

Osten carefully makes a convincing argument without overstating her case. She demonstrates that, although heavily influenced by it, the Partido de la Revolución Mexicana (PRM) was no mere carbon copy of the southeast's socialism, whose various parties were likewise not identical to one another. She also shows that Calles's national party featured other influences, most notably Luis Morones and the Laborista Party (PLM). In fact, this volume might have benefited from a chapter on the PLM's influence on the early PRM, which would have enabled the author to further round out the examination of the PRM's various influences without straying too far from the book's emphasis on the southeast.

Conversely, material taken from Tabasco archives might have added to the study's strong regional emphasis. As it stands, this volume easily represents the best treatment of the PRM's origins available, and Osten should be commended for producing such a well researched, accessible, and useful study.

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Unrevolutionary Mexico: The Birth of a Strange Dictatorship. By Paul Gillingham. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021. Pp. 464. Abbreviations. Glossary. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$45.00 cloth.
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Paul Gillingham deepens the relatively light historiographical imprint of mid twentieth-century PRI politics, significantly revising historians' understanding of the official party's machinery by comparing and contrasting regional political formation in the states of Guerrero and Veracruz between 1945 and 1955, roughly centered around the Miguel Alemán administration. This archivally rich study demonstrates the everyday mechanics of hegemony and the manufacture of consent.

The PRI's twentieth-century domination was far from a foregone conclusion. Evidence of plenty of agitation, would-be coups, and the implausible retention of cacical power shows how Mexico's *dictablanda*, or soft dictatorship, narrowly evaded the military dictatorship pitfall in which nearly every other contemporary Latin American nation found itself—but not for lack of violent ambition in military and political circles.

Two very thorough background chapters on each state's respective geographic and economic conditions, stretching back into the nineteenth century, provide such deep context that they could stand as regional microhistories on their own. The next pair of chapters traces the interlaced municipal, state, and federal elections of the 1940s, which saw divergent results in top-down attempts to incorporate local *pistoleros* and *agrarristas*

into the party structure. Chapter 5, “Elections, Fraud, and Democracy,” is the heart of the book, relying on the refocused regional lens to pose some significant questions about the functions of electoral politics in a democracy. This chapter shows the capaciousness of the PRI as an organization designed to reshuffle (however slightly) the longstanding hierarchies of power unique to regional locales. Yet, as the author convincingly argues, the pervasive fraud and repression endemic in electoral processes does not point to a successfully repressive machine. Instead, the level of investment poured into turning out desired electoral results spoke rather to the persistence of public belief in them. Else why bother with the façade of ballot boxes at all?

The next chapter takes up the question of violence and demilitarization, sustaining an interesting comparison with Colombia’s contemporary decade of violence that preceded its controlled democracy experiment. A chapter on development from the vantage point of the two states helps to dismantle the myth of the Mexican Miracle by demonstrating how the mechanisms of corruption siphoned off much of the speculative capital. But Gillingham demonstrates how the pervasiveness of corruption translated to political capital at the most local level, introducing both stabilizing and destabilizing effects that ultimately strengthened the PRI.

The next chapter shows the unconvincing way that the PRI corralled revolutionary icons, heroes, and narratives to bolster its image, and the lackluster popular response that such initiatives elicited. Finally, the last chapter posits some answers to an important question suggested by its title: why did Mexico not become a military dictatorship? At the provincial level, the remaining commanding officers of a deeply diminished army found their rent-seeking outposts to be lucrative and influential enough to temper higher ambitions. At the federal level, the most imposing military brass—ex-presidents and revolutionary veterans among them—operated as an unofficial senate behind the scenes of the elected president. But the balance of power was tenuous at best, and secret security archives reveal that Mexico only very narrowly escaped succumbing to a military coup.

The sheer volume of evidence presented in this daunting history shows how the sausage is made, or how using “the language of democracy, but with the unequivocal meaning of authoritarian centralization” (280) came to be the *modus operandi* of the PRI. It is not a book for the uninitiated in modern Mexican history—it sweeps through proper nouns at breakneck speed and it will be up to the reader to keep apace. But the book will utterly transform scholars’ understanding of the shape and scope of PRI hegemony and the flexible interplay between force and consent in its regional manifestations during this defining decade.

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