CITIZENS OF SCANDAL

Journalism, Secrecy, and the Politics of Reckoning in Mexico

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To my parents, Susan Caldwell and Matthew Freije

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMI	Agencia Mexicana de Información / Mexican Information Agency
BAY	Banco Agrario de Yucatán / Yucatán Agrarian Bank
CCH	Colegio de Ciencias y Humanidades / School of Sciences and Humanities
CCI	Central Campesina Independiente / Independent Campesino Organization
CDE	Comité de Defensa Ejidal / Ejidal Defense Committee
CENCOS	Centro Nacional de Comunicación Social / National Center for Social Communication
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIASES	Centro de Información y Análisis de los Efectos del Sismo / Center for Information and Analysis of the Effects of the Earthquake
CISA	Comunicación e Información, S.A. / Communication and Information, S.A.
CNC	Confederación Nacional Campesina / National Campesino Confederation
CNOP	Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares / National Confederation of Popular Organizations
CROC	Confederación Revolucionaria de Obreros y Campesinos / Revolutionary Confederation of Workers and Campesinos
CTM	Confederación de Trabajadores de México / Confederation of Mexican Workers
DFS	Dirección Federal de Seguridad / Federal Security Office
DGIPS	Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales / General Office for Political and Social Intelligence
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FCE	Fondo de Cultura Económica / Endowment for Economic Culture
FPI	Frente Popular Independiente / Independent Popular Front
IMF	International Monetary Fund

IMP	Instituto Mexicano de Petróleo / Mexican Petroleum Institute
JLCA	Junta Local de Conciliación y Arbitraje / Local Committee on Conciliation and Arbitration
MLN	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional / Movement for National Liberation
NAFINSA	Nacional Financiera / National Finance Agency
NIIO	New International Information Order
OPEC	Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional / National Action Party
PBS	Public Broadcasting Service
PCM	Partido Comunista Mexicano / Mexican Communist Party
PEMEX	Petróleos Mexicanos / Mexican Petroleum
PERMARGO	Perforadora Marítima del Golfo / Maritime Drilling of the Gulf
PFDT	Procuraduría Federal de la Defensa del Trabajo / Office of the Federal Attorney General for Labor Protection
PGR	Procuraduría General de la República / Office of the Attorney General of the Republic
PIPSA	Productora e Importadora de Papel, S. A. / Paper Importer and Producer, S. A.
PJF	Policía Judicial Federal / Federal Judicial Police
PMT	Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores / Mexican Workers' Party
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional / Institutional Revolutionary Party
PSUM	Partido Socialista Unificado de México / United Socialist Party of Mexico
SEDUE	Secretaría de Desarrollo Urbano y Ecología / Ministry of Urban Development and Ecology
SEP	Secretaría de Educación Pública / Ministry of Public Education
SMGE	Sociedad Mexicana de Geografía y Estadística / Mexican Society of Geography and Statistics
SSA	Secretaría de Salubridad y Asistencia / Ministry of Health and Assistance
UN	United Nations
UNAM	Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México / National Autonomous University of Mexico
UPD	Unión de Periodistas Democráticas / Union of Democratic Journalists
USIA	United States Information Agency

Long before I began graduate school, my interest in Mexican politics and culture was shaped by my own geography. I grew up in a small town known only for its avocado groves and proximity to a military base. It was an hour's drive from Tijuana, thirty minutes from the Pauma Indian Reservation, and fifteen minutes from an imposing immigration checkpoint. So began my education in border politics. I am grateful to friends and teachers, including Tony Acevedo, Everard Meade, and Eric Van Young, who encouraged me to formally study the dynamics that I frequently encountered as a young adult.

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that made the writing process less lonely and reminded me that scholarly work is best when undertaken in conversation with others.

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In Mexico, we inhabit a realm of two truths: one is the people's, they know it because they have seen it, it is what everyone on the street recognizes as reality; the other truth is the official one, the one that is imposed by decree.

—JOSÉ LUIS GONZÁLEZ MEZA AND WALTER LÓPEZ KOEHL, *UN ASESINO EN LA PRESIDENCIA?*

The press, a big gossip, will go off and tell everyone.

—ROBERTO BLANCO MOHENO, *MEMORIAS DE UN REPORTERO*

In July 1979 star journalist Manuel Buendía reported on Acapulco's "decadence" and decline, painting a picture of deteriorated opulence.[1] His nationally syndicated column described blue waters cluttered with bottles and cans and untreated sewage runoff that posed a serious health hazard to swimmers. In addition to producing new environmental threats, the modernization of the resort city in the 1940s had delivered uneven benefits. To construct high-rise waterfront hotels, federal developers expropriated small-scale farmers' land and (with the aid of police) burned their crops.[2] The result was popular protests, housing shortages, and expanding squatter settlements on the surrounding hillside. Social discontent was still evident decades later. Buendía observed protests in the city square, where taxi drivers mounted a hunger strike to demand the *placas* (medallions) that they needed to legally work. The columnist blamed this conflict on the unpopular state governor, Rubén Figueroa, whom he depicted as a thug with a paunch that "shook like a 'sack full of skulls'"—a turn of phrase that humiliated the politician and delighted disgruntled residents.[3] Overall the article suggested that Acapulco's once glimmering exterior, like Mexico's modernization, could no longer mask the ugly reality of violence, impunity, and inequality.

The attention from a prominent Mexico City journalist sparked impassioned exchanges that crossed class divides as local workers, reporters, and public officials responded to the article. In Acapulco's central plaza, the taxi

drivers took to megaphones to broadcast the columnist's accusations. Meanwhile, white-collar hotel workers congratulated Buendía on his influential article.[4] Letters and megaphones were just two of the technologies, along with photocopy machines, talk radio shows, telephones, flyers, and graffiti, that readers used to comment on what they read. This engagement exemplifies the emergence of new publics that, while not fully national in scope, connected Mexico City and regional news consumers.

Buendía's was just one of many articles that broke with the long-standing conformism in national broadsheets, the country's oldest and most prominent newspapers. In the 1960s, influential Mexico City reporters of diverse educational and ideological backgrounds increasingly exposed public officials' misdeeds, including embezzlement, torture, police violence, and electoral fraud.[5] Journalists also introduced new perspectives into their reporting, citing the testimonies of marginalized groups and including the views of disaffected officials. Exposés at times erupted into political scandals that circulated between print and broadcast media, electrified debate, and connected different publics, altering the nature of urban political culture.

