Institutionalizing Mexico's New Democracy

The presidential victory of Vicente Fox in 2000 ended one-party domination of the Mexican presidency. Joseph L. Kleiner writes that political reforms made possible the establishment of new political parties and allowed the electoral victory of parties other than the long-dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) by removing the PRI from control of the authorities that supervised elections during the 1990s. The Federal Electoral Institute has increased the transparency of elections by involving ordinary citizens in running the polling stations and by installing advanced information systems for rapid disclosure of the election results.

Mexican political reform facilitated the establishment of new parties by providing generous funding. The resulting multiparty system, however, leads to difficulties in passing legislation. The political reform did not change the requirements of "no reelection" of government officials, so that great power remains in the hands of the presidency because each elected or appointed official must look for a new position in three or six years. This concentration of power also results in part from changes in the number of legislators and in the way in which they are selected. The Chamber of Deputies initially had 100 members in single-member districts. Seats by 1980, 200 members were added in proportional representation seats. The Senate includes two senators from each of the political parties that won the election, one from the party that came in second, and thirty-two additional senators nationally elected by proportional representation from party lists. No single party controls Congress; moreover, power has shifted to municipalities with results that vary from greater control by local bosses to increasing control by citizens who demand to know where their increased taxes and fees are being spent.

The fragmentation and instability of the government led to a strong decline from 1960 to 2000 in confidence in Congress, the civil service, and political parties, accompanied by increased general confidence in government and in experts making decisions. This suggests that there is increasing public concern for efficient decision making that could lead to the elimination of the "no reelection" clause and the reconsideration of how elections are financed and the criteria for national recognition of political parties.

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Joseph L. Kleiner

Institutionalizing Mexico's New Democracy

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Vicente Fox's unexpected victory in the July 2000 presidential election brought to culmination Mexico's protracted transition from one-party authoritarian rule to democracy. The nation's prolonged, at times glacial movement toward democracy involved the emergence and growth of a civil society committed to citizens' involvement in shaping Mexico's future; a gradual liberalization of the public sphere, particularly in the realms of freedom of speech and of the press; and the slow growth of opposition political parties. However, despite progress in the late 1980s and 1990s by the Mexican citizenry in developing new channels of political participation and in liberalizing the political regime, most critics of the long-ruling PRI argued that Mexico could not be considered a democracy until there had been alternation of parties in the control of the powerful presidency. If President Fox accomplishes nothing else in his political career, he will be remembered and honored by millions of Mexicans as the man who ousted the PRI from Los Pinos, Mexico's White House, and thereby brought democracy to his people.

Although alternation in the presidency may be a sign of a transition to democracy, the constitution of that democracy requires more than alternation in the party controlling the presidency. Indeed, an overly powerful presidency has characterized the seventy-one years of PRI rule, and democratization of Mexico's regime will necessarily include downgrading the role of the presidency. Despite physical features and a demeanor that suggest he can be a strong leader, Fox has not been an overly powerful president, in part because he has lacked the support of the traditional wing of his political party, the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, PAN). If anything, the alignment of political forces in Mexico today suggests that the days of all-powerful presidents—limited-term dictators, in the words of Frank Brandenburg (1964, 16ff.)—are part, at least for the near future.

Yet place an all-powerful president, Mexicans must build new institutions of democracy. In the past decade, political elites and activists have turned to create (or recreate) the institutions, both formal and informal, of democratic governance.

Is this chapter I will address institutional change, focusing on the political reforms that made presidential alternation a possibility, on developments within the major political parties that will make them more effective instruments of democratic representation, and on the divided government that has accompanied the reemergence of a Congress with real legislative powers. In addition, I will explore the geographical dispersion of power in Mexico, examining the forces that have begun to replace its overly centralized regime with the federalism that the nation has long incorporated in its Constitution, considering both the creeping federalism that has come with the growth of opposition party strength in states and localities, and the formal dislocation of central power that is known as the new federalism. First, though, before turning to the significant changes that have come to the Mexican political regime in the past decade, I will explain the structural bases of Mexican authoritarianism so that the changes associated with Mexico's democratization can be better set in their context.
### Changing Characteristics of the Mexican Political Regime

