

**Does the Collapse of Single-Party Rule in Central and Eastern Europe  
Reveal the Path Down Which Mexico is Headed?**

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## **Does the Collapse of Single-Party Rule in Central and Eastern Europe Reveal the Path Down Which Mexico is Headed?**

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Perhaps the trite answer to the question in the title is “no—and yes.” Many party systems in the ex-communist states of the former Soviet Union and the Eastern European countries dominated by the USSR have fragmented in ways that should not repeat themselves in Mexico—but some have consolidated into two-party, government-versus-opposition arrangements. Other successors to the once-ruling communists have failed to adapt successfully to competition, but several have reformed and transmuted themselves well enough to share in the governance of their nations. Some successor parties and new party systems have failed to develop effectively a democratic political culture, but others have advanced the consolidation of democracy in the former Soviet bloc. Comparative analysis of the Mexican transition with the new regimes of Central and Eastern Europe can tell us much about the peculiarities of Mexican democratization and offer insights into the future of its former ruling party.

Novelist Mario Vargas Llosa (1991) once called the Mexican regime the “perfect dictatorship.” Perfect though it may have seemed to Vargas Llosa, the 71-year control by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) of Mexico’s executive branch ended unexpectedly in July 2000. Since then, the party’s fortunes have fluctuated. The former ruling party appeared strong in 2003 and 2004 as it captured the most seats in the midterm congressional elections and won several gubernatorial races. In the 2006 presidential contest, however, the nominee of the self-styled “revolutionary party,” former party president Roberto Madrazo, finished a disappointing third, running best among the most elderly and most economically marginalized citizens. (Klesner 2007). The PRI has neither disappeared nor is it primed to retake power at the national level. Two parties of long standing, the National Action Party (PAN), a center-right organization founded in 1939, and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), a center-left coalition dating from 1989, have surged ahead of the PRI in national popularity. The perfect dictatorship has yielded to a democratic evolution, which—if not perfect—can be considered optimal. The former ruling party retains influence, governs a majority of Mexico’s federal entities (17 of 31 states), and holds the balance in the Congress in the first half of President Felipe Calderón’s term, which began on December 1, 2006. Still, its appeal to younger, urban voters remains limited, so it is likely that the PRI will give way to more modern political organizations that excite broader interest. Only a thorough makeover of the PRI comparable to the transformation of some of the former ruling communist parties in Central and Eastern Europe—e.g., the Hungarian Socialist Party—will ensure its longevity.

The Mexican transition has had three critical consequences for the party system. First, while defeated, the former ruling party has not yet imploded and retains the most national structure of the major surviving parties. Second, although there are new opposition parties, the Mexican party system has remained remarkably solid, with both national and state- and local-level politics revolving around three major parties. The

party system has not fragmented. Third, the dynamic of competition drives the parties' internal development to encourage them to be catch-all parties (Klesner 2005; Shirk 2005; Wuhs n.d.), which moderates their ideological zeal.

That the Mexican party system has evolved as it has owes much to the nature of the Mexican transition. The emergence of competitive democracy in Mexico came via what many commentators have described as a "protracted transition." The earliest significant reforms that set the stage for the PRI's ouster from power were made in 1977 (Middlebrook 1986). The first true challenge to the ruling party came in the 1988 presidential election, when PRI apostate and eventual PRD founder Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas may have been cheated of victory over the official PRI candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. In the wake of this disputed showdown, Salinas (president, 1988-94) advanced important reforms to gain PAN legislative support for his sweeping neoliberal economic policies. Salinas's successor, Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), implemented even more significant electoral changes. He leveled the electoral playing field so that adversaries could defeat the PRI in fair elections. The first such contest came first when Cárdenas garnered the mayorship of Mexico City in 1997. In that year, the PAN and PRD prevented the PRI from regaining its congressional majority (Klesner 1997). In the next presidential election (2000), the PAN's Vicente Fox, running on a ticket of "change," upset the PRI's nominee. This lengthy transition featured a difficult but crucial process of amalgamating different currents of the Left into the PRD under Cárdenas's leadership, effective PAN party organization at the state and local level (Wuhs, n.d.), the appearance of a vast array of grass-roots organizations devoted to increasing political participation, and the emergence of an independent and critical media, particularly newspapers willing to investigate government malfeasance (Lawson 2002).

