

## Reformas, conflictos y procesos electorales en los plebiscitos de la Junta Auxiliar Ignacio Zaragoza, Puebla (2014-2022)

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<https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/cgap.92884>

Received: 06/12/2023 • Revised: xx/xx/xxxx • Aceptado: 31/03/2024

**ES Resumen.** El objetivo de este artículo es describir los procesos electorales 2014, 2019 y 2022 de la Junta Auxiliar Ignacio Zaragoza para determinar las principales problemáticas y conocer cómo estos procesos contribuyen a la participación local; la metodología utilizada mixta se efectúa una revisión estadística y documental de los plebiscitos y se realizan entrevistas a personas involucradas en los plebiscitos con el fin de conocer la percepción de la comunidad. Las limitaciones encontradas son la falta de información por parte de las instituciones encargadas y los pocos estudios en esta materia. El proceso plebiscitario es un ejercicio que requiere una revisión jurídica y política de la forma de ejecutarlo debido a los problemas que presenta y también a la baja participación de la población, ya que las autoridades auxiliares son las más cercanas a la comunidad y representan un eslabón más de la participación local.

**Palabras clave:** junta auxiliar; plebiscitos; legislación electoral; participación electoral.

### EN Reforms, conflicts and electoral processes in the plebiscites of the Ignacio Zaragoza Auxiliary Board, Puebla (2014-2022)

**EN Abstract.** The objective of this article is to describe the 2014, 2019 and 2022 electoral processes of the Ignacio Zaragoza Auxiliary Board to determine the main problems and understand how these processes contribute to local participation. The methodology used is mixed, a statistical and documentary review of the plebiscites is carried out and interviews are undertaken with people involved in the plebiscites in order to know the perception of the community. The limitations found are the lack of information from the institutions in charge and the few studies on this subject. The plebiscite process is an exercise that requires a legal and political review of the way it is executed due to the problems it presents and also the low participation of the population, since the auxiliary authorities are the closest to the community and represent a link more of local participation.

**Keywords:** auxiliary board; plebiscites; local democracy; electoral participation.

**Contents:** 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology. 3. Theoretical discussion. 4. What is an auxiliary council and how are its authorities elected? 5. Contextualisation of the Ignacio Zaragoza Auxiliary Board. 6. Analysis of the 2014, 2019 and 2022 plebiscites in the Auxiliary Board. 6.1. Plebiscite 2014-2019. 6.2. Plebiscite 2019-2022. 6.3. Plebiscite 2022-2025. 7. Impact of the plebiscite elections on the population participating in Ignacio Zaragoza. 8. Conclusions. 9. References.

**How to cite:** Hernández Cid, E., Miquel Hernández, M. y Limón Gutiérrez, J. J. (2024). Reformas, conflictos y procesos electorales en los plebiscitos de la Junta Auxiliar Ignacio Zaragoza, Puebla (2014-2022), en *Cuadernos de Gobierno y Administración Pública* 11(1), e92884. <https://dx.doi.org/10.5209/cgap.92884>

## 1. Introduction

Auxiliary authorities exist throughout Mexico, but with different labels and configurations. Out of the 32 states of Mexico, only 16 elect these authorities by popular vote. Puebla is the only state where the process of electing auxiliary authorities is called a plebiscite, which has led to confusion about what is meant by a plebiscite and what is done in Puebla. Additionally, there is little published work on the auxiliary boards, since they are the only auxiliary authorities with this name in the whole country, and the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States recognises three orders of government: federal, state and municipal. The elections of the Auxiliary Authorities allow us to understand what happens in terms of participation at the local level and, as Olmedo (2005) points out, they become a fourth order of government. This case study allows us to understand the phenomenon from the particular and presents information that cannot be found elsewhere on the three electoral processes.

The elections of the auxiliary boards have not been the subject of extensive research, which is why it is not possible to find information about what happens in each process. There is no clear statistical data, and it seems that every time a process takes place, the information is not stored. In this research work, a case study will be made of a single auxiliary board, the Ignacio Zaragoza's one, which was selected due to the fact that it is the only one that had an election organised by the local electoral institute. The study will encompass three elections: the first is that of 2014, which arose after an amendment to the Municipal Organic Law of the Free and Sovereign State of Puebla, in the article referring to the Auxiliary Boards, where they ceased to be government bodies to become decentralized bodies, and the homologation of the electoral calendar with the federal calendar, leaving the authorities elected in 2014 for four years and eight months in office. The 2019 election is notable for the electoral conflicts that led the State Electoral Institute (IEE) to oversee the process, resulting in the city council remaining in office without functioning due to incompetence and the perceived lack of legitimacy of the process. The 2022 plebiscite process was marred by minor incidents.

The plebiscite is a mechanism that is employed in order to elect the members of the administration of the auxiliary presidency. The duration of this administration is generally three years, and in the case of the Municipality of Puebla, the responsibility for organising this legal political exercise lies with the Secretary of Municipal Governance. The significance of this endeavour lies in its focus on the local context, as auxiliary authorities are the closest to the local population, as Martín and García (2019: 166) have observed: "Local elections emphasise the direct dealings of the candidates with the electorate, which increases – tentatively – their relevance among the voting factors, to the detriment of other elements such as the brand/party, the social and/or economic environment, among others".

The article is structured in seven sections. The theoretical section briefly reviews what a plebiscite is and how it is understood in Puebla; it also reviews the work that has been done on auxiliary boards and auxiliary authorities, to show that little work has been done on these issues; and ends with the issue of clientelism and chiefdom, as this is one of the central elements found in the case study analysis. The fourth section describes what an auxiliary board is according to the current regulations and what its election methods are, to give way to a contextualisation of the auxiliary board under study and to present the descriptive research of each plebiscite in the subsequent section. In the last section, the results of the interviews carried out to find out citizens' perceptions of the plebiscites are included.

