

# The 2000 Mexican Presidential and Congressional Elections

## PRE-ELECTION REPORT

Joseph L. Klesner  
June 15, 2000

Western Hemisphere Election Study Series

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CSIS Americas Program

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Mexico's July 2, 2000 presidential election will test the stability of the nation's post-revolutionary political institutions. The highly charged presidential race, with the biting personal attacks levied against each other by the three strongest contenders, and the uncertainty of the election's outcome, contains the possibility that losers will cry foul and call their supporters into the streets to protest the decision. The temptation to resort to electoral fraud will be great given the closeness of the race. The relatively new and autonomous Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, or IFE) will be challenged in its responsibility to guarantee a clean and fair result. President Ernesto Zedillo's commitment to oversee a democratic transition in his nation will require statesmanship on his part to protect the democratic advances made under his leadership.

At the same time, the July 2 elections hold the promise of cinching for Mexico a transition to a fully competitive electoral democracy. Many institutions, both governmental and nongovernmental, are now in place to assure that the voters' decision will be respected. Beyond the IFE, which demonstrated in the July 1997 congressional elections that it could manage national elections that were fair and clean, Mexico now has increasingly independent media that have reported nearly every sneeze made by the leading presidential contenders, and have been carrying out monthly opinion polls that track the contest. Exit polls conducted on July 2 will make fraud difficult to perpetrate. Nongovernmental organizations, many benefitting from resources provided by international alliances, will be observing the voting like watchdogs and reporting their conclusions about its fairness to the rest of the world. The leading opposition contender for the presidency, Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, or PAN), has created an electoral organization called *Amigos de Fox* that he claims has more than four million members, all poised to deny the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, or PRI) an undeserved victory.

Thus, Mexico's political future rests on the outcome of the July 2 elections. In addition to the presidency, Mexicans will choose a new Congress as all 500 members of the lower house, the Chamber of Deputies, are replaced and 128 members of the Senate are renewed. Three years ago Mexico made a major step toward competitive democracy, when opposition parties won a majority of the Chamber of Deputies. That opposition majority has made it impossible for President Zedillo (1994-2000) to exercise many of the meta-constitutional powers post-revolutionary presidents have usually enjoyed. If the PRI is again denied a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, Mexico will likely continue its experiment in divided government; even if Fox wins the presidency, his party is unlikely to take the majority of the lower house. If Fox wins, the whole structure of post-revolutionary politics, whereby the PRI dominated national politics through its monopoly of key electoral positions—the presidency and the majority of the two houses of Congress—and its management from those positions of a vast network of clientelistic relationships, will have finally collapsed. Only a victory by the PRI's Francisco Labastida Ochoa, along with the PRI's retention of the Senate and its retaking of the Chamber of Deputies, could conceivably return Mexico to the era of one-party hegemony. But while a Fox victory, or the return of a Chamber of Deputies without a PRI majority would certainly mark a movement in a democratic

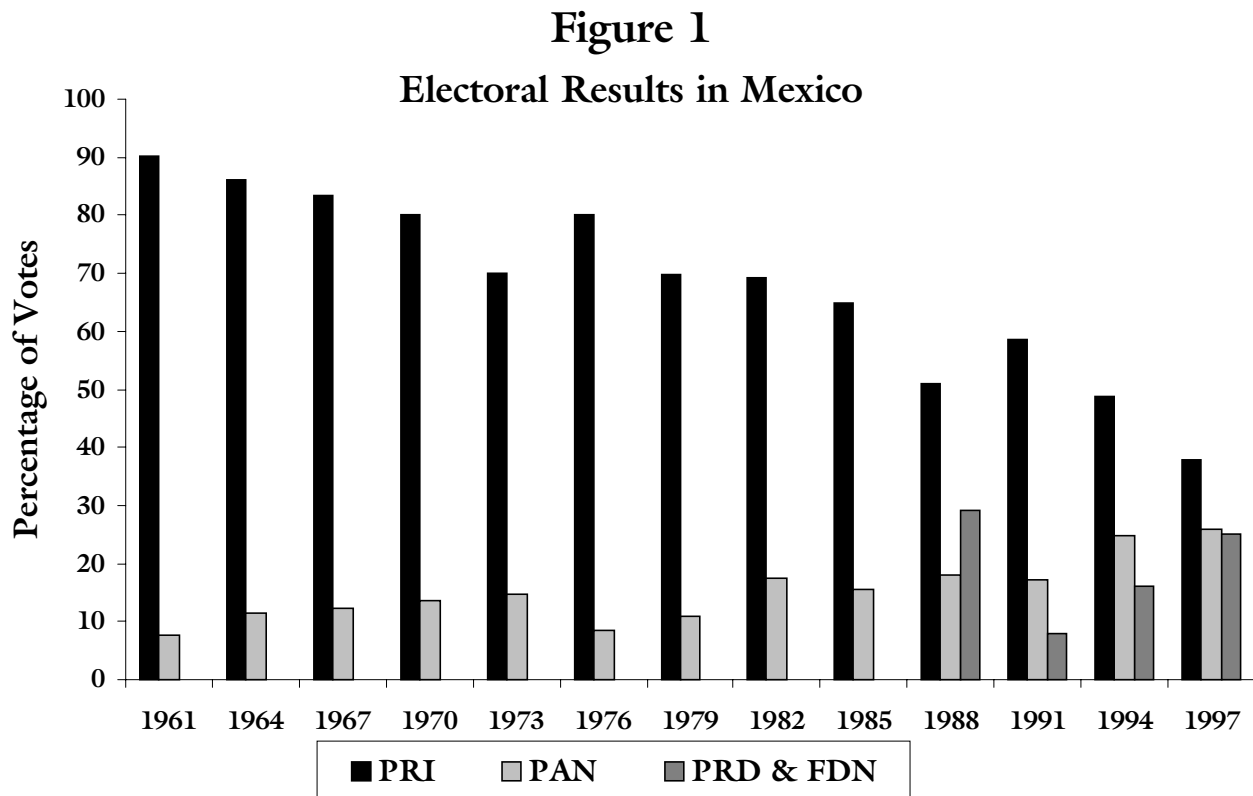
direction, what the character of political relationships in that new era might be remains to be determined.

## The Context of the July 2000 Elections

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the PRI is now the world's longest ruling political party, if by that term we mean control of the national executive. Founded as the National Revolutionary Party in 1929, the PRI has won every presidential election (held every six years) since then, often by overwhelming margins. Only in 1940 and 1988 has the authenticity of those electoral victories been questioned seriously. Because the PRI also won nearly all congressional contests during its long reign, and because a constitutional prohibition on reelection to any electoral office impedes politicians from developing institutional bases of political power in the way that members of the United States Congress can, presidents elected from the PRI have ruled supreme. Presidential supremacy has been challenged since 1997, when for the first time, the PRI failed to take a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. In the 1997 elections, the PRI's once-commanding majority fell to 38 percent of the popular vote as the electorate punished the party for its perceived responsibility for the economic crash associated with the December 1994 peso devaluation and for the transgressions of the presidency of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-94). Consequently, President Zedillo has had to build support for each legislative initiative he sends to Congress, and the actions of the executive branch have come under unprecedented scrutiny. Classic political horsetrading has allowed the opposition to wrest some concessions from the executive—including increased federal funding for state and municipal governments, many of which are now in the hands of opposition party members. The opposition parties' internal cohesiveness also has been tested, as they have had to come to decisions about whether or not to compromise with the PRI on policy, what to demand from the executive, and so forth.