In the remainder of this article, I will compare the PRI to the heirs to the former ruling communist parties that emerged after the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe. In so doing, I will consider the PRI's prospects for playing a significant role in its country's prospects. I will also examine the party systems that have arisen in the new European democracies and that which developed during the protracted Mexican transition. Before turning to those topics, I will offer preliminary comments on how to define single-party systems and important contextual factors crucial to these comparisons.

### **Preliminaries: Definitions and Context**

All one-party systems were not created equal, as many scholars have carefully delineated. Following Giovanni Sartori (1976), we can distinguish among predominant party regimes, hegemonic party systems, and single party states. For example, during its first four decades of independence, India had a predominant-party system in which the Congress Party held sway without effective competitors. Other viable parties existed, and the Congress Party did not always receive a majority of the popular vote. In such cases, it did not control all state governments and only achieved dominance in the national legislature by winning an absolute majority of parliamentary seats. As Sartori observed (230), the Congress Party "remains submissive to the conditions that make for a

responsible government,” such as yielding to the will of the electorate and going into opposition, as events over the past decade have shown. Other examples of predominant party systems include Japan under the Liberal Democratic Party (1955 to the present), Italy when the Christian Democratic Party prevailed (1945-1990s), and Sweden under the Social Democrats for most of the twentieth century (see Pempel 1990).

Mexico, on the other hand, epitomized what Sartori called a “hegemonic-pragmatic” party system: hegemonic because while other parties were allowed to exist, “the possibility of rotation in power [was] not even envisaged” (1976: 230); and pragmatic because the ruling party, the PRI, lacked a coherent ideology and concentrated on maintaining its “relaxed monopoly.” India under the Congress or Japan under the LDP represented cases of democracy in which one party predominates, while Mexico under the PRI was a civilian authoritarian regime in which the “hegemonic party permit[ed] second class parties as long as, and to the extent that, they remain as they are.” (Sartori 1976: 235). In addition, Taiwan under the Kuomintang had hegemonic party configuration. In the PRI’s last decade of rule, especially after 1994, the party system evolved toward a predominant party system as the PRI was disposed to accept defeats at the state and local levels.

The party systems of the former communist states as well as a handful of other societies fit into Sartori’s “single party” category; namely, that “[o]ne party means, literally, what it says: Only one party exists and is allowed to exist. This is so because such a party vetoes, both *de jure* and *de facto*, any kind of party pluralism.” (1976: 221) In Eastern Europe, parties were granted the constitutional responsibility, and frequently practiced that duty, to oversee the operation of the revolutionary state. This “leading role” made communist parties totalitarian institutions. Without discussing whether communists truly dominated the state bureaucracies or whether state ministries enjoyed some degree of autonomy, suffice it to say that competition from other parties was unwelcome. Thus, it’s possible to conceptualize the former communist party systems as party-state systems.<sup>1</sup>

The party-state systems fall into two categories: those that came to power through an indigenous revolution such as the Soviet and Chinese communist parties and those imposed from the outside by the imperial reach of an existing communist state. We may assume that party-states established through revolutions came to power because they had a significant organization and ideological appeal to the population. Moreover, because they have often combined a national independence struggle with the implementation of a socialist developmental strategy, such party-states excite nationalism by donning the mantle of liberators. In contrast, those communist party-states imposed by Moscow in the late 1940s often reached power without broad appeal (hence the need to impose them), and the obeisance of “national” leaders to their Soviet overlords undermined their claim to hold legitimizing nationalist credentials. Scholars of Eastern European party systems argue that parties such as the Polish United Workers’ Party, the governing party in communist Poland, and the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party found their legitimacy questioned because they were clearly imposed from outside. In contrast, the Czechoslovak Communist Party effectively cultivated the image of a home-grown movement until 1968. The ruling parties of communist Romania and Bulgaria made

similar claims (Ishiyama 1995: 158-9). This dichotomy clearly oversimplifies a much more complex Eastern European reality, but for analytical purposes the comparison will serve.