## 2. Methodology

The aim of this article is to describe the 2014, 2019 and 2022 electoral processes of the Ignacio Zaragoza auxiliary board in order to determine the main problems and find out how these processes contribute to participation. The research questions of this study are: How does the fact that it is not properly regulated by local electoral laws, rules or guidelines affect the conduct of the election? What are the problems that arise in the organisation and execution of the plebiscites? What is the perception of the population regarding the election of auxiliary authorities? In order to achieve this objective, a mixed methodology was employed. This entailed firstly conducting a theoretical review of the central concepts of the study, namely electoral governance, plebiscite and chiefdom. This was followed by a statistical and documentary review of the plebiscites and 15 semi-structured interviews with members of the locality and 6 in-depth interviews with people involved in the plebiscites in order to ascertain the community's perception. The interviews are based on a respondent-driven sampling method, whereby informants are invited to recommend potential participants. This approach is also referred to as "snowball sampling" or "chain referral sampling". Moreover, the involvement of a subject who has already been included in the project facilitates the establishment of a relationship of trust with the new participants, as well as enabling access to individuals who are difficult to identify. Finally, the researchers encounter fewer difficulties in specifying the characteristics they require from the new participants (Salamanca y Martín-Crespo, 2007: 2). This method was chosen as the population is still reluctant to express their views and it is necessary for them to trust the researcher in order to give real answers about their perceptions. The researchers were introduced to the relevant individuals by small grocery shop assistants, who are typically the

ones who are acquainted with the people in question. The indispensable requirement for being interviewed is that they have participated in some of the plebiscite processes under study. Contrary to what one might think, the responses and perceptions are not homogeneous, since the people interviewed participated in the process in different ways and with different groups.

In order to determine the population's perception, fieldwork was conducted from January to March 2023. It was observed that the residents of the neighbourhoods surrounding the board's presidency were more willing to participate in interviews, likely due to a heightened level of engagement with the subject matter. This observation is further supported by the results of the study, which revealed a low turnout at the polls in more remote areas, suggesting a lack of interest in the issue.

The information was collected using a method known as "avalanche sampling", whereby participants were encouraged to invite their neighbours to take part in the study. In addition to this, a further strategy employed to build trust was to approach local businesses, with shopkeepers providing assistance in the collection of information. A pivotal aspect of the research involved identifying individuals who were involved in the plebiscite processes on the auxiliary board. The interviewees, who resided in the area, guided the researchers to their homes and requested assistance from their neighbours, given their knowledge on the subject.

A total of 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted with citizens of the board. In addition, 6 in-depth interviews were conducted as follows: 1 candidate, 4 people who had been part of a slate team on more than one occasion, and the current Vice President, José Ángel García. Out of the 21 people interviewed, only three asked to remain anonymous, but given the subject matter and the fact that they are people involved in political processes, it was decided that, in order to protect their integrity, the participants would remain anonymous, with the exception of the Auxiliary President, who is an authority and whose interview could be made public, and the former candidate Ramón Héctor Miranda Aguilar, who is also a public figure.

Among the participants there is a 72 year old pensioner who has been living in the board for 37 years; a person who has been living in the board for the longest time with approximately 50 years; interviewee 1 (E1) is the person who has been living in the board for the shortest time with only 4 years. This is a sign of the plurality of the interviewees. Of the 21 interviewees, 62% are men and 38% women. The age range most addressed was the middle-aged 30-49 years, which is equivalent to 52% of the research. Regarding the educational level of those interviewed, there are 10 people with higher education; in a second group, there are 5 people with higher secondary education; in basic education, there are 6 people interviewed, divided between primary and secondary education. The research reveals the impact of the plebiscite process on the population. This is why it is presented as a section at the end, because it allows us to relate the statistical and documentary information to the experience of the population, in order to have a global vision of the event. There are few studies that investigate elections in auxiliary boards and include interviews with the population, such as the studies by Miquel (2023), Miquel and Cazarín (2021), Gutiérrez (2017). There are works such as Suarez, Valdés and Cazarín (2022) that deal with elections, but only from a legal and documentary point of view.

### 3. Theoretical discussion

In this section, the relationship between democracy and participation is presented in order to explain the instrument called plebiscite. As this section seeks to show, from a theoretical and legal point of view, plebiscite is a clear concept, but it does not express what is happening in the plebiscites of the Auxiliary Boards in Puebla. For this reason, there is confusion about the term and its application.

Democracy, in its basic aspect, is the exercise of electing a representative of the community with the free participation of the citizens. According to Article 40 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, it is the will of the people to establish a federal, democratic, representative and participatory republic.

Norberto Bobbio studies modern democracy and defines it in its simplest form as a system in which majority rule prevails (2022). Democracy must reflect the real needs as well as the customs and habits of each community. That is why social democracy is adjusted to these processes.

Social democracy: the set of primary democracies—small communities and concrete voluntary associations—that support and nurture democracy at its base, at the level of civil society. Thus, social democracy here means the infrastructure of micro-democracies that serve as the basis for macro-democracy as a whole, the political superstructure. (Sartori, 2006: 60).

As Sartori points out, the first step is the community, which forms and becomes the pillar of democracy at the micro level, allowing the whole to configure what he calls macro democracy. Democracy is considered to be a collective tool because it allows societies to make decisions that affect the whole community, taking into account the opinion of citizens, either directly or indirectly, an important point that should not be overlooked in any way. In a democratic environment, the democratic political opposition is indispensable because, by respecting the vote and the law, by being tolerant and negotiating, and by defending the rights of all people and not just those of its supporters, it contributes to the durability, viability and solidity of the democratic system itself, which is positive because, as we have said, it guarantees freedom.

Individual freedom, which gives citizens the right to decide and the responsibility to chart their own course and manage their own affairs, is the main characteristic of modern democracy.

Nowadays, democracies demand governments that work, that make their decision-making and operational processes transparent, and that create channels for citizen participation. In this still incomplete “new mode”, it is no longer enough for governments to win at the ballot box to gain legitimacy, but they must earn the trust of citizens on a daily basis. (Arellano, 2012: 25).

It is for this reason that Arellano mentioned that participatory democracy is emerging as an alternative, where elements of direct democracy are added, this model allows citizens to regain a central role. (Contreras y Montesinos, 2019).

Participatory democracy is exercised directly by citizens through the institutions of referendum, plebiscite and popular initiative, both at the state and municipal levels, according to Article 115 of the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States.

The legislative consultation system defines plebiscite: “As an instrument of participation - a direct consultation of the population on a matter of importance in collective life - applies to acts of government - administrative, non-legislative in nature.” (Sistema de consulta legislativa, 2022: 25)”.

