

Procedural Justice, Representation, and Institutional Trust in Mexico

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Abstract

Both theoretical and empirical studies suggest that confidence in institutions is crucial for the functioning of democratic political systems and is an important element of the citizen–state relationship. Trust in institutions has been mainly explained in terms of institutional performance or as an extension of interpersonal trust. Using data from the 2020 National Survey of Civic Culture (Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Cívica), we examined the determinants of Mexicans' trust in two institutions elected via popular vote: Congress and the Presidency. We focus on procedural justice and representation to account for trust in both institutions. We found positive relationships (of different magnitudes) between citizens' trust in both Congress and the Presidency and the indicators of perceived representation, procedural justice, institutional performance, and interpersonal trust. In addition, we found different and significant effects of party identification on trust levels in both institutions.

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Resumen

Tanto la teoría como los estudios empíricos en diversos contextos sugieren que la confianza en las instituciones es crucial para el funcionamiento de los sistemas políticos democráticos y de la relación ciudadano-Estado. La confianza en las instituciones se ha explicado principalmente en términos de desempeño institucional o como una extensión de la confianza interpersonal. Utilizando datos de la ENCUCI (Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Cívica) 2020, examinamos los determinantes de la confianza de los mexicanos en dos instituciones elegidas por voto popular: el Congreso y la Presidencia. Nos centramos en las nociones de integridad electoral y representación para explicar la confianza en ambas instituciones. Además del desempeño institucional y confianza interpersonal, encontramos relaciones positivas (de diferente magnitud) entre nuestros indicadores de representación percibida, integridad electoral, identidad partidista y niveles de confianza tanto en el Congreso como en el Presidente.

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Keywords

Trust, procedural justice, representation, institutional performance, Mexico

Palabras claves

Confianza, justicia procedimental, representación, desempeño institucional, México

Introduction

Does the constitutional division of powers in presidential systems also divide the process of building political trust in different branches of government? Are there differences between the determinants of trust in the legislative and executive powers?

Several opinion surveys conducted recently have suggested that citizens' trust in core democratic institutions, such as parliaments and governments, has declined in Western societies.¹ Fewer citizens in established democracies trust the institutions they can vote for (parties, parliaments, and presidents), compared with those they cannot vote for, such as the military, judiciary, or bureaucracy (Merkel and Kneip, 2018). Although these data are worrisome, Western European democracies appear to be robust, with democratic parties still winning elections at high margins. One reason for this might be that support for democratic norms and values remains high, even though trust in specific democratic institutions is declining (Merkel and Lürhmann, 2021).

However, in younger democracies such as those in Latin America, exceptionally low trust in Congress seems to be a condition that favors the degradation of the constitutional-liberal component of democracy and the "incumbent takeover," especially in countries that have presidents with high popularity. In other words, the lack of confidence in Congress may serve as the precursor to the process of the "populist" erosion of democracy. Populist parties typically emerge to cater to popular dissatisfaction with the workings of

the current political system. Populist rhetoric is based on an anti-establishment message where the populist identifies with the concerns of ordinary people and promises to confront the corrupt elites. Hence, political mistrust (voter's belief that established political actors will take advantage of them) should promote support for populism (Van Kessel, 2015). Distrust in Congress may give populist executives a greater leeway to implement their policies without negotiating with opposition and subnational governments.

Data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP, 2021) show that although confidence in Congress and the Presidency has plummeted across Latin American countries over the last decade, there is a significant gap of approximately 10 points between the former and the latter, almost always in favor of the former. From 2004 to 2021, the weighted average for trust in Congress for all Latin American countries decreased from 41.4 to 35.1 and from 52.9 to 44.4 for trust in the Presidency.²

Trust in democratic institutions has been mainly examined in terms of institutional performance or as an extension of interpersonal trust. For instance, Catterberg and Moreno (2006) concluded in their work on institutional trust in new and established democracies that "political trust depends strongly on performance" (45). They add that other aspects (e.g., social capital, measured as interpersonal trust) also have a positive effect on institutional trust. Similarly, Rothstein (2009) claimed that legitimacy, which is closely related to institutional trust, depends greatly on government quality. In other words, legitimacy is created and maintained on the output side of the political system. However, we argue that trust in institutions is also generated on the input side of political systems. Therefore, representation and procedural justice clearly play important roles in explaining institutional trust (Dunn 2015; Lind and Tyler, 1988).

The concept of representation may be regarded as an effort by the elected or other public officials "to build more inclusive, deliberative, and engaged relationships with the public" (Orr and McAteer, 2004: 133). Heywood (2004) asserted that "as a political principle, representation is a relationship through which an individual or group stands for, or acts on behalf of a larger group of people" (224).

Procedural justice or fairness refers to an individual's perception that a particular activity in which she participates has been conducted fairly (Lind and Tyler, 1988). Research has shown that even if outcomes are not favorable for individuals, they are less likely to be dissatisfied with unfavorable outcomes if they believe that the procedures that produced those outcomes are fair (Folger and Bies, 1989; Lind and Tyler, 1988).

Although representation and procedural justice are analytically different concepts, they are related in different ways. The procedural justice literature states that providing individuals with a voice in institutional processes facilitates trust in the institutions involved in such processes. For democratic institutions, citizens are provided with a voice through political representation (Dunn, 2015). If individuals think that an elected authority (e.g., the President or a Congressperson) represents their interests and the process of selection is fair and legal, they will be more likely to trust them. If individuals believe they are represented in the Parliament or Congress, they will trust this institution more than if they believe otherwise. As an overwhelming majority

of individuals never participate directly in Congress, their interests are protected through representation. Individuals trust Congress more when their elected representatives are perceived as advocating for their political preferences in the policymaking process (Dunn, 2015).

Paradoxically, the spread of democracy worldwide has coincided with a decline in institutional trust (Zmerli, 2012), increasing the importance of understanding its determinants. Using data from the 2020 National Survey of Civic Culture (Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Cívica [ENCUCI])³, we examine the determining factors of Mexicans' trust in two democratic institutions: Congress and the Presidency. We decided to analyze these institutions because although both Congress members and the President are selected by popular vote, we argue that the determinants of trust in both institutions are not necessarily the same.

First, in presidential systems, where legislative and executive powers reside in different institutions, Presidents tend to have greater opportunities to build direct ties with citizens, which can generate higher levels of trust. Similarly, the collective nature of congressional bodies can make it more difficult to build trust between citizens and their respective Congress. Specifically, in Mexico, Congress is made up of 300 majority deputies and 200 proportional representation deputies (also called "plurinominales"). In the case of the latter, the voters do not know the candidates for whom they are voting, since it is the parties that make the lists of candidates. In that sense, there is a disconnection between voters and plurinominal deputies, potentially impacting citizens' levels of trust in them. Second, in presidential systems, presidents may exploit the public's mistrust in other branches, and even actively foster it.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows. Section 2 provides the theoretical background and hypotheses of the study. Section 3 presents the Mexican case. Section 4 introduces the data, methodology, and results. Section 5 draws the conclusions and discusses the implications of this work.

