

JOSEPH L. KLESNER

Institutionalizing Mexico's New Democracy

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The presidential victory of Vicente Fox in 2000 ended one-party domination of the Mexican presidency. Joseph L. Klesner 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 requirement 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 300 members in single-member district seats. By 1986, 200 members were added in proportional representation seats. The Senate includes two senators from the party 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 stalemate of the government led to a strong decline from 1990 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 to the reconsideration of how elections are financed and the criteria for national recognition of political parties.

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 citizen 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 consolidation 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, 161ff.)—are past, at least for the near future.

To replace an all-powerful presidency, Mexicans must build new institutions of democracy. In the past decade, political elites and activists have strived to create (or recreate) the institutions, both formal and informal, of democratic governance. In 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 deconcentration 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.

Table 21.1

Changing Characteristics of the Mexican Political Regime

Mexican authoritarianism	Emerging democracy
One-party dominance (1929–1994)	Three-party system (1995 to present)
Presidentialism (1934–1997)	Divided government (1997 to present)
Excessive centralism (until 1990s)	New federalism (1984 to present): Greater financial autonomy of <i>municipios</i> Increasing opposition control of state and municipal governments (1989 to present)
Corporatism (1936–1990s)	Declining importance of major interest associations of labor and peasantry (1980s to present) Greater independent influence of business (1988 to present)
Clientelism (until 1994)	Emergence of popular organizations (1985 to present) Erosion of sources of patronage (1980s to present)
Corruption (continuing)	Repeated pledges to eliminate corruption
Electoral fraud (until 1994)	Independent electoral authorities and clean elections (1994 to present)
Weak judiciary subordinate to executive(continuing)	Efforts to strengthen judiciary (1995 to present)

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 the time of President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940), the former ruling party was organized into three sectors, one for peasants, another for the workers, and a third for state bureaucrats. This organizational 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 national 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 confederation 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 (Mainwaring and Shugart 1997), but Mexican presidents enjoyed "metaconstitutional powers," a "series of prerogatives [that] corresponds to the 'unwritten' norms of the Mexican system. They allow the president to centralize his power progressively through a distortion of constitutional mechanism" (Garrido 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 there 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 metaconstitutional 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 forbidden reelection to the many positions just mentioned, it becomes easier for us to understand why the president was so powerful (Cosío Villegas 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 a new administration 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 area 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 *camarillas*, 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 presidentially 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 accomplishment for Mexican presidents. As mentioned above, between the 1930s and the late 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,” local government that has autonomy in making local laws and policies, but *municipios* (equivalent to U.S. counties, the lowest level of government in Mexico, whose size varies tremendously, from *municipios* in Oaxaca with fewer than 1,000 residents to Guadalajara’s nearly 2 million) were subordinate to the federal government in the same way that the Congress was 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 (Courchene, Díaz-Cayeros, 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 in 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 (if not 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 maverick 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 ouster of the PRI until July 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 gradually 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, which 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 perquisites 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 performance; 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 (Domínguez 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\$5 million to several small parties whose genuine electoral support base is miniscule (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 conditional 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 (PVEM, Partido Verde Ecologista de México), Fox's coalition partner in 2000, which defected shortly thereafter and ran as a coalition partner of the PRI in 2003. Critics point out that the PVEM'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 Horcasitas 1991). A distinct division of the party system into pro-regime and anti-regime camps emerged by the 1990s, deepened by the electoral conflict of 1988. The PAN and the PRD came to be seen as offering two different versions of an anti-regime message—a moderate but pro-democracy, pro-business stance by PAN, and a more intransigent, anti-PRI, pro-economic nationalism on the part of PRD.

The anti-regime message drew a wide range of Mexicans who became 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 opposition 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 come from the category of those who always cast their vote for the same party. In contrast, the defectors tend to come from the ranks of the politically nonaligned—independents—and tend to report that they switch their votes from party to party. In the pivotal 2000 election, Fox gained many votes from new voters or from those who had not gone to the polls in 1997, as the last column of Table 21.2 indicates.