The plebiscite is a tool employed in matters of significance to a community, whereby the community becomes an active participant in an electoral process focused on identifying the most advantageous course of action in administrative or political domains.

Arteaga defines plebiscite as:

It is the query made to the population to vote directly and secretly on the approval or rejection of the adoption of a governmental measure or of a specific policy. It is the query to the electoral body on an act of a governmental or constitutional nature, i.e. political in the true sense of the word. It does not revolve around a legislative act, but a political decision, although it may perhaps take legal form. (Arteaga, 2014: 103).

As posited by Merino (2013: 39), plebiscites are intended to elicit popular judgement as opposed to the election of representatives, and it is precisely this distinction which renders them unique to the context of Mexico. In the case of Puebla, it is evident that these processes are utilised not only as a means to make decisions, but to solicit the direct voice of the populace. However, an auxiliary president emerges from these processes, who is accompanied by a slate that becomes responsible for administering the auxiliary board. For the purposes of this paper and the object of study, plebiscite will be understood as the query to the people to determine by direct vote who will be their representative in the first instance, which in this case would be an auxiliary president in charge of the decentralised body called the auxiliary board. It is important to note that plebiscite processes comply with the characteristics to carry out an elective process. However, it is not regulated by the electoral laws and is instead subordinated to the city council.

In relation to the debate on local participation, this case study does not fall within the conventional debate on participation in municipalities. Rather, it concerns a level of participation that is one tier below that of auxiliary authorities. As previously noted, there is little work on elections of auxiliary authorities, primarily due to the absence of explicit regulation of these authorities in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States. Consequently, each state determines the powers of these authorities and the electoral process for their selection. Some of the most important research studies have focused on case studies, such as those by Raúl Olmedo (2005) for the state of Tlaxcala. Olmedo (2005) established that this state presented similar conditions to those found in the case of auxiliary boards in Puebla. This is due to the fact that citizens participate in the election to form the auxiliary authority, and there is no room for political parties. All of this is regulated by local organic laws respecting the uses and customs of each population. Juan Venancio Domínguez (2014) has described the similarity between Puebla and the State of Mexico in terms of elections of auxiliary authorities, although in the State of Mexico they retain powers that were removed in Puebla after the reform of the Municipal Organic Law in 2013. Arellano Ríos (2011) studies the states of Campeche, Colima and Quintana Roo, which have an internal governing body called the municipal board, and finds that the municipal government is responsible for laying the groundwork and conducting the election, as well as being conceived as an auxiliary board. It is not the purpose of this paper to review the configurations of the auxiliary authorities in the country<sup>1</sup>, but what the aforementioned works and those reviewed in the methodology section agree on is that the problem of conducting electoral processes without an electoral authority is recurrent. For this reason, the states of Tlaxcala, Campeche and Chihuahua have opted to allow the State Electoral Institute to organise the elections.

Chiefdom is a form of political, economic and territorial control, in which a person or family, by means of force and money, takes control over others in a defined space where they exercise their power. Chiefdom is characterised by the retention of political power, which they achieve through clientelistic relationships with

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<sup>1</sup> This has already been done in a previous work by one of the authors entitled: Comparative analysis of the elections of auxiliary authorities in Mexico (2023).

subordinate social classes or with social classes similar and equal to their own, whose power extends to a scale of micro-regions (communities or auxiliary boards), local or regional, where these actors use different types of violence to retain the power they have obtained in different ways.

Beginning with the description of the phenomenon, explaining chiefdom and its characteristics can be difficult due to the large number of concepts that have been formed over time from the study of chieftaincy cases. For example, Paré (Salmerón, 1980) gives a broader definition of chiefdom, emphasising the impact it has on the political system, along with the context in which the chief operates, but as with everything else, concepts change because the phenomenon occurs in different regions, societies and with different characteristics from others, but chieftaincy is identified on the basis of its constants, such as the signalling of clientelism or the violence used to maintain control. In the case of the first characteristic, Moreno (1995) explains that these are informal relationships that are not regulated, but which create periodic links derived from the exchange of goods and services, the nature of which is mainly instrumental, since it is an unequal exchange of favours. Regarding the second, the author points out that it is a characteristic that is made explicit through methods of acting to dominate the social class and make it adopt a fixed behaviour. As chiefdom encompasses a multitude of dimensions that have resulted in a plethora of classifications, ranging from ideologies to forms of social coercion or from power structures to political bases, it is a somewhat challenging phenomenon to comprehend in terms of its role in local government systems (Salmerón, 1980). In the context of auxiliary boards, there are instances of families who have been serving multiple consecutive terms. This issue will be addressed in the section dedicated to interviews.

Chiefdom is accompanied by another phenomenon called clientelism, which is presented as “a relationship between someone who grants a favour or patronage and a group of petitioners, with benefits for both parties. For the patron the reward is access to political power, for the clients the advantages materialise in the form of jobs, government contracts, building or business licences, etc.” (Bealey: 2003: 72). Clientelism is a practice in which two or more participants are involved to generate situations of bargains and agreements, in which the main actor seeks access to a political structure.

The present study seeks to demonstrate that clientelism constitutes an integral component in the maintenance of political authority within a specific geographical domain. This phenomenon is further examined in order to illustrate how a select group of individuals, operating as chieftains, employ both coercive and economic means to perpetuate their hold on power.

#### 4. What is an auxiliary council and how are its authorities elected?

The Auxiliary Boards are a peculiarity of the State of Puebla and are defined in Article 224 of the Organic Law of Municipalities (LOM):

The Auxiliary Boards are decentralised bodies of the municipal public administration and will be subordinate to the City Council of the Municipality of which they are a part, subject to coordination with the agencies and entities of the municipal public administration, in those administrative faculties that they develop within their circumscription. The link for information and interaction will be the Secretariat of Municipal Government or its equivalent in the administrative structure. The Auxiliary Boards will be made up of a president and four proprietary members, and their respective substitutes (LOM, 2023: 131).

The Auxiliary Board is conceived as a support body for the City Council to help it achieve its objectives and, unlike the Municipality, it is an order closer to the people. They also have the purpose of assisting the Town Council in the administrative matters assigned to them in a specific area and have legal personality with their own assets.