Theoretical Background: Explaining Institutional Trust

Trust relates to beliefs, actions, and expectations. According to Claus Offe (1999), "[t]rust is the belief that others, through their action or inaction, will contribute to my well-being and refrain from inflicting damage upon me" (47). Therefore, trust is of paramount importance in solving numerous collective action problems faced by citizens in modern social, economic, and political systems (Lubell, 2007; Putnam, 2001).

Institutional trust is essential for the governance of modern states because allowing citizens to accept government authority supports the legitimacy, effective functioning, and stability of democratic institutions (Kaasa and Andriani, 2022; Mishler and Rose, 2005). In general, both theoretical and empirical studies suggest that confidence in institutions is a vital resource for the functioning of democratic political systems and an important element of the citizen–state relationship (Bauer et al., 2018). Moreover, institutional trust plays an important role in economic growth. If the government is perceived

as trustworthy and believed to enforce the law and guarantee property rights, the investment and economic activity will increase (Olson, 1993).

Trust in public institutions manifests itself when citizens assess public institutions as promise-keeping, accountable, efficient, predictable, open, transparent, fair, and honest (Kaasa and Andriani, 2022; Van der Meer and Hakhverdian, 2017). Hence, citizens determine whether institutions act in their best interest (Miller and Listhaug, 1990) and produce outcomes aligned with their expectations. So, what accounts for citizens' confidence in institutions such as Congress and the Presidency? As previously mentioned, institutional trust has been explained, either directly or indirectly, through institutional performance and social trust. We claim that trust in institutions such as Congress and the Presidency is the result of different factors that can be categorized as self-interested, cognitive, and affective. In addition to institutional performance and social trust, we argue that the notions of representation and procedural justice also affect citizens' trust in institutions even in a more significant way than the other two factors.

According to Pitkin (1967), political representation is the activity of making citizens' voices, opinions, and perspectives "present" in public policymaking processes. Political representation occurs when political actors speak, advocate, symbolize, and act on behalf of others in the political arena. Pitkin argues that representatives should be responsive to those they represent. Simultaneously, a representative cannot be responsive when she merely executes orders or meets demands. The representative is not a "mere instrument" (Pitkin, 1967: 126) or servant—the represented should be present in the representative.

In modern representative democracies, individuals necessarily grant representatives the power to act on their behalf in the process of governing. In doing so, they abdicate control over their political lives. Even though they are unable to act on their own behalf, when individuals feel represented by elected institutional actors, they may develop trust when authority is exercised by another whom they do not personally know and whose actions they cannot directly control (Culnan and Armstrong, 1999; Van den Bos et al., 1998). Following these arguments, our first hypothesis is:

H1. Perceived representation positively relates to trust in Congress and the President.

Besides representation, we build on the procedural justice approach to support the idea that citizens trust processes and institutions that they believe are honest and unbiased, even when they produce outcomes they do not agree with, as well as those with which they perceive themselves to have a voice (Dunn, 2015). This perception is clearly related to citizens' belief that the heads of these institutions represent their interests and that they were elected through fair, legal, and transparent processes. Factors that contribute to the perception of procedural fairness include providing citizens with a voice and controlling their actual outcomes (Folger and Greenberg, 1985; Lind and Tyler, 1988).

Tyler and colleagues (e.g., Sunshine and Tyler, 2003; Tyler and Fagan, 2008) have developed an argument based on the role of procedural justice in shaping institutional legitimacy. Their body of work emphasizes the need for justice institutions to pursue fair and respectful processes—in contrast to outcomes—as a strategy for building trust

in justice and, concomitantly, institutional legitimacy and compliance with the law. Some elaborations of procedural justice theory proposed that procedural justice and “moral affiliation” are the most critical factors in fostering or retaining institutional legitimacy (e.g., Hough et al., 2013; Jackson et al., 2012a; Jackson et al., 2012b). The experience of procedural fairness fosters in people feelings of motive-based trust in (and shared group membership with) the authority concerned—that both it and they are ‘on the same side.’

In line with these assertions, previous research has highlighted that violations of the basic principles of distributive and procedural justice exert a significant detrimental effect on citizens’ legitimacy beliefs—most notably on their political trust (Schnaudt et al., 2021). Therefore, our second hypothesis is as follows:

H2. The perception of procedural justice is positively related to trust in Congress and the President.

A particularly complicated challenge is how to measure procedural justice since we recognize that it is a multidimensional concept. Although there is not much empirical research on the concept, there are some studies that have attempted to measure it. Most of them tend to agree that procedural justice has at least two dimensions. First, the idea is that people are more willing to defer to the decisions of legal authorities when the decisions are perceived as being made fairly. One factor that influences whether government procedures are perceived as fair is the extent to which citizens can influence policy. Rhodes-Purdy’s work focuses on this dimension that he calls citizen’s strong voice, defined as the extent to which regime institutions, procedures, and practices are influenced by the behavior and choices of citizens.

In addition, studies of procedural justice suggest that citizens are influenced by whether they view the procedures of government as being generally consistent with the principles of the rule of law (Tyler, 2007). One aspect of the rule of law is that government procedures are respectful both of citizens as people and of their rights as members of the political community. The other is that they are neutral, transparent, and rule based (Levi et al., 2009).

Finally, there has been an increase in the number of scholars focusing on the relationship between electoral integrity, legitimacy, and political trust (Birch, 2008; Norris, 2014). Their main argument is that the way in which citizens perceive the integrity of an election is a relevant source of legitimacy and political trust. So, they have explored the determinants of election trust, demonstrating the importance of institutional factors such as the impartiality of the electoral authorities or the efficiency of the voting process, besides voters’ idiosyncratic characteristics (Hernández-Huerta and Cantú, 2022; Ugues, 2018).

We argued that electoral integrity may be seen as one dimension of procedural justice since elections are one of the most important governmental procedures, through which two of the powers of the State are chosen: the Presidency and Congress. As we will

explain in detail later in this work, to capture the complexity of the concept of procedural justice, we use three dimensions: rule of law, citizens' voice, and electoral integrity.

As we mentioned above, the two dominant approaches in political science explaining institutional trust are those that focus on institutional performance (Berg and Hjerm, 2010; Dong and Kübler, 2018; Hadarics, 2016; Yang and Tang, 2010) and social/interpersonal trust (Rotter, 1971). The former argues that trust in institutions is a consequence of institutional performance and has empirically confirmed that different indicators of institutional trust are positively related to individual-level evaluations of institutional performance. However, explaining institutional trust only through actual performance has received much criticism because this approach ignores citizens' assessment of this metric (Hooghe et al., 2017; Hooghe and Zmerli, 2011). Some scholars have proposed that both the institutions' actual performance and the evaluations individuals make about them are relevant (Berg and Hjerm, 2010); therefore, they have considered the evaluation of and response to the perception of design, performance, and outputs of institutions as determinants of institutional trust (Godefroidt et al., 2017; Mishler and Rose, 2001; Suh et al., 2012).