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<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Authoritarianism</th>
<th>Emerging Democracy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidentialism (1834–1907)</td>
<td>New federalism (1994 to present)</td>
<td>Greater financial autonomy of municipalities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive centralism (until 1990s)</td>
<td>Increasing opposition control of state and municipal governments (1989 to present)</td>
<td>Declining importance of major interest associations of labor and peasantry (1980s to present)</td>
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<td>Corporatism (1890–1990s)</td>
<td>Greater independent influence of business (1980 to present)</td>
<td>Declining importance of major interest associations of labor and peasantry (1980s to present)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clientelism (until 1994)</td>
<td>Erosion of patronage (1980s to present)</td>
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<td>Corruption (ongoing)</td>
<td>Repeated pledges to eliminate corruption</td>
<td>Repeated pledges to eliminate corruption</td>
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<td>Electoral fraud (until 1994)</td>
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<td>Weak judiciary subordinate to executive (ongoing)</td>
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*Note: See text for definitions of terms. Dates may overlap because reforms have been introduced before old regime characteristics change definitively.*

### The Bases of Mexican Authoritarianism

Mexican authoritarianism rested on one-party domination of the political system. (Table 21.1 summarizes the features of Mexican authoritarianism, not all of which I can discuss in this short chapter.) From 1934 to 1940, the former ruling party was organized into three sectors, one for peasants, another for the workers, and a third for state bureaucrats. A corporatist structure made the PRI a corporatist institution. By incorporating these organizations of peasants, workers, and bureaucrats into the PRI, Cárdenas gave them privileged access to decision makers. At the same time, however, the incorporation of these groups within the party, especially of their leaders within the PRI hierarchy, made them vulnerable to co-optation and control. In particular, labor and peasant leaders were co-opted by the PRI's corporatist leadership—offered personal political opportunities in return for exercising restraint in their demands on behalf of their constituents.

The PRI's corporatist organization also had the advantage of providing to the party unparalleled capacity to turn out voters on election day. Local representatives of the peasant confraternities served as political bosses in their villages and state capitals, providing the party with unusual support in getting rural voters to the polls and ensuring that they voted for the ruling party. Labor union leaders were similarly able to convince their membership to vote for the PRI.

Under Cárdenas, the powerful position of the presidency within the political regime became cemented too. The Mexican presidency held a formidable set of powers. The president's formal Constitutional powers are not more extensive than those held by most presidents in other Latin American political systems (Maierwein and Shugart 1997), but Mexican presidents enjoyed "metacorporatist powers," a "series of prerogatives [that] correspond to the 'unwritten' norms of the Mexican system. They allow the president to centralize his power progressively through a distortion of constitutional mechanism" (Carrido 1989, 422). Such powers set up a characteristic of Mexican politics that scholars have labeled "presidentialism," which is defined by Roderic Ai Camp (1999, 11) as "the concept that most political power lies in the hands of the president and all that is good or bad in government policy stems personally from the president."

The Mexican Congress is charged with the responsibilities of auditing the public accounts of the previous year, approving the budget of the coming fiscal year, and voting on all bills introduced to it by the president or by members of the Chamber of Deputies or the Senate, the two houses of the bicameral legislature. In the formal rules about making laws established in the Mexican Constitution, a bill becomes a law in ways similar to the United States: bills must pass both houses of Congress; they can be approved or vetoed by the president; and if they are vetoed, the veto can be overridden by a two-thirds vote of both houses. However, until very recently, studying the way a bill becomes a law in Mexico did not require the same attention to executive-legislative relationships that we have given it in the United States. Before the 1990s, the Mexican Congress had not rejected a bill introduced by the president since the 1930s.

How can we explain presidentialism, this seemingly unprecedented domination of the legislature and other national institutions by the president with his metacorporatist powers? When we take into account the incredible advantages accruing to the PRI of having been the incumbent party since 1929 (it took credit for all of the benefits of economic development that had come to Mexico) and its capacity to mobilize voters because of its corporatist incorporation of peasants, workers, and urban popular groups, we should not be surprised that a PRI nomination was equivalent to an appointment to that "elected" position—for federal congressional candidates or for those running on the PRI ticket for governor, state assembly member, mayor, or membership on the municipal council. If we then remember that post-revolutionary Mexico has forgotten retribution to the many positions just mentioned, it becomes easier for us to understand why the president was so powerful (Cordova Villalobos 1978). Politicians cannot develop support bases in constituencies that will return them to office in the way that U.S. politicians can.
Each "elected" PRI politician thus had to be looking for a new position, either elected or appointed, within three (for municipal offices, state assembly members, or federal deputies who serve in the equivalent of the U.S. House of Representatives) or six years (for governors or federal senators). Likewise, because each new president brought new ideas with him, those appointed to political positions in the bureaucracy knew that they must plan to be appointed to some new position—probably in another branch of the bureaucracy—or be nominated for an elected post within six years. Who controlled these appointments and nominations? Ultimately, the president. However, for younger politicians to gain presidential approval, bosses in their camarilla, or political groups, could provide essential support to indicate that an aspiring politician was worthy of appointment to a lesser elected or appointed position. Candidates for political jobs therefore were "clients" of bosses, and, ultimately, of the president. Hence, clientelism became an essential means of ascent in a system in which political recruitment was dominated from the top by the president.