Table 21.2 thus suggests that Fox owed his victory to voters who did not have a history of party loyalty. There were and are many loyal partisans in Mexico; slightly over half of voters can be relied upon to cast their ballots for the same party in two consecutive elections. However, in a three-party system with significant numbers of unattached voters and former opposition voters who do not have the same degree of commitment to the parties for which they have voted as do PRI partisans, electoral success can depend much on the ability of the parties to run successful campaigns. In 2000, Fox and the PAN ran a brilliant campaign. In 2003 they did

Table 21.2

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

	Loyalists			Defectors		Non-voter to Fox
	PAN/ Fox	PRI/ Labastida	PRD/ Cárdenas	PRI to Fox	PRD to Fox	
Partisanship in 2000						
PAN	76.0	2.7	0.7	26.5	43.0	54.9
PRI	1.1	86.5	0.8	27.7	2.8	5.0
PRD	0.3	0.4	75.8	1.1	14.0	1.8
None/other/do not know	22.6	10.4	22.7	44.7	40.2	38.3
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Self-reported party loyalty:						
Always vote for the same party	65.9	89.1	65.6	29.3	17.3	36.2
Sometimes vote for one party, sometimes another	29.5	9.8	28.2	63.9	76.2	46.7
Neither/do not know/no answer	4.6	1.1	6.2	6.8	6.5	17.1
Total	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00	100.00
Percent of total sample*	15.5	20.0	5.9	4.5	2.9	14.8

Note: *Table excludes voters for smaller parties (3.0% of the total sample); 1997 PAN voters (2.3%) and 1997 non-voters (16.8%) who voted for any other party in 2000; and those who could not remember or would not report their 1997 vote (13.7%). To ascertain partisanship, the Mitofsky/Consulta exit poll asked, "Normally, do you consider yourself *panista*, *priísta*, or *perredista*?" (Normalmente usted se considera *panista*, *priísta* or *perredista*?).

not, with the result that fewer than six in ten Fox voters chose PAN Congressional candidates in the most recent mid-term elections and the PRI took the largest share of the votes cast by new voters ("Impera disinterés en abstencionistas," 2003).

Since the early 1990s, then, a three-party system has gradually emerged to replace one-party dominance. Since 2000, we can hardly use the term "opposition" in this new three-party system, for none of the three parties is truly an opposition party—each holds key elected executive positions at various levels of government and all share power in 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

Distribution of State and Local Elected Positions as of 2004

Party	Percent of state legislators	Number of governors	Percent of population under party governors	Percent of population under party municipal governments
PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)	45.6	17	57.4	40.1
PAN (National Action Party)	26.1	9	22.8	32.3
PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party)	18.7	5*	15.7	18.0
Other	9.6	1**	4.0	9.5

Sources: Partido Acción Nacional, *Presencia de Gobierno* (Mexico City, April 2004); Consulta Mitofsky, *Los congresos estatales* (Mexico City, May 2004).

*The PRD'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.

organization beholden to presidential will. The values of Mexican voters are complex and differ according to their characteristics (see Chapter 2 in this book), a point that was not well understood by the PRI of old that largely saw itself as *Mexico*—it was the party of the majority, and its ideological position was frequently little more than that. Perhaps as a result, until mid-2004, the time of this writing, the former opposition parties have made more progress in learning the ways of governing than the PRI has in learning to be a party of opposition. Both the PAN and the PRD governed at the state and local level in the 1990s, experiences that have produced party leaders with a record in government, most notably President Fox himself, the former governor of Guanajuato. Table 21.3 provides information about the portions of Mexico governed by each political party as of April 2004.