There are several ways in which institutional performance has been measured, such as administrative effectiveness or the government's ability to boost economic performance (Suh et al., 2012). In addition, citizens' evaluation of institutional performance includes their perception of public officials' behavior, placing the public interest before personal interests (Wang and Wan, 2007), and corruption perceptions. In this study, we used two indicators of institutional performance: the perception of poor government performance and citizens' experiences with public officials' corrupt behavior. In line with prior research, we expect that better institutional performance is positively associated with higher levels of trust in Congress and the President; and that citizens' experience of public officials' corruption is negatively related to higher levels of trust in Congress and the President.

The social trust approach explains institutional trust as an extension of individuals' trust in others, which encompasses interpersonal or social (generalized) trust (Berg and Hjerm, 2010; Suh et al., 2012). This general propensity to trust others promotes institutional trust through civic associations (Mishler and Rose, 2001, 2005). Social relations and cooperation among citizens stimulate trust and a sense of civic engagement, which are important for institutional trust (Guiso et al., 2004; Putnam et al., 1993) and compliance (Tabellini, 2008). Empirical studies have shown that institutional trust is positively related to different measures of an individual's social trust (Hadarics, 2016; Newton and Zmerli, 2011). Therefore, we expect that interpersonal trust is positively related to trust in Congress and the President.

Finally, recent literature in Latin America provides evidence about how partisanship affects voters' policy stances, their evaluation of the economy, attitudes towards democratic institutions (Castro Cornejo and Langston, 2024; Haime and Cantú, 2022), electoral behavior, and even their confidence in the integrity of the electoral process (Cantú and García-Ponce, 2015). For instance, in the case of Mexico, Castro Cornejo shows the important role that partisanship plays in voters' likelihood to believe the allegations of electoral fraud in the 2006 presidential election in Mexico (Castro Cornejo, 2024).

Party identification has also been related to how elites and the public evaluate democratic performance in Latin America (Singer, 2021). Specifically in Mexico, Monsiváis-Carrillo (2023) found that MORENA (AMLO's party) identifiers are clearly more satisfied with the regime's performance and trustful in the President than opposition partisans. Conversely, opposition identifiers are more confident in INE, the integrity of elections, or the judges than Morenistas.

Derived from these studies, we propose the following last hypothesis:

H3. MORENA identifiers (winners) will be more trustful of the President and Congress (where MORENA has a majority) than other partisans.

The Mexican Case

The relationship between procedural justice and institutional trust in Mexico has been particularly appealing since, for several decades, the country was a clear example of undemocratic electoralism: elections were held and opposition parties organized campaigns, but the election procedures and counts were unfair and fraudulent, a situation that has been changing since 1996. Analyzing Mexicans' trust in popularly elected institutions is particularly interesting at a time when several scholars are talking about a process of democratic backsliding, the rebuilding of a dominant party system (Loaeza, 2020; Petersen and Somuano, 2021) and "the falling of Mexico in the authoritarian trap" (Sánchez-Talanquer and Greene, 2021). These scholars consider Mexico to be undergoing a process in which presidential power is reaching unprecedented levels (considered to have begun in earnest in 2000). Given this scenario, a relevant question is whether high levels of citizens' perceived representation and trust in democratic institutions such as Congress can protect them against illiberal and authoritarian challenges. Therefore, it is crucial to understand who (dis)trusts Congress in the context of a popular president with an authoritarian inclination.

The Context

On July 1, 2018, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) won Mexico's presidential election with 53 per cent of the popular vote. The coalition led by AMLO's party, the National Regeneration Movement (MORENA), claimed a majority in both houses of Congress. For the first time since 1997, the winning party became the absolute political majority, allowing the President to advance his reform agenda. In addition, with help from its partisan allies, MORENA's deputies held two-thirds of the Deputy Chamber (Cámara de Diputados)—the majority necessary to modify the constitution.

Three years later, on July 6, 2021, midterm elections were held. At the federal level, the coalition backing AMLO (made up of the parties MORENA, the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM), and the Work Party (PT) no longer had the qualified majority needed to modify the constitution, although it would continue to hold the absolute majority. At the local level, MORENA strengthened its power structure, since it won (with the support of its allies) 12 of the 15 governorships that were in dispute. Perhaps one of

the most remarkable results of the midterm elections was MORENA's defeat in nine of the 16 boroughs (alcaldías) of Mexico City.

The 2021 elections were the largest in the country's history, not only because of the size of the electoral register but also because of the number of positions that were elected, as 32 entities in the country held local elections concurrent with the federal one (for a total of 21,000 positions). Interestingly enough, despite the COVID-19 pandemic and the numerous threats against politicians and candidate assassinations (perpetrated by organized crime), the turnout rate was 52.67 per cent, which was higher than the average rate in the last three elections of this type (44.6 per cent). The polarization generated by the President's discourse is likely to have driven the high turnout rate for the polls. On the one hand, the anti-incumbency argument states that anger among voters encourages more people to cast votes. On the other hand, a high voter turnout could also reflect a strong pro-incumbency sentiment: when voters feel strongly in favor of the incumbent government, they tend to come out in large numbers and express their support. An alternative explanation is the fact that the last midterm election was organized on the same day as many gubernatorial elections, which may be an important predictor of high levels of turnout. Beyond that, high participation can also show that citizens may have a certain level of confidence, not only in the elections and the electoral body but also in certain democratic institutions.

Institutional Trust in Mexico

Several decades ago, political analysts expressed concern regarding the fragility of young Latin American democracies. In Latin America, most citizens are extremely dissatisfied and convinced that their regular democratic institutions and representative channels do not allow them to express and exert pressure effectively. Dissatisfaction with the performance of elected presidents and congresses has led to anger and deep rejection. According to Latinobarómetro (2020), 75 per cent of citizens in Latin America believe that their governments do not defend the interests of the majority; Mexico is no exception (70 per cent).

Data from the ENCUCI show that Mexicans consider themselves to be poorly represented by several democratic institutions, such as the federal and local Congress, governors, and the presidency. Only 25.5 per cent of Mexicans feel represented by the President, 12 per cent by the governor of their state, 5.4 per cent by their local deputies, and 3 per cent by senators and federal deputies. This is particularly worrying because all these authority figures are elected via popular elections. If perceived representation is related to citizens' levels of trust in these institutions, it is likely that low institutional trust will have harmful effects on their assessment and satisfaction with democracy.

With regard to institutional trust, during the last 20 years, surveys have shown that the institutions in which Mexicans trust the most are the Army, the Catholic Church, and schoolteachers/universities, whereas those in which they trust the least are the police, Congress, and political parties. As mentioned previously, it is particularly worrisome that Mexicans trust the most institutions for which they cannot vote.

