The dynamics present in this infrastructure (local leadership roles, political values, party reputations) were found to modulate citizens' participation in local municipal politics.

The answer to the first part of this research question lies in the centrality of the following participation patterns, in addition to the claim that sociopolitical infrastructure was a modulating agent. The coexistence of these patterns characterize the three *ranchos* studied: low overall political efficacy, party loyalty towards the PRI, healthy participation rates of women, the centrality of "immediate" needs, and negative evaluations of government efficiency. The answer to the second part of the research question lies in tracing these patterns as outcomes of either local, regional, or national processes. The findings suggest that while these patterns can be partially traced to national processes, they are better understood as outcomes of local and regional processes which continue to bear relevancy in citizens' political decisions.

Previously, this research posited a 'distance' between the local and the national, which in turn rationalized this research's aim to take a "microhistorical" look at political experiences at the local level. I attempted to map this distance first by honing in on the

political experiences and infrastructures of the three *ranchos*, and then gauging (through participant interviews) to what extent these experiences were influenced by the national political narrative. The national political narrative here is comprised of the political issues and events that take center-stage at the national level — for example, economic policies, educational reform, foreign diplomacy, etc. In other words, the national narrative or domain is one outside the municipal political space that was the focus of this research. A ‘distance’ was apparent and underlined by both the immediacy of the factors that reportedly influenced participants’ political decisions, and the valence of their local sociopolitical infrastructures. In this way, participants were more influenced by local and regional political processes and factors than national ones.

The influence of national processes, however, cannot be entirely negated. After all, the processes considered (*agrарismo*, sociopolitical infrastructures, parastate actors, and economic changes) all have their origin in the national sphere that was posited earlier, at a higher level of governance. But the point to anchor here is that these processes have manifest uniquely in the state of Michoacán and its municipalities, such that these unique manifestations differentially predispose this specific region to patterns of political participation. This thesis argues that the answer to the second part of the research question is as follows: the patterns witnessed in Villamar are more a result of local factors, and participation is then more influenced by immediate needs and realities as opposed to national-level political concerns. To make sense of this suggested ‘distance,’ it can be considered that the evaluation of the political context (Almond & Verba, 1963) for citizens in Villamar is more limited to the local, municipal context.

While the first two chapters ground the primacy of immediate and local factors, the final chapter attempts to understand how these factors might converge with a broader, national current. What this research found was that participants' reflections of their engagement and interest in the national political sphere was almost strictly limited to their negative evaluations of government inefficiency and expressions of mistrust. This is yet another finding that amplifies the idea that there is a 'distance' between national and local politics, one in which estrangement with the national contrasts with the immediate relevancy of local and regional factors.

The limitations of this research are, of course, central to understanding the scope of my answer to the research question. Time and resources limited the research period and therefore, the number of participants represented in the sample. Interviews in more than three *ranchos* would have provided a more detailed and holistic picture of the political experiences in Villamar, but expansion of the research area would have translated to slower and less efficient participant recruitment. For this reason, the three *ranchos* were chosen due to their proximity but differential population sizes, to provide the most representative sample possible. Another limitation in this research is the lack of perspective from local politicians themselves, who were difficult to contact due to high responsibility during the research period. An additional impediment to the true representativeness of the sample was the challenge in interviewing younger participants (18-28), who showed low interest in engaging with the topic. Finally, because this research consistently alludes to a 'national sphere' or narrative, a true comparative

approach would have carried out the same methodology in urban spaces where this is more likely to be apparent.

However, despite these impediments to validity and reliability, the contributions of this research to the field of political participation are clear. First, by embracing González y González's (1973) valuation of the microhistorical genre, this research is among few political inquiries at such a microscopic level. Not only does it foreground the importance of detailing local political experiences, but it also invites further characterizations of local sociopolitical infrastructures, a concept not previously explored or utilized in research. It follows that, in efforts to narrow the focus to the local level, this research also posits the potential influence of region as a factor into modes of participation. For example, Villamar's rurality, which is associated with the *campesino* category and participants' socioeconomic status, indirectly influenced local political participation and decisions.

Region, in addition to historical processes, are largely missing from considerations of factors that influence participation. Klesner (2009), for example, suggests that the factors agreed upon are grouped into four broad categories: institutional opportunities and constraints, economic resources, political values, and engagement. Our finding that contemporary mutations of the PRI's long-standing relationship with the rural populace is still relevant, has been previously corroborated (Bartra 1982) yet still remains on the margins of the dialogue around political participation. This research, then, contributes in validating the importance of historical factors. Finally, the findings in this research invite scholars of political participation to revisit the patterns associated with

specific demographics, including those with lower levels of formal education and those belonging to a specific class (rural *campesinos*). Citizens of Villamar, who would generally be predicted to exhibit lower participant rates, are participating in myriad ways despite evidence of low political efficacy and negative evaluations of government.