The PRI faces the test of turning its 2000 defeat into the motivation to rebuild as a genuine political party that seeks votes by appealing to those who cast them with policy prescriptions, rather than just the clientelist favors it so often dispensed in the past but which are now in rather shorter supply with the PRI's diminished access to government coffers. There are two major challenges before the PRI, both having important consequences for the Mexican party system and Mexican democracy. First, in the absence of a president from the PRI to serve as *de facto* party

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 party president Roberto Madrazo (who seeks to make the PRI into a social democratic party, but whose democratic credentials are very suspect given his violations of campaign financing restrictions when he ran for governor of Tabasco in 1997), 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 Echeverría (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 mean 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 contestation 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 Cárdenas in 1988, many still remain in the party, and other newer leaders—such as Madrazo—see promise in a strategy of recreating 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 PAN'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 or 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 impolitic—

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 not 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 so intimidated his rivals for being the party's standard bearer that 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 barbarian 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.

PRD

The PRD's origin as the organizational manifestation of the (Cuauhtémoc) Cárdenas movement—initially involving secession of a portion of the PRI's left wing—has created a different set of challenges for the major party of Mexico's often fractious left. To a large extent, supporting the PRD has been synonymous with supporting Cárdenas in his challenge to the PRI. However, Cárdenas never defeated PRI candidates in his three tries for the presidency (or was denied a fairly won victory in 1988 and defeated in his two subsequent races) and he is aging. Fierce struggles have taken place within the PRD for leadership after Cárdenas. At the same time, Cárdenas has resisted suggestions that he step back from another presidential candidacy. Moreover, the PRI no longer controls the presidency, so the PRD (like the PAN) must put forward a platform containing issues other than ousting the PRI.

The PRD's control of the Mexico City government means that it and its popular mayor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, can reward supporters and lure potential voters with public spending projects. But whether spending in the capital can effectively convince voters the length and breadth of Mexico that the PRD is a cred-

ible alternative to either the PAN or the PRI remains to be seen. The PRD, too, is tending 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 currents, it has built into its organization much of the fractiousness that has historically characterized the Mexican left.

As a self-consciously democratic party, the PRD has sought to establish clear formal rules that guide the party's internal life, in contrast to the murkiness of procedures and the imposition of candidates from above in the PRI that caused so many current PRD members to flee the PRI. Unfortunately, the PRD's fractiousness 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 found an independent party of the left, but who has played something of a caudillo role within the PRD, 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 keys to presidential dominance during the PRI's heyday were the PRI's complete control of the Congress combined with the principle of no reelection. Prior to 1977, almost all Congressional seats (both Chamber 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 such 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 too had access to the *plurinominal* seats, as they came to be called). This “mixed member proportional” system was first used in West Germany and has been introduced recently in Japan and Russia. In Mexico, 100 such seats in the Chamber of Deputies (the lower house of the federal Congress) were introduced in 1977, and another 100 were added in 1986, on top of the 300 single-member district seats that were usually nearly all won by the PRI. Thus are now 500 deputy seats, each elected every three years: 300 from single-member districts, 200 from

lists in proportional representation races.¹ 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 atrophied. Its investigative 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 misdeeds—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 than was the case before 1997, in particular legislation concerning dual nationality, health care, and pension reforms (Weldon 2004), it has not passed several significant reform measures that Mexico should address in its transition away from PRI rule, such as further

Table 21.4

Distribution of Seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 1991–2003

Party	1991	1994	1997	2000	2003
PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)	320	300	239	208	224
PAN (National Action Party)	89	119	121	205	151
PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party)	41	71	125	54	97
PVEM (Mexican Green Ecological Party)	—	0	8	17	17
PT (Workers Party)	—	10	7	8	6
Others	50	0	0	8	5
Total	500	500	500	500	500

Sources: Grayson (2003, 4–5); Weldon (2004, 13).

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 Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) in Chiapas, the administration found its bill eviscerated by PAN legislative leaders, who were upset by not having been 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-

lative agenda. His presidency has been marked by frequent trips outside the capital to trumpet the administration's policy agenda (Dresser 2003). The Congress, especially because it does not face re-election pressures, lacks incentive to listen to a citizenry that Fox has riled up, if indeed he has convinced average Mexicans of the merits of his legislative initiatives. However, members of Congress have reason to listen to their party leaders, for those individuals will make decisions about their future nominations for elective office or for administrative appointments when and where their parties hold power. And those party leaders have little incentive to cooperate with the president, whose failure can open opportunities for their own success as candidates for office in the next presidential election.