In this situation, the reasons for Congressional subordination to the president become clear. Even though the PRI typically had ample majorities in the Congress, which PRI deputy or senator wanted to demonstrate opposition to a presidency initiated bill? What would a vote against a bill proposed by the president accomplish? Since a member of Congress could not be reelected, why would he or she care about constituents' reactions to a bill that might not be favorable to their district? But, since his or her career required getting another position within three or six years, why would he or she risk antagonizing the president by voting against a presidential initiative?

This logic produced an impressive record of legislative accomplishments for Mexican presidents. As mentioned above, between the 1930s and the last 1990s, no bill initiated by the president was turned down by the Mexican Congress. Opposition members of Congress usually spoke against bills emanating from the presidency, but to little practical effect, especially if the national media paid little attention to their speeches, which was generally true before the 1970s.

Mexico's 1917 Constitution also enshrined the concept of the "free municipality," a local government that has autonomy in making local laws and policies. municipios (equivalent to U.S. counties, the lowest level of government in Mexico, whose size varies tremendously, from municipalities in Oaxaca with fewer than 1,000 residents to Guadalajara's nearly 2 million) were subordinate to the federal government since they were dominated by the president. This local political subordination to the center developed despite the strong regionalism that has characterized Mexico.

The long record of central government domination of the states can be attributed to three factors. First, the federal government raises by far the greatest proportion of tax revenues, which it then "shares" with states and localities. Indeed, after 1947, the federal government came to control practically all sources of government revenue (Cossío, Durán-Cayoyos, and Webb 2000). However, federal revenue sharing need not be proportional to the amount of taxes that a state or locality contributes to the federal budget. Thus, state and local governments had to be careful about their relationship with the federal government, especially with the all-powerful executive, for fear of being allocated relatively small shares of federal revenues (Rodríguez 1997). Second, once the PRI was formed and came to control political recruitment throughout the nation, further political advances for state governors and other aspiring politicians in a state then depended on staying in the good political graces of the president. While there were still regional strongmen in the 1930s and 1940s, fewer and fewer of these regional power brokers could withstand presidential wishes as the PRI-dominated political system developed through the 1950s and 1960s. Third, like other elected officials in Mexico, governors cannot be reelected and thus they have been constrained to the degree to which they have been able to build local political machines that would be support bases for resisting central government demands. In effect, because most or all state governors have had further political ambitions (at least for themselves, then at least for their closest followers, often their own children) that they would pursue through the PRI, the president had the de facto power to appoint and to remove governors. Thus, the power of the Mexican presidency extended beyond the federal government to the states and the municipalities.

These features of Mexican authoritarianism came under assault during the nation's protracted transition to more democratic rule. Because of space limitations, I cannot address all features of the political regime and their change over the past two decades—for example, I will not discuss the growing role of women in politics (see Chapter 22 in this book) or the part that nongovernmental organizations and social movements have played in the transition to democracy. Instead, I will focus on political reforms and challenges by the political opposition that have fundamentally altered electoral politics and the means of representation that electoral politics permit, especially in the political parties; the changing balance of power between the president and Congress; and the emergence of a more real federalism in Mexico.

The Record of Political Reform

Mexico's protracted transition to democracy has had a "two steps forward, one step back" character. While oppositionists often hoped to make sudden advances—as in 1988, when Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (son of Lázaro Cárdenas, and a vanguard who left the PRI in 1987 and established the Party of the Democratic Revolution—PRD, or Partido de la Revolución Democrática—in 1989) seemed poised to defeat the PRI's presidential candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari—those efforts never quite succeeded in producing the outcomes the PRI held up in 2000. The PRI held onto power in no small part because it controlled the institutions that oversaw the legal process by which individual politicians succeeded each other in power. Mexico has used elections to produce citizen consent for transitions.
of power at the federal, state, and local levels since the 1910 revolution. Because those elections were supervised by federal and state electoral agencies controlled by the PRI until 1996, opposition parties and candidates often charged they had been cheated out of legitimate victories and thus long felt that the electoral playing field was tilted against them.