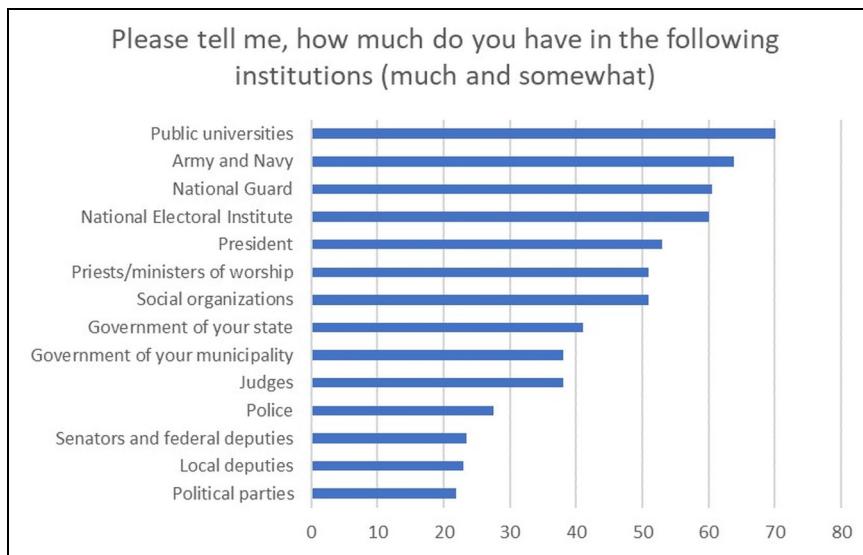


Figure 1. Trust in Institutions in Mexico (Much/Somewhat).

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ENCUCI 2020.

As shown in Figure 1, ENCUCI data confirmed this trend. The institutions with the highest levels of confidence are public universities, the Army and Navy, and the National Guard. Interestingly, the National Electoral Institute (*Instituto Nacional Electoral [INE]*) is also among the most reliable institutions for Mexicans. Representatives elected by citizens, such as senators and federal and local deputies, are located in the lower part of the graph.

In contrast to other countries, where trust in public institutions seems to be correlated (Lipset and Schneider, 1983), Mexican data on trust in Congress and in the government⁴ do not follow similar patterns. In fact, they have different trends: people who trust one institution do not necessarily trust the other, or trust can increase in one institution and decrease in the other.

Figure 2 shows that during the period 1995–2020, Mexicans' level of trust in Congress was higher than that in the government, with the exception of President Vicente Fox's six-year term. Mexicans' trust in Congress appears to be less volatile than their trust in the government. The lowest point on the Congress trust line was in 2003, a year in which midterm elections were held. Polls showed that, while President Fox's approval ratings remained high, many voters were disillusioned by his failure to deliver on his promise to create millions of jobs, which he made when he was elected in July 2000. Voters were also disappointed by Fox's inability to push major reform proposals through a divided Congress. The second lowest point of trust in Congress occurred in 1996. This may be related to the guerrilla uprising that began in Chiapas a year and a half earlier and the tremendous effects of the economic crisis that started at the end of 1994.

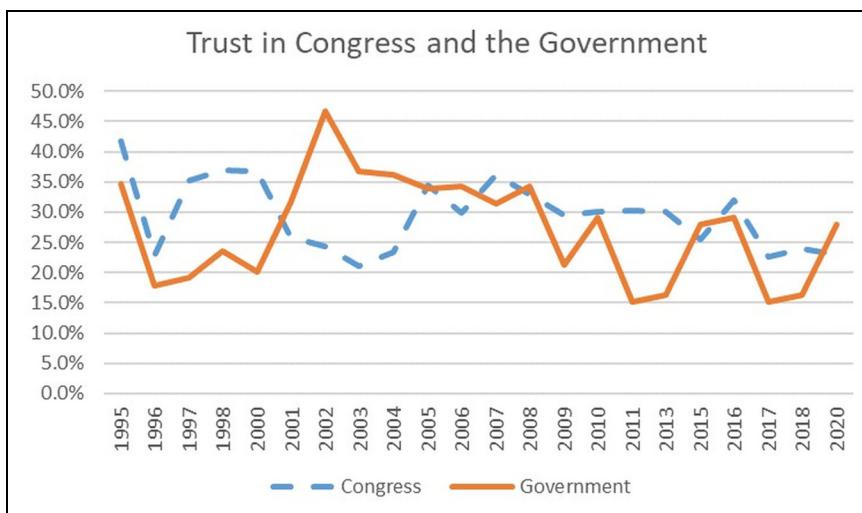


Figure 2. Trust in Congress and Government, 1995–2020.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on Latinobarómetro.

Regarding trust in government, there is an upward trend from the time presidents begin their term in office until they reach the two-year mark. From that point onward, citizens' trust in them begins to decrease—and even plummet in some cases, as was the case of Presidents Calderón and Peña Nieto in 2011 and 2017, when citizens' trust in them fell to less than 15 per cent.

Data and Methods

To test our hypotheses, we use the ENCUCI 2020 survey, which aimed to study Mexico's civic culture and citizenship. The survey was conducted face-to-face by INEGI between August 17 and September 18, 2020. The sample comprised 25,113 Mexican citizens aged 15 years and over who lived permanently in private houses within the national territory (INE, 2022: 283). Samples were collected using a stratified, probabilistic, clustered sampling design. The survey asked respondents questions on their household's sociodemographic characteristics; interest in and knowledge about politics; beliefs, values, and attitudes; associational life; perception of power; participation; electoral integrity; and representation.⁵

As discussed earlier, we assume that the level of trust Mexican citizens have in the President and Congress may differ; thus, their determinants may also differ. To test this possibility, we estimate the models of trust in the President and Congress separately, using the same explanatory variables and examining the effect of these variables on the level of trust in each institution. In addition, we estimate the model of the difference in trust in the President and Congress to see if the

same predictors have similar effects on how citizens distinguish trust in these two representative institutions⁶.

The models are specified as follows.

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Trust in the President}_{pi} = & \alpha_{pi} + \beta_{pi1} * \text{Representation}_{pi} + \beta_{pi2} * \text{Procedural Justice}_{pi} \\ & + \beta_{pi3} * \text{Partisanship}_{pi} + \sum_k^n \beta_{pik} * X_{pki} + \gamma_{pj} + \epsilon_{pj} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Trust in Congress}_{ci} = & \alpha_{ci} + \beta_{ci1} * \text{Representation}_{ci} + \beta_{ci2} * \text{Procedural Justice}_{ci} \\ & + \beta_{ci3} * \text{Partisanship}_{ci} + \sum_k^n \beta_{cik} * X_{cik} + \gamma_{cj} + \epsilon_{ci} \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned} \text{Difference in Trust}_{di} = & \alpha_{di} + \beta_{di1} * \text{Representation}_{di} + \beta_{di2} * \text{Procedural Justice}_{di} \\ & + \beta_{di3} * \text{Partisanship}_{di} + \sum_k^n \beta_{dik} * X_{dki} + \gamma_{dj} + \epsilon_{di} \end{aligned}$$

where β is the estimated coefficient; i and j stand for the cross-sectional units; k is the number of other independent and control variables; γ_j refers to dummy variables for 32 federal entities of Mexico; p , c , and d correspond to the models of the President, Congress, and the difference in trust in the President and Congress, respectively; and ϵ_i is an error term. A detailed description of the variables used for our analyses is presented below.