Given that the USSR thrust communism on many people of the region, nationalism loomed large in the demise of the communist party in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as in Russia itself. Those who lived in the Soviet sphere of influence sought to break away from Moscow's control. In the republics of the ex-USSR itself, nationalists sought to apply the principles of the Soviet constitution, specifically that Soviet Russia was a voluntary association, in order to escape the grip of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. The latter was true even of the Russian Federation itself (Carrere d'Encausse 1994). At the time of fall of the Berlin Wall, the various ruling communist parties had to take an ideological and political stance vis-à-vis this nationalist élan. Some chose to remain relatively internationalist ideologically and to reject the appeal of nationalism electorally and as guide to policy (e.g., successor parties in the Czech Republic and to a lesser extent those in Hungary and Poland). However, many successor parties chose to tap nationalist emotions to survive in the new environment (notable examples include Russia and Romania; see Ishiyama and Bozóki 2001). Nationalism and ethnic issues continue to serve to define a powerful cleavage in post-communist party systems in the new European democracies, as we will see below.

In the Mexican case, nationalism played no significant role in the democratic transition. It can be argued that the new openness to international trade—especially with the United States from the late 1980s onward—pushed Mexico to begin opening the political sphere to competitors. Such a move helped promote the image of democracy and liberalism in a regime that was neither democratic nor liberal regime in the early 1990s. The PRI's strong advocacy of liberalization before the reforms of the 1980s and 1990s obviated appeals to national independence. Put briefly, the nationalism and ethnic issues had little relevance in Mexican context electoral politics.

### **The Evolution of Former Ruling Parties**

Do the experiences of the former ruling communist parties of Central and Eastern Europe offer any lessons for the PRI's future? The resilience of the heirs to communism stands out as one of the most salient aspects of post-transition politics in the region. Transformed or, in some cases, un- or partially-altered structures and cadres from the former ruling communist parties have appeared in several countries of the former Soviet bloc. Table 1 offers a summary of the electoral success of post-communist successor parties and that of the PRI since the time of their respective democratic transitions.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Electoral Success of Successors to Former Ruling Parties**

Country	Ruling Party	Successor Party	Vote Share in PR portion of Lower House Election (date)		
			First Democratic Election	ca. 2000	Most Recent Election
Bulgaria	Bulgarian Communist Party	Bulgarian Socialist Party	47.2 (1990)	17.1 (2001)	34.2 <sup>a</sup> (2005)
Hungary	Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party	Hungarian Socialist Party	10.9 (1990)	32.2 (1998)	43.2 (2006)
Poland	Polish United Workers' Party	Democratic Left Alliance	12.0 (1991)	41.0 (2001)	11.3 (2004)
Romania	Romanian Communist Party	Social Democratic Party of Romania <sup>b</sup>	66.3 (1990)	36.6 (2000)	36.8 (2004)
Russia	Communist Party of the Soviet Union	Communist Party of the Russian Federation	11.8 (1993)	24.3 (1999)	12.8 (2003)
Ukraine	Communist Party of the Soviet Union	Communist Party of Ukraine	12.7 (1994)	20.0 (2002)	3.7 (2006)
Mexico	Institutional Revolutionary Party	Institutional Revolutionary Party	39.1 (1997)	37.8 (2000)	28.2 <sup>c</sup> (2006)

Sources: Rose and Munro (2003); for most recent elections, Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org>) entries for elections in Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Russia and Ukraine; for Mexico, Instituto Federal Electoral (<http://www.ife.org.mx>).

<sup>a</sup> As part of the Coalition for Bulgaria (*Koalicija za Bălgarija*).