Beginning in 1977 (when newly elected president José López Portillo had the somewhat embarrassing triumph that came with winning his 1976 election uncontested) but accelerating in the 1990s, a process of political reform-making gradual-ly removed the PRI from control of the authorities that oversaw elections. Electoral reforms addressed two main features of the electoral regime. First, the federal electoral authority—for decades known as the Federal Electoral Commission (IEF)—became the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) in 1990—had been headed by the secretary of the Interior (Gobernación) since 1946 and always included a majority of members in one way or another linked to the PRI. The Federal Electoral Commission approved parties’ petitions for registration and oversaw the voting on election day, recording (or not) procedural irregularities and certifying the election results. To the extent that the PRI won office by electoral fraud, its control of the electoral authority permitted those victories.

In the 1990s, the opposition pushed hard to reduce the extent of PRI control of the IFE, first succeeding in removing the president’s power to appoint the membership of the IFE’s executive committee in 1994, and then entirely removing the secretary of the interior from the management of the IFE in 1996. These gains by the opposition were achieved because President Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994) needed to reach political accommodations with the PAN, the largest opposition party, in order to pass the more fundamental elements of his neoliberal economic reforms in the Congress, and because of President Ernesto Zedillo’s (1994–2000) commitment to democratize a country whose presidency he controlled only after a series of truly unexpected events, including the assassination the PRI’s first 1994 presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio. From 1996 forward, a professionalized IFE led by citizen-councilors approved by all major political parties has run Mexico’s electoral processes. The IFE has promoted the transparency of the electoral process by involving ordinary citizens in running the polling stations on election day and by installing advanced information systems for the rapid and broad dissemination of election results.

Second, as the ruling party for seven decades, the PRI enjoyed many privileges of incumbency, including often inappropriate access to state coffers to fund party functions, including campaign financing. Although earlier electoral reforms had made more public monies available to opposition parties for campaign efforts, new reforms adopted in 1996 made a qualitative difference in the character of opposition campaigns. By the 1996 electoral law, private sources of campaign finance are supposed to be limited to 10 percent of total campaign spending. The remainder of campaign funds come from the government, distributed by the IFE to parties according to a formula based in part on past election performances; the

large sums allocated to federal campaign financing reflect the Zedillo administration’s efforts to drive private financing out of Mexican electoral politics (Preston and Dillon 2004, 277–78). Although the PRI remained favored by this public campaign-financing scheme, its advantages over the other parties were greatly reduced. Similarly, the parties gained greater access to free time on television and radio, again according to a formula based on past performance. With these new sources of campaign finance, the PRD produced a much-improved campaign to elect Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas as Mexico City mayor in 1997 and Vicente Fox won the presidency behind a lavishly financed campaign, funded partly by the federal contributions mentioned above and partly by his political action committee, Mexico’s first of the genre, called Amigos de Fox.

These reforms have changed Mexico’s electoral system from one of the most suspect in the world to a system that the parties and the citizenry can trust to mount a fair electoral contest, in which the votes cast by Mexican citizens will be faithfully and rapidly reported. While finding exactly comparable survey evidence is difficult, in 1988 nearly six in ten Mexicans expected that widespread fraud would take place in that year’s election, while prior to the 2000 election two-thirds expected the process would be clean and fewer than 17 percent reported that they thought there had been fraud after the elections had taken place (Donizáquez and McCann, 1996, 157; Mexico 2000 Panel Study). Yet making Mexico’s elections both clean and fair has been an expensive process. For example, the IFE oversaw the distribution of some US$306 million in public funds to the parties in the year 2000 alone, including sums of over US$55 million to several small parties whose genuine electoral support base is mislabeled (Crespo 2000). Both political analysts and the public at large have begun to view these expenditures as too high for a developing country like Mexico.

Future electoral reforms will likely address the scale and formula for public funding of parties and the electoral process. In particular, many analysts and major party leaders have grown concerned that establishing new political parties has become a business for opportunistic political operators. Lavish federal financing of parties that meet minimal constitutional registration requirements—an organization petitioning to become a party has to show that it has at least 3,000 members in each of 10 of the 32 states, or at least 300 in each of 100 of the 300 federal electoral districts—has led to a proliferation of small parties without clear ideological or programmatic positions. A good example of the political opportunism rampant among small parties in Mexico that such critics seek to curb is the Green Ecological Party of Mexico (PVEEM, Partido Verde Ecologista de México), Fox’s coalition partner in 2000, which defected shortly thereafter and ran as a coalition partner of the PAN in 2003. Critics point out that the PVEEM’s leader, Jorge González Torres, and his family have been the main beneficiaries of the party’s appropriation of the green label for a party that is largely pro-business. Other examples abound of political operatives seeking to establish parties in order to feed from the public trough.
Developments in the Political Parties

For seventy-one years the PRI was the party in power. During that time its leaders and activists developed the view that the PRI was the governing party and that its role in Mexican society was to recruit and develop future Mexican leaders. Indeed, one view of the PRI was that it was the electoral organ of the ruling elite, designed principally to produce electoral legitimacy for the continued rule of a small but somewhat open group of civilian politicians—not a real political party at all. The idea that the PRI might lose an election did not begin to take hold within the party until well into the 1990s.