This book explores contests over knowledge production, political voice, and information access in late twentieth-century Mexico. From the 1960s through the 1980s, the public sphere became more robust and the political arena became more competitive. These decades are popularly and historiographically associated with Mexico's democratization, a gradual process by which the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) allowed new spaces for urban political engagement. While independent unions, student movements, and civic organizations flourished, the PRI held on to the presidency until 2000, capping over seventy years in power. To explain this slow decline in political dominance, scholars have emphasized the importance that watershed moments played in reversing the PRI's legitimacy.[6] The 1968 massacre of protesting students, the painful 1982 debt crisis, and the 1985 Mexico City earthquake all figure prominently in scholarly explanations for Mexico's democratic change. A study of political scandals, however, demonstrates that such "watersheds" were themselves a creation of the national press.

Citizens of Scandal examines how Mexico City print media critically shaped narratives of political change. It explores what happened when wrongdoing, while common knowledge, became a topic of public debate. I argue that the circulation of critical news and spectacle had two transformative effects on political culture and urban citizenship. First, the national publicity of wrongdoing undermined state attempts to manage public discourse.

Governing officials traditionally made decisions behind closed doors and announced them after the fact. Yet news exposés disrupted this practice by forcing federal officials to respond to public opinion and to reckon with internal party schisms. A study of scandal thus reveals the conflicting interests that divided the PRI, challenging monolithic representations of the party.

Second, scandalous news items provided collective opportunities to revise political expectations and sharpen expressions of dissent. Readers would not have been surprised to learn of the impunity of street cops, the corruption of city bureaucrats, or the absence of effective representation. Yet knowing had not meant reckoning. As Heather Levi instructively writes about secrecy, the boundaries between knowing and not knowing are rarely absolute.[7] Public exposure, especially in print, functioned as "a powerful mechanism both for the enforcement of values and norms and for the rearticulation of those norms."[8] Publicity thus became an important, though unpredictable and inequitable, tool of political representation.

Urban Mexicans were, in this sense, "citizens of scandal." While the law promised equal rights, the reality was a "differentiated citizenship" that was often based on skin color, gender, property, religion, class, or access to the legal system.[9] Scandals could only offer an uneven and similarly inequitable mechanism to deliver justice. Despite these shortcomings, spectacles constituted an important aspect of the meaning-making practice of urban citizenship. The Mexico City press served as a launching pad for scandals that reached a national audience. This study considers both how news coverage outside of Mexico City found its way into the national press as well as how Mexico City journalists reported on political developments outside of the capital. While this focus cannot capture the heterogeneity of regional news and audiences, it is not merely a Mexico City story. As suggested by the opening vignette, scandals circulated through multiple media with national reach, knitting together different publics in moments of shared outrage. By engaging with and reinterpreting scandals, ordinary Mexicans asserted their right to participate in the definition of the country's social and political problems.[10]

Finally, this book challenges long-standing assumptions that a free press and democracy are mutually constitutive. In late twentieth-century Mexico, the work of journalism became more dangerous as the political system democratized, and reporters increasingly faced retaliation from organized crime and public officials.[11] Meanwhile, print media did not equitably deliver accountability and representation. Scandals not only amplified the voices of the powerful but also relied at times on gendered and racialized language to garner broad-based outrage. Even as critical reporters denounced corruption,

moreover, they withheld many more secrets from public discussion. These tensions—between free speech and (self-)censorship, representation and exclusion, and transparency and secrecy—defined the Mexican public sphere in the late twentieth century.

MEDIATED CITIZENSHIP

The 1960s were ripe for deliberation over Mexico's political system. The 1959 Cuban Revolution had catalyzed profound regional change, fundamentally altering expectations about the possibilities of revolutionary uprising. In Mexican cities, Cuba's example inspired massive labor strikes and radicalized university campuses, while motivating the federal government to unleash greater repression against dissidents. Four decades had passed since the 1910 Mexican Revolution forged a new social pact that guaranteed land reform, workers' rights, and sovereignty over natural resources. In 1929, revolutionary generals formed a single party to ensure the peaceful transfer of power, and in 1946 the PRI inherited this one-party state, claiming the revolutionary mantle while pursuing more conservative economic policies. The party governed through three class-based organizations, which mediated the grievances of industrial workers, peasants, and white-collar urbanites. As a testament to the PRI's ideological flexibility, diverse groups from political bosses (*caciques*) to leftist syndicalist leaders could register their demands so long as they did so within party structures.[12] Power sharing among elites allowed Mexico to avoid the military coups and dictatorships that beset much of Latin America in the twentieth century, but political stability also came at the cost of persistent repression in the countryside. By the 1960s the PRI received international accolades for ushering in a uniquely stable, if idiosyncratic, democracy and for overseeing high economic growth.[13]

Popular political engagement was shaped by the spread of new information technologies at midcentury. Urban Mexicans developed a "mediated citizenship" in which their political commitments and practices were forged through everyday interactions with mass media.[14] This was evident, for example, in a 1973 letter from an Acapulco resident to Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa, the opinion editor at the national broadsheet *Excélsior*. The letter writer, named Leonor, thanked the columnist and other journalists for affirming what she already believed: that political leaders did not understand her lived reality and that "corruption is an enormous pit into which nearly everyone falls to some degree."[15] Mexico City media furnished Leonor with a

repertoire of images, texts, and vocabularies that she shared with other urban residents and that helped her narrate her political worldview.