<sup>b</sup> In 1990, part of the National Salvation Front (*Frontul Salvării Naționale*, FSN). In 2000, as part of the Social Democratic Pole. In 2004, in alliance with the Humanist Party of Romania (*Partidul Umanist din România*)

<sup>c</sup> In alliance with the Ecological Green Party of Mexico (*Partido Verde Ecologista de México*, PVEM)

Table 1 indicates that post-communist successor parties have boasted electoral success in the aftermath of their nations' democratic evolutions. While none of the successor parties has become dominant in the new democracies, several have participated in coalitions in the parliamentary regimes—e.g., the Hungarian Socialist Party, Poland's Democratic Left Alliance, the Bulgarian Socialist Party, and the Social Democratic Party of Romania. In presidential regimes they have been able to play significant roles in the legislatures of their regimes—e.g., the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) and the Communist Party of Ukraine. Reasons for the recent decline of communist party heirs in Ukraine, Russia, and Poland vary widely with no generalizable explanation. In Ukraine, the emergence of personalist parties initially focusing on presidential candidates Viktor Yushchenko and Viktor Yanukovich, who produced the "Orange Revolution" in 2004-5, has eclipsed the Ukrainian Communist Party (Hesli 2006). In Russia, the 2003 Duma election proved especially disappointing to the KPRF as its vote share was halved compared to 1999, to but 12.8 percent. The KPRF failed to rally its rural, conservative base, which suggests that the party has not attracted the "losers and malcontents" arising from the liberal economic reforms (Wegren 2004; Wegren and Konitzer 2006), indicating that its fate may be similar to its Ukrainian counterpart. In Poland, a medley of factors—policy failures, scandals, and a split within the Democratic Left Alliance—led voters to punish it in the 2005 parliamentary contests (Markowski 2006).

The PRI's setback in 2006 clearly relates to Madrazo's lack of appeal and his poor campaign (Langston 2007). That PRI congressional candidates outperformed their presidential nominee by six percentage points suggests that the party will not be as easily eliminated from the political arena as occurred with the Ukrainian communist party. Still, the PRI's decline partially mirrors that of the Russian communists in that both parties garner support from rural and economically backward zones that are waning in size and salience.

Those who have scrutinized their development underscore several ways of distinguishing among the several post-communist successor parties that have some heuristic value for the PRI's evolution. Scholars note that pre-transition regimes, party choices, and party organizational and environmental characteristics have made a difference in the types of post-communist successor parties that have emerged.

**Old-regime legacies.** Ways of characterizing pre-transition regimes in Central and Eastern Europe vary widely. Kitschelt (1995: 453-4) suggests three categories:

1. *Patrimonial communism*, with low intra-elite competition and which "rely on hierarchical chains of personal dependence between leaders in the apparatus and their entourage, buttressed by extensive patronage and clientelistic networks." (1995: 453) Examples are Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine.

2. *Bureaucratic-authoritarian communism*, where “the level of rational-bureaucratic institutionalization is high.” (453) Because of that, the regime could not quickly respond to external challenges such as the civic uprisings of 1989. Cases include the former East Germany and Czechoslovakia.
3. *National consensus communism*, which allowed for interest articulation and some competition within the political elite. Hungary and Poland are prime examples.

Where national consensus communism prevailed, the communist parties could anticipate change more easily—and even spearhead it—to best position their successors after the transition than proved true in the patrimonial or bureaucratic-authoritarian regimes (the latter simply imploded). When change came to the patrimonial communist regimes, it resulted from elite transformations—pre-emptive reforms as exemplified by Mikhail Gorbachev’s *perestroika*. The consequences for party organization during and after transition included clique-based struggles within the communist nomenklatura and weak liberal but strong nationalist opposition (Kitschelt, *et al.* 1999). In the aftermath of the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, the surviving communist parties in these patrimonial regimes could have chosen either to continue reforms in a social-democratic direction or adopt a “leftist-retreat” strategy. Many such parties took advantage of surging nationalism to convert themselves into national-patriotic entities (Ishiyama and Bozóki 2001). This allowed some parties, such as the Russian Communist Party, to avoid reforms, while still courting the electorate by stressing its defense of the motherland during the twentieth century. This appeal, of course, is important when the party no longer has government resources to lavish on its constituents.

Mexico under the PRI exhibited patrimonialism *and* national consensus politics. On the one hand, the PRI was a classic clientelist party. Among PRI politicians and in the party’s relationship to the broader society, patron-client relationships dominated. It recruited many astute politicians and public servants through clientelist networks known as *camarillas* (Camp 1999: 116-120). Those same *politicos* encouraged Mexican citizens to make demands on the state through patron-client channels that they controlled, rather than through interest groups. The PRI continues to operate through both kinds of patron-client ties, with party factions coalescing around *jefes*, but with the patronage now distributed through PRI-run state and local governments. As a result, the PRI has become a party of governors, powerful politicians seeking to parlay their regional strength into national prominence. The unwillingness of many PRI state executives to identify with Madrazo’s campaign sprang from their sense that the nominee’s poor image would damage their support (Langston 2007).