On the other side of the electoral picture stood opposition parties that seldom won significant elected positions. As time passed, those parties—although they held distinct ideological positions and policy preferences—came to see themselves and to be seen by voters as primarily anti-regime parties, or pro-democracy parties (Molinar Hocarras 1991). A distinct division of the party system into pro-regime and anti-regime camps emerged by the 1970s, deepened by the electoral conflict of 1988. The PAN and the PRD came to be seen as offering two different visions of 40. The anti-regime message was a wide range of Mexicans who become floating opposition voters, choosing the party for which they voted based upon which seemed most efficacious to them in a particular election. Table 21.2 shows some dimensions of this floating opinion vote as well as the relative steadfastness of PRI partisans. The table divides those who voted in the 2000 presidential race into three groups: those who remained loyal to the party for which they voted in the 1997 mid-term Congressional elections; those who defected from their 1997 party choice to vote for Fox; and those who did not vote in 1997 but cast a ballot for Fox in 2000. The greater loyalty of those who call themselves PRI partisans is notable, as is the extent to which PRI voters changed their preference. Partisan loyalty is a major explanation for why PRI candidates lost the 1997 elections, as well as the 2000 presidential elections.

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Table 21.2 Political Characteristics of Loyalists and Defectors, 1997–2000 (percent)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Partisanship in 2000</th>
<th>Loyalists</th>
<th>Defectors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PAN/Fox</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboristas</td>
<td>76.0</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD/Canavés</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRI to Fox</td>
<td>39.3</td>
<td>39.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRD to Fox</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None/other do not know</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Self-reported party loyalty:
- Always vote for the same party: 65.9%
- Sometimes vote for one party, sometimes another: 29.5%
- Don’t know/no answer: 4.6%

Percent of total sample: 15.5

Note: *Table excludes voters for smaller parties (3.0% of the total sample; 1997 PAN voters (2.3%) and 1997 non-voters (14.8%) who voted for any other party in 2000; and those who could not remember or would not report their 1997 vote (13.7%).

For an analysis of the process of political party formation, see the section titled "Political Party Formation" in chapter 20.

In the last 2000 election, only 2 of 6 Fox voters chose PAN; Congressional candidates in the most recent mid-term election and the PRI took the largest share of the votes cast by new voters ("Imperio disintegrido en abstraccionismo," 2002).

Since the early 1990s, then, a three-party system has gradually emerged to replace the one-party dominance. Since 2000, we can barely use the term "opposition" in this new three-party system. For some of the three parties in truly an opposition party—each holds key elected executive positions at various levels of government and all share power to the federal Congress. With the end of the regime—opposition distinction, however, come significant challenges to each party in terms of identity and strategy.

PRI

 Consolidating democracy in Mexico must involve making the PRI into a true political party that can offer the electorate a distinct vision of Mexico, not just an...
Table 21.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Percent of state legislators</th>
<th>Number of governors</th>
<th>Percent of population under party governors</th>
<th>Percent of population under party municipal governments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>57.4</td>
<td>40.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAN (National Action Party)</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22.8</td>
<td>32.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PND (Democratic Revolutionary Party)</td>
<td>18.7</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9.6</td>
<td>1**</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sources: Partido Acción Nacional, Presidencia de Gobierno (Mexico City, April 2004); Consulta Miscelánea, Los Congresos Estatales (Mexico City, May 2004).

*The PRI's total includes the position of head of the Federal District government, equivalent to a governorship.
**The governor of Chiapas was supported by a coalition of the PAN, the PRD, and several smaller parties.

leader, can the party resolve party leadership struggles without falling apart? Thus far the evidence suggests that it can, but major tensions exist between PRI leaders who identify with current president Roberto Madrazo (who seeks to make the PRI into a social democratic party, but whose democratic credentials are very suspect given his violation of campaign financing restrictions when he ran for governor of Tabasco in 1995), and Madrazo's rivals, some of whom are still identified with former presidents Salinas and Zedillo and failed PRI presidential candidate Francisco Labastida. Prior to the 2000 presidential election, party leaders pushed (forward a new party rule that PRI presidential candidates had to have held electoral office before becoming the PRI's nominee—none had done so since the time of Luis Echeverria (1970-1976), including Salinas and Zedillo. In addition, the PRI introduced a national party primary to select its presidential nominee, with the encouragement of then-president Zedillo. These reforms meant the party is no longer the instrument of the president—but of course, the PRI no longer holds the presidency. Internal party struggles are now much more in the open than ever before; the extent to which they are resolved according to clearly defined norms of democratic contention remains suspect.