Dependent Variables

To measure trust in the President (*President*) and Congress (*Congress*), we used the following questions included in the ENCUCI. More specifically, the question ap5_3_2 was used to measure the level of trust in the President, whereas the question ap5_3_6 was for the level of trust in Congress:

ap5_3: Please tell me, how much do you trust the following institutions?: Do you trust them a lot, trust them somewhat, distrust them somewhat, or distrust them a lot?

ap5_3_2: President of the Republic.

ap5_3_6: Senators and federal deputies.

For both questions, we coded 1 for the response “Distrust a lot,” 2 for “Distrust somewhat,” 3 for “Trust somewhat,” and 4 for “Trust a lot,” and treated the categories of “Do not know” and “Does not apply” as 0. The distribution of the answers is shown in Figure 3. The percentages of respondents who distrust the President and Congress (“Distrust a lot” and “Distrust somewhat”) were 41.6 per cent and 76.1 per cent, respectively, whereas the percentages of those who trust them (“Trust somewhat”

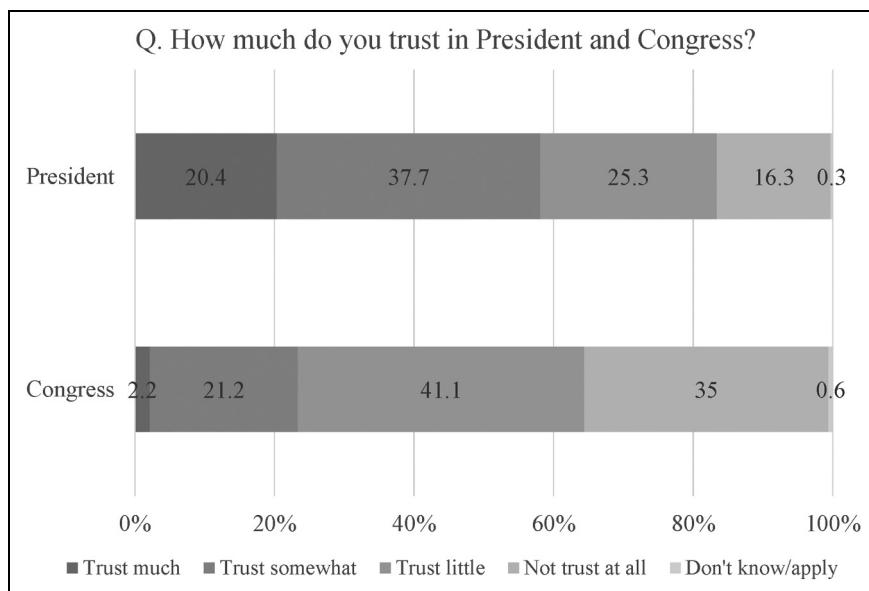


Figure 3. Trust in the President and Congress.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ENCUCI 2020.

and “Trust a lot”) were 58.1 per cent and 23.4 per cent, respectively. Interestingly, trust in the President was much greater than that in Congress, exhibiting a difference of 34.7 per cent in the year 2020.

Finally, to measure the difference in trust in the President and Congress (*difference*), we subtracted the trust in Congress values from the trust in the president values for each unit ($difference = President - Congress$). This variable ranges from -3 to 4 . Positive values mean that trust in the President is greater than trust in Congress. Moreover, a larger value means a greater difference in trust between the two representative institutions. As shown in Figure 4, the data are normally distributed with a mean of 0.644 and a median of 1, suggesting that trust in the President was much higher than trust in Congress, as shown in Figure 3.

Independent Variables

As discussed in the previous section, three hypotheses were tested using the ENCUCI survey: representation, procedural justice, and partisanship. The two main hypotheses postulated in the well-established literature regarding institutional performance (operationalized as voters' evaluation of government policy performance and their experiences of corruption) and social trust were also tested in our models. For the hypotheses on representation and partisanship, we measured them and constructed one variable for each. Since procedural justice is a multi-dimensional concept, we operationalized it in

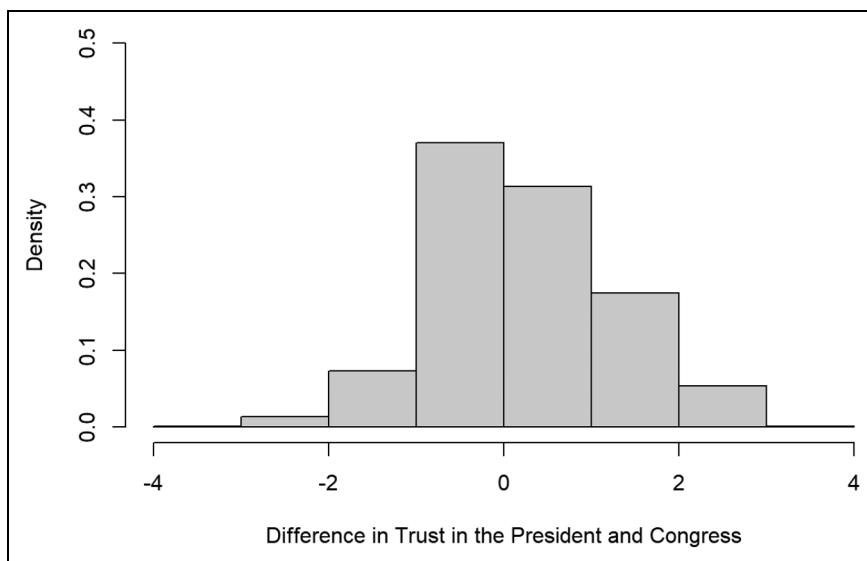


Figure 4. Difference in Trust in the President and Congress.

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on ENCUCI 2020.

three ways corresponding to the theoretical arguments we developed above: electoral integrity, the rule of law, and citizens' voice. The operationalization of the variables for representation, procedural justice, and partisanship is explained below.

Representation: To operationalize the perception of representation, we used the following questions for both the President and Congress:

ap9_4: Who best represents your interests?

The respondents were asked to choose an answer from among "The President of the Republic," "federal legislators (deputies and senators)," "local deputies," "state governors," "mayors," "all of them," "none," and "do not know/no response." For the variables for the perception of representation by the President (*Rep_Pres1*) and Congress (*Rep_Con1*), we created dummy variables for each. More specifically, if the respondents chose the President of the Republic for the question, we coded the variable *Rep_Pres1* as 1; otherwise, we assigned it a value of 0. Likewise, if the respondents answered that federal legislators (deputies and senators) best represented their interests, the variable *Rep_Con1* took the value of 1; otherwise, it was coded as 0. We expected that the higher the level of perceived representation, the more likely the respondent was to trust in the President and Congress.

One might question whether the use of this dichotomous measure is appropriate to the perceived representation of these institutions. The potential shortcoming of this measure is that the responses to this question are mutually exclusive, although respondents may

feel represented by both.⁷ Since there are no other questions that directly ask respondents about their perceptions of representation by the President and Congress, we used this question as a proxy for representation.