On the other hand, the pre-transition Mexican regime emphasized national consensus, at least until the last two decades of PRI rule. The PRI articulated a nebulous ideology of “revolutionary nationalism” that rhetorically integrated all Mexicans into a development project based on economic nationalism and import-substituting industrialization (Hansen 1970). The party allowed token, loyal opponents, which it subsidized (except for the PAN), to compete for office. Contending intra-party currents

emphasized either more market-oriented or more state-directed policies. Revolutionary nationalism faded by the late 1970s once the struggle to define a new development approach came to the fore in the 1980s. Nevertheless, the PRI continued to claim that it was, above all, the party of the majority of Mexicans. The PRI must develop a post-revolutionary ideology to appeal to voters who cannot be recruited by the now limited patronage. This is particularly difficult for a party that once presented itself as all things to all people.

**Political choice.** In countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Bulgaria, the former ruling parties had factions willing to negotiate with the democratic opposition, to sacrifice its constitutional “leading role” status, and—in Poland and Hungary—to layer Western European-style social democracy on the remnants of the communist party (Waller 1995). Table 1 suggests that these have been among the most successful communist successor parties. For their part, the Russian and Ukrainian parties resisted giving up their leading role until forced to do so by reformers who even outlawed those parties for a time. The early willingness of the former Polish and Hungarian ruling parties to foresee the need to adapt to change led them to adopt reforms that allowed the successors in those countries to serve as social-democratic pillars of new party regimes. The Russian and Ukrainian parties retained large roles in their new democracies. This outcome resulted from the incapacity of those new democracies to create institutionalized parties *de novo* in the wake of repressive communist regimes. In their most recent elections, the Ukrainian and Russia successor parties have suffered major reverses that indicates that they may soon fade from the political stage (see Table 1).

The PRI’s leadership was divided about how much they should revamp the party during the democratic change. While PRI modernizers typically accentuated pre-emptive reforms to develop the capacity to win elections fairly, other elements in the party either resisted changes or sought to undermine reforms proposed by party chiefs. Moreover, the party split over the neoliberal project pursued by PRI presidents Carlos Salinas and Ernesto Zedillo with neither the champions of continued economic liberalization nor paladins of statism winning by the time that the PAN swept the PRI from power in 2000. During Fox’s term, PRI heavyweights fought among themselves for control of the party. This intra-mural struggle aside, the party failed to resolve the pro-market, anti-market clash. This lack of ideological clarity benefited the PRI when it was the “party of the majority”—the Mexican version of the “big tent”—and it was not a liability as long as it offered the most credible alternative to the now-governing PAN, as was the case in 2003. Yet when another party—the PRD—presented a viable option to the PAN in 2006, the former governing party found itself running third and failing to capture a single state. The PRI has survived thanks to its traditional constituencies and state governments from which to distribute patronage. It lacks a coherent, compelling, and most importantly, distinctive message for the national electorate, including the millions of new voters.

**Organizational and environmental characteristics.** Scholars exploring the adaptation of communist party successors have distinguished the extent to which successor parties have made adaptations because of such “environmental” factors as changing electoral institutions, the emergence of competitors on the left, or party organizational characteristics. Ishiyama (2001) demonstrates that some successor

parties—notably Bulgaria’s and Romania’s—took power primarily because of the absence of an organized, coherent leftist competitor. Their organizations, particularly the degree to which they were led by officeholders intent on creating effective electoral mechanisms, would not have vaulted them into the government (Ishiyama 2001: 860). Other successor parties have relied on organizational strengths to win enough votes to gain office or, at least, to play a significant role in the legislature (as did Russia’s KPRF). Meanwhile, Hungary’s Socialist Party and Poland’s Left Democratic Alliance had to acquire the electoral apparatus to shove aside foes that might have filled the left on the political spectrum. The Russian and Ukrainian successor parties encountered a weaker challenge on the left.