Related to problems about party leadership is the challenge of defining the PRI's policy platform and ideological orientation now that it is no longer simply the "party of the majority." Under Salinas and Zedillo, the PRI put through Mexico's neoliberal economic program, turning its back on a long history of populism. Many supporters of the neoliberal restructuring continue in the party. While some populists left the PRI with Cardenas in 1988, many still remain in the party, and other newer leaders—such as Madrazo—see promise in a strategy of recruiting the PRI as a social democratic party. The PRI can probably also be something of a catch-all party—indeed, when in power it played this role in terms of recruitment and efforts to appeal broadly to the whole electorate. The question is in which the PRI will situate itself in a party system where the PAN will sit to the right of center and the PRD to the left—is there room in the middle?

PAN

The PAN has a long history of disagreement between those party leaders who feel committed to maintaining the party's ideological purity as a party in the mainstream of Catholic social teaching with a commitment to democracy—effectively, a Christian Democratic position—and those who have urged the party to strive for electoral victory and government power even if it means broadening the party's social and ideological bases and making compromises with former enemies. Many of the former group of PAN leaders are "sons" and daughters of grandsons and granddaughters of PAN leaders of the 1950s and 1960s; they regard the latter group as "barbarians of the north, " since many relatively newer PAN members come from northern states and from the business community and are regarded as impostor—
more interested in simply getting things done or "throwing the bastards [PRI] out!" than in doing so with grace.

Fox is a quintessential barbarian. His ascension to the presidency has come without serious tensions with more socially conservative and traditional PAN leaders. To ensure that he would win the PAN's presidential nomination in 2000, Fox created the first Mexican political action committee, Amigos de Fox, which to intimidated his rivals for being the party's standard bearer so no one else ended up contesting the nomination. Within the party, the PAN operates according to well-defined democratic procedures, but it is important to note that those rules pertain to party members only. The PAN has the smallest membership base of the three main parties, reflecting stringent rules designed to keep out of the PAN those regarded as not sufficiently serious about the responsibilities of party membership and those regarded as not sufficiently prepared ideologically. Fox, for instance, was formally selected as PAN presidential nominee by a party primary in which only party members participated; had there been a rival, Fox could have lost even though he was clearly very popular with the general electorate. Many newer PAN members believe the party must embrace as much of Mexico as possible in order to continue to win important electoral posts, and they favor easing the barriers to party membership, essentially making the PAN a catch-all party, even if one situated on the center-right of the ideological spectrum. More traditional party members fear that allowing too many new members into the PAN will blur its focus. Fox's victory has meant that the burlesque wing of the party is on the rise, but it does not mean that PAN has fully committed to being one of two or three catch-all parties in the Mexican party system.

**PDR**

The PDR's origin as the organizational manifestation of the (Cuautemoc) Cárdenas movement—initially involving secession of a portion of the PRI's left wing—has created a challenge for PDR members. Often, candidates have been successfully nominated for office; in 1988 and in 1992, candidates for the PAN victory in 1988 and 1992, respectively. In 1992, the PAN's presidential candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, won in the election. His winning the presidency, so the PDR (like the PAN) must put forward a platform containing issues other than existing the PRI.

The PDR, which was the center of the Mexican government, means that it is an organizational entity. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, can rival supporters and the support of potential voters with public spending projects. But whether spending in the capital can effec-

cively convince voters the length and breadth of Mexico that the PDR is a credible alternative to either the PAN or the PRI remains to be seen. The PDR, too, is in the direction of a catch-all party, in this case for the left, but in catching many former PRI activists as well as people from many other progressive extremes, it has built into its organization much of the friction that has historically characterized the Mexican left.

As a self-conscious democratic party, the PDR has sought to establish clear formal rules that guide the party's internal life, in contrast to the miasma of procedures and the imposition of candidates from above in the PRI that caused so many current PDR members to flee the PRI. Unfortunately, the PDR's fractionalism has led to intense rivalries that have sometimes promoted violations of the party's democratic procedures; elections for party president in 1999 had to be nullified because of fraud, for example. Also threatening to the health of the party has been the role of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, whom everyone recognizes for leading the struggle against PRI hegemony to find an independent party of the left, but who has played something of a caudillo role within the PDR, insisting on running for president again in 2000 after two defeats and refusing to rule out a fourth candidacy in 2006.