The opposition's congressional victory in 1997 did not emerge out of nowhere. It capped a lengthy process of opposition growth that can be attributed to socioeconomic factors and political reform. First, the PRI's electoral dominance was built on the foundation of a Mexico that was overwhelmingly rural and populated by mostly poor and uneducated peasants and by workers controlled in an official labor movement. Mexico's modernization since the end of the Second World War gradually weakened that foundation; urban Mexicans, with greater economic opportunities and higher levels of education, have both sought alternatives to the PRI and been able to join opposition parties and vote for them. Figure 1 illustrates the gradual but real erosion of PRI hegemony in the last forty years. That erosion accelerated in the 1980s, especially as the result of the long economic downturn associated with Mexico's foreign debt crisis and the structural adjustment policies put in place to create an alternative to the state-sponsored import substitution strategy of development that had manifestly failed by 1982.

President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88) selected Carlos Salinas to follow him in the presidency in 1988, thus demonstrating the ascendancy of the neoliberal reformers in the upper reaches of the ruling elite. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas—the son of former president Lázaro Cárdenas, who had governed the nation during the 1930s and enacted many pro-



gressive reforms—led a faction of the PRI out of the party and ran against Salinas at the head of a coalition of mostly left-leaning parties. Joining Cárdenas in the exodus from the PRI was Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, former PRI party president and former ambassador to the United Nations. In a hard-fought race, Salinas defeated Cárdenas, but that victory was marred by widespread irregularities, which included a crash of the electoral authority's computer early in the reporting of the results (most observers believe the then secretary of government, Manuel Bartlett, simply pulled the plug) and the destruction of half of the ballots before any recount could be ordered. The actual vote count of the 1988 elections will never be known, but that election established a presence on the left of a significant electoral alternative (eventually formed as the Democratic Revolutionary Party—*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, or PRD). Questions about the legitimacy of the Salinas government abounded and the degree of cynicism and of distrust of Mexicans for their political institutions only increased.<sup>1</sup>

The PRI's decline has also been paralleled by a process of electoral reform that has gradually opened the legislature to opposition party representatives; made the electoral system less subject to manipulation, by making the electoral process more transparent and the electoral authorities more autonomous; and substantially leveled the playing field for the opposition parties in terms of access to the economic resources necessary to run a competitive campaign. Reform has involved a delicate interaction between a PRI keen to reestablish the legitimacy of the regime it ruled and an opposition eager to create the institutional framework in which genuinely democratic elections could take place. Since 1977, when



political reform greatly increased opposition access to the Chamber of Deputies and legalized existing opposition organizations, Mexico has had six major changes to the electoral system and other minor amendments. Reforms in 1994 and 1996 went far toward first creating genuinely autonomous electoral authorities, and then making progress toward campaign finance reform and giving the opposition parties more equal access to the broadcast media to get their campaign messages out.<sup>2</sup> While further electoral reform remains on the national agenda,<sup>3</sup> the legal structure is now in place by which a defeat of the PRI can be achieved, as the 1997 congressional elections showed.

Thus, over the last quarter century, Mexico has undergone protracted political transition toward democracy. The PRI has sought to maintain its hegemony but its leadership has generally preferred the legitimacy of winning free and fair elections even while some elements in the party have been willing to resort to old-time vote rigging practices and some new ones. Those well-tested practices and the advantages of incumbency have enabled the PRI to retain power despite periodic economic crises. The opposition has been able to take advantage of electoral reforms, imperfect though they have been, to channel the frustrations of Mexicans into larger and larger vote shares in national elections, victories in many state and local elections, and control of the Chamber of Deputies.

Mexico's political transition has been facilitated by positive support from President Zedillo. Zedillo happened into the presidency when the PRI presidential nominee whose campaign he was managing, Luis Donaldo Colosio, was assassinated during the 1994 race. The tumult of 1994—including the initiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, simultaneous with the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, a second political murder (of PRI Secretary General José Francisco Ruiz Massieu), and the peso devaluation—seems to have set Zedillo on a plan to promote Mexican democracy. Zedillo supported the reforms that made the Mexico City regency an elected position; transformed the IFE into a truly autonomous body; reduced the over-representation of the largest party (effectively, the PRI) in the Chamber of Deputies; and changed the structure of campaign finance. Zedillo has often been characterized as a weak president, and that characterization may be true if strength is identified as the capacity to act without constraints. However, to Zedillo's credit, in 1997 he applauded the opposition's electoral advances even after he had campaigned for PRI candidates. Most importantly, Zedillo chose against appointing his successor by *dedazo*, the traditional practice whereby Mexican presidents have reserved the power to select the PRI nominee (although usually allowing some other member of the political elite to make the revelation of that nominee). The PRI primary came about because Zedillo insisted on the modernization of the PRI's nomination procedures. Following his past practices, Zedillo has not so far intervened unfairly in the July electoral processes.

Since 1997, a coalition of four opposition parties has denied the PRI control of the Chamber of Deputies. This experience in divided government has opened the procedures of the Congress to much greater public scrutiny, thus contributing to greater accountability. Divided government has not been easy for anyone concerned. The Congress has had very little real experience putting forward its own legislation, and opposition-initiated legislation would have to pass the PRI-controlled Senate and obtain President Zedillo's approval. Thus, Zedillo remains the great legislator, but he has had to create coalitions to pass his legislation on a case-by-case basis. Often the PAN has chosen to support presidential initia-

tives, frequently after getting concessions from Zedillo, and generally irritating its coalition partner, the PRD, in the process. Meanwhile, the PRD and the PAN have worked together to try to restructure the procedures of Congress.

In the nearly six years of Zedillo's presidency, the opposition has advanced at the state and local levels. The PAN made major gains in 1995 and 1996, coming to govern most of the nation's largest cities and many state capitals. It also won the governorships of Jalisco, Guanajuato, Baja California Norte (for the second time), Querétaro, and Aguascalientes. The PRD surged in Cárdenas's successful campaign for the Mexico City rency in 1997 and it won gubernatorial contests in Zacatecas, Tlaxcala, Baja California Sur, and Nayarit in coalition with other opposition parties. The opposition's presence is felt close to home by many Mexicans, and those governors and mayors it has elected have accumulated experience in government.