Speculation about the inability of President Fox to improve relations with Congress reflects the fact that some felt that the president has chosen to assist the presidential aspirations of his wife, Marta Sahagún, at the expense of forming good working relationships with congressional leaders in the PAN and the PRI—although in July 2004 both the president and Mrs. Fox have declared that she has no intention of seeking Mexico's presidency. Poor relations also are tied to Fox's contentious relationship with the PRD's possible candidate for the presidency in the 2006 elections, Mexico City mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Still others claim that the poor relations stem from President Fox's severe back pain, which may impair his political abilities. Yet others note that neither Fox nor his predecessor, Zedillo, had much political (as opposed to administrative) experience prior to assuming the presidency, and hence have had difficulty in the intensely political negotiations that go on as legislative bargains are hammered out. Regardless of the reasons for Fox's difficulties with Congress, most observers regard the current situation as a standoff in which major areas of public policy are not being addressed. The Congress seems to be checking the president more than facilitating the passage of major pieces of legislation. Even if the Congress were not checking President Fox's efforts for partisan political gain, though, other patterns of decision making that have evolved in Mexican society, such as the pact making that Soledad Loaeza discusses in Chapter 3 of this book, threaten to undermine any president's ability to choose a specific policy, advocate its passage as a Congressional act, and implement it. Most parties affected by a policy now know how to organize to protest decisions that adversely affect them, and if the administration does not effectively negotiate with affected parties beforehand, they can and will use direct political action and the media in an attempt to block implementation of policies with which they disagree.

Creeping Federalism

The extreme centralism of PRI rule during the 1940s through the 1970s has succumbed to two parallel processes—the first, a devolution of power from above

that I will describe in the next section, and the second, a series of challenges to the former ruling party emanating from opposition victories at the local and state levels in the 1980s and 1990s. Given the PRI's advantages in national politics during its prime, we should perhaps not be surprised that the opposition parties put considerable effort into contesting PRI rule at more local levels of government where smaller campaign funds could be effective and less formidable organizational challenges could be overcome. The PAN, in particular, followed a strategy of "creeping federalism" in its growth during the 1980s and 1990s. During the later 1990s, the PRD, too, began to win local and state office more frequently, in part by winning over the political organizations of failed contenders for the PRI's nomination to state and local office.

Mexico has over 2,400 municipios, the lowest level of government in the nation, equivalent in many ways to the U.S. county. The PRI remains in power in the vast majority of the smaller municipios. Although the PAN won a few important town halls in 1982–1983, in the aftermath of Mexico's economic collapse of that period, the PAN made its major gains after 1988 and especially after the economic crisis of 1994–1995. By 1998, the PAN governed over 300 municipios. More important, though, the PAN governed most of the largest cities in Mexico. By 1999, the PAN had governed in 25 of the 30 largest municipios outside of Mexico City (Lujambio 2000). Moreover, before the 2000 elections, it had won the governorships of several important states: Baja California, Guanajuato, Chihuahua, Jalisco, Nuevo León, Querétaro, and Aguascalientes, and it added Morelos and Yucatán to its list in 2000 and 2001. From these mayoral and gubernatorial positions, PAN leaders were able to develop their skills as political executives and the party was able to build its organizational base to challenge the PRI nationally. This was, effectively, its strategy of "creeping federalism"—coming to power nationally by gradually winning over Mexicans in localities, states, and regions. As part of this strategy, the PAN successfully negotiated increased federal revenue sharing with municipios as part of its legislative approach during the last three years of the Zedillo administration, gaining more money for local governments in exchange for support on a controversial bank bailout bill.