**Divided Government**

As I described above, the key to presidential dominance during the PRI's heyday were the PRI's complete control of the Congress combined with the principle of non-selection. Prior to 1977, almost all Congressional seats (both chambers of Deputies and Senate) were chosen by a single-member district winner-take-all system like that used in the United States. As the dominant party, the PRI won all or nearly all seats. Nomination by the PRI for a Congressional seat became tantamount to election, but no member of Congress could serve more than one term consecutively. As the effective leader of his party, the president could exercise enormous power over members of Congress who relied upon him for their next nomination to elected office or appointment in his administration. Consequently, the Congress never rejected presidential initiatives and rarely modified them in significant ways.

In the long process of political reform that began in the mid-1970s, Mexico's legislative bodies were made more representative of the political forces in the nation by the creation of new legislative seats in the Chamber of Deputies (originally reserved for minority parties i.e., those other than the PRI initially; after a 1986 reform, the PRI no longer controls the presidency, so the PRI (like the PAN) must put forward a platform containing issues other than existing the PRI.

The new center of the Mexican government once meant that it was an organizational entity. Andrés Manuel López Obrador, can rival supporters and the support of potential voters with public spending projects. But whether spending in the capital can effect-

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cively convince voters the length and breadth of Mexico that the PDR is a credi-
lists in proportional representation races. The Senate, whose members are elected every six years at the same time as the president, also has been made more representative. Each state now has three senators, two elected from the party that finishes first in the Senate race in that state and one from the party that finishes second. These 96 senators are joined by 32 more who are elected nationally by proportional representation from party lists. The party lists for both senators and deputies are drawn up by the national party leadership; not surprisingly, the highest positions on the lists are usually occupied by party leaders themselves so that they can be assured election to the upcoming Congress.

In the political reforms of the 1990s, the opposition parties pushed the Salinas and Zedillo governments to change the proportional representation formula so that the overrepresentation of the PRI was diminished. In 1996, the Zedillo government acquiesced to a formula by which a party had to win at least 42 percent of the popular vote in order to take the majority of the Chamber of Deputies; the 42 percent figure was arrived at after intense negotiation between electoral experts in the Zedillo administration and the political parties.

In 1997, its first election under this new “governance” formula, the PRI failed to win 42 percent, with the result that a coalition of opposition parties could deny the president and the PRI passage of laws. Since 1997, Mexico has had divided government: Fox may have won 44 percent of the popular vote in 2000, but his Alliance for Change coalition (his PAN and the PVEM) failed to win 42 percent of the Congressional vote, receiving 38.3 percent of the deputy vote and 222 seats between them, well short of the 251 needed to form a majority. In 2003, the PAN suffered an electoral setback and is thus even further from being able to support President Fox’s initiatives than during the first half of his term. Furthermore, the PRI has a stronger position in the Senate than in the Chamber of Deputies. Table 21.4 illustrates PRI dominance of the Chamber before 1997 and divided government since then.

During the seven decades of PRI hegemony and dominance of the presidency, the formal powers of the Congress were minimal. Its investigatory powers were rarely invoked, committee debate of bills was often pro forma, and submission of significant bills by the Congress was uncommon. Since 1997 the Mexican Congress has been rebuilding its capacities as a legislative body—for example, by holding oversight hearings on a variety of executive and former ruling party undoeds—but the Congress remains stymied by the principle of no re-election. For example, the heads of major committees in the legislature are first-term members of Congress, or have not been members of that house of Congress in a decade.

Experts on the Mexican Congress differ in their evaluations of its accomplishments since 1997. They write that although the Mexican Congress has taken on a considerably larger volume of business that was the case before 1997, in particular legislation concerning dual nationality, health care, and pension reforms (Welden 2004), it has not pushed several significant reform measures that Mexico should address in its transition away from PRI rule, such as further electoral reforms (elimination of the no re-election clause, among others) and fiscal reform (Dresser 2003; Lawson 2004; see also Chapter 9 in this book). When the Fox government sought to pass a set of laws to address the complaints of indigenous peoples, as most prominently expressed by the Zapotecs National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Chiapas, the administration found its bill evaded by PAN legislative leaders, who were upset by not being being consulted by the president on the legislation, as well as by congressmen from other political parties.