As for their form of eligibility, it is found in articles 225 and 226 of the Organic Municipal Law of the State of Puebla (2023)<sup>2</sup>, in which it is established that they will be elected in plebiscite and this will be the responsibility of the City Council, they will be carried out the fourth Sunday of January of the corresponding year. They will hold responsibility for 3 years<sup>3</sup>.

Regarding the requirements to be part of the administration of an auxiliary board, number 227 of the LOMP states that it is required to be a resident of the municipality and to have resided in the corresponding municipality for at least six months. In addition, article 228 states that if the people are not satisfied with the election of the auxiliary council, it can be dismissed if three quarters of the electoral roll so request. The neighbourhood slates are subject to a referendum. These slates are made up of the candidate for Auxiliary President and four councillors. The slate that wins the election becomes a full member of the *Junta's* administration, unlike the Town Council, where representatives of other political parties are elected on a proportional basis. Thus, there is no representation of any other ticket in the Auxiliary Council.

<sup>2</sup> The Municipal Organic Law is not an electoral law, it is a state ordinance that establishes the organisation of the municipality.

<sup>3</sup> It is only for the period 2014-2019 that the term of the municipal council has been extended in order to harmonise it with the national elections, which is why the auxiliary government has also been extended from three years to 4 years and 8 months.

## 5. Contextualisation of the Ignacio Zaragoza Auxiliary Board

The auxiliary board of Ignacio Zaragoza is located within the capital of Puebla. It is one of the five auxiliary boards situated in the urban area, together with San Felipe Hueyotlipan, San Baltazar Campeche, La Libertad, Ignacio Romero Vargas. By decree of the H. Congress of the State in its XLI Legislature, issued on 6 September 1962, the population becomes auxiliary board of the Municipality of Puebla. (H. Ayuntamiento de Puebla, Municipio de Puebla, 2001).

The Auxiliary Board of Ignacio Zaragoza is made up of various areas in which you can find Colonies, Housing Units, Housing States and Housing Complexes. Also, within it you can find: Commercial Plazas, Medical Units, Hospitals, Schools, Manufacturing Industries, Factories, Leisure Centres and Military Areas. In the auxiliary board there are significant or very representative aspects such as the 25/a. Military Zone, the Military School of Sergeants, the Army and Air Force Command College, the Puebla Regional Military Hospital and the Banjercito.

The total population is 124,988 inhabitants (INEGI, 2022)<sup>4</sup>. Its economic activity is retail trade, the activity that is most present in the Boards. This is reflected within the board, as a wide variety of establishments can be found in its colonies. In the vicinity of the military zones, for example, there are establishments selling food, hairdressing salons and items for the military.

The community of the Auxiliary Board is diverse: at the centre of the Auxiliary Board is the auxiliary presidency. It houses the offices of the Auxiliary President and the Auxiliary Workers. This is where the traditional *Grito de Dolores*, the main celebration, takes place, as well as a library and rooms for organising events. The original families of this community are concentrated around the Auxiliary Council, and it is these families that dispute the political control of the Auxiliary Council, as they are the families that know the most and have seen the evolution of the Auxiliary presidents. The centre of the Board is also the military zone, which is why you can see military families living in the nearby neighbourhoods, and these families also show no interest in local political affairs. The neighbourhoods surrounding the centre are middle and upper middle class. On the western side there are apartment blocks that concentrate a large population, but most of them commute to other parts of the city for work, so local political issues are not important to them and they take little part in plebiscites.

## 6. Analysis of the 2014, 2019 and 2022 plebiscites in the Auxiliary Board

This section presents a comprehensive overview of the key elements inherent to each plebiscite process. The 2022 period is particularly noteworthy due to the abundance of available information on this specific process, in contrast to the paucity of data concerning the two earlier instances. Even the information requested from the city council regarding these processes is scant.

### 6.1. 2014-2019 Plebiscite

On 13 April 2014, the call for the auxiliary boards was approved. For the first and only time, the period would be extended from 3 years to 4 years 8 months, this was clarified above so that the state and municipal elections would be concurrent with the federal elections.

In this electoral process, political parties will not be directly participating. Instead, these entities will register as slates, each of which will select a distinct name for themselves; however, it should be noted that these plebiscites and the slates do not necessarily lack political interests. It is customary for them to adopt the colour of a political party so that the public can identify which party the members of the slate are affiliated with. During the campaigns, the candidates of the auxiliary boards visit their neighbours and make tours of neighbourhoods, especially in the centre of the board. In the surrounding areas, candidates do not present themselves because there is no interest on the part of the voters. It is in the centre of the board where people meet and where they divide up to choose their candidates. (Miquel, 2023:10).

The outcome of the election is shown in Table 1 and, as can be seen, the turnout was low, with 23,500 people included in the census. This census is carried out by the City Council and does not include all the people of voting age in the Board, it only includes the colonies that the slates set up and only the people who live in those colonies can vote, leaving out the colonies that are part of the Board. The turnout was 24%, reflecting the lack of popular interest in the process, but also the difficulty for some citizens to vote. Table 1 also shows that the “El Kiosko” slate of Flor Viridiana Lázaro Martines won by only 28 votes over the second place “Águila Dorada” of Alonso González Hernández; this was a very close race and the percentage difference is minimal, as can be seen in the fourth column of Table 1.

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<sup>4</sup> Statistical information is scarce. In order to find out, a request for transparency information was sent to the Puebla City Council: “This secretary is not competent in the matter, therefore we suggest to pose the present question to the National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI), which was previously based on article 59 section 1 of the law of the National Institute of Statistics and Geography”. The Auxiliary Board of Ignacio Zaragoza also has no statistical data on its population, and it is worth mentioning that they did not know where to find this information.

Table 1: Voting Ignacio Zaragoza 2014

Slate	Candidate	Number of votes	Voting percentage
El Kiosko	Flor Viridiana Lázaro Martines	1526	27%
Águila Dorada	Alfonso González Hernández	1498	26.6%
Unidos por Ignacio Zaragoza	Marco Antonio Barrientos Pérez	876	15.5%
La Campana Alianza Ciudadana	Edgar Pérez Gaspar	645	11.4%
El Reloj	Francisco García Palafox	459	8.2%
La Paloma Circulo Guinda	Maritza Paola Morales Martínez	367	6.5%
Angelópolis	Hugo Cortés Santiago	263	4.6%
Total		5634	

Source: Authors' work with information from the Puebla City Council 2022 transparency consultation.

