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Mexico 2000: the end of a regime

Ludolfo Paramio

On December 1st, 2000, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León handed over the president's ceremonial sash to Vicente Fox Quesada, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN)'s candidate and the winner of the presidential election held earlier that year on July 2nd. The handover brought the curtain down on 71 years of presidential rule in Mexico by the same party, formed in 1929 as the Partido Nacional Revolucionario by General Plutarco Elías Calles, re-christened Partido de la Revolución Mexicana in 1938 and known as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) since 1946.

That transfer of presidential power to another party culminated what many political scientists and practically all the media defined as the transition to democracy in Mexico. The truth is, however, that although that alternation in power certainly brought about a real change in the regime, it did not mean that democratic procedures and rules to elect the country's leaders had not existed before that or that the opposition had not been notching up a string of significant victories in the polls since the 1980s in the municipal governments and the States. On the contrary, the road leading up to the change in the presidency involved a long process of electoral and political reforms that started off as a straightforward move to open up and liberalize the regime. The reforms gradually went further and deeper, developing guarantee mechanisms—especially when the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) was set up as the Federal electoral supervisory body, given independence and allowed to work on behalf of the Mexican people—until the general conditions of full competition in elections and trustworthy results were put in place after 1996.

The elections that took Ernesto Zedillo to Los Pinos (Mexico's official presidential residence), in 1994, were legitimate, as he himself claimed, although they were not fair or equal because the official party enjoyed huge superiority over its rivals as far as the means and resources it had at its disposal were concerned. The legitimacy of the 1997 elections could be

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defended with even greater justification. On that occasion, the PRI lost its majority in the lower house in addition to losing the Distrito Federal government, elected for the first time, which was taken by the opposition. Although objections could be raised to both elections, if they had been the first ones held after a military regime nobody would have thought twice about regarding them as the founding elections of a new democracy. But as they did not bring alternation of power, they were not identified with the arrival of democracy. Nevertheless, an important step forward had been taken in the work carried out by the IFE which offered just the right guarantees the Mexican people needed to be able to trust the election results.

Changes had started to be made to electoral rules and mechanisms at least as far back as the six years José López Portillo was in power (1976-1982) as part of a strategic approach devised by Jesús Reyes Heróles, a politician and intellectual in the best Mexican liberalism tradition, who had set himself the task of finding a solution to two problems. The first one was the deficit of legitimacy suffered by López Portillo because he had been elected as the sole candidate, even though the main reason for that had been the lack of an agreement within the PAN —at its Extraordinary Convention held on January 25th— on who to designate as its own candidate for the 1976 presidential election. The second problem was the growing use of violence by the new Mexican left that had emerged in the wake of the events of 1968 because it found it impossible to carve out any political and electoral niche for itself and as part of the widespread radicalization prevailing in Latin America in the 1970s.

Reyes Heróles' reforms gave the electoral procedures back their legitimacy although they did not make the elections themselves really competitive because with an additional number of seats —assigned in proportion to the total vote regardless of those obtained by majority in the constituencies— they ensured victory for the PRI in them and gave minority left groups a presence in the Parliament and increased the number of representatives for the PAN. But after the nationalization of the banking sector at the end of López Portillo's time in government, in a futile attempt to check what would eventually blow up into the debt crisis, the businessmen in the north of the country (those who had most ties to the North American market) pledged their firm support for the political opposition and against State interventionism. The 1980s, therefore, were the years of the rise of the Acción Nacional party, thus creating a problem that was increasingly without solution in the framework of electoral processes controlled by the Government. Basically, if the Government was to hold on to its own legitimacy then it had to acknowledge the PAN's increasing number of victories and if it did, that acknowledgement was bound to spark off disputes within the PRI itself.