Mexico is saddled with a constitutional structure in which a presidential system coexists with a Congress in which no party holds a majority. It suffers from the further challenge that past presidents enjoyed large majorities in that Congress. Thus, a pattern of policymaking in which presidents can dictate to Congress has become the norm by which current presidential performance is measured. Not pushing through major policy initiatives may look like presidential failure when it is little more than a reflection of current political constraints. At the same time, President Fox has made errors in his handling of both his own party and the PRI. PAN and PRI legislators and their leaders have some incentive to pursue effective public policies because they can then go to the electorate with evidence of their parties’ accomplishments in meeting Mexico’s urgent challenges. Fox, however, has not effectively courted either rivals within his own party or in the former ruling party, with the consequence that major policy and political reform initiatives remain to be introduced in Congress or have been held up there.

Facing the check of no majority in the Congress, President Fox has chosen to appeal to the people to try to put pressure on the Congress to pass his legis-
In the 1940s through the 1970s, the PRD has successfully navigated the complex political landscape of Mexican society, utilizing its electoral strength to shape the political agenda. However, as the political landscape has evolved, the PRD has faced new challenges. The current political system, characterized by the PRI's dominance, presents both opportunities and challenges for the party. The PRD is actively working to adapt and modernize its strategies to remain relevant in the ongoing political discourse. In the next section, we will delve into the strategies and challenges faced by the PRD in the 1990s and beyond.
from the PRI to the PRD in 1998 and 1999, in part reflecting the long-term frustra-
tion with the PRI's national leadership for importing candidates on states and lo-
calities. These prominent local PRI leaders brought their supporters and local
organizations to the PRD, which led to PRD victories (often at the head of ali-
cances of various opposition parties of both national and state-level orientation)
in Zacatecas, Baja California Norte, and Tamaulipas, respectively—of the party's earlier ele-
ctions in the south and the capital city area. The PRD also won Michoacán in 2001
behind the candidacy of a second Lázaro Cárdenas, son of Cárdenas and
grandson of the famous president, his namesake, both of whom had earlier gov-
erned that state.
With their victories in local and state elections (see Table 21.3), the PAN and
the PRD have sought to provide good government of a kind that had long been
omitted from the national agenda. In doing so, local PAN and PRD governments
have sometimes been stymied by hostile PRI governors who have withheld revenues
they were supposed to share with localities. In addition, providing good govern-
ment may mean cases moving to gather more revenue in order to be able to
offer the services required in Mexico's burgeoning cities, which is difficult be-
cause the federal government has controlled income and value-added taxes
and sought to use these revenues for its own purposes. Opposition governments in
the early 1990s were generally successful in improving the provision of services; how-
ever, with the consequence that in many cases these governments remained in the
hands of the PAN or the PRD (Rodríguez and Ward 1995). Yet, as the stories of
continuing drug trafficking in various Mexican states and the murders of over two
hundred young women in Ciudad Juárez indicate, bringing parties other than the
PRI to power in states and localities does not immediately bring an end to Mexico's
dreadful problems in the areas of preventing and punishing crime or with other
inadequately provided public services.

The New Federalization
Not all of the movement away from centralism comes from opposition challenges
to the former ruling party, however. The federal government itself has sought to
decentralize the regime since at least a 1984 municipal reform law promoted by the
Miguel de la Madrid administration. In this reform initiative, the Instituto Mexicano de
Desarrollo (IMD) and his government followed a time-honored PRI approach of peremptory
reforms—creating reforms to deflect criticism from the PRI-led federal govern-
ment that did not work. Most observers would concede, however, that it has been largely
with the late 1970s. Local governments had gained most of their income from federal
revenue sharing, reaching a point in 1983 where 64 percent of local government
revenues came from that source (Rodríguez 1997). The 1984 reforms gave greater
fiscal autonomy to municipalities, which obtained exclusive control of revenues
from property taxes and any fees they might charge for public services (water and
sewage rates, garbage collection fees, and so forth).
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Note

1. To select the 200 proportional representation seats (called plurinominal in Mexico), the country is divided into five member districts (or "circuit electoral") of forty seats each. Each party places a list of forty candidates. The seats then are elected by proportional representation within the region—if in a region the PAN wins 25 percent of the votes, it receives ten seats—and the top ten candidates on its list go to the Chamber of Deputies.

References

Mexico 2000 Panel Study. Directed by Miguel Bazdresch, Rodrigo Camp, Wayne Cornelius, Jorge Dominguez, Federico Estudillo, Joseph Kersaul, Chappell Lawson (principal investigator). James McCann, Raymond Magaloni, James McCann, Ethan Perez, and Alejandro Pical. Support for the Mexico 2000 Panel Study was provided by the National Science Foundation (SES-9920733) and Reforma newspaper.
CHANGING STRUCTURE OF MEXICO
POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC PROSPECTS
SECOND EDITION
LAURA RANDALL
EDITOR

M.E. Sharpe
Armonk, New York
London, England
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