Whereas both the 1988 and the 1994 presidential elections took place in periods of economic uncertainty, barring a worldwide stock market crash, the July 2000 elections should transpire during a period of significant economic recovery and growth. In 1999, the rate of growth of gross domestic product (GDP) was 3.7 percent. Various projections suggest it could exceed 5 percent in 2000. In the first quarter of 2000, the industrial component of GDP grew at an 8.6 percent annualized rate. Meanwhile, inflation remains fairly low, declining from 12.3 percent in 1999 to nearly 9 percent this year.<sup>4</sup>

Whether Mexican voters are economic voters has occasioned much academic discussion. Carefully designed studies of voting behavior have suggested that Mexicans make their voting decisions based on several factors, including partisanship, assessment of candidates' personal qualities, assessments of the state of the economy and their personal economic situations, and their willingness to accept risk.<sup>5</sup> With regard to economic voting in the peculiar context of Mexico's hegemonic party system, Beatriz Magaloni argues: "When comparing a party with a long record in government against the uncertain alternatives, voters might choose to reelect the long standing incumbent, even if they hold negative short-term retrospective assessments, for two reasons. First, voters might employ their long-term memories on the economic performance of the PRI, leading them to adjust their expectations gradually in the face of new information. Second, voters might be averse to turning the government over to an uncertain alternative."<sup>6</sup> Thus, in uncertain times, such as 1994, economically rational voters might choose against the opposition for fear that the opposition's probability of pulling the country out of a crisis or an impending crisis is much lower than that of the PRI, with its years of governing experience. In July 2000, however, given the relatively strong economy and the memory that the PRI did not handle the 1994 crisis well, voters may well apply a similar logic in a way that benefits the opposition, especially the PAN. First, the opposition now has more governing experience, at least at the state and local levels, so the PRI does not necessarily benefit from the uncertainty of opposition performance in office. Indeed, the PAN's experience in government has generally been similar to the PRI: favorable in some instances, and unfavorable in others. Second, the strength of the economy and the efforts of the Zedillo administration to avoid a post-election surprise also make the short-term future less uncertain, so that taking a risk and putting the opposition into the executive is not such a threat to Mexico's future. Finally, for more and more voters, especially those young people who have entered the electorate since

1982, there are practically no good PRI performances to remember in their long-term memories. And, in economic policy terms, most voters sense that the PAN and the PRI differ little in their commitment to a market economy and a continuation of the neoliberal development strategy.

The profound changes that have come to Mexico since the beginning of the economic crisis in 1982 have thus eroded the dominance of the PRI; even if the Zedillo administration has handled the economy well in the last three years, voters may be no longer prepared to reward the PRI for its economic performance. Other factors, including, most importantly, a rejection of the dominant party regime, regarded as corrupt and incapable of addressing the most pressing problems of the nation, may be pushing voters toward the opposition parties, especially toward the well crafted slogan of Vicente Fox, *¡Ya!* (Enough already!).

## The Long Campaign for the 2000 Presidential Election

### *The Fox Campaign*

Mexico's presidentialist system now mirrors its U.S. counterpart in the length of its presidential campaigns. Vicente Fox has been openly running for president since July 1997, three full years before the July elections. He has been involved in politics since 1988 when he first ran for Congress, and won. He lost a fraud-ridden gubernatorial election in Guanajuato in 1991, an election that Carlos Salinas forced the PRI victor to forfeit, handing the governorship to another member of the PAN. Fox won an easy gubernatorial victory in 1995.

Fox typifies the *neopanista* wing of the PAN—the insurgents who joined the party during the 1980s in the aftermath of President José López Portillo's nationalization of the banks. Known to the more traditional sector of the PAN as *bárbaros*, or barbarians of the north, the *neopanistas* came from the private sector with little tolerance for what they perceived as timidity on the part of many PAN members. A former head of Coca-Cola de México, Fox has been involved in his family's footwear business in León, Guanajuato, since 1979. The Fox consortium also exports vegetables to the U.S. Because Fox's mother came from Spain, he was constitutionally ineligible to run for the presidency until Article 82 was amended in 1993. That reform was advocated by the PAN with Fox's future in mind.<sup>7</sup> The Guanajuato governor is self-confident and brash, plain-talking in the extreme.<sup>8</sup> Many observers regard his manner as authentic and appealing; others find Fox difficult to deal with, including many of the Mexico City-based leaders of the PAN.

To launch his precandidacy for the PAN nomination, Fox created an organization called *Amigos de Fox*, or Friends of Fox. Amigos de Fox remains one of the 2000 campaign's great unknowns. Through contributions of its members, Amigos de Fox financed Fox's campaign in the period before he won the PAN nomination. The organization and Fox's dogged campaigning were sufficiently daunting so that none of the many rivals of Fox within the party contested the nomination. As early as December 1998, Fox had raised over US\$1 million to finance his pre-campaign, perhaps as much as a third of that figure coming from anonymous donations to an Amigos de Fox bank account. Membership in the organi-

zation totaled about 100,000 by the end of 1998, many of them enrolled through the Website of the organization (<http://www.amigosdefox.com>).<sup>9</sup>

Fox designed the Amigos de Fox organization not just to win him the PAN nomination, but also to bolster what he regarded as a weak PAN organization, insufficient for getting out the vote and protecting the integrity of the electoral process in too many parts of the nation. Integrating the PAN apparatus and Amigos de Fox in order to run the campaign has proven to be a challenge, particularly since even early in the growth of the organization, the vast majority of Amigos were not party members.<sup>10</sup> However, as the organization has grown, its potential as a “defender of the vote” has developed too. As of late May 2000, the Fox campaign claimed that the Amigos counted as many as 4.5 million Mexicans who would be mobilized to cover the 13,500 voting booths around the nation.<sup>11</sup> Whether the Amigos actually number 4.5 million or whether the PAN can coordinate a poll-watching army of 40,500 (three for each polling place) remains to be seen.

The challenge is particularly acute in rural Mexico, still the PRI’s bastion. To meet that challenge, the Fox campaign has identified 68 rural electoral districts (of the 300 total districts in the country) into which the PAN has yet to penetrate, and designed “Operation Tractor” to get Fox into those regions and to identify local leaders who can be recruited to the Fox campaign.<sup>12</sup> Fox is a natural in rural Mexico, unlike past PAN candidates, having grown up on a farm and looking the part of the typical *ranchero*: tall (he’s 6’5”) and rugged, more naturally dressed in boots, jeans, and a cowboy hat than in a business suit. However, the PRI has been tenacious in rural Mexico in the past, employing such tactics as vote buying and voter coercion, and can be expected to fight hard for every rural vote in July 2000.

Fox will need many friends to defeat the PRI in July, and his strategy from the beginning has been to accept all who offer support. Among his new friends are prominent public intellectuals, including the historian Enrique Krauze, journalist Federico Reyes Heróles, political analyst Jorge Castañeda, and Senator Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, some of whom have spent most of their lives as part of the Mexican left. Castañeda and Aguilar Zinser have become part of Fox’s inner circle, known as the “Room Next Door.”<sup>13</sup> The entire Amigos de Fox mobilization strategy and Fox’s political eclecticism in welcoming what might otherwise seem to be strange bedfellows reveal that his primary objective is to oust the PRI from power; his coalition is, more than anything, devoted to ending the PRI’s rule, rather than coming to power in order to implement a policy agenda—an issue which worries many leaders of the PAN’s traditional wing.

### *Efforts at Opposition Alliance*

Fox, of course, is hardly the only Mexican politician devoted to throwing the PRI out of Los Pinos (the presidential residence). Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas has spent enormous energies since 1987 in an effort to do just that. Perhaps cheated out of the presidency in 1988 and disappointed by a distant third place finish in 1994, Cárdenas has ventured forth on a third run for the nation’s highest office at the head of the PRD. The experiences of the 1997 midterm election when the PRI still finished well ahead of its two strongest challengers (the

PRI taking 38 percent, the PAN and the PRD about a quarter of the votes each), and of gubernatorial elections in 1998 and 1999, in which the opposition only won where it put forward coalition candidacies, suggested to many politicians and political analysts that the PRI would be vulnerable to a coalition candidacy backed by the PAN and the PRD (and as many other opposition parties as chose to support a joint candidacy). Much of the pre-campaign period in 1999 was thus spent in speculation about a united opposition candidacy and negotiations over arranging one.