This process was the result of a major reform of the auxiliary boards, where they went from being government bodies to decentralised bodies of the administration, which brought with it issues of governance and governability within the boards and had repercussions on their renewal process. (Miquel y Cazarín, 2021).

## 6.2. 2019-2022 Plebiscite

The process for the renewal of the auxiliary presidency of Ignacio Zaragoza in the 2019-2022 period was very complex, as situations of violence and harm to the participants<sup>5</sup> occurred. In an unprecedented situation for this auxiliary board, conflicts arose due to the inefficient organisation of the town council and the intervention of partisan interests (Miquel, 2023), and three different plebiscite processes were organised, two of which were organised by the Puebla town council. The first was cancelled on the day of the vote due to irregularities; the second was not able to hold the vote due to a ruling by the Electoral Tribunal of the Judiciary of the Federation (TEPJF) the day before; finally, a third allowed the process organised by the Electoral Institute of the State of Puebla to be concluded.

On 27 December 2018, the call for the renewal of the members of the auxiliary boards for the period 2019-2022 was approved. The registration of the slates took place on 5, 6 and 7 January 2019. As required by article 226 of the municipal organic law, the plebiscite was held on the fourth Sunday of the month of January, specifically on 27 January 2019. Beginning with a little uncertainty due to the previous days, after midday, ballot boxes were stolen, votes were burned, violence and vote buying began; as a consequence of these actions, the election was suspended.

At a press conference, the plebiscite commission announced that the plebiscite processes had been suspended in 6 out of 17 Auxiliary Boards, among them the board of Ignacio Zaragoza. On the 8th of February, the call for the extraordinary process for the renewal of the Auxiliary Boards Ignacio Zaragoza, Ignacio Romero Vargas, La Resurrección, San Pablo Xochimehuacán, San Sebastián de Aparicio, San Felipe Hueyotlipan, San Francisco Totimehuacán and Santa María Xonacatepec was approved, scheduling the election for the 24th of February of that year.

The Electoral Court of the Judiciary of the Federation (TEPJF) ruled that the election should be organised by the state electoral institute. It was resolved by unanimous vote, the inapplication of articles 225 and 228 of the Organic Municipal Law, removed the jurisdiction of the city council of Puebla for the process of the auxiliary board Ignacio Zaragoza and thus endowed with authority to the Electoral Institute of the State of Puebla (IEE), as the organizer for this process.

On 9 October 2019, the IEE began the plebiscite process with the call for the renewal of auxiliary authorities. Because the local electoral body took control over this process and in compliance with the guidelines that govern them, it carried out processes such as: drawing of the letter and month for the people who would be part of the polling stations, insaculation to see who would form the polling stations, notifying citizens of their participation, as well as their training and hiring of trainers for the plebiscites.

The slate registration took place at the IEE's prerogatives and political parties department from 12 to 16 October 2019. Five slates were registered: *El Circulo*, *La Herradura en Unidad por Zaragoza*, *Reconstruyamos Zaragoza*, *Contreras por Zaragoza* and *El gallo*. These slates were allowed to conduct campaign events in the

<sup>5</sup> The causes of these conflicts can be attributed to three key factors, the City Council's substandard organisational skills have contributed to the situation; the auxiliary presidents' limited capacity to manage works has been a contributing factor, despite not receiving resources directly from the City Council, which instead allocates them to the works, these presidents have been observed to benefit their close associates; the auxiliary presidents have been observed to perceive these works as a platform for competing for other posts in the subsequent elections.

period from 13 November 2019 to 27 November 2019. A campaign limit of \$196,080.43 was established, in this agreement all the forms that the slate had to fill out regarding their income and expenses were mentioned, as well as all the fiscal issues that they had to comply with in order not to be subject to sanctions.

The IEE published the voting centres, extending the election to the neighbourhoods that make up the board, unlike what the city council does, which agrees with the candidates and only chooses a few neighbourhoods, “the candidates decide which neighbourhoods participate, so they leave out citizens who live in the board”. (Miquel, 2023).

In Table 2, the votes obtained by each slate in the process for the renewal of the auxiliary presidency, organised by the IEE, are shown. The total number of votes was 6,099, and the total number of people who were on the electoral roll was 76,577. It should be noted that in this plebiscite, all citizens living in the board were allowed to vote; as a result, the number of people on the roll is higher than in the previous election, where only selected colonies voted. This figure falls short of the 10% voter turnout of the local population. The slate *El Círculo* emerged victorious, garnering 48.53% of the votes with 2,960 votes; in second place was the slate *La Herradura*, which secured 34.15% of the votes with 2,083 votes; third place was occupied by *Reconstruyamos Zaragoza* with a 7.81% by registering 476 votes; in second to last place was *Contreras por Zaragoza* with 329 votes, equivalent to 5.39% of the vote; and in last place was *El Gallo* with 4.11%. The vote of the *El Gallo* slate stands out in these results, since it was its candidate who filed the legal appeals to get the IEE to conduct the election.

Table 2: Ignacio Zaragoza Voting 2019

Slate	Candidate	Number of votes	Voting percentage
El círculo	Alejandro Lázaro Martínez	2960	48.53%
La Herradura en Unidad por Zaragoza	Gilberto Ismael Hernández Campos	2083	34.15%
Reconstruyamos Zaragoza	Victor Hugo Ramírez Corona	476	7.81%
Contreras por Zaragoza	Bernardo Daniel Emilio Contreras Reyes	329	5.39%
El gallo	Sergio Regulo Cortes Santiago	251	4.11%
Total		6,099	

Source: Authors' work with information from the Puebla City Council 2022 transparency consultation.

### 6.3. 2022-2025 Plebiscite

The process for the renewal of the Auxiliary Boards in the municipality of Puebla began on 28 December 2021. Following the approval of the call in an extraordinary session, the details were published on 2 January 2022. This document delineated the stages to be fulfilled in the plebiscite for the renewal of Auxiliary Boards, as well as the corresponding regulations for participation. Only residents of the board were permitted to be part of the slate, and political parties were excluded.