The spread of mass media was a Global South phenomenon in the 1950s and 1960s. International development organizations, influenced by modernization theory, saw mass media adoption as a pivotal step in economic development and civic engagement.[16] To this end, the Ford Foundation; the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization; and other nongovernmental organizations sponsored communications studies, funded technology transfers, and provided technical aid to the Global South—especially Africa and Latin America.[17] The Cold War battle for hearts and minds provided another rationale for mass media investment in the so-called Third World, and Soviet and U.S. leaders tried to reach new audiences with radio broadcasts, television programs, and films. Shaped by this context, Mexican leaders saw mass media as essential not only to modernization but also to the creation of a national identity and to their preservation of power.[18] Over the course of the twentieth century, the state invested in radio transmitters, newsprint production, a microwave broadcasting system, and two satellites, making the country a regional front runner in communications development.[19]

Government support for education and culture fundamentally altered reading practices. State-subsidized newsprint and advertising gave consumers access to affordable and diverse reading material. Since the late 1930s, the state-run monopoly Paper Importer and Producer, S. A. (Productora e Importadora de Papel, S. A., or PIPSA) stabilized the domestic newsprint market by purchasing, warehousing, manufacturing, and selling paper. The result was well-stocked corner newsstands that sold popular comic books, sensationalist crime tabloids, and sports dailies alongside mainstream periodicals and political magazines. Urban dwellers lingered at newsstands to skim headlines while they waited for their buses, and political elites pored over the news while they had their shoes shined. By the end of the day, a single copy of a newspaper would be well worn after passing through multiple hands at barbershops, shoeshine stands, or tenement patios.[20]

Official census data charted a considerable growth in primary school attendance between 1940 and 1970, and over these decades literacy climbed from 42 percent to over 76 percent, with even higher rates in Mexico City.[21] Census data likely overestimated literacy by including individuals who could only write their names, but ethnographic research provides additional context for these figures. Researchers in the 1960s and 1970s found that tabloid readership was prevalent in tenements and squatter settlements in greater Mexico City.[22]

Surveys conducted by the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) also indicate that newspaper readership thrived outside the capital. By 1966, 64 percent of residents in midsize cities in central Mexico, such as Irapuato, Pachuca, Puebla, and Toluca, read the newspaper daily or several times per week.[23]

The experience of urban life was one of mass media saturation, even for the very poor. New theaters and government-enforced price controls on tickets popularized moviegoing.[24] A 1952 USIA survey found that 53 percent of urban Mexicans went to the movies at least once per month, and *Variety* reported in 1966 that Mexico had the joint highest per capita rate of film attendance in the world.[25] By the 1960s, storefronts, bus stations, bars, and restaurants boasted television sets to attract patrons. Television viewership began as a public activity, and residents would gather (for a small fee) at neighbors' homes to watch popular telenovelas. It was not until the 1970s that the domestic manufacturing of television sets made ownership possible even for the urban poor.[26] By 1965, 43 percent of residents in Mexico's three largest cities (Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey) owned a television set and 86 percent owned a radio.[27]

Three decades of urbanization and industrialization between 1940 and 1970 produced dramatic demographic and cultural shifts, and the PRI struggled to adapt with this changing population. Improved public health lowered rates of infant and maternal mortality while contributing to rapid population growth and rising unemployment. The postwar mechanization of agriculture increased landlessness and rural unemployment, driving many subsistence farmers to migrate in search of work, particularly in the 1960s. During that decade, 1.8 million people immigrated to the greater Mexico City area. The city and its environs swelled from 1.5 million people in 1940 to 8.4 million three decades later; by 1970, one-sixth of Mexico's population lived in the capital.[28] Facing strained public services, growing unemployment, and housing scarcity, public officials joined international demographers in blaming economic recession on population growth.

Political magazines and newspapers with small metropolitan readerships, such as *El Día*, *Política*, and *Siempre!*, were among the first Mexico City publications to discuss the problems of landlessness, poverty, and corruption in the early 1960s. These news outlets attacked leading power brokers, rather than midlevel figures, and drove broader debates over policy. While critical articles often began in more rarefied publications, they ignited collective discussion by circulating through a wide network of media. Practices of "borrowing" news items without attribution were common, and established mainstream newspapers frequently reported on exposés first broken by left-leaning out-

lets. By the late 1970s, syndication services placed critical columns, including Buendía's and Granados Chapa's, in newspapers across the country, enabling distinct readerships to encounter the same news items. News and cultural production were heavily concentrated in Mexico City; television broadcasts centered on events there, and many local publications relied on national news feeds for their stories.[29] Mexico City media were not uniquely confrontational, but they were exceptionally influential in shaping national debates.

Scandalous exposés circulated beyond elite readers, worrying public officials who saw the lower classes as unpredictable and potentially violent. Cheap tell-all memoirs and comic books magnified and reinterpreted salacious stories, and neighborhood organizations diffused articles by reprinting or summarizing them in bulletins or flyers. Radio and television programs commented on scandalous cases and generated greater interest through interviews with aggrieved parties. As politicians found themselves forced to respond to accusations, they also spread the topic to a wider audience. The availability of multiple critical news outlets made this intertextual exchange possible. At the same time, readers encountered the news in different ways depending on their education levels, reading speeds, and insider knowledge.

Mexico City's independent-minded press democratized public debate by widening the topics discussed and the voices represented. In this way, journalism contributed to the expansion of the public sphere, or the arena that "compel[led] public authority to legitimate itself before public opinion."[30] Philosopher Jürgen Habermas theorized the public sphere as a horizontal space for debate that first emerged in eighteenth-century Europe alongside the rise of the bourgeoisie. He lamented, however, that the public sphere was later corrupted by mass culture and the welfare state, which collapsed the boundary between state and society and turned news into a commodity.[31] In his rendering, the rise of the market economy made the public sphere possible but later undermined it altogether.