How can we access the PRI’s organizational characteristics? First, we should note that its two major competitors define themselves as center-right (PAN) and center-left (PRD), with the former having a much stronger organization than the latter (Wuhs n.d.). In the wake of the PRI’s loss to the PAN in 2000, few PRI leaders advocated vying for the same ideological space as the PAN; indeed, many observers ascribed the party’s debacle to its having moved too far to the right on economic issues. On the other side of the continuum--where the PRI’s traditional pro-state, revolutionary nationalist ideology comfortably fit--the PRD posed a robust threat. The PRI boasts a better organization than the PRD, but both are strong enough that in the Federal District and a half-dozen states the PRI would not necessarily win one-on-one against the PRD.<sup>3</sup>

Second, the PRI is organized nationwide: the PRD has an anemic presence in the North; the PAN has difficulty penetrating rural southern Mexico. Its national reach will enable the PRI to continue to win elections. This means that it can serve as the alternative to either the PAN (in the north and the west) or the PRD (in the south) if state or local voters want to punish the incumbent party. That national presence will not return the presidency to the PRI unless it fields more appealing standard-bearers than it did in 2000 or 2006 (Klesner 2001; Langston 2007).

Third, in the absence of effective competition to the PRI until the mid-1980s, the PRI served as an instrument to reward friends and punish foes. In other words, it placed aspiring power holders—and, increasingly, technocrats—into executive offices (Smith 1978; Camp 1995).<sup>4</sup> In the late 1980s, it had to improve its vote-winning capability, but many PRI “dinosaurs” disparaged modern campaign techniques.

The PRI has introduced some important institutional innovations such as the use of primaries to select presidential, gubernatorial, and senatorial candidates (Klesner 1999; Langston 2006). Yet the party remains deeply riven. Before the PRI’s fall from power, the Mexican chief executive’s control of the appointments and his influence over nominations allowed the party to paper over internal divisions because no one dared rock the boat lest he incur the president’s wrath. Today, with the PAN occupying the Los Pinos presidential residence, no figure wields similar power within the party. As a result, some PRI big shots openly urged voters to turn their back on Madrazo even as they cast ballots for state and local party aspirants (Langston 2007). The internal wrangling for control of the party eclipses the struggle against other parties.

By comparison to the communist successor parties, the PRI has some advantages, but faces some challenges as it adapts to competitive politics. It is a genuinely indigenous party with an elaborate organization, holds power in many states and localities, and can use its governorships and mayorships to reward clients/supporters. At the same time it lacks a distinctive and coherent message. Moreover, its internal divisions have diminished its electoral clout. Finally, it has failed to attract a new base following its presidential defeats. Its inability to replace the rural, less educated, and aging voters who have been its bulwark for years threatens to put it in the same situation as the Russian communists, whose core voters aging and passing from the scene.

### **The Emergence of Competitive Party Systems**

At first glance, the party systems of the former communist nations appear to feature an alphabet soup of new parties—a menu of bewildering choices, with options as various as the Polish Beer-Lovers' Party, the German Minority in Silesian Opole, and the Peasant Alliance in Poland alone.<sup>5</sup> In her survey of 19 new democracies, Sarah Birch (2003) found an average of 5.87 *elective* parties in contests up to 2002. However, the effective number of *parliamentary* parties in those regimes totaled only 4.12 (Birch 2002: 111). The latter figure masks considerable diversity, too, with the effective number of parliamentary parties varying widely from country to country and over time. For example, while in 2002 Hungary had 2.21 effective parliamentary parties, Ukraine had 4.43. In its first democratic election in 1991, Poland had 10.89 competitive electoral parties, a figure that plummeted to 3.6 by 2001. Yet, in the region as a whole, the effective number of both electoral and parliamentary parties changed very little between the first and fifth elections (Birch 2002: 110).

Table 2 provides a set of measures of party system fragmentation in Central and Eastern Europe, with Mexico included for comparative purposes. The figures describe elections held in large countries approximately a decade after the fall of the Berlin Wall and portray the results of the third (Russia and Ukraine), fourth (Hungary, Poland, and Romania), and fifth (Bulgaria) democratic elections. The figures for Mexico reflect the third post-transition election in 2006. We see that party system fragmentation in Mexico (1) compares favorably to outcomes in Poland, Romania, Russia, and Ukraine, (2) exhibits similarity to Bulgaria, and (3) is greater than in Hungary.