General Calles' invention in 1929 had worked well as a way of disciplining the elite factions springing out of the revolution within a set of rules whereby the impossibility of re-election meant that political careers could only be developed by the disciplined party members who could rely on the party's support wherever they contested elections even though they might be far away from their grass roots power base. As a result, any violent insurrection on the part of

the nonconformists, which had been the rule in the 1920s, gradually turned into the exception. Not only did that allow for the normalization of political life but also the construction of a State with an effective monopoly of force. However, the prerequisite for those rules to work properly was that the PRI's support had to guarantee victory in the polls or that whoever lost in them could be compensated with non-elected posts.

If the elections became really competitive, the PRI would no longer be able to guarantee electoral victory and if its presence in local governments was reduced nor would it be able to give the losers sufficient compensation in the form of government posts. Thus, there was a dilemma between maintaining legitimacy in the eyes of the opposition and public opinion and maintaining a consensus within the PRI itself: if the party's control over electoral processes was loosened, the internal consensus would be eroded as the number of losers or victims would rise in line with the reduction in rewards for internal party discipline.

A new dent was made in the PRI's ability to control events in 1987. The economic restructuring program that President Miguel de la Madrid had been implementing to combat the 1982 debt crisis, plus the growing strength of the PAN opposition, had led to a critical school of thought within the party which was staking two very different claims. Firstly, the critics wanted democratization of the party and, secondly, they wanted the PRI to go back to the social priorities of a party that had taken up the legacy of the revolution. That two-fold claim coincided with the demand that the PRI candidate running for the presidency in 1988 should be someone with a nationalist and revolutionary background. Someone like Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son and heir in popular mythology of General Cárdenas, who during his six-year tenure (1934-1940) had laid the ideological and social foundations of the regime with the so-called Socialist education, agrarian reform, the inclusion of the workers' movement and the nationalization of the oil industry in 1938.

When President De la Madrid unveiled Carlos Salinas de Gortari as the PRI candidate, the criticisms turned into a rift within the party's elite sectors and the *Corriente Democrática* faction led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, former Governor of Michoacán (which had been his father's "fiefdom") and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, former President of the PRI and a man with extensive experience of power, put forward its own candidate to run in the 1988 election under the name of *Frente Democrático Nacional* (FDN). It is a well-known fact that the final crisis of an authoritarian regime starts to unfold when its elite sector splits off from it and that was what happened on this occasion. What actually forced the PRI to promote the new series of reforms that would lead to alternation in the presidency two (six-year) presidential tenures later was competition with the FDN.

The 1988 elections dealt a serious blow to the PRI's legitimacy. A new computer system has been installed to get the poll results through quicker and the first results which were, as was to be expected, the figures from the urban areas and Mexico City in particular, showed Cárdenas to be well in front at that stage. Instead of waiting for the trend to be corrected when

the results came in from rural areas where the voting for the official candidate was guaranteed, or perhaps fearing that before that happened people would spill out onto the streets, someone, probably the Cabinet Minister, Manuel Bartlett, took the decision to suspend the transmission of voting figures. “The system has crashed”, he said, and the sterile computing jargon he used immediately became infused with a very different connotation for the opposition supporters. The official announcement of victory for Salinas with just over 50% of the votes would never be accepted or believed by Cárdenas’ followers who were convinced that victory had been snatched from the grasp of their own candidate.

After merging with the Partido Mexicano Socialista, the party that had succeeded the Communist left and the new left born in 1968, the breakaway group from the PRI formed a new party called the Partido de la Revolución Democrática. From that moment onwards, the Mexican political game turned into a peculiar three-party tussle in which originally the PRI competed above all with the PAN in the northern States and with the PRD in the centre and south of the country. In the 1997 elections, the PRI obtained 39% of the votes, the PAN won 27% and the PRD 26%, with the remainder of the votes being shared out between the smaller parties. Those election figures seemed to imply that the only way to take the presidency away from the official party was through an agreement between the PAN and the PRD.