Habermas's normative prescription has elicited considerable criticism. Feminist scholars have argued that he glossed the gendered and class (not to mention racial) exclusions that underpinned his idealized public sphere.[32] How, they wondered, could these spaces be considered democratic when access to them was premised on being white, male, and middle class? Meanwhile, scholars of the non-European world have adapted Habermas's model to their regions of study by resisting the ideal of "rational" debate. Latin American historians, for example, have shown that seemingly illiberal or irrational forums, such as gossip columns, crime pages, and Catholic radio programs, could constitute spaces for critical deliberation.[33] They have also

illustrated that the public sphere could be extended under undemocratic or even authoritarian governments.[34] In effect, these scholars identify how critical deliberation operated under conditions distinct from Habermas's formulation. Indeed, Pablo Piccato usefully frames the public sphere as the "processes" and "interactions" that brought together "private interests, state policies, and social practices such as reading and conversation."[35]

This book shows that even politically and financially compromised journalists could expand the public sphere. For much of the twentieth century, Mexico City publications, reporters, and directors could not survive financially without state subsidies. Newspaper owners were economically dependent on government advertising and state-subsidized newsprint, and reporters relied on the notorious *embute*, bribes in the form of cash-stuffed envelopes from public officials, to supplement their meager salaries. These conditions undoubtedly placed considerable constraints on reporters. State and press entanglements also extended beyond economic dependence. Like North Atlantic journalists, Mexican reporters relied on insider leaks (and thus political goodwill) for confidential information. Meanwhile, as readerships expanded, public officials needed reporters to manage public opinion and to silence damaging stories. Examining how interpersonal relationships undergirded scandals, this book reveals that the opening of the public sphere simultaneously rested on processes of negotiation, alliance, and concealment.

As Mexico City writers pressed to open a closed political system, they did not see all voices as equally deserving of amplification. Politicians and journalists often described knowledge production in gendered terms that cast elite male knowledge as rational news and subversive speech as feminine gossip. Journalists and intellectuals similarly naturalized gender and class inequalities by delineating who could lay claim to knowledge. By raising these contradictions, I push back against Habermas's normative understanding of the public sphere as an inherently democratic realm. Moreover, instances of violence toward Mexican journalists, as in some other parts of Latin America, have only increased under electoral democracy.[36] The outsize role that criminal organizations and private corporations have played in shaping contemporary news also underscores the need to revise Habermas's understanding of the relationship between the market, the state, and press freedom.

OPEN SECRETS AND THE ONE-PARTY STATE

This book departs from prevailing scholarship on Mexico City print media. Scholars and journalists alike have described the national press as co-opted

or complicit in the maintenance of the PRI's decades-long rule.[37] Sociologists and political scientists argue that it was not until the 1990s that economic liberalization, the privatization of PIPSA, and shifting newsroom cultures fostered the development of "civic journalism."[38] Recent scholarship, however, highlights that national media could cultivate critical subjectivities despite state attempts to forge quiescence. Popular songs and films emphasized individual development, cultivating anti-authoritarian mindsets, while flysheets and crime news generated critical discussions of state impunity.[39] Building on this work, my book shows that, beginning in the 1960s, reporters did not have to be fully independent to effect substantial change. In fact, as political insiders they could stoke elite rivalries and launch penetrating investigations into corruption. These exposés were not neutral and often served as weapons for one political faction against another. Indeed, journalists both reflected and generated serious competition inside the party. By moving away from dichotomies of co-optation versus independence, we can better understand how journalists shaped Mexican political culture and engagement.

A study of the national press from the early 1960s through the late 1980s also reveals the PRI's infrapolitics and draws our attention to moments of rupture within the ruling party, underscoring its continued heterogeneity. In so doing, this book revises our ideas about the one-party regime in the late twentieth century. Historians of the postrevolutionary period have shown the decentralized, organic, and local processes of negotiation that produced the modern Mexican state.[40] In recent years, historians of midcentury Mexico have similarly revealed the significant popular opposition and state repression that persisted after the PRI consolidated power. As Paul Gillingham and Benjamin T. Smith argue, the PRI combined an ambiguous mix of "hard and soft power, of coercion and co-option," leading them to characterize the regime as a "*dictablanda*."[41] Demonstrating that the party's control was never complete or even, these studies collectively challenged revisionist historiography that depicted an all-powerful ruling party.[42]

And yet, work on post-1968 Mexico still tends to reproduce the sensibility, if not the language, of contemporary writers who characterized the PRI as an authoritarian "monolith."[43] With few exceptions, studies of this period often depict the ruling party as a unanimous and cohesively acting body. In rural Guerrero, it was a brutal authoritarian regime;[44] in Mexico City and other urban centers, however, the PRI was more flexible and responsive to disgruntled middle classes, independently organized street vendors, and Indigenous leaders who worked within state institutions.[45] This produces the sensation of walking through a hall of mirrors; the party is reflected differently

depending upon the location from which one views it. From the vantage point of the Mexico City press, the party appeared beset by challenges. It also struggled to mask its internal divisions, which had become so polarized that disagreement was often resolved by publicizing dissent. Leaking to the press played an important role in stoking internal party divisions and ultimately contributed to the PRI's splintering in 1987, auguring the end of one-party rule.

Airing the party's dirty laundry broke with the open secrets that guaranteed mutual protection among political elites and were constitutive of twentieth-century Mexican political culture.[46] Open secrets, or "that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated," had disciplined governing officials, journalists, and ordinary people by requiring the silencing or dissimulation of knowledge.[47] In practice, of course, this silence was contingent on one's audience and location; behind closed doors, public officials openly gossiped about evident wrongdoing, but they avoided publicly airing the information. Journalists were often privy to these conversations but publicly dissimulated their knowledge to avoid appearing complicit.[48] Writing on the Argentine context, Ieva Jusionyte notes that crime reporters relied on a dense web of relationships, which required them to "develop the social knowledge and skills necessary to recognize where *not* to look and what not to see."[49] Ordinary people, meanwhile, might possess only partial knowledge of official wrongdoing, but lack the protection or access to denounce it. Indeed, secrets perpetuated "separate spheres of knowledge" that served to "create and maintain social difference and relations."[50] This book examines how the interplay between exposure and secrecy shaped the Mexican public sphere while enforcing complicity at multiple levels.

DENUNCIA JOURNALISM

Many of the journalists in this book clashed personally and ideologically, but they were united by their willingness to expose official wrongdoing, even while their individual motivations and strategies differed considerably. I describe these figures as *denuncia* journalists. In so doing, I reclaim a derogatory characterization that Latin American public officials used to describe those who smeared politicians without real evidence against them.[51] Throughout Latin America, *denuncia* refers both to a general, public accusation and a formal, legal complaint. For example, victims of a crime can file a formal report (denuncia) to initiate a criminal investigation. In the absence of legal safeguards, however, victims historically sought out journalists who trans-

formed individual grievances into issues of common concern. The reference to denuncia thus signals the ways in which journalists connected ordinary people with political elites, capturing reporters' liminal roles as both the tribunals of civil society and the advocates of state bureaucrats.