The aforementioned reality brings us to consider what this low attitudinal support (Boulding & Nelson Nuñez, 2014) means for Mexico's democratic transition. The findings of this research point to low political efficacy and negative evaluations of political context, characteristics that permeate Villamar's political ambience. However, it was also evidence that an interest in political engagement remained intact. Similarly, expressions of mistrust coexisted with healthy rates of participation. What can we make of these seemingly contradictory patterns? I suggest that democratic fervor is present, in rural *ranchos* and *campesinos*, but institutional and structural deficits limit local citizens' ability to experience democracy at its fullest expression. For example, in the problems present in municipal governments that Berthin (2012) suggested, at least three were present in Villamar: unequal relationships with national government, limited financial capacity, and limitations in institutionalization of citizen participation. All three contribute to the negative evaluations expressed by citizens, and therefore introduce a somewhat impervious layer between the citizenry and government.

Torres Espinoza (2014) suggests seven pillars of democratic consolidation, and at least one of these is being violated in Villamar: corruption-free elections. Additionally, the financial instability of municipal governments and their dependence on state government (González Casanova, 1975) reflect fissures in the foundations of Mexico's

democratic project. These fissures and violations undermine the prospect of democratic maturation, at least in the ways citizens of Villamar can experience it. The reality of a still-relevant relationship between the PRI and the rural populace (as evidenced by PRI party loyalty) also suggests that vestiges of Mexico's undemocratic past remain intact, with clientelistic tendencies still corrupting the integrity of the transition.

There are two ways to understand democracy: theoretically and pragmatically (Sartori, 1989). These two ways interact in a dialectical manner, one informing the other. This research assumes that in Mexico, the theoretical and pragmatic manifestations of democracy differ, and that the theoretical dimensions place a premium on electoral participation. However, its pragmatism reveals pitfalls. Putnam (1955) posits that three patterns of participation threaten Mexico's democracy: those more educated tend to participate more, peasant participation rates owe themselves to clientelistic party politics, and social capital (believed to be a positive predictor of participation) which is disproportionately available to more affluent sectors of the population. All three patterns implicate the reality of social inequalities, which in turn suggest the division of Mexico along socioeconomic lines.

It is with this suggested division in mind that González Casanova's *La Democracia en México* (1975) merits a final word on these findings' implications for Mexico's democracy. For González Casanova, Mexico's population is divided into those who participate and those who are marginal — in colloquial terms, the 'haves' and 'have nots.' He then argues that that social marginalization has severe ramifications in the political realm, that there is such a thing as 'political marginality' (González Casanova,

1975). Many Mexican citizens, he argues, are marginal political subjects, devoid of politics — at an extreme, these marginal subjects are often *part* of the politics of those who do have it (González Casanova, 1975). They are political objects, to be more exact. To illustrate this marginality, González Casanova (1975) suggests that a lack of political information is one of its primary manifestations. At the time of the book's publication, over half of Mexico's population (mostly rural) did not have access to "national" political information, and were limited to "local" and "verbal" information, which he suggests coincided with a lack of "national consciousness" (González Casanova, 1975). Inevitably, this marginal participation in politics does not align with democratic ideals.

The limited scope of political information suggested above is directly related to the 'distance' posited by this research. While the political patterns observed in Villamar are understood as outcomes of local factors and regional processes, they are also indicative of the rural population's limited scope of influence. If the precedence of local 'information' and factors dictate the rural citizenry's insertion into Mexico's political life, are these same citizens participating in and benefiting from democracy? We know that in Villamar, people are participating, some vote because they hope for change, despite pernicious levels of political efficacy. However, we have reason to believe that Villamar's population remains on the margins of Mexico's political agenda. Insofar as their scope of influence remains highly localized, rural citizens' demands will continue to be highly localized as well, leaving the much needed national-level structural changes unaddressed.

Lupe laughs when I ask her how she made her election decisions in previous years: “I thought, well I can’t read so I don’t know which box to check. The little dove logo looks nice!” Her daughter’s favorite color was blue. “So there was the logo with the little dove, and it was blue...it was the PAN. I also felt bad that they were the ones with least support, so I voted for them,” she says. Lupe’s calculus is just one of the many ways in which Villamar citizens described their political participation and political decision making in the 2015 midterm elections. Her description, however, does demonstrate the perils of Mexico’s contemporary social and political crisis: citizen participation, though robust, is still not fully institutionalized. As the country’s aspirations look outward onto the global stage, the full expression of its emerging democracy sluggishly advances and retracts on its path towards its rural and most vulnerable pockets. There, in the rugged valleys of Villamar, the *Pacto por México*’s promises are but a distant echo, a faint soundbite eclipsed by rural citizens’ immediate realities.

APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. This summer, legislative elections were held. Did you vote?
2. Can you describe the political campaigns that took place prior to the election this year?
 1. What political parties are you familiar with? Can you tell me about each one?
 2. Was there one political party that received more attention than others, in your *rancho*?
2. How would you describe the way people in your town respond to these campaigns?
 1. Do they welcome political parties?
4. How important do you think it is to vote in México?
5. How important do you think it is to be politically involved?
6. What is your opinion on the national/federal government?
7. Tell me a little bit about your municipal government.
Do people from your town interact with them a lot?
Can you describe these interactions?
Has it always been this way?
Do you trust your municipal government?
8. What do you think should be the government's priority, for people from your town?
9. What do you think is needed most here?
10. Do you participate in any government programs, such as PROSPERA and PROCAMPO?
If so, how have these programs impacted your daily life?
Did they impact who you vote for?
11. What are political issues that most affect you today?
12. What do you think about when you vote? How do you decide?
13. Do you think the Mexican government does a good job of listening to its citizens?

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