Procedural Justice: As we mentioned above, procedural justice is a complex multi-dimensional concept. In order to operationalize it, we used three indicators: electoral integrity, the rule of law, and citizen's voice. ENCUCI asked seven questions regarding electoral integrity. Each of these variables had values ranging from 1 ("Never") to 5 ("Very frequently"):

ap7_16: In your opinion, how often do the following situations occur during elections in Mexico?

1. Votes are counted fairly (*Transparency*).
2. Opposition candidates are banned from running (*Competitiveness*).
3. There is vote buying (*Cleanliness*).
4. The rich buy elections (*Justice*).
5. Electoral authorities are fair (*Fairness*).
6. Voters are threatened at polling stations (*Freedom*).
7. The government uses public resources to favor its political parties (*Impartiality*).

As for the rule of law (*Rule_Law*), we used the following question item. The value of this variable ranged from 1 ("Not at all") to 4 ("Very much").

ap5_12: How much do you think Mexican leaders (mayors, governors, heads of government, and the President of the Republic) respect the law?

Regarding citizens' voices, we used the question below. For this variable (*Voice*), values ranged from 1 ("Strongly disagree") to 4 ("Strongly agree").

ap4_10: Tell me how much you agree or disagree with the following statement: "In Mexico, the government takes the opinions of people like you into account when making decisions."

Using principal component analysis, we reduced the dimensions of the procedural justice variable in three stages. In the first step, principal components were computed for the seven variables of electoral integrity (transparency, competitiveness, cleanliness, fairness, justice, freedom, and impartiality). The first component was highly correlated with cleanliness, justice, freedom, and impartiality, while the second had a strong correlation with transparency, competitiveness, and fairness. In the second stage, we added the rule of law variable to the component analysis. The results were the same as in the first stage. We also found that the rule of law was not strongly correlated with the first and second components, suggesting the importance of including it as a separate variable. In the third stage, the principal component analysis included the seven electoral integrity variables and the citizens' voice variable. Citizen's voice was highly correlated with the second component, therefore, we decided not to include this variable separately in the models.

In sum, through principal component analyses, seven electoral integrity variables were reduced to two dimensions: the first component (*Cleanliness*, *Justice*, *Freedom*, and

Table 1. Hypotheses, Operationalization of Variables, and Predictions.

| | Trust in the president | Trust in congress | Difference |
|---------------------------|--|--|--|
| H1: Representation | Perception of representation (+) | Perception of representation (+) | Perception of representation (+) |
| H2: Procedural Justice | Procedural electoral integrity (PEI) (+) Institutional electoral integrity (IEI) (+) Rule of Law (+) | Procedural electoral integrity (PEI) (+) Institutional electoral integrity (IEI) (+) Rule of Law (+) | Procedural electoral integrity (PEI) (+) Institutional electoral integrity (IEI) (+) Rule of Law (+) |
| H3: Partisanship | MORENA supporter (+) | MORENA Supporter (+) | MORENA Supporter (+) |

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Impartiality) and the second component (*Transparency, Competitiveness, and Fairness*). The former referred to the electoral process and the latter to the behavior of the electoral authorities. We called them *Procedural Electoral Integrity (PEI)* and *Institutional Electoral Integrity (IEI)*, respectively. Second, we found that the rule of law variable fell into a separate dimension. Thus, procedural justice was operationalized as *PEI*, *IEI*, and the rule of law, which were included in all models.

Partisanship: To measure party identification, we used the following question, and then we created dummy variables for supporters for the incumbent party (*MORENA*) and independent voters (*Independent*), which have gained importance in influencing the recent elections. These variables take the value of 1 if they are *MORENA* supporters and independent voters respectively, and the value of 0 otherwise.

ap7_9: Regardless of which political party you voted for in 2018, which political party do you most identify with?

In addition to these variables, we included a battery of independent and control variables such as *Institutional Performance*, *Corruption*, *Personal Trust*, *Political Interest*, *Political Knowledge*, *Internal Political Efficacy*, *Voting in the 2018 Election*, *New Media Consumption* (social networking sites [SNSs]), *Age*, *Sex*, *Education*, and *Income*. The expected signs of the coefficients for the main variables are summarized in Table 1. The operationalization of the control variables and the descriptive statistics of all variables used in our empirical analyses are presented in Tables A1 and A3 in the online supplemental materials.

Empirical Analyses

We estimated three different models to evaluate trust in the President and Congress, using complete cases for which missing values were excluded ($N = 9395$). First, we estimated OLS models for trust in the President (Model 1) and Congress (Model 3) including state-level dummy variables to control for region-specific effects. Second, since the dependent variables were categorical, we also ran ordered logistic regression models for trust in the

President (Model 2) and Congress (Model 4) as robustness checks. However, the results were highly similar among these estimators, as statistical significance and the expected signs barely changed. Because it is more straightforward to interpret the results of simple OLS regressions, we present the specific results of Models 1 and 3 for trust in the President and Congress, respectively. Third, we estimated an OLS regression model for the difference in trust in the President and Congress (Model 5) in a similar setting with the models to assess trust in the President and Congress. The only difference is that Model 5 includes the variables for the perception of representation by both the President and Congress, which may independently influence the level of difference.

The results of Models 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 are summarized in Table A4 in the online supplemental materials. Figure 5 shows the results of Models 1 and 3 for trust in the President and Congress, respectively, whereas Figure 6 presents the results of Model 5.

Trust in the President

First, the results of the estimation of Model 1 (trust in the President) show that all variables related to our hypotheses, which are the perception of representation (0.386),

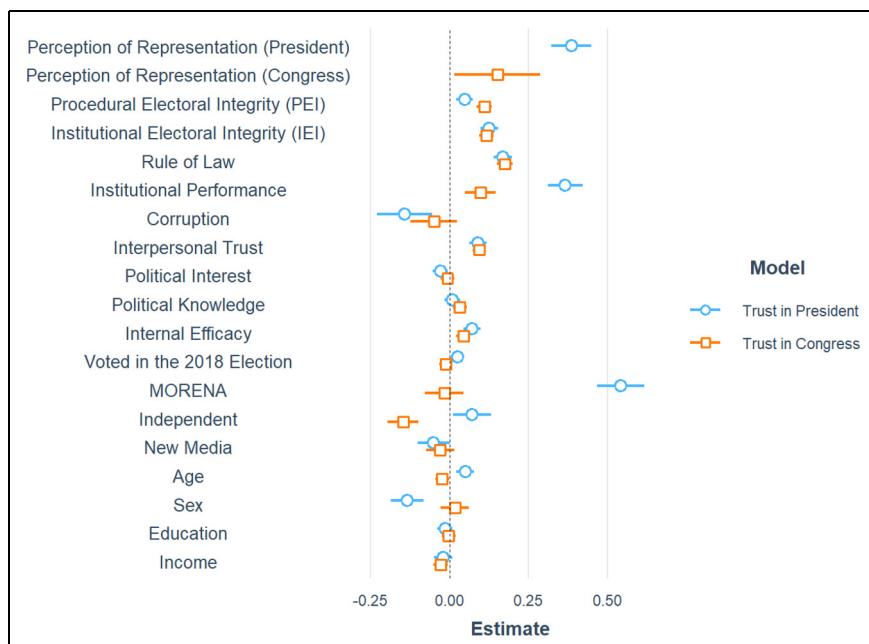


Figure 5. Results of OLS Regression Analyses for Trust in the President and Congress.