Midcentury denuncia journalism was predated by a long history of politically committed commentary in the press. Pointed denunciations became particularly visible during the late nineteenth-century dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz when newspapers like *El Hijo del Ahuizote* and journals like *Regeneración* excoriated public officials by name. The repercussions for denunciations were severe, and the Díaz government imprisoned confrontational editors, confiscated newspaper copies, and destroyed printing presses.[52] With the outbreak of the Mexican Revolution in 1910, denuncia journalists and photographers kept readers informed of the violent conflict that would unseat the dictator and claim at least a half million lives. After the fighting subsided, radical leftists and conservative Catholics alike exposed government wrongdoing in periodicals like *El Diario de Yucatán* (Mérida), *El Informador* (Guadalajara), and *El Machete* (Mexico City). Crime news also furnished a space to denounce police incompetence and official injustice. With the consolidation of the one-party regime in the 1930s, officials closely monitored the national press, but denuncia journalism continued to thrive outside the capital.[53]

In the 1960s, many young Mexico City journalists were politicized by experiencing state violence firsthand. Left-leaning culture writer Carlos Monsiváis witnessed the military's violent repression and imprisonment of railroad strikers in 1959. Héctor Gama, Froylán López Narváez, and José Reveles were similarly radicalized after they marched in the 1968 Mexico City student protests and saw plainclothes security forces open fire on an unsuspecting crowd of students, teachers, and professors. Many budding writers considered the Tlatelolco Massacre, as the attack became known, to be the defining event of their political lives. After sustaining a gunshot wound to his leg, reporter Francisco Ortiz Pinchetti embraced conservative criticisms of the PRI. Elena Poniatowska, though she did not participate in the protests, became famous for her interviews with the participants, which she compiled in her best-selling 1971 chronicle *La noche de Tlatelolco*. Heberto Castillo, an engineering professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México), was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured for his involvement in the protests. Upon his release two years later, he used journalism to build support for his leftist opposition party. In short, the massacre was a profoundly formative event for many journalists.[54]

Reporters who named and shamed public officials did not represent the average Mexico City journalist. They were exceptional in terms of their influence, moral authority, and, at times, financial security. Exposing wrongdoing implied social, economic, and professional risks. Many of these writers had sufficient means to survive economically if their exposés resulted in their firing. For example, chronicler and novelist Poniatowska was the descendant of Polish nobility and independently wealthy, making it possible for her to take greater risks. Castillo, a professional engineer and leftist activist, was a regular news commentator in the 1970s, but journalism was not his primary source of income. Julio Scherer García earned a reputation for always refusing bribes, but one editor noted that the famous newspaper reporter and director could afford to do so because he came from a wealthy family.[55] Others, like Buendía and Monsiváis, grew up in lower-middle-class families but became influential and respected public figures by the 1970s, which granted them greater latitude for dissent. Financial security or cultural prominence thus allowed these writers to challenge powerful officials in print.

Still, reporters encountered an unpredictable government, which alternatively supported, co-opted, or repressed them. While President Luis Echeverría promised that his "democratic opening" would include press freedom, the boundaries of acceptable dissent were often shifting. Muckraking publications like *Por Qué?* suffered repeated attacks, and in 1976 Echeverría intervened in the nation's prominent broadsheet, *Excélsior*, to remove its editorial team. This experience compelled the ousted editors to found more critical news outlets, including *Proceso* and *Unomásuno*, in the late 1970s. These publications covered numerous high-profile scandals that emerged during the subsequent administration of José López Portillo. In addition to denouncing political corruption, such news outlets also provided spaces for *crónicas*, narrative journalism that foregrounded the voices and experiences of those often marginalized by the press and political power.

These dynamics functioned differently outside the nation's capital, where financial ties were weaker between local and regional newspapers and state governments. As a result, small publications could collaborate closely with civic movements and deliver damning criticism of local authorities and corruption. Yet there also were significant limitations to doing so. Impunity reigned to a greater degree outside Mexico City, and crossing the wrong official could lead to serious, even deadly, consequences. This led to an odd paradox: capital city journalists enjoyed the greatest level of safety but higher levels of scrutiny.[56]

By the 1970s Mexico City denuncia journalists generally had some higher education, which further distinguished them from most working reporters.[57] They established their careers in the capital, though many were born elsewhere in the country, and their worldviews were informed by Mexico City's connection to the wider world. Many had the opportunity to travel abroad; some went for study while others went as agricultural workers as part of the joint Mexican-U.S. Bracero Program that began during World War II. In universities, newsrooms, and publishing houses, Mexico City writers and academics rubbed elbows with Spanish and South American exiles who shaped the political and cultural outlook of these institutions. Mexico City journalists also closely followed regional developments, and some took to the streets to protest the 1961 Bay of Pigs Invasion in Cuba and the 1973 coup that overthrew socialist Chilean president Salvador Allende. Reporters and intellectuals were also influenced by regional religious trends. A 1968 meeting among Latin American Catholic bishops in Medellín, Colombia, resulted in a regional ecclesiastical turn toward liberation theology. Though far from universally accepted within the church, a commitment to social justice filtered into educational institutions, civic organizations, and sermons. Journalists' political expectations thus were shaped by the ideological and political developments in the region.

Mexico City reporters and opinion writers also were influenced by shifting international journalistic norms and genres. The New Journalism movement in the United States informed Mexican literary reporting, inspiring long-form pieces that cultivated readers' identification with marginalized individuals.[58] Chronicles brought new voices and issues into the elite press, introducing the experiences of rape victims, Indigenous activists, and soccer fans, to name just a few.[59] Mainstream periodicals in Mexico City also closely followed the Watergate scandal and lauded the heroic reporters who confronted President Richard Nixon. The prolific output of media and communications studies further articulated ethical expectations, including objectivity and balance, which were diffused internationally in conferences and textbooks.[60] By the late 1970s journalism students in Mexico were well versed in the arguments of U.S. and Western European communications theorists.