How sincere either the Fox camp or the PRD was about finding a means to put forward a single opposition candidate is questionable. Either Fox or Cárdenas would have happily accepted the other's departure from the campaign, but neither was willing to stand down in favor of the other. Fox entered the period of most intense negotiations about opposition unity with a considerable margin over Cárdenas in public opinion polls. Cárdenas had fallen significantly in public support in reaction to his difficulties governing Mexico City. For his part, Cárdenas could point to a long record of running against the PRI and his victory in the 1997 Mexico City mayoral race. Mexico has no vice presidency, so no means existed to put both men on the same ticket. However, despite the sizes of their egos, the Fox-Cárdenas rivalry may have been less important in scuttling the lengthy negotiations about a coalition than were the interests of their parties and the constraints of Mexican electoral law.

Mexican electoral law stipulates that two or more parties wishing to put forward the same presidential candidate "must form a coalition with a common platform, in addition to presenting common candidates for the 300 relative majority representative slots, for the 200 proportional representation seats, and the senator seats in the 32 federal entities."<sup>14</sup> Hence, beyond resolving the question of whether Fox or Cárdenas should have been the single opposition presidential candidate, negotiators from the PAN and the PRD also would have had to decide which aspiring *panistas* and *perredistas* would be asked to forego their congressional candidacies and what a common platform might include. With regard to the latter, even though Fox has been far from dogmatic about following the neoliberal economic strategy that the PAN has supported for the past two decades, he is a former businessman who generally favors market-based solutions to Mexico's economic challenges. Cárdenas and the PRD, in contrast, prefer a larger role for the state. With regard to resolving the question of who would have received congressional nominations from a coalition, there were plans for the distribution of candidacies—essentially the party in a district with the greatest electoral strength would get the nomination<sup>15</sup>—but with the PRD's popularity dwindling, due in part to scandals associated with the party's internal elections for party president, and PAN candidates' prospects of riding Fox's coattails into office, the PAN's organizational interest did not encourage the party to join a coalition. In the end, the PAN chose to reject an opposition alliance, with Fox expecting his own popularity to carry him and the PAN to electoral success in July.<sup>16</sup>

The failure of the PAN and the PRD to create an alliance had at least a temporary fallout for the Fox candidacy. Some 63 percent of respondents to a *Reforma* poll had supported the idea of an alliance. Additionally, a significant part of the politically involved intelligentsia had promoted an alliance.<sup>17</sup> Opinion polls indicated that Fox's popularity vis-à-vis the leading PRI pre-candidates, Francisco Labastida and Roberto Madrazo, declined

between August and November when the alliance discussions faltered and the PRI's primary race began to dominate the news.<sup>18</sup>

The PRD and the PAN did form alliances with smaller parties for the 2000 elections. The PRD formed the Alliance for Mexico (the name of the failed coalition with the PAN) with the support of the Workers' Party (*Partido del Trabajo*, or PT) and other smaller groups. The PAN joined forces with the Mexican Green Party (*Partido Verde Ecológico de México*, or PVEM) in the Alliance for Change. Each party can thus claim to be seeking a broad coalition to oust the PRI.

### *The PRI Primary*

Fox's slump last autumn had as much to do with the centrality of the PRI primary and his lack of campaign funding prior to his official nomination by the PAN as it did with the failed alliance with the PRD. The PRI primary, initially suggested by Zedillo in July 1998, then more broadly endorsed by party leaders in March 1999, was finally adopted by the PRI's National Political Council on May 17, 1999. The PRI primary introduced a third novel element into the pre-campaign period. The final impact of the PRI primary on the July general election is at present difficult to measure.

The PRI's decision to choose its candidate by means of an open primary must be understood as a response to its electoral failures at the beginning of the Zedillo presidency. As Federico Estévez and Alejandro Moreno summarize:

*Priista* willingness to embrace the primary system was largely impelled by the need to find a new modality of candidate selection that would prove more effective against the opposition. It was also spurred by the evident success enjoyed by the PRI's candidates selected through primaries. The scorecard for the Zedillo administration spoke for itself. Under the "open" conventions (with selection of delegates by lottery with quotas) celebrated at the beginning of Zedillo's term, the PRI's candidates [for governor] in Jalisco and Guanajuato went on to resounding defeats in 1995. In 16 states since 1995, the normal closed conventions of the PRI, usually held to rubberstamp the leadership's choice, have produced eight winning gubernatorial candidates and eight losing ones. Since early 1998, ten gubernatorial primaries have been celebrated with eight subsequent victories for the PRI in the general election and only two losses, in Baja California Sur and Tlaxcala, where opposition alliances chose aggrieved *priistas*, who had denounced the primary process as rigged, to run again the ruling party.<sup>19</sup>

Despite this record in state level contests, using an open primary to select the PRI nominee entailed significant risk. An excessively antagonistic primary election campaign could split the party prior to the 2000 general election.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, a well-run primary campaign could restore the PRI's rusty electoral machinery. This seemed especially likely because the candidate preferred by the PRI apparatus and by President Zedillo, Labastida, might rely on the electoral machine to turn out his votes. In contrast, Madrazo ran against

the party apparatus. Many incidents were reported that suggested that state and local party leaders resorted to time-honored methods of buying votes for Labastida and obstructing the campaign efforts of his opponents, who included former government minister and ex-Puebla governor, Manuel Bartlett, and former party president, Humberto Roque.<sup>21</sup> Regarding whether the PRI's calculated risk paid off, a careful analysis by James A. McCann of a national survey conducted in February 2000 concluded that supporters of Madrazo, Bartlett, and Roque may be somewhat less supportive of Labastida in the general election race than those voters who did not take part in the primary election, but that the bitterness toward the PRI of a few party members disgruntled by the primary's outcome may be the price the party has to pay to shed the image of an authoritarian organization.<sup>22</sup>

Whether the PRI apparatus was reinvigorated during the primary season or whether it made the difference in Labastida's comfortable victory over Madrazo (59 percent to 30 percent, with Bartlett and Roque receiving 6 percent and 4 percent, respectively) remains unclear. Estévez and Moreno suggest that Madrazo's campaign strategy—running as an outsider and attacking Labastida in highly negative campaign ads—failed him. Voters objected to Madrazo's negative campaign style while Labastida more carefully resisted going negative, at least not too negative. They conclude: “While the party machinery may have been decisive for turnout, it is not the case that it was instrumental in determining voter choice.”<sup>23</sup>

Labastida won in an impressive 272 of the nation's 300 electoral districts and bested Madrazo in all regions except Madrazo's south (he is the governor of the southern state of Tabasco). An issue much on the minds of Fox's strategists has been how to beat or at least to neutralize the PRI machine in its strongholds—rural districts—suggesting that opposition leaders still take seriously the PRI. Officially, the PRI reported that 9.7 million voters participated in the primary, an impressive number (17 percent of the total electorate) for a primary election, although pollsters Daniel Lund and Alejandro Moreno suggested that the turnout had to have been exaggerated.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the party set up “64,200 polling stations nationwide and more than 450,000 people [were] involved as officials and poll watchers.”<sup>25</sup> Moreover, because Madrazo chose not to contest the outcome and to stay in the party, the PRI's democratic image got a boost from the leadership's decision to hold the primary.<sup>26</sup> How the organization that put together this primary will fare compared to Fox's 4.5 million “amigos” (or whatever large number is accurate) remains to be seen, but it seems unwise to expect the PRI apparatus to be easily bested by an organization of amateur, albeit enthusiastic, political activists.