The PRD found early electoral popularity in central and southern Mexico, winning several town halls in the state of Michoacán in 1989 and the early 1990s as well as in Oaxaca, Chiapas, and Veracruz (Rodríguez 1997). Political conflict and violence characterized the PRI–PRD relationship during the Salinas administration, and the federal government clearly treated the PAN more favorably than the PRD as each challenged the PRI in local and regional settings. The Salinas government also clearly used funds from its National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), ostensibly designed to encourage local initiative in projects to improve the lives of the poor, in an attempt to win voters back from the PRD in the southern states. (For an evaluation of PRONASOL, see Chapter 29 in this volume). The electoral victory of the PRD's Cárdenas in the election for Mexico City mayor in 1997 caused a series of disappointed contenders for the PRI's gubernatorial nominations to bolt

from the PRI to the PRD in 1998 and 1999, in part reflecting the long-term frustration with the PRI's national leadership for imposing candidates on states and localities. These prominent local PRI leaders brought their supporters and local organizations to the PRD, which led to PRD victories (often at the head of alliances of various opposition parties of both national and state-level orientation) in Zacatecas, Baja California Sur, and Tlaxcala, all outside of the party's earlier electoral bases 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 Cuauhtémoc and grandson of the famous president, his namesake, both of whom had earlier governed 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 lapsed in many settings under the PRI. 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 government may in many cases mean needing to gather more revenue in order to be able to offer the services required in Mexico's burgeoning cities, which is difficult because the federal government has controlled income and value-added taxes and sought to use those revenues for its own purposes. Opposition governments in the early 1990s were generally successful in improving the provision of services, however, with the consequence that in many cases those 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 endemic problems in the areas of preventing and punishing crime or with other inadequately provided public services.

The New Federalism

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 (1982–1988) administration. In this reform initiative, de la Madrid and his government followed a time-honored PRI approach of preemptive reform—creating reforms to deflect criticism from the PRI-led federal government that, as most observers could easily argue, had become too centralized by 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 reform gave greater financial autonomy to municipios, 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).

As I mentioned above, there are limits to the income that can be generated from property taxes and fees imposed on already poor people. Consequently, the state and local share of total government revenue raised remains quite low—on the order of 5 percent. States are especially squeezed in the federal fiscal equation, for they cannot effectively raise revenue from the sources reserved to local governments nor from the major federal tax sources—the income and value-added taxes (Ward and Rodríguez 1999). So they too rely on federal revenue sharing.

This decentralization brought with it improvement in public administration by reducing clientelist practices and by introducing modern management practices. Also, local government has become more transparent, especially regarding fiscal accounts, as citizens demand to know where their increased taxes and fees are going (Rodríguez 1997).

The movement for decentralization discussed above, in combination with the general democratization explored in this chapter, has had some negative consequences for Mexico. As Wayne Cornelius and his collaborators have argued (Cornelius, Eisenstadt, and Hindley 1999), the unraveling of centralized authoritarianism in Mexico has meant that the central government's control of law and order at the regional, state, and local levels has weakened. In some cases this means the injustices associated with PRI domination of state or local affairs have ceased, or at least been replaced with more benign rule by the PAN, the PRD, or some coalition of local political forces. In other cases it means that new strongmen have emerged, able to resist the federal authorities and inclined in some instances to align themselves with drug traffickers and other criminal elements. In other words, the loosening of central power has not in all cases led to greater democracy and to more just law and order at the local level; in some cases, quite the opposite has resulted.

Conclusion

During the 1990s and at the beginning of the new century, significant institutional change has come to Mexican politics. One-party domination has given way to three- (and more) party competition. Divided government has replaced presidential supremacy. A highly centralized political regime has been followed by renewed emphasis on federalism. In most ways, Mexico can be said to have democratized in the years since the controversial election of 1988.

Democracy does not always mean easier policymaking; indeed, it usually means that more actors have an opportunity to attempt to veto policy initiatives. Democracy does not always mean better public policies either, although democracies are usually more responsive to citizen demands than nondemocracies. Democracy does mean, however, that more Mexicans have an opportunity to compete for public office and to participate effectively in the choice of national and local officials.

Note

1. To select the 200 proportional representation seats (called *plurinomial* in Mexico), the country is divided into five multimember districts (or "circumscriptions") of forty seats each. Each party poses a list of forty candidates. The seats then are elected by proportional representation within the region—if in region 1 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.

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