In other ways, denuncia reporters were no different from their less confrontational counterparts. Even the most influential reporters understood that their content was subject to negotiation. *Siempre!* magazine director José Pagés Llergo famously articulated the internalized journalistic norms in his pronouncement that Mexican reporters could write about anything save the president, the military, and the Virgin of Guadalupe (that is, the

Catholic Church). The quotable phrase captured the possibilities of journalistic speech while also obscuring how the boundaries of acceptable criticism were always shifting. The minister of the interior frequently called newsrooms to communicate requests for stories or alterations, which editors and directors typically heeded.[61] Officials, from congressional representatives to cabinet members, cultivated relationships with their preferred reporters to generate positive coverage. Journalists and editors thus learned to navigate competing interests and to adjust their coverage accordingly.

In a profession dominated by men, reporters rubbed elbows with police and politicians in spaces of masculine sociability, such as cantinas, shooting ranges, or late-night poker games.[62] Conservative reporter Roberto Blanco Moheno pithily described journalism as "the comradery of drink and the distribution of coin."[63] Relationships were also lubricated with gifts of imported scotch and invitations to family events, such as christenings. Female reporters, meanwhile, were typically excluded from these reciprocal relationships. This made information gathering more challenging while allowing women to avoid the expectations that accompanied personal relationships with informants. Until the late 1970s, most female journalists, including Poniatowska, were relegated to writing for the social pages. Those who gained access to political beats improvised methods for accessing information. Among them was Sara Lovera, who covered labor issues for *El Día* in the 1970s and *La Jornada* in the 1980s. To gain incriminating information, she once wore a disguise to sneak into a closed-door meeting. Poniatowska, meanwhile, avoided official sources and instead interviewed ordinary people for her chronicles. Other women may have used their sexuality to cultivate informants, as Colombian journalists Laura Restrepo and Virginia Vallejo famously did with a member of the guerrilla group M-19 and Pablo Escobar, respectively.[64]

SCANDAL AND NARRATIVE

One outgrowth of denuncia journalism was the prevalence of political scandals, which galvanized readers' attention and helped sell newspapers. Headlines warned darkly of "The Complicity of Silence" and revealed "A Fashionable Sport: Hunting Journalists."[65] Exposés also took direct aim at powerful figures, lobbing accusations that Mexico City's police chief ran an extortion ring and that the president's family was involved in drug trafficking.[66] High-profile cases could even prompt the resignation and imprisonment of public figures. Scandals were unique in late twentieth-century Mexico because they mobilized national, rather than local, attention.[67]

In the broadest terms, scholars understand scandals as disruptive accusations of transgression. Notably, such accusations demand a response.[68] As Don Kulick and Charles Klein write on the Brazilian context, scandals produce "small-scale and temporary crinkles in the overall social fabric" and can be seen as "political actions that result in both recognition *and* redistribution."[69] This dynamic was evident in the aftermath of Buendía's column, as discussed at the opening of this chapter. His confrontational coverage prompted the Guerrero state director of police and transit to issue a response in national newspapers the following day, discrediting the hunger strikers as disingenuous "whiners" and accusing them of sneaking home to eat dinner.[70] Paid articles delivered similar messages in local and national newspapers and issued veiled threats against Buendía, making him fear for his safety.[71] Despite these ad hominem attacks and this personal intimidation, Guerrero's governor, Figueroa, eventually acceded to the taxi drivers' demands and issued them the medallions they requested.[72] With this Janus-faced response, state officials delivered an episodic and unpredictable form of accountability.

I consider scandals not as abbreviated interactions but as social processes involving a series of amplifying moments that included recirculation, gossip, new revelations, public responses, denials, punishment, remembering, and silencing. This definition foregrounds the echoes evident long after an initial disruption has passed. The social processes of scandals allowed multiple actors to shape the political resonance that these cases would have. These resonances changed over time and were contingent on the social and political conditions of scandals' production and revelation. Scandals were not only interpreted and diffused by media but also through word of mouth, public performances, and handmade signs. Analyzing the circulation of scandals leads me to depart from James C. Scott's influential framing of everyday popular expression, including gossip, stories, and slander, as "weapons of the weak." Scott has argued that these "backstage" expressions revealed disgruntlement but did little to change structures.[73] Scandals, however, collapsed the boundaries between "onstage" and "offstage" expressions, and unattributed accusations could fuel collective action and prompt official responses.

As scholars now recognize, scandals are socially constructed, and most bad behavior does not garner national outrage and attention.[74] Late twentieth-century Mexico was no exception. Reporters often withheld potentially salacious stories because they lacked sufficient evidence or support within the government, which they would need as protection against retaliation. And

even when journalists reported wrongdoing, many exposés failed to capture the popular imagination. Those that did ignite outrage could be synthesized into easily digestible sound bites. As "bounded stories," scandals often functioned as cautionary tales or lessons that media, from documentaries to radio, invoked long after the scandals subsided.[75] Through iterative processes, references to a case could evoke a wider set of meanings. For example, a mention of 1968 referenced state violence and illegitimacy; and an allusion to Mexico City police chief Arturo Durazo elicited images of morally depraved and abusive functionaries during the economic crisis. And comments regarding clandestine sweatshops, which collapsed in the 1985 earthquake, recalled employer greed and state complicity in poor labor conditions and shoddy building construction. The meanings behind these political events and figures were undoubtedly contested at the time. But reporters consistently reiterated the stakes, inscribing these transgressions into popular memory as watershed moments.

The corruption of high-ranking officials became an overriding theme of exposés. In the fall of 1982 Mexico defaulted on its foreign debt repayments, catalyzing an economic crisis that reverberated throughout Latin America. Structural adjustment agreements with the International Monetary Fund in 1976 and 1982 inaugurated an era of neoliberal governance characterized by technocracy, deregulation, and market liberalization. Though they differed considerably in their conceptualizations of Mexican democracy, both leftist and conservative journalists and activists concurred that the PRI's corporatist system had allowed political leaders to act with impunity. Reporters collaborated with burgeoning social movements to diversify the voices and demands in their exposés.