## **The Campaign Season, January-June 2000**

### *Issues, Where are the Issues?*

There are issues in Mexican politics that survey respondents identify as important for the next president to address. Two national polls conducted about three months apart confirmed five issues to be at the top of the electorate's list of concerns: poverty, corruption, employment, education, and public security (see Table 1). Other issues trail these five in salience for

**Table 1**  
**Important Issues for Mexican Voters**

February and May 2000

Issue	% Mentioning Issue May	Rank May	% Mentioning Issue February	Rank February
Education	52	1	30	4
Public Security	41	2	28	5
Employment	37	3	31	3
Poverty	36	4	37	1
Corruption	33	5	36	2
Healthcare	22	6	12	11
Salaries	20	7	22	6
Drug Trafficking	15	8	16	9
Inflation	12	9	16	8
Economic Growth	11	10	15	10

Sources: February data: Mexico 2000 Panel Study, conducted February 19-20 and 26-27 (N=2399); May data: *Reforma*, May 24, 2000, conducted May 13-14 (N=1547). Both surveys were conducted by *Reforma's* polling team using the following question:

Question: Of the issues on this list, which three do you consider most important for the next president's attention?

Mexican citizens. Perhaps reflecting the strength of the economy, the macroeconomic factors—inflation and economic growth—are far down on most voters' lists of concerns.

Interestingly, in the nearly three months that transpired between the polls, two issues rose to the top of voters' agendas: education and public security. Education in particular has received very high attention from the candidates, with Labastida taking the lead by proposing that all children learn English and that schools have computers.<sup>27</sup> Many observers ridiculed him for proposing what they regard as unattainable goals, but he certainly brought the issue to the fore. Fox has countered by offering that there be scholarships available so that students can attend secondary schools and universities.

However, the issues do not necessarily separate the candidates from each other as much as they might because Fox and Labastida, in particular, are not far apart on most issues (other than regime issues). Furthermore, voters sense that Fox or Labastida would be



equally effective in dealing with education or public security, but they regard Cárdenas to be relatively ineffective at addressing either of those policy areas (see Table 2). The data in Table 2 come from the Mexico 2000 panel study, in which the same respondents were polled in February and April (after the first debate). Given that these two issues have received much attention by the candidates, it is revealing to observe that during the course of the campaign, a higher percentage of the public has come to believe that each candidate is able to effectively deal with those issues (again, see Table 2), with Labastida making greater gains in education, Fox in public security. Interestingly, the movement of voters' perceptions of the candidates' abilities to deal with those two issues seems to be greater than for perceptions of their abilities to manage the economy. These data also show that voters are becoming surer of their opinions about candidates' issues, as the final column of the table indicates.

Corruption is an issue of a different kind. Mexicans typically rank corruption at the top or near the top of the list of barriers to the democratization of their society. In short, corruption is more a regime issue than a policy issue. Several authors, most notably Juan Molinar, have argued that the principal source of cleavage in Mexico's party system since at least the mid 1980s has not been a policy issue—even a policy issue as salient as economic development strategy. Rather, the principal issue dividing Mexican parties and Mexican voters has been continuity of the dominant party regime. Table 3 shows the very clear divide between *priistas*, on one side, and *panistas* and *perredistas*, on the other, regarding their evaluation of whether Mexico is a democracy. Similarly, those who expect to vote for Labastida are much more likely to call Mexico a democracy than those planning to vote for the major opposition candidates. Not surprisingly, then, Vicente Fox has chosen the campaign slogan *¡Ya!*. His campaign and his willingness to accept the support even of leftists who are dedicated to throwing the PRI out of office, are intended to capitalize on this sense of dissatisfaction with the regime.

### *Character Issues and Negative Campaigning*

Not differing fundamentally on most issues, other than the continuation of the PRI-dominated regime, the leading candidates have lowered themselves to slinging mud at their adversaries, with Labastida and Fox making shots at each other daily. Never in Mexican history have presidential candidates engaged in such vitriolic rhetoric toward each other. Each calls the other a liar regularly. Each raises questions about the presidential character of his principal adversary.

Fox has followed what appears to be an explicit strategy of character assassination of Labastida, questioning his masculinity with various taunts, calling him “shorty,” a “sissy,” and *La Vestida* (a play on his adversary's name; literally, “the dress”). He seems to be intending to question Labastida's capacity to exercise authority, counting on Mexican machismo to support his effort.<sup>28</sup> In the second televised debate, Fox responded to questions about his own character by saying, “You need character, firmness, and true leadership to end 70 years of corruption, poverty, and desperation. Do you believe that a weak and gray person could have confronted the PRI and its allies? Do you believe that a person without emotion could

**Table 2**  
**Changes in Perceptions of Principal Candidates**

February and April 2000

How able do you believe [the candidate] is at improving the education system?					
	Very able	Somewhat able	Little able	Not at all able	Not sure
<b>Labastida</b>					
February	22%	29%	18%	13%	17%
April	29	32	22	9	8
<b>Fox</b>					
February	16	33	20	12	19
April	23	36	24	8	9
<b>Cárdenas</b>					
February	7	21	24	28	20
April	12	29	32	16	11
How able do you believe [the candidate] is at combating crime and insecurity?					
<b>Labastida</b>					
February	18	29	19	17	17
April	23	32	24	13	8
<b>Fox</b>					
February	14	32	21	14	20
April	20	37	25	9	9
<b>Cárdenas</b>					
February	6	19	24	32	20
April	11	27	30	22	10
How able do you believe [the candidate] is at managing the economy?					
<b>Labastida</b>					
February	18	30	20	15	17
April	24	31	25	12	9
<b>Fox</b>					
February	16	32	20	12	20
April	19	35	25	11	10
<b>Cárdenas</b>					
February	6	16	24	33	21
April	10	28	29	22	11

Source: Mexico 2000 Panel Study.

**Table 3**  
**Evaluation of Mexican Democracy and Electoral Preferences**

Presidential Preference	Do you consider Mexico today to be a democracy or not?		
	Yes	No	Don't Know
Francisco Labastida (PRI)	52	35	13
Vicente Fox (Alliance for Change)	36	58	7
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (Alliance for Mexico)	31	56	13
<b>Partisanship</b>			
<b>PRI</b>	55	34	12
<b>PAN</b>	37	58	5
<b>PRD</b>	31	60	10

Source: Mexico 2000 Panel Study, first wave (N=2399).

move the conscience of Mexicans to achieve change?”<sup>29</sup> Fox thereby implied that Labastida, whom he constantly depicts as a colorless bureaucrat, is incapable of bringing real change. In these interchanges, Fox’s 6’5” frame towers over Labastida, reinforcing the sense Fox wishes to convey of his own power and Labastida’s weakness. In addition, Fox has at times tried to link Labastida, the former governor of Sinaloa, with the high levels of drug-related violence in that west coast state.<sup>30</sup>

Labastida and the PRI campaign have sought to respond to Fox by casting the PAN candidate as uncultured, hot tempered, stubborn, and rash—essentially not sufficiently stable to be president of Mexico. Because Fox has visited the United States to campaign among Mexicans and Mexican-Americans and visit Washington, and because he and the PAN have supported economic integration, the PRI has also questioned Fox’s patriotism and sought to rally Mexican nationalists against him. As an example of the anti-Fox character-bashing by the PRI, Manuel Bartlett, recently recruited to the Labastida campaign and charged with coordinating PRI efforts in states governed by the opposition, asserted recently that Fox was an agent of transnational interests, “of wrathful and idiotic character,” and an embarrassment to Mexico.<sup>31</sup> This strategy may also seek to highlight Fox’s heritage—his paternal grandfather emigrated from the U.S. and his mother from Spain.