As mentioned above, three main parties have contested elections since 1988.<sup>6</sup> However, other small parties have existed alongside the PRI, PAN, and PRD, notably the Mexican Ecological Green Party and the Labor Party. As in 2006, these small parties often form electoral coalitions with larger parties. The figure of 3.03 for the effective number of parliamentary parties measures *coalition* seats; it rises to 3.57 if the actual *party* identities of members of the lower house of congress are considered.

**Table 2: Comparative Measures of Party Systems**

<i>Country (date of election)</i>	<i>Effective number of parties</i>	<i>Effective number of parliamentary parties</i>	<i>Vote shares in PR</i>		<i>Seat shares</i>	
			<i>Elections</i>		<i>Largest party</i>	<i>Largest two parties</i>
Bulgaria (2001)	3.95	2.92	42.7	60.9	50.0	71.3
Hungary (2002)	2.94	2.21	42.1	83.1	48.7	94.8
Poland (2001)	4.50	3.60	41.0	53.7	47.0	61.1
Romania (2000)	5.26	3.57	36.6	56.1	44.9	69.3
Russia (1999)	6.22	4.67	24.3	47.6	25.1	41.3
Ukraine (2002)	6.72	4.43	23.5	43.5	24.7	47.3
Mexico (2006)	3.43	3.03 (3.57)	34.2	63.9	41.2	73.2

Source: For formerly communist countries: Birch 2003: 109-114 and Rose and Munro 2003; for Ukrainian seat shares: Sherr 2002: 11; for Mexico: author calculations based on data provided by the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), at [http://www.ife.org.mx/docs/Internet/IFE\\_Home/CENTRAL/Contenidos\\_Centrales/Informes\\_Especiales\\_gastos\\_CP/Integracion\\_Congreso\\_Union\\_2006/integracion\\_total.pdf](http://www.ife.org.mx/docs/Internet/IFE_Home/CENTRAL/Contenidos_Centrales/Informes_Especiales_gastos_CP/Integracion_Congreso_Union_2006/integracion_total.pdf).

Table 2 shows that no single party has won the majority of votes in these new democracies. In the relatively concentrated systems of Bulgaria and Hungary, single parties have at times won parliamentary majorities, thus being able to form governments. At the same time, the party regimes have not fragmented to the extent that any party fails to garner substantial plurality; large parties take first place in these countries and, in most of them, two parties share the lion's share of votes. But the mixed electoral systems in Russia and Ukraine gave rise to large numbers of independents elected in single-member districts. This made their legislatures more diverse than their counterparts in the region. Birch (2002: 140-2) also notes that the presidential systems—complemented by power struggles between executive and legislative branches—have led the Russian and Ukrainian chief executives to encourage party proliferation.

As the literature suggests, the factors shaping the emergent party systems include the number and salience of issue dimensions (or cleavages) and institutional features, principally whether the regime is presidential or parliamentary and the type of electoral system employed to select legislators. Regarding the latter, Birch (2002: 137-9) concludes that proportional representation (PR) engenders a proliferation of parties in the

new European democracies, a reaffirmation of the conventional wisdom on the impact of electoral systems on party system development. However, she notes the exception of the former Soviet republics, namely, that single-member constituencies often favor a large numbers of independents or regional parties. Of course, electoral law can inhibit such fragmentation by prohibiting independent candidacies, which Mexico does. To the extent that Mexico uses single-member districts for a majority of legislative seats (60 percent of the Chamber of Deputies and 50 percent of the Senate), imposes a threshold to keep out extremely small parties (the current 2 percent level may be too low), and requires candidates to be nominated by registered parties, it should discourage fragmentation. Similarly, Mexico's presidential system propitiates the formation of large parties—or, at least, alliances centered on large parties—to contest the long and costly campaigns effectively. Thus, compared to the post-communist regimes, Mexico's institutional should discourage the multiplication of parties.