The registration of candidates took place on 3, 4, 5 and 6 January 2022. Each list had to include both women and men, with incumbents and alternates always of the same gender. At least three of the incumbents and alternates had to be of a different gender from the first name on the list. Slates had to submit their distinctive logo, avoiding the use of acronyms, distinctive electoral emblems or images related to a political party, as well as patriotic or religious symbols. The logo also could not include the name or image of any of the candidates, in contrast to the 2019 process organised by the IEE, which allowed the use of names in the logo.

The deadline of 10 January 2022 was established for the plebiscite commission to confirm the candidacies of the slates that had completed their registration for the plebiscite in a timely manner and in the prescribed form. A total of five slates were registered.

The slates already registered could not replace their members except in cases of death, illness and resignation, in case of any of the latter two, they had to comply with what was stated in the call. Due to the SARS VIRUS COV-2 (COVID -19) situation, all participants in the process had to comply with all the recommendations presented by the Ministry of Public Health. In case of death, the alternate would fill the vacancy in any part of the process.

The slates were permitted to initiate their campaigning one day after the delivery of their certificate of approval, thus enabling all slates to commence their electoral activities on 11 January 2022, with a deadline of 19 January 2022. During the campaigns, the various candidates of the slates engaged in acts of proselytism, walking around the board to promote their image, as well as their proposals. They also engaged with the residents of the Ignacio Zaragoza board, held meetings with colonial leaders to offer their support, and concluded with their customary dances in the auxiliary board.

In the plebiscite process of the auxiliary board of Ignacio Zaragoza in 2022, there would be a lower participation of its inhabitants since, unlike the election of 2019 organized by the IEE where all the people that

conform it were included, being 76,577 voters, for that election it would only be 26,500, corresponding to 34.61% of those who had the possibility in 2019. The plebiscite, corresponding to the Auxiliary Board Ignacio Zaragoza 2022-2025, involved 20 geographical demarcations. These were selected by the competing slates, proposed and endorsed on 11 January 2022 in the facilities of the Municipal Institute of Youth with the five general representatives.

The candidates' designation of neighbourhoods for participation is informed by their territorial presence, leading to the emergence of a notable phenomenon within the board: the chiefdom. This is characterised by the exclusive occupation of the board's administration by a single family. Voting took place for the renewal of the boards on Sunday, 23 January 2022. The polls were scheduled to open at 8:00 a.m., but it was reported that there were delays in the opening of the polling stations.

On said event, the participants, as well as the candidates Margarita del Carmen Rodríguez Daruich of the slate *Círculo Rosa*, Ignacio Zaragoza and José Domingo Morales Jiménez of the slate *Colonias Unidas Por Zaragoza* denounced the harassment, vote buying and intimidation by the slate *La Estrella* and its candidate José Ángel García Herrera. The discontent on the part of a sector of the population of the board of Ignacio Zaragoza was due to the exclusion of 26 electoral sections, which is equivalent to half of the 52 sections corresponding to the board of Ignacio Zaragoza, and not including the entire population, as the IEE allowed in 2019.

Table 3 shows the results of the plebiscite process held in the board of Ignacio Zaragoza on Sunday 23 January 2022. In this process, only 4,921 inhabitants of the board participated, which corresponds to 18.65% of the 26,500 inhabitants who had the possibility to vote.

Table 3: Voting Ignacio Zaragoza 2022

Candidate	Slate	Votes	Percentage
José Ángel García Herrera	LA ESTRELLA	2.607	52,7%
Ramón Héctor Miranda Aguilar	LA HERRADURA	1.363	27,6%
Eduardo Osorio Galicia	TODOS UNIDOS X ZARAGOZA	254	5,1%
José Domingo Morales Jiménez	COLONIAS UNIDAS POR ZARAGOZA	233	4,7%
Margarita del Carmen Rodríguez Daruich	CÍRCULO ROSA IGNACIO ZARAGOZA	227	4,6%
NULL	NULL	257	5,2%

Source: Authors' work with information from the Puebla City Council 2022 transparency consultation.

The slate that was elected was led by José Ángel García Herrera, *La Estrella*, who received 2,607 votes, equivalent to 52.7% of the total, with a difference of 27.59%, that is, 1,244 votes more than his closest competitor, *La Herradura* of Ramón Miranda Aguilar, who received 1,363 votes, equivalent to 27.6% of the total vote.

The third position was attained by the slate *Todos Unidos X Zaragoza*, representing the candidate Eduardo Osorio Galicia, who received 254 votes, equivalent to 5.1% of the total. The second-to-last position was secured by candidate José Domingo Morales Jiménez of the slate *Colonias Unidas por Zaragoza*, who received 233 votes, representing 4.7% of the election; while in last place was the candidate Margarita del Carmen Rodríguez Daruich of the slate *Círculo Rosa Ignacio Zaragoza* with 227 votes, constituting 4.6% of the total vote. It is also noteworthy that there were 257 invalid votes, equivalent to 5.2% of the total vote.

On 26 January 2022, Ramón Miranda, candidate of the slate *La Herradura*, and Hugo Cortés Santiago, his representative, presented an appeal to the Electoral Court of the State of Puebla for the protection of political and electoral rights (see file TEEP-JDC-028/2022). This appeal related to a call that had been dismissed. The plebiscite process for the renewal of the Auxiliary Boards of the municipality of Puebla was ratified on 13 February 2022, and the members of the slate *La Estrella* took oath for the 2022-2025 period.

## 7. Impact of the plebiscite elections on the population participating in Ignacio Zaragoza

Regarding the understanding of what a plebiscite is, it is noteworthy that only one individual demonstrated a close understanding of the definition and purpose of a plebiscite, highlighting it as a "legal process and is given to popular vote for making decisions that are important for the State" (E14, personal communication, 2023). The remaining participants either misunderstood the definition or did not consider it to be an administrative aspect, but rather a mechanism of direct democracy for elections.