Source: Authors' own Elaboration.

Note: These are the results of Models 1 and 3. The detailed results are reported in Table A4 of the Supplementary Material.

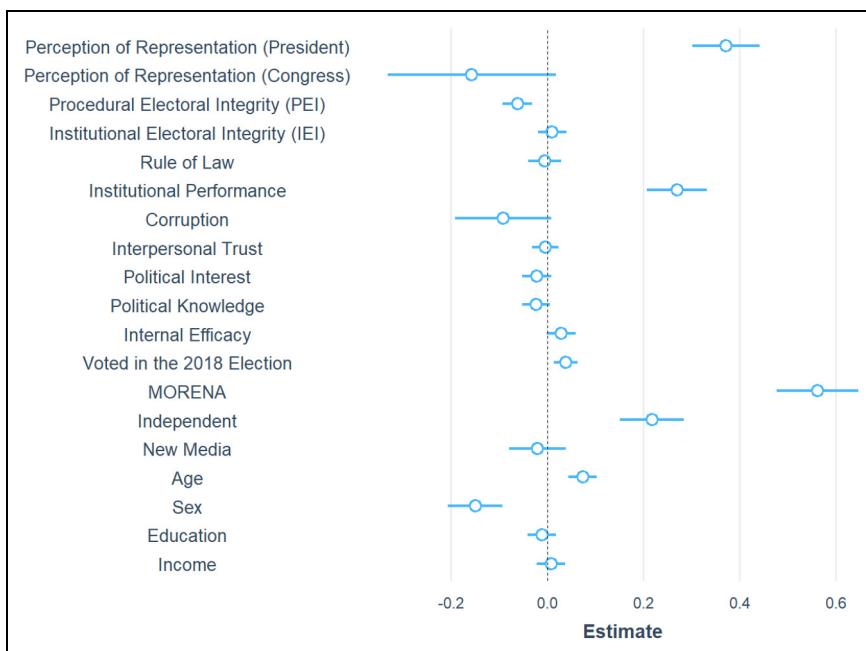


Figure 6. Results of OLS Regression Analyses for Difference in Trust in the President and Congress.

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Note: The detailed results are reported in Table A4 of the Supplementary Material.

procedural electoral integrity (PEI [0.049]), institutional electoral integrity (IEI [0.049]), the rule of law (0.132), and partisanship (MORENA [0.541], and independent [0.071]), had significant effects on respondents' trust in the President ($p < 0.05$), which supports all three hypotheses. In addition, as previous studies demonstrate, we confirmed that institutional performance (institutional performance [0.366] and corruption perception [-0.142]), and interpersonal trust (0.039) showed expected effects. The results were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$).

Second, to interpret the substantive significance, a one-unit increase in the perception of representation led to a higher level of trust in the President, exhibiting an increase of 0.386 points. As for the three variables for procedural justice (PEI, IEI, and the rule of law), a one-unit increase was associated with a greater level of trust in the President by 0.049, 0.132, and 0.213 points respectively. Higher levels of support for MORENA and being independent were also associated with an increase in trust in the President by 0.541 and 0.071, respectively. Regarding institutional performance, the higher the recognition of government performance and fewer corruption incidents experienced, the higher respondents' level of trust in the Presidency was. Finally, the levels of interpersonal and institutional trust in the presidency were positively correlated.

Third, as for the control variables, *political interest* (-0.043), *internal political efficacy* (0.076), *Voted in the 2018 election* (0.034), *age* (0.003), and *sex* (-0.133) showed statistically significant effects ($p < 0.05$). These results suggest that people with higher internal political efficacy and who voted for the 2018 election tended to have greater trust in the President. It is also noteworthy that sex was negatively associated with trust in the President, suggesting that males were more likely to trust the President.

Trust in Congress

First, the estimation results of the Congress models are similar to those of the president models, although there are important differences in a few of the independent and control variables. Four of the variables to test our hypotheses, namely, *perception of representation* (0.151), *PEI* (0.113), *IEI* (0.123), and *the rule of law* (0.221) had significant effects on respondents' trust in Congress ($p < .05$). In addition, *institutional performance* (0.079), and *interpersonal trust* (0.041) also showed statistically significant effects. In contrast to the results of the president models, the variables for partisanship showed different results: *MORENA* had no significant effects, and *Independent* had a significant result with a negative sign of the coefficient. We will discuss this result later in the text. Furthermore, the effect of *corruption* was not significant.

Second, as for the substantive interpretation, a one-unit increase in the perception of representation increased the level of trust in the President by 0.151 points. With regard to the three variables for procedural justice (*PEI*, *IEI*, and *the rule of law*), a one-unit increase was associated with a greater level of trust in the President by 0.113 , 0.123 , and 0.221 points respectively. Regarding institutional performance, the higher the recognition of government performance was experienced, the more the respondents trusted Congress. Furthermore, a greater level of interpersonal trust was more likely to increase trust in Congress.

Third, the control variables *political knowledge* (0.035), *internal political efficacy* (0.046), *age* (-0.002), and *income* (-0.013) had statistically significant effects on the level of trust in Congress ($p < .05$). In contrast to the models for trust in the President, political interest and the experience of having voted in the 2018 election were not predictors of the level of trust in Congress.

Finally, as indicated above, important differences were noted when we compared them to those in the model for trust in the President. It deserves special attention that *Party ID Independent* was negatively associated with trust in Congress, whereas *Party ID MORENA* did not have a significant effect, in contrast to the model of trust in the President. How can we interpret these differences between both models? A possible answer is that high trust in the President by MORENA supporters may be attributed to AMLO's popularity, who has been highly successful in using a discourse that appeals directly to "the people," without other actors' mediation. However, the popularity of the President does not necessarily translate into voters' trust in Congress among supporters of the incumbent party. This may be because empathizing with a single person is easier than doing so with a collective body. Moreover, especially in Mexico, it is likely that

the identity that people have developed towards MORENA is largely owed to AMLO. Instead, many citizens (including MORENA partisans) perceive Congress as an amalgamation of various political “tribes” in constant conflict. Furthermore, voters who are not attached to any political party may not trust Congress simply because it is dominated by a ruling party with which they do not sympathize.