The most salient scandals identified a single perpetrator, personalizing political power by reducing a complex web of relations to a solitary individual.[76] Conscientious reporters would flag the structural conditions that perpetuated these issues, and they described corruption as a generalized problem with the PRI rather than the individuals within it. As accusations circulated through media, the narrative structure of scandals made it easy to lose this nuance. Stories often made a spectacle of shaming select individuals and repeating key sensational details. Public apologies, forced resignations, and even indictments became expected outcomes of public accusations. Such performances of justice legitimized the status quo by underscoring that the political system was working. Moreover, these punishments were individualized; the press served as an ad hoc lever of justice that could not possibly guarantee rights for all. With scandals, contestatory publics and a pluralistic

public sphere emerged, but government accountability rested precariously upon the publicity of wrongdoing.

WRITING A HISTORY OF THE RECENT PAST

By centering the press in the study of late twentieth-century knowledge production, I aim to make a familiar source unfamiliar. If archival documents feel rarefied, news publications are the opposite. Internationally, periodicals share a visual style and layout (headlines, columns, sections, and bylines) that make them easily legible and navigable. Scholars and other writers have turned to journalists' accounts to make sense of the post-1968 period because many government archives remain inaccessible. In so doing, historians have tended to deracinate influential press articles from their moments of production, erasing the processes that allowed particular narratives to assume a prominent place in public memory.

Like archives, print media have their own histories of production, curation, and silences. A historian can read periodicals against the grain, searching for telling cracks that reveal divisions among the newsroom staff or coded messages that were only intelligible to a select few. A well-informed observer can discern the various interests at play on any given page. Paid advertising space projected the denunciations of local organizations and unions. Wrapped around news articles were public service announcements informing readers of everything from the availability of housing credit to the accomplishments of the Ministry of Water Resources (Secretaría de Recursos Hidráulicos). Less visible but equally prevalent were *gacetillas*, paid articles that editors masked as real news. Opinion pages frequently featured weekly contributions from politicians, who saw editorials as an alternative means to disseminate their ideas. As president, Echeverría even pseudonymously wrote a regular column, "Granero Político," to project his views.[77] His authorship was an open secret among the political elite, but perhaps unknown to the working-class reader of *La Prensa*, the tabloid where the column appeared. News publications, then, are rich texts that reveal contests over information, political power, and economic resources.

This book brings together a new archive of materials, some of which have never been examined before. I analyze print media sources, including advertisements, photographs, letters to the editor, and cartoons, alongside unpublished documents culled from over seventeen archives, primarily located in Mexico City. While I focus on the print origins of scandals, I trace the circulatory relationships among different media. This illustrates

how television and radio reported on print stories, authorities responded, street performances and memoirs offered commentary, and these interventions circulated back to inform print media interpretations. I juxtapose these media sources against materials from journalists' and politicians' private collections, state intelligence archives, presidential papers, and congressional debates. Reading these documents together allows me to consider the relationship between knowledge, secrecy, and scandal, teasing out the bits of information omitted from the public record and dissimulations that accompanied scandalous exposés.

Examining print media alongside unpublished documents also deepens our understanding of how knowledge production and state surveillance functioned. Given the limited archival materials available for the period after 1964, most historians rely on the archives of two intelligence services, the Federal Security Office (Dirección Federal de Seguridad, or DFS) and the General Office for Political and Social Investigations (Dirección General de Investigaciones Políticas y Sociales). These agencies, which operated from 1947 to 1985, were charged by the Ministry of the Interior with identifying political challenges, and both organizations became notorious for their repression and violence. In 2002 President Vicente Fox declassified these intelligence archives shortly after his National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional) defeated the PRI in a historic election. Both Fox and contemporary observers framed the declassification as a promising sign of transparency that would allow the country to reckon with its authoritarian past. Scholars have since combed through intelligence sources to reveal a greater prevalence of both state repression and popular resistance than was previously associated with the height of the PRI's power. Other historians have used the materials to demonstrate the sources of regime vulnerability and anxiety after 1968.[78]

Historians are aware of the limitations of intelligence reports.[79] State spies typically had little education and were unfamiliar with their subjects of analysis. At times they exaggerated threats to boost their agencies' importance or they simply lied, perhaps to avoid a troublesome investigation. Spies were also notorious for their abuses of power, particularly as funding increased over the 1970s and into the early 1980s.[80] Even while acknowledging these realities, historians have tended to privilege intelligence sources as granting unfettered access to the state's logic and true intentions. Yet as Ann Laura Stoler notes, the arbitrary designation, production, and traffic in secrets is itself a key marker of state power.[81] Paul Christopher Johnson further observes that secrecy raises thorny epistemological issues because

one can never know with certainty that they have accessed the entire truth.[82] Indeed, in the late twentieth century ordinary people frequently presumed that official pronouncements and scandalous exposés always hid a larger conspiracy.

A history of the press blurs the boundaries between what historians have considered to be "secret" and "public" sources. Paging through investigative news publications reveals the reproduction of secret documents that were leaked to journalists. Many of the originals can be found across multiple private archives, suggesting that these sources passed through many hands relatively freely. Leaked reports also bear material traces, including signatures and stamps of receipt, that betray widespread knowledge of mismanagement across different organizations. By publicizing these documents, journalists made state secrets public. Intelligence agents also produced reports that relied on thousands of published press articles. By studying the transformative nature of publicity, this book highlights that open secrets were key to the PRI's maintenance of power.

Interviews with twenty-five journalists and politicians helped to shape and identify the archive for this book. These were not necessarily well-known figures, but they had all been active in the press or in politics during the 1960s and 1970s. Some of them, like Gustavo Robles, had been part of the state bureaucracy for decades, moving among different institutions for much of his career. He, like others, pointed me in the direction of more people to talk to and facilitated access to personal archives. While these interviews helped shape my archive and broader understanding of Mexican journalism and politics, they do not make up the empirical basis for my analysis and thus will rarely appear in the references of this book.

The journalists' and politicians' private collections I consulted are generally informal archives stored in family kitchens, home offices, or attics and awaiting organization and curation. Reporters saved leaked documents, correspondence with readers and politicians, drafts and clippings of their articles, and research that informed their writing. Journalists like Sara Lovera amassed smaller collections that centered on the stories and issues that she viewed to be defining of her career. These private archives not only offer a window onto the self-fashioning of the reporters but also their decision-making processes. Juxtaposing leaked documents against published articles reveals that journalists did not merely report leaks as officials wished. At times the reporters saved the leaked materials without ever exposing them, and in other cases they used the documents to reveal a wider network of complicity. While officials always leaked stories with particular aims in

mind, the outcomes were not always what they hoped for. Private archives thus offer another window into the press as a site of knowledge production.