Cleavages also shape party systems, of course. Economic issues have been dominant in post-communist Central and Eastern Europe as the new democracies have struggled to shift from central planning to market-oriented regimes. As a result, political entrepreneurs have made nationalism an important wedge issue in several countries. In addition, during the early post-communist rule, a division existed between those who preferred a more democratic regime and those more comfortable with authoritarian rule (Sitter 2002; Kitschelt 1995). When combined with electoral systems with significant PR elements, these cleavages created the prospect of broad representation and multiparty systems (see Kitschelt *et al.* 1999 for a more extensive demonstration).

A pro-regime, anti-regime face-off that characterized competition in Mexico in the 1990s (Molinar Horcasitas 1991; Moreno 1998; Klesner 2005) was supplemented by differences over economic policy. In many ways the election of Fox put an end to the salience of the regime cleavage. In its place, economic questions have surfaced as the principal cleavage (Moreno 2007). Some Mexicans yearn for the PRI's hegemonic regime just as some Central and Eastern Europeans long for the certainties of authoritarian rule, but that pro-regime, anti-regime dimension of party competition will likely fade from the scene. Strife over nationalism and ethnicity has not arisen. A potential nationalist versus internationalist conflict overlaps with the economic cleavage because economic policies relate to the Left's nostalgia for statism in contrast to continued openness to the U.S. and world economies. The Left has exploited anti-American nationalism, but on the most emotional issue—the treatment of Mexican nationals in the United States—all parties advocate better treatment of Mexicans north of the Rio Grande and the liberalization of U.S. immigration statutes. A possible cleavage based on claims by indigenous Mexicans for greater rights has not been channeled effectively through the party system. For better or worse, the economic divide shapes a party system in which most other factors work to discourage proliferation.

## Conclusions

At this point, Mexican politics has one strong cleavage, but three main parties—one more than necessary to represent that division. The competitive dynamics of Mexican politics—in races for the presidency, governorships, and single-member district

legislative seats—should reduce the number of parties. The PAN and the PRD have distinct agendas; the PRI does not. Were party systems determined only by social cleavages, the PRI would confront a bleak future.

The PRI does have organizational strength, however, and it can nominate presidential candidates with extensive experience in government at the national and state level. Moreover, it continues to promote clientelistic machines throughout the country. Nevertheless, if it fails to place itself within the new party system as the Hungarian and Bulgarian successor parties have done, it risks fading into irrelevance. Of the new democracies, the evolution of the Hungarian party system before and after the demise of communism closely resembles that of Mexico. However, the Hungarian Socialist Party—in contrast to the PRI—developed an effective vote-winning capability that landed it a key space in the new party system. The PRI could forfeit its electoral space to the PRD, unless bad decisions by its failed presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador and other leaders discredit it in the eyes of the electorate. If this happens, the PRI may rebound as the fortunate recipient of a gift from its major competitor on the Left.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Sartori (1976: 44) writes that “Parties only make for a ‘system,’ . . . when they are parts (in the plural).”

<sup>2</sup> I use 1997 as the transition election for Mexico—although the presidency did not change parties (because it was a midterm election), the PRI lost control of the lower house of congress and thereby could no longer unilaterally implement public policy. I focus on six of the larger Central and Eastern European countries—Bulgaria, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Romania, and Ukraine—for comparability because their population size is of similar scale to that of Mexico, unlike the Baltic states. I exclude the Czech Republic and Slovakia because of the complications in assessing change after the breakup of Czechoslovakia, and similarly, I do not include the former Yugoslav republics.

<sup>3</sup> Many PRD local organizations are former PRI organizations that joined the PRD when local PRI leaders defected.

<sup>4</sup> PRI candidates elected president of Mexico in 1970, 1976, 1982, 1988, and 1994 had never before run for elective office.

<sup>5</sup> For a compilation of the parties contesting elections in post-transition Eastern Europe, see Rose and Munro 2003.

<sup>6</sup> Cárdenas contested the 1988 election at the head of the National Democratic Front, a coalition of left-leaning PRI defectors, social movements, and small parties of the Left. The PRD was founded in 1989, using the registry of the Mexican Socialist Party, which merged with the PRI defectors and some social movement actors.