Following a thorough analysis of the available data, it has been determined that those who are not from the neighbourhoods surrounding the board's presidency are the ones who are not always able to vote. For instance, E11, a member of the Board, has not cast a vote in any election to date. E9 notes that he was able to participate in the 2019 process organised by the IEE, but was unable to do so in 2022 due to his colony's exclusion from

the candidates' selection. It is noteworthy that only two people have not participated despite living in neighbourhoods where they can always vote. E16 mentions that he is not allowed to vote even though he lives in an area that does vote in all processes and does not know why they never let him (which exemplifies the lack of updated voter lists for this exercise), while E1 comments that he always imagined that the only ones who could go to the polls were those who lived in the Zaragoza neighbourhood (an example of the lack of information in the population).

Regarding the motivation to participate, four interviewees indicated that it is the economic issue, since on election day they receive an economic 'stimulus' that can reach up to 500 pesos, although they decided not to give more details. Three respondents indicated that their decision to vote was influenced by tradition and a desire to support family or friends who may be nominated or part of the slate team. Four respondents cited their commitment to living in a democracy and their desire to exercise their political and electoral rights as motivations for their participation.

In the 2022 plebiscite elections, Ramón Miranda stated that his motivation to participate as a candidate representing *La Herradura* was as follows:

Basically, to support our people, to support each other, it is not necessary to have a title or a position, but it is necessary to have the full support of the government to support our neighbourhoods, on issues that some do not choose to work on, and to ensure that the people of our board can have a better lifestyle (Miranda, personal communication, 2023).

The Auxiliary President, José Ángel, says that among the reasons for his candidacy were: the fact that the neighbours encouraged him; the support of the people throughout the process of being elected Auxiliary President; and what has always motivated him in this and previous processes: love for his neighbourhood, family, friends and neighbours who live in the Auxiliary Board of Ignacio Zaragoza.

In response to the query regarding the necessity of conducting plebiscites for the election of representatives, one group asserts the importance of maintaining this practice, citing their right to elect their representatives as a fundamental right. In contrast, another group contends that the efficacy of plebiscite processes is diminishing, proposing their dissolution as a potential course of action. This perspective is exemplified by the statement made by E14, who asserts that "it is obsolete, especially for the Boards that are located in the urban area, there is no longer a reason for it to exist and it only generates unnecessary expenses" (E14, personal communication, 2023).

Most interviewees highlighted the significance of maintaining the process, as it provides them with the opportunity to participate. However, the analysis also uncovers the presence of social-political conflicts, including clientelism and chiefdom, which hinder the process.

It was highlighted by those interviewed that there is the presence of a chiefdom within the Board, a finding that is supported by the observation that, in the previous three processes, the winning slates and, consequently, the individuals who become Auxiliary Authorities are family members. This has given rise to a degree of discontent within one sector, given that only one family has managed to secure a position of authority within the Ignacio Zaragoza Auxiliary Board, and that is why they are opposed to the continuation of this process.

Table 4: Perception of fairness in Ignacio Zaragoza's plebiscites.

Name	Do you think the plebiscite process is fair?
E13	No, right now you can already perceive who will or can be the president of the board, even in 2019 it was very aggressive and there were attacks against the candidates and from that moment you can see the quality of the board that it is in the aspect of how important it is for the state in the aspect that it represents a great cover for it.
E7	No, there are always money or power relations issues in between.
E9	Clearly not, that has been the case since the PRI has been in power for years, here it is the same thing.
E3	Anyone can win, but many are not honest.
E15	It is democracy that meets and for power, but it is fair.
E10	No, they have never played fair.
E11	I guess, it depends on whether they know you.
E16	Not always
E12	No.
E1	Yes.
E14	No, they are very rigged, there is a lot of vote-buying, harassment and many other things that taint the process.
E4	A little.
E8	Yes.
E2	Yes, we all know each other.
E6	No, not everyone competes fairly.
E5	Yes, but there is the presence of a family lately.
Ramón Miranda	No, because it is not run by an institution, it is run directly by the municipality and it is there where the people who are more involved or have more commitments in the municipality are the ones who support it, because they are the ones who run it, they are the referees, they are everything.
José Ángel	Yes, it was fair, all the colleagues involved my respects, it was a healthy competition.
E17	The one who puts in the most money and is the sponsored person will not always win.
E18	No.
E19	It is always fair but the other candidates have a dirty war.

Source: Authors' work with data taken from fieldwork in 2023.

Table 4 shows the answers given to the question “Do you think the plebiscite process is fair?”, which shows that in general, villagers do not trust that the election will be fair and therefore doubt the results.

There's always a lot of violence during these processes, especially at the end of the campaign and during the voting, when ballot boxes are stolen and burned, and people get hurt in fights that happen at the end of the process. It's pretty normal to see confrontations between family members, friends, and neighbours who live in the same area and are on the slates.

In relation to the 2019 election, organised by the IEE, the interviewees agreed that the voting process had been executed in a similar manner. In 2022, the body responsible for the plebiscite process for the Ignacio Zaragoza auxiliary board would once again be the plebiscite commission of the Puebla City Council. It was noted by E9 and E11 that, due to the aforementioned body being the plebiscite commission rather than the IEE, their respective neighbourhoods were not included. Consequently, they were unable to participate in the election of the new auxiliary president. E1 and E16 opted not to exercise their voting rights due to a lack of interest; however, they did observe incidents of violence in proximity to the designated voting areas. During the election period, when the spread of COVID was at its peak, residents such as E2, E3 and E4 decided to abstain from the electoral process to safeguard their health and to avoid the crowds that could be generated at the polling stations.

For the candidates interviewed, the perception is different. In the case of José García, the winner, the election was well organised and very well conducted. However, Ramón Miranda pointed out that the election was biased towards the winning candidate. One interviewee recounts issues that he experienced supporting one of the slates:

The brigades were organised, and the candidates were canvassing door-to-door in an attempt to gain more visibility and to establish a network of potential supporters and voters. They were providing minimal assistance to ensure that the candidates were not overlooked. In contrast, the opposing factions engaged in violent acts, including the burning of ballot boxes. The outcome was already known by midday, rendering

the election a foregone conclusion, that's why they were trying to nullify the election, using vote buying and chaos, but they didn't achieve their objective, the election continued with the results already contemplated (E17, Personal Communication, 2023).