A key issue will be whether negative campaigning will have an adverse effect on those who employ it. In the perception of the public, Fox has run a campaign more oriented

toward criticizing his adversaries than have his rivals. Half of the respondents in a *Reforma* sample survey in mid March said that Fox's campaign was oriented toward criticizing other candidates; fewer than a quarter thought he was communicating new proposals. In contrast, only 34 percent thought Labastida was running a negative campaign.<sup>32</sup> Sergio Sarmiento notes the parallel between Fox's strategy and that of Roberto Madrazo in the primary campaign, closing on a note of warning for Fox:

Roberto Madrazo . . . obtained very good results at the beginning with a very aggressive campaign against Labastida. At the end of the road, however, these attacks began to weigh against the *tabasqueño*, who could not project a presidential image with that strategy, even less so with predominantly *priísta* voters.<sup>33</sup>

Perhaps if Fox seeks only to attract votes from the 55-60 percent of voters who are not in the firm PRI base, his strategy can work. As Sarmiento notes, Fox's insults to Labastida are probably entirely calculated, not a reflection of deep personal animosity. The likelihood is that Fox will abandon the negative road as soon as his pollsters determine that it no longer serves the goal of victory.

### *The Contest*

The media have not made issues the focus of their coverage of the presidential succession either. From the start, the 2000 campaign promised to be a close race, closer than any previous race, with the possible exception of 1988 when Cárdenas seemed to peak late in the contest. Hence, even more than in 1994, the pollsters have made the news and the attentive public waits expectantly for the next poll to appear. Campaigns U.S.-style have made their way to Mexico. Indeed, Labastida has employed the champions of poll-based campaigning—Bill Clinton's own James Carville and Stanley Greenberg—as campaign strategists.

Paying attention to the contest does not imply, however, having a shallow appreciation of Mexican politics or the dilemmas facing whomever wins the July 2 balloting. A close race, as revealed in public opinion polls, may encourage opposition voters who are not strong party identifiers and independents to vote for the opposition candidate most likely to win in July. Indeed, it seems clear that many Mexicans have been waiting for evidence that the PRI can be beaten before joining the bandwagon of the leading opposition candidate.

Consequently, the camps of both leading candidates take the polls very seriously and attempt to use them to their benefit—Labastida in order to leave the impression that the PRI is still the dominant party and hence that oppositionists should neither count on a win in July nor vote strategically to get one, and Fox in order to suggest that now is the time for Mexicans to join the bandwagon against the ruling party. Efforts are made to discredit polls that don't provide good news to one's candidate, and to publicize those that suggest a surge of support for one's side.

How many voters are prepared to shift to one or the other candidate during the race is not so clear, however. On the one hand, only 16 percent of respondents to the first wave

of the Mexico 2000 panel study identified themselves as strong PRI partisans; another 21 percent claimed to be weak PRI supporters, and 5 percent said they were independent but leaning toward the PRI (see Table 4). In addition, only 3 percent of the respondents called themselves strong *perredistas*. Even if we allow that the weak *priistas* would be hard to lure to the Fox campaign, that leaves 60 percent of the electorate available to the PAN standard bearer. On the other hand, of respondents to the Mexico 2000 panel study in February, a full 71 percent claimed to be already sure of the candidate for whom they intended to vote. As many as 33 percent of the entire sample were certain Labastida voters, 8 percent were certain Cárdenas voters, and 1 percent certain supporters of other candidates—again leaving Fox almost 60 percent of the electorate to court. However, he has to win these voters to his cause, having first convinced them to vote at all. When surveyed again in April, 73 percent of the panel had not changed voting intentions; 85 percent of Labastida supporters had not switched allegiance, even after the first debate.<sup>34</sup>

The contest has tightened, however, as several polls have shown. *Reforma*'s monthly tracking poll, for instance, reveals that Fox and Labastida are in a dead heat (see Table 5).

**Table 4**  
**Partisanship in Mexico**

Partisanship	Percentage of Respondents
<b>PRI</b>	<b>37</b>
Strongly PRI	16
Weakly PRI	21
<b>PAN</b>	<b>22</b>
Strongly PAN	6
Weakly PAN	16
<b>PRD</b>	<b>9</b>
Strongly PRD	3
Weakly PRD	6
<b>Other</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>None or Don't Know</b>	<b>34</b>
Leaning toward PRI	5
Leaning toward PAN	7
Leaning toward PRD	2
Independent or Don't Know	20

Source: Mexico 2000 Panel Study, first wave (N=2399).

**Table 5**  
**Preferences for President**

January–May 2000

	January	February	March	April	May
<b>Francisco Labastida</b> (PRI)	48%	47%	47%	45%	42%
<b>Vicente Fox</b> (Alliance for Change)	39	39	39	42	40
<b>Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas</b> (Alliance for Mexico)	12	13	13	12	16
Others	1	1	1	1	2

Source: “Nada para nadie todavía,” *Reforma*, May 18, 2000. Don’t knows and no responses were eliminated and the percentages recalculated.

The two point difference in their May polling numbers is statistically within the margin of error of the sample. Fox has not pulled away from his opponent, but he has erased the advantage in the race that Labastida enjoyed after winning the PRI primary. His campaign, of course, hopes that with a close race, voters who in the past have voted PRI or PRD will think twice when casting their ballots on July 2, and then cross the box with the symbol of the Alliance for Change.

### *The Debates*

Debates are relatively new to Mexican politics. The first debate was held during the 1994 presidential campaign, during which the PAN candidate, Diego Fernández de Cevallos, made his two opponents, Zedillo and Cárdenas, look wooden and slow-thinking. After that debate, the Fernández campaign experienced a large jump in its polling numbers. Hoping to replicate the 1994 experience, but pledging not to waste the advantage it offered, Fox has been keen to debate Labastida and Cárdenas. He succeeded in scheduling two debates, the first with all six presidential candidates (the others are Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, Manuel Camacho, and Gilberto Rincón Gallardo),<sup>35</sup> the second with just the top three contenders.