CHAPTER OUTLINE

The book follows widely circulated stories that achieved broad audiences and thus stitched together national publics. Many of the episodes I examine will be familiar to those with knowledge of Mexican history, and I return to these moments in part because of their continued resonance in popular memory. I also chose to examine particular scandals based on the availability of archival documents that could elucidate the production and dissemination of these stories. The chapters take on a variety of temporal and geographic scales. Whereas one chapter covers nearly six years, another focuses on events that unfolded over the course of three weeks. These different time frames capture the multiple ways in which media exposés took shape and the social and political echoes they inspired. The chapters center primarily on Mexico City media. Mexico City was both the seat of the federal government and, by the mid-1970s, home to one-sixth of the country's total population. "Local" corruption investigations could thus have national consequences through federal reforms, and Mexico City media played a disproportionate role in shaping national news.

Chapters 1 and 2 explore the development of a mediated citizenship in greater Mexico City. While denuncia journalism thrived in regional newspapers, it was not until midcentury that critical exposés regularly appeared in capital city publications. Chapter 1 examines how Mexico City journalists and the broader public reckoned with the limits of state-led development, and, by extension, the Mexican Revolution. The chapter analyzes two scandals that shaped these discussions: a 1963 investigative series on the ailing Yucatecan henequen industry, and the 1965 censorship of Oscar Lewis's *Los hijos de Sánchez*, an anthropological exploration of Mexican poverty. Both exposés ignited heated debates about who could disprove narratives of revolutionary progress. The chapter traces the echoes of scandals in letters to the editor, boisterous university roundtables, and peasant protests.

While chapter 1 shows how elite-generated scandals could fuel collective action, chapter 2 demonstrates how popular accusations catalyzed a scandal in elite print media. In 1974, unsubstantiated accounts surfaced claiming that the government was sterilizing poor schoolchildren, leading to widespread panic and school closures in the greater Mexico City area. Denuncia journalists were wary of knowledge that came from the city's

impoverished periphery, and they allied with governing officials to discount the accusations as ignorant rumors. Policing the boundaries of rational debate, journalists tried to exorcise popular knowledge from printed forums. Yet residents of greater Mexico City drew on the language and vocabularies of international sterilization scandals to formulate denunciations against state-sponsored violence. Chapter 2 examines how conflicts over knowledge production emerged amid the opening of Mexico City's major broadsheets.

Chapters 3 and 4 focus on the denunciation of corruption, which became a central theme of muckraking journalism in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Chapter 3 examines an embezzlement scheme at Mexican Petroleum (Petróleos Mexicanos, or Pemex) that led to the imprisonment of its director, Jorge Díaz Serrano. At the time, denuncia journalists covered the case to argue for a more equitable distribution of wealth and an end to PRI corruption. But the 1982 economic crisis led public officials and conservative groups to mobilize the Pemex scandal to their own ends: to justify the slashing of the social safety net and the liberalization of Mexico's economy. Chapter 4 takes up the iconic scandal of Mexico City chief of police Arturo Durazo, who was embroiled in drug trafficking, embezzlement, and, most dramatically, murder. The scandal escaped the control of investigative journalists, circulating widely and inspiring new interpretations in comic books, films, and tell-all accounts. These popular media often gave racialized and gendered explanations of corruption. The chapter thus highlights a tension within scandals: they could expose state impunity and wrongdoing even while relying on discriminatory language to mobilize outrage. Together, chapters 3 and 4 consider how the meanings of scandals ultimately escaped the control of their originators.

Chapters 5 and 6 explore how scandals intersected with growing demands from civil society. Chapter 5 analyzes news coverage after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, which revealed that abusive and unregulated labor conditions had heightened the death toll. The chapter examines the conflicts over how to represent the disaster. State-sponsored radio programs and public service announcements mobilized experts to deflect blame, and government-aligned media produced sensational coverage to depoliticize the scandal. Chronicles traced the affective and individual responses among marginalized groups. Meanwhile, the increasingly visible victims of state corruption, like the survivors of collapsed clandestine sweatshops, struggled to shape coverage in a way that reflected their interests. When they failed to project their own views through bulletins or filming, they could also register their dissent by refusing to speak to reporters. The chapter thus highlights

how scandals brought contests over public space and representation into sharp relief.

Chapter 6 analyzes local, national, and international coverage of the 1986 gubernatorial elections in the northern state of Chihuahua. Electoral fraud sparked hunger strikes and civil disobedience from the conservative opposition. While leftist denuncia journalists acknowledged the evidence of fraud, the Chihuahuan elections raised thorny questions about the politics of scandal. Academics, activists, and journalists commented on the case, questioning whose interests were served by the accusations and voicing fears that ill-intentioned groups could weaponize scandals against political opponents. Obvious silences and presumed prejudices elicited angry calls from readers to newsrooms, bitter accusations of co-optation by journalist peers, and on-the-ground confrontations between correspondents. These conflicts highlight the competing standards to which reporters were held by each other and their readers. Confrontations reveal that many readers and reporters understood the press as an advocate that could not (and should not) be objective.

An epilogue concludes with the dizzying scandals of the late 1980s and early 1990s, which linked President Carlos Salinas and his family to narcotrafficking and even murder. Shortly after Salinas's term in office ended, his brother was imprisoned and Carlos went into a self-imposed exile. These seemingly unprecedented events had their roots in the development of Mexico City's denuncia journalism in the 1960s. Collectively chapters 5 and 6 trace the formation of a national public sphere in which the denunciation of powerful figures provided an episodic and unpredictable mechanism of accountability. These scandals consistently revealed and aggravated disunity among regime officials and challenged conventional methods of managing public opinion. They also brought together new publics who reinterpreted the scandals and incorporated them into their narratives of political change. The public sphere permitted new voices and perspectives while revealing the persistent tensions between transparency and secrecy, representation and exclusion, and free speech and censorship.