Locals were asked about the differences between the plebiscite processes organised in 2019 by the IEE and those organised in 2022 by the plebiscite commission in charge of the City Council of Puebla. 50% of those interviewed indicated that they experienced the processes in the same way, with the traditional places to go to the polls, the neighbours who were in charge of counting the votes, people going to the polls from very early in the morning. While 10% considered that there was a significant change, they were able to vote for the first time in 2019, while in the other elections they were excluded.

The plebiscites in the Auxiliary Boards are characterised as a process in which the only participants are the community members themselves, and contenders are selected through a designated slate system. Political parties are excluded from this process, and the community has expressed its own views on the matter. 8 interviewees consider this to be a process in which only the residents are the participants. In contrast, the remaining 13 interviewees contend that political parties do exercise influence over the board and that it is evident who receives their support. E9 further elaborates on this perspective, stating, 'Clearly, a lot, always the municipal president of Puebla is the one who operates or helps all the Auxiliary Boards to put in their auxiliary president' (E9, personal communication, 2023).

This exercise is the closest to the people at the local level, and they were asked whether these plebiscites motivate citizens to participate. In the opinion of the Ignacio Zaragoza auxiliary board, more than 60% of respondents consider that this does not help or motivate them to participate in other popular election processes. Quite the opposite is true, since being such a particular aspect that involves only neighbours, too many anomalies and violence occur, which leads to apathy on the part of the community.

The remaining population conveys that the plebiscite process does indeed motivate them to participate in electoral processes, attributing this motivation to the trust engendered by the sense of community with their neighbours. Furthermore, they posit that this practice constitutes an integral component of democratic processes, enabling them to go out in every process where they can raise their voice.

In relation to their sense of belonging to the board, 43% of respondents identified with the board, primarily due to their long-term residence in the area, family and social connections, or even historical tradition. Conversely, 24% expressed a lack of identification with the board, citing feelings of alienation. The remaining 33% fell somewhere in the middle, with varying degrees of identification.

52% of those interviewed are against the disappearance of the auxiliary board and consider it to be part of their tradition as inhabitants of the Ignacio Zaragoza board; 33% of those interviewed do not have such a clear position on the continuity of the board. 15% consider that the best thing would be for the board to disappear.

As is illustrated by the questions posed to the Ignacio Zaragoza auxiliary board inhabitants, participation is diverse and the data demonstrate that it is minimal, with interest in participating in these processes being particularly high among the inhabitants closest to the centre.

The perception of the inhabitants regarding the organisation between the town council and the IEE is that it was similar and that they did not feel significant changes. A segment of the population mentions that the difference was the openness so that they could go to the polls and that all the inhabitants were respected, not only those from the neighbourhoods surrounding the presidency.

The participants interviewed on the subject of the slate and the support of outsiders to the board alluded to the fact that, above all, there is a family, in this case the winners of the contests, who maintain control of the board through clientelism.

The majority of the board's community feels identified with its board and considers the prevalence of plebiscite processes to be of utmost importance, maintaining its identity and respecting its autonomy.

## 8. Conclusions

The objective of the present article was to provide a detailed description of the electoral processes of the Junta Auxiliar Ignacio Zaragoza in the years 2014, 2019 and 2022, aiming to identify the main issues and ascertain the extent to which these processes contribute to participation. The objective was achieved since each process was described and the problems that arise from the poor organisation of these processes by the City Council, the lack of information to the community about what an Auxiliary Board is, the lack of clarity in the electoral rolls and the use of clientelism as a tool to guarantee the triumph in the plebiscites. The findings of this study can be replicated in the 659 auxiliary boards throughout the state, yielding similar results, as the phenomena of chiefdom and clientelism are not exclusive to this board, but persist in the local reality of the state.

Regarding the ongoing discussion surrounding the potential involvement of the State Electoral Institute (IEE) in the organisation of this election, the law does not yet allow it. Nevertheless, the findings of this study demonstrate that the election organised by the IEE exhibited minimal alterations in comparison to those conducted by the City Council. In fact, the problems that are present at the national level are replicated within the Ignacio Zaragoza auxiliary board due to violations of the General Law on Electoral Crimes, such as vote

buying, harassment, lack of participation, the burning and theft of ballot boxes and post-electoral conflicts.

Therefore, the plebiscite process within the Auxiliary Boards constitutes an exercise that allows for local participation. However, this process is subject to a legal and regulatory review of its execution by the city council. This is due to the fact that, whilst it does allow for local participation at the community level, there are problems with the organisation and a lack of interest on the part of the people. This ultimately leaves its contribution to local democracy in question.

It is also noteworthy that the Auxiliary Boards are decentralised bodies, yet they are subject to a unique electoral process for the election of their authorities. This is a distinctive feature that sets them apart from any other decentralised body within the City Council. This unique electoral process can lead to confusion, since the legal order does not consider them a government, but it does endow them with government by organising an election for their designation. This figure is somewhere in between being a fourth order of government (as it already is the case in Tlaxcala) or becoming another agency of the municipality, for which an election would not be necessary.

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### **Semi-structured interviews**

1. Interviewee 1, personal communication, 12 January 2023.
2. Interviewee 2, personal communication, 20 February 2023.
3. Interviewee 3, personal communication, 27 February 2023.
4. Interviewee 4, personal communication, 20 February 2023.
5. Interviewee 5, personal communication, 28 February 2023.
6. Interviewee 6, personal communication, 28 February 2023.
7. Interviewee 7, personal communication, 5 December 2022.
8. Interviewee 8, personal communication, 20 February 2023.
9. Interviewee 9, personal communication, December 5, 2022.
10. Interviewee 10, personal communication, 27 February 2023.
11. Interviewee 11, personal communication, 27 February 2023.
12. Interviewee 12, personal communication, 12 January 2023.
13. Interviewee 13, personal communication, 5 December 2022.
14. Interviewee 14, personal communication, 12 January 2023.
15. Interviewee 15, personal communication, 27 February 2023.
16. Interviewee 16, personal communication, January 12, 2023.

### **In-depth interviews:**

1. Interviewee 17, personal communication, 28 February 2023.
2. Interviewee 19, personal communication, 28 February 2023.
3. Interviewee 20, personal communication, 28 February 2023. 4.
4. García Herrera, José Ángel, personal communication, 28 February 2023.
5. Miranda Aguilar, Ramón Héctor, personal communication, January 18, 2023.

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