In the first debate, held on April 25, Labastida found himself attacked by all five of the other candidates, but the debate clearly featured a Fox-Labastida duel. Polls conducted after the debate confirmed that Fox was perceived as having won the contest by a wide margin.<sup>36</sup> Yet, despite his success in that debate, few who responded to the *Reforma* poll expected it to change their views. Indeed, 53 percent of the respondents to that poll said the

debate hadn't influenced their preference, and another 30 percent reported that it had strengthened their presidential preference.<sup>37</sup>

With no knockout punch having been delivered, the candidates sought to structure the second debate to their advantage. Rincón Gallardo, who had performed well in the first debate, pleaded to be included in the second. Labastida, apparently preferring to have the 90 minutes of debate spread among five adversaries rather than two, jumped on that request to demand a renegotiation of the second debate to make it more "inclusive." Cárdenas and Fox refused to change the second debate's arrangements, and the possibility that no second debate would occur became high. Fox also sought to change the debate's structure from one in which each candidate effectively gave policy statements with little interchange among the "debaters," to a U.S.-style debate in which questions would be posed by a panel of journalists.<sup>38</sup> Thus began a long series of almost comical exchanges among the three contenders, with charges of cowardice flying back and forth, and intensive negotiations among the three camps. The debate, originally scheduled for May 23, was first canceled. Then, the candidates appeared collectively on a television news program on May 22 and again on May 23, when they were filmed negotiating the terms of the second debate at the campaign headquarters of Cárdenas. Fox came out of the "debate about the debate" appearing stubborn and unreasonable—suggesting that the debate be held on the evening of May 23 as it had originally been scheduled. The three agreed to debate on May 26, although Fox initially said he wouldn't appear.<sup>39</sup>

In the end, opinion polls again suggested that Fox was perceived as having won the second debate by a wide margin.<sup>40</sup> The controversy about the second debate and Fox's errors in judgment about how to respond to his adversaries' obstructions may have denied him the opportunity to score a big gain in the race to July 2, but in the end, the contest remains extremely close.

With a little more than two weeks to go until the election, the main contenders are now picking up the endorsements of those lesser candidates who have played for as much advantage as they can up to this point. Fox has acquired the endorsements of several former *priistas* and *perredistas* who see him as the most likely agent of democratization in Mexico. Muñoz Ledo, the PARM presidential nominee (although repudiated by that party's leader), offered his backing to Fox.

Clearly the campaign is making a difference in the likely outcome of the 2000 elections. The candidates certainly believe that their campaign efforts matter. There has been movement in the electorate toward Fox at this stage. However, none of the candidates has delivered the knockout punch he so strongly desires to wield—the debates haven't pushed Fox over the top, nor did the maneuvering of his opponents during the controversy over the second debate scuttle his candidacy.

## To the July Elections

### *Preparing a Clean and Fair Election*

The creation of an autonomous electoral authority in the IFE has contributed significantly to the cleanness of the Mexican electoral process. Electoral fraud had posed serious chal-

lenges to the process of democratic transition since the mid 1980s when the PRI responded to early opposition victories by resorting to more blatant manipulation. Elections in 1985, 1986, and 1988 were marked by allegations of cheating and large post-election demonstrations against the PRI's mendacity. The IFE's successful management of the 1997 midterm elections, an opposition victory, suggests it can contribute to Mexico's passage to democracy. However, there remain questions about the electoral process, which can be divided into three large areas: campaign finance, vote buying and coercion, and the fairness of the media. Juan Molinar, one of the IFE's electoral counselors, argues: "I'm not worried how the ballots are counted, but I am worried about how the votes are won."<sup>41</sup>

Mexico's 1996 electoral reform moved toward campaign finance reform by providing significant public monies to the political parties, both for ordinary operations and to finance campaigns (split 50-50 into those two broad areas). In addition, Mexican electoral law limits private funding of parties and campaigns to 49 percent of the total a party receives from the IFE and it requires that 90 percent of the campaign be financed by the public monies. The public funds are distributed to the parties based on a complicated formula—30 percent distributed equally and 70 percent proportionally, based on the percentage of the vote captured in the previous federal election. In sum, the public funding has been generous. For example, the PRI will receive almost US\$100 million of total public funding this year, half of which can be spent on its campaigns, and it can raise almost another \$50 million from private sources.<sup>42</sup> However, the PRD, together with its smaller allied parties, has enjoyed an even larger budget from public funds. The result is that Mexico is awash in campaign money.

The electoral law has major limitations, however, in its reporting requirements. Each party must submit a report on campaign revenues and expenditures within the first 60 days of 2001 and the IFE has another 60 days in which it must review those reports. This means that audits of campaign financing will not be completed until about May 2001, almost halfway through the new president's first year. Moreover, even if the IFE found a party to have broken the electoral law, only parties, not individuals, can be prosecuted. Penalties for breaking the law would include fines and, in severe cases, denying a party its public funds or cancellation of its registration (the latter being highly unlikely). Hence, many observers fear that the parties will take advantage of the lax reporting requirements to use both private and public funds to engage in vote buying.

Vote buying is a time-honored Mexican political tradition. Millions of Mexicans have sold their votes for "gifts" that range from chickens and cooking oil to scholarships for their children. Often such gifts are bestowed by local governments that the PRI has controlled. This raises the additional issue of the use of non-authorized public resources to promote party fortunes, although opposition governments have also been found to resort to such tactics. Already this year several journalists have reported about PRI distributions of large gifts—construction materials, steeply discounted household appliances, and the usual food staples—but in relatively large volumes, like ten chickens.<sup>43</sup> How many voters will be influenced by such gifts is difficult to gauge; in a close race, even 2-5 percent could make the difference.

Linked to vote buying is coercion of those dependent on public resources. The ruling party has been accused of threatening those who receive benefits from public programs like



the PROCAMPO rural subsidy program—should the voters of a particular locality support non-PRI candidates, the program may disappear generally or just from that place. A survey conducted in mid May by Daniel Lund of MUND Opinion Service for Alianza Cívica, the nongovernmental organization that seeks to promote democratization in Mexico, discovered that while 33 percent of the general population indicated that it would support the PRI, 43 percent of those receiving welfare benefits planned to vote for Labastida.<sup>44</sup>

Regarding the media, an important advance for the media's fairness came with a recent shakeup at Televisa, the television giant that dominates Mexican airwaves. Long offering news uncritical of the government and dismissive of the opposition, Televisa's new chairman, Emilio Azcárraga Jean, has announced that Televisa will henceforth strive for neutrality and objectivity in its news coverage. The strongly pro-government news anchor Jacobo Zabludovsky and other broadcasters have left the network. Yet, an IFE study of campaign news coverage indicates that 37 percent of the reporting in the broadcast media has been devoted to Labastida, compared to 27 percent for Fox. Further, 44 percent of Labastida's coverage has been positive, compared to 32 percent for Fox. Generous campaign budgets has meant that all parties have purchased a lot of television airtime, enabling opposition parties to get their message out over primetime media.

Clearly, the institutional arrangements to assure a fair and clean election are better in 2000 than in any earlier presidential election. However, the closeness of the contest increases the temptation to break the rules this year, more so than at any time in the past, except maybe 1988. If the official tally proves very close, the victor's legitimacy will surely be questioned.

### *Scenarios*

Three distinct possibilities could emerge from the July balloting. First, Labastida could win the presidency and the PRI could recover the Congress. For this scenario to come about, the PRI will have to take 42 percent or more of the vote for deputies. Split-ticket voting is rare in Mexico, and the most recent *Reforma* poll has Labastida still taking 42 percent, so this outcome is distinctly possible. Such a result would avoid the pitfalls of divided government for the next three years.