Difference in Trust in the President and Congress

Estimation of the Model 5 yields interesting results. First, some of the independent variables such as the perception of representation by the President (0.370), partisanship (MORENA [0.561]), independent [0.217]), and institutional performance (0.269) had significant effects on the difference in trust ($p < .05$). These results were consistent with those of the Models 1 and 3. Second, the variables related to procedural justice show mixed results. Specifically, the *PEI* (-0.064) had a significant effect ($p < .05$), but the sign was negative, which was different from Models 1 and 3. Conversely, the *IEI* (0.010) and the *rule of law* (-0.007) were not statistically significant. Third, the control variables *Voted in the 2018 Election* (0.083), *Age* (0.005), and *Sex* (-0.150) had statistically significant effects on the level of difference ($p < .05$), which were mostly consistent with the results of Models 1 and 3. Based on these results, we can infer that citizens who have disproportionately more trust in the President than in Congress are associated with lower levels of procedural electoral integrity. This could be further evidence that the high level of trust in the President among MORENA supporters is primarily due to AMLO’s popularity.

Table 2. Summary of Results.

| | Trust in the president | Trust in congress | Difference |
|------------------------|--|--|--|
| H1: Representation | Perception of representation (+) | Perception of representation (+) | Perception of representation (+) |
| H2: Procedural Justice | Procedural electoral integrity (PEI) (+) Institutional electoral integrity (IEI) (+) Rule of Law (+) | Procedural electoral integrity (PEI) (+) Institutional electoral integrity (IEI) (+) Rule of Law (+) | Procedural electoral integrity (PEI) (-) Institutional electoral integrity (IEI) (+), but not statistically significant Rule of Law (-), but not statistically significant |
| H3: Partisanship | MORENA supporter (+) | MORENA supporter (-), but not statistically significant | MORENA supporter (+) |

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Taken together, our empirical analyses confirmed most of the hypotheses related to trust in the President and Congress with some nuanced results for the model of the difference in trust in the President and Congress. Specifically, we found that the perception of representation and procedural justice (*PEI, IEI, rule of law*) had significant effects on people's trust in both institutions. Furthermore, our analyses showed that party identification had a distinctive effect on trust in the President and Congress. While identification with MORENA boosted trust in the former, being independent and not being sympathetic to any political party dampened trust in the latter. These findings highlight the importance of disaggregating political institutions and exploring the distinct mechanisms through which people perceive and shape their trust in each institution (Table 2).

Conclusions

In this article, we analyzed the determinants of trust in two democratic institutions popularly elected—the Presidency and Congress—with evidence from Mexico. On June 6, 2021, nationwide elections were held. The high turnout rate, despite being a midterm election, emphasizes the effects of the President's polarizing discourse, but also citizens' trust in institutions such as the INE and the elections themselves. Institutional trust is a crucial element of modern democracies. Paradoxically, the spread of democracy worldwide has been accompanied by a decline in levels of institutional trust, which, in many cases, has been more acute in institutions elected via popular vote.

We believe that our study is particularly important at a time when various academics have noted the recentralization of power in the figure of the President, which has led to democratic backsliding in Mexico. Although Mexicans have historically tended to trust the President more than Congress⁸, this has become more evident during AMLO's presidency. According to data from ENCUCI (2020), 53 per cent of Mexicans trust ("a lot" or "somewhat") the President, whereas only 23 per cent trust ("a lot" or "somewhat") Congress.

Institutional trust has generally been explained in terms of extended trust and institutional performance. We focused on two factors that are on the input side of the institutional process-building process. Specifically, we used the concept of representation and built on the procedural justice approach to support the idea that individuals trust the processes and institutions in which they perceive themselves to be represented, they feel to have a voice, and they believe are honest and unbiased. We add the idea that partisanship is also a possible determinant of institutional trust.

In accordance with our hypotheses, our statistical analysis shows that the perception of representation, procedural justice (operationalized as procedural electoral integrity, institutional electoral integrity, and the rule of law), and partisanship have significant effects on people's trust in the President and Congress. Our results point to the importance of citizens' perceptions of procedural justice, as well as the relevance of representative institutions (those elected by popular vote) truly representing citizens' interests. Both are fundamental factors associated with higher levels of trust in institutions such as the Congress or the Presidency. The positive effect of procedural justice on institutional trust is particularly relevant in the Mexican context because of the costs that the building of an electoral authority,

independent and autonomous from the government, has implied in recent decades. Moreover, the current President's constant attacks on the INE and the electoral court may prove very costly if they manage to erode their image, especially in a disputed electoral context.

In line with prior research, we corroborated that institutional performance and interpersonal trust also have important effects on our dependent variables. Interestingly, our analyses showed that party identification had a distinctive effect on confidence in the President and Congress. While attachment to MORENA increased the level of trust in the former, being independent or not sympathetic to any political party reduced confidence in the latter. This may be due first, to the fact that it is easier to empathize with a single person rather than with a collective body, especially when the President is highly popular. Second, in Mexico, it is likely that the identification that citizens have developed with MORENA is largely owed to AMLO. Third, since the beginning of his administration, AMLO has been discrediting institutions, including parties.

Overall, our findings highlight the importance of disaggregating political institutions and exploring the distinct mechanisms through which people perceive and shape their trust in each institution. The data analyzed and other surveys⁹ show low levels of trust in Mexican democratic institutions in general, revealing that, unlike the democratic ideal, citizens perceive representatives in Mexico as more committed to their party leaders than to the citizens they represent.

While this research has focused on Mexico, its findings are relevant to other contexts in Latin America and beyond. Recent studies have found citizens' trust in core democratic institutions, such as parliaments and governments, has declined in Western societies. Specifically in young democracies, low trust in Congress may be a condition that favors the degradation of the constitutional-liberal component of democracy. Distrust in Congress and other democratic institutions may contribute to the accumulation of the power of populist executives to make decisions excluding "opponents" and without consulting other actors, endangering democracy itself. How low levels of trust in certain democratic institutions diminish the resilience of democracy in the face of an authoritarian onslaught remains an open question for future research.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. Based on Eurobarometer data, there was an average decline in trust in governments and parliaments in Europe between 1994 and 2013.
2. Original responses were coded on a scale ranging from 0 (“not at all”) to 7 (“a lot”). Responses were rescaled from 0 to 100. Data from LAPOP. https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/lapop.central/viz/LAPOPV3_2/Combination?publish=yes
3. The ENCUCI 2020 was conducted by the National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics (Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática [INEGI]) and the National Electoral Institute (Instituto Nacional Electoral [INE]). The dataset is publicly available at: <https://www.inegi.org.mx/programas/encuci/2020/> (Last accessed on August 10, 2023).
4. For comparison purposes, we use the government instead of the president because the Latinobarómetro does not have a question that asks about trust in the latter. We assume that people associate “government” with the presidency and its bureaucracy.
5. The detailed questionnaire can be consulted in the Methodological Appendix (Anexo Metodológico) of the INE (2022).
6. We appreciate an anonymous reviewer for suggesting the inclusion of the variable “difference in trust in the Presidency and Congress”.
7. We appreciate an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this measurement concern.
8. This has been found in different studies about Mexico’s political culture (see different waves of the Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas).
9. See, for example, Latinobarómetro (2018, 2020) and ENCUCI (2020).

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