Two major implications attend this scenario. The first is that such a strong performance by Labastida will owe much (or at least will be perceived by the Mexican political elite to owe much) to the traditional PRI politicians that Labastida's campaign recently enlisted, including Bartlett, after the PRI nominee turned in the lackluster performance in the first debate.<sup>45</sup> As Lorenzo Meyer has argued, Labastida would in this case be beholden to the hardline *priístas*, the so-called dinosaurs, who would likely develop greater autonomy in their regional bases of power, exacerbating a trend that has emerged under Zedillo. Corruption would likely fester and Labastida would probably be no more able to control the party than his predecessor as its "feudalization" ripened.<sup>46</sup>

If Labastida wins and the PRI takes the lower house by a close margin—for example, 42 percent PRI, 40 percent PAN, 18 percent PRD—post-electoral conflict is a near certainty. Early in the campaign Fox pledged not to accept a loss if it were by less than 10

percent. He was roundly criticized for the statement by IFE officials and various commentators. The PAN had much experience with post-electoral demonstrations against alleged fraud in the 1980s and early 1990s. Indeed, Fox's first run for the Guanajuato governorship in 1991 ended with post-electoral confrontation in which Salinas eventually intervened to the PAN's benefit. Cárdenas led massive rallies after his disputed loss in 1988 and he attempted to do the same in 1994, to a much smaller following. Mexican opposition politicians thus have had ample experience with "the second round"—post-election maneuvering to try to remedy the deficiencies of the official results of the balloting. More than a third of the Mexican public (37 percent) expects the election to be unclean, or mostly so.<sup>47</sup> Given the hype of the Fox campaign and the emergence of Amigos de Fox, some post-election violence may follow a close loss.

A second scenario would have Labastida winning the presidency but the PRI failing to take a majority of one or both houses of Congress. This scenario is more likely to be realized if the Cárdenas vote exceeds 20 percent. In this event, Labastida would still owe the dinosaurs for his victory; however post-electoral conflict would remain likely, maybe more so, because in this scenario, Labastida would have received less than 42 percent of the vote, meaning the Labastida-Fox margin could be very close. In addition, the new president could face governability problems. The past three years have involved the parties democratizing the Congress's internal structures and figuring out how to operate without a majority party. Several standoffs between the PRI and the opposition have taken place, and important bills have been passed late and in a context of highly partisan and very public conflict. This second scenario would likely produce an even more split Congress because the PRD and the PAN may find it even more difficult to work together due to the animosities created when their attempted alliance faltered. The second scenario would clearly test Labastida's political skills to their utmost.

Lastly, Fox could win. If he does, he is unlikely to sweep in a PAN majority in either house of Congress because his victory will be built by voters crossing over from the PRD or even from the PRI—voters who may be less willing to vote against their usual party in other contests. Fox would thus have to build a coalition in Congress to support his legislative agenda. He has already said that his administration would include cabinet ministers who come from outside the PAN; and that willingness to reach outside of his partisan base augers well for building a similar broad coalition in Congress. Fox would not likely face strong opposition from organized labor, which is a shell of its former self. Mexican big business has stated that it would not be much affected by having a *panista* in Los Pinos because, after all, the PAN supports a vibrant private sector as much as does the neoliberal wing of the PRI. A Fox victory would bring enormous prestige to the PAN, of course, and the opportunity for many *panistas* to join the government. A Fox victory could further the evolution of the PAN into a catch-all party in which ideology and party principles are less important than electoral expediency, a possibility that more traditional PAN leaders fear but which would surely pay off for the party in electoral terms.

A Fox victory could have enormous implications for the PRI. As Meyer ponders: "A party that was born with power in its hands, that has never had to account for its acts, if it is obliged to play the role of opposition, will it survive, fragment, or crumble? Will it cooperate to maintain governability during the process of transition or will it sabotage the transi-

tion?”<sup>48</sup> A loss to the opposition would stimulate tremendous fingerpointing within the PRI as “New PRI” activists and dinosaurs question the merits of each other’s tactics. The party’s main source of cohesion for decades has been its majority status and the high rate of success of its recruits as they seek to ascend the political ladder. If the PRI cannot guarantee victories any longer and if it cannot distribute the political patronage that has kept it in government for so many years, why would aspiring young politicians choose the PRI over its alternatives? PRI leaders recognize the danger associated with a loss at the national level, hence their decision to exploit every possible resource available to the party comes as no surprise.

## Concluding Remarks

Unless there are blatant irregularities, this election will mark an advance for Mexican democracy. If the PRI wins a clean election, it will have been after the most open, raucous, and intensely followed campaign in Mexican history. If the PRI loses, a genuine transfer of power—a real test for the consolidation of democracy—will take place. Not only has Mexico experienced its most tightly contested race in memory, but it has imported the techniques of modern democratic elections. Modern campaign techniques—especially the use of the broadcast media—render other democratic institutions less important in modern democracies, especially political party organizations. Yet, this campaign will still be strongly affected by the way the PRI and Fox organizations perform on July 2. Whether Amigos de Fox will dissolve on July 3 or survive to form the organizational basis of a larger, more inclusive PAN or of a citizen movement of some kind, is still unclear.

Regardless of which candidate wins, the large social questions of Mexican politics will remain on the political agenda. Coming to the presidency after a democratic election will not likely change the difficulty of dealing with the conflict in Chiapas, other guerrilla insurrections, the discontent manifested in the student strike at the national university, or the huge problems of poverty and maldistribution of income. A clean election will, however, increase the likelihood that future presidents and other major offices will be chosen by a vote of the people rather than the decision of a sitting president.

## Notes

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2. Joseph L. Klesner, "Electoral Reform in Mexico's Hegemonic Party System: Perpetuation of Privilege or Democratic Advance?" Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C., August 28-31, 1997.
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6. Beatriz Magaloni, "Is the PRI Fading? Economic Performance, Electoral Accountability, and Voting Behavior in the 1994 and 1997 Elections," in Domínguez and Poiré (eds.), *Toward Mexico's Democratization*, p. 233.
7. Verónica Espinosa, "Fox se dice a la cabeza de la sucesión, pero oculta la origen de sus fondos de campaña," *Proceso*, no. 1156, December 27, 1998.
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9. Espinosa, "Fox se dice a la cabeza de la sucesión, pero oculta la origen de sus fondos de campaña."
10. Juan Manuel Venegas, "Comienzan las negociaciones entre el PAN y Amigos de Fox," *La Jornada*, April 15, 1999.
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13. Molly Moore, "Mexican Candidate Draws Left and Right," *Washington Post*, May 10, 2000. See also Sam Dillon, "Endorsements Buoy Spirits of Opposition in Mexico," *New York Times*, May 17, 2000.
14. Crespo, "Raising the Bar: The Next Generation of Electoral Reforms in Mexico," p. 13.
15. Claudia Guerrero, "Amarra oposición candidatos únicos," *Reforma*, July 16, 1999.
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34. These results are reported by Alejandro Moreno in "La intención de voto, casi sin cambios," *Reforma*, May 19, 2000.
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36. E.g., "Gana Vicente Fox el debate," *El Economista*, April 26, 2000; "Gustó el debate," *Reforma*, April 26, 2000.
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38. Fernando Mayolo and Daniel M., "Rechazan debate Fox y Cárdenas," *Reforma*, May 16, 2000.
39. Sergio Sarmiento, "Debate en TV," *Reforma*, May 25, 2000.
40. Ernesto Nuñez, "Pierde Labastida," *Reforma*, May 27, 2000.
41. Laurence Iliff and Alfredo Corchado, "Vote buying Tactics Face New Resistance in Mexico," *Dallas Morning News*, May 21, 2000.
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