Such an agreement, however, was extremely improbable on ideological grounds. For the PRD, the PAN represented, on the one hand, the denominational conservatism of Mexican Catholicism going back to its origins and, on the other hand, the economic neoliberalism brought to the party by the northern barbarians, the entrepreneurs who went into politics in the late 70s. A combination like that was always going to be difficult to swallow for the PRD leaders whose political background was the PMS tradition, but it was even more so for those who came from the PRI as they regarded themselves as the legitimate heirs of the revolutionary nationalism tradition which the PRI had supposedly betrayed, including a belligerent and sectarian secularism within that tradition.

Given those ideological differences, the most logical outcome that could have been expected, a little naively perhaps, was that the PRI and the PRD would have managed to overcome the reasons for the 1987-88 confrontation. After all, the PRI had a long history of co-opting and evolving which had allowed it to renew itself for half a century, giving impetus to the movement and turnover of its elite sectors as forced to do so by the no re-election principle. The 1987 split, however, was not resolved, largely because of the PRD’s decision to refuse to accept Salinas as the legitimate new president. Salinas responded with a political exclusion strategy — “I can neither see nor hear the PRD” — which went hand in hand, according to the accusations from the party led by Cárdenas, with constant repressive harassment. But, on top of all that, the policies of the 1988-1994 presidency effectively broke away from the tradition of the Mexican regime much more drastically than the timid reforms and economic adjustment of De la Madrid’s tenure.

Unlike De la Madrid, whose fundamental intention seems to have been to put the economy and the country onto a stable footing again, Carlos Salinas de Gortari put into practice an ambitious project for change that can be summed up by the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with USA and Canada when the NAFTA came into force on January 1st, 1994, not only did Mexico gain access to the North American market, but it also bound itself to a project from which there was unlikely to be any chance to turn the clock back to the times of isolationism or economic protectionism. It was a project that meant the country was strongly committed to overcoming the idiosyncrasies of Mexican history, including the ambivalent hostility felt by its elite sectors towards USA. When the Mexican economy was on the brink of bankruptcy in 1995 because of the disastrous devaluation the previous year, the speed and intensity with which Washington came to its financial rescue already proved that unlike the famous saying by Porfirio Díaz, Mexico did not have to regard being so close to the USA as a misfortune.

But other anomalies also had to be solved, such as its lack of recognition of the Catholic Church or the fact that the agrarian reform process was still open and as it left ownership rights uncertain it took away any incentives for business investment in the countryside. Thus, the reforms undertaken by Salinas moved away from the revolutionary nationalism tradition not just by privatizing public companies, including some of those that had been considered strategic until then such as telecommunications but also because it intended closing the agrarian reform process or acknowledging the institutional existence of the Church. The gulf between these steps and those taken by the re-founder of the postrevolutionary regime and father of the PRD leader could not have been wider.

The PRD did not actually reap any benefits at all from this radical confrontation in 1994 even though it was undoubtedly an *annus horribilis* for Salinas. The social uncertainty created by the uprising in Chiapas by the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional—the very day that the NAFTA came into force on January 1st—, plus the murder in March of the PRI candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, triggered a strong desire for security amongst the voters and that probably worked in favour of the official party. But the new official party candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, did not have much to be afraid of in any case from a party whose ideas were backward-looking, who flirted with the rebels in Chiapas and who condemned the NAFTA as a disaster for Mexico in contrast to the optimism felt by the most dynamic sectors of society.

By basing its strategy on the defence of the historic principles of legitimacy of the regime, the PRD was forced to compete with the official party for votes amongst the most traditional sectors, the ones the Government had greater ability to control, and it could only be sure about support beforehand from the most radicalized sectors of the university, bureaucracy and the middle classes. After the economic disaster of 1995, those sources of support and the straightforward economic protest vote were enough for Cárdenas to achieve an overwhelming victory in 1997 for the leadership of the Distrito Federal Government in the capital, reediting

his 1988 results (he had been acknowledged as winning 48% of the votes in DF then), but his attempts to bring his approach up-to-date to run for president a third time in 2000 probably came to late.

There is a fair amount of consensus about the fact that Ernesto Zedillo's presidency was key to making the change in presidency in the 2000 election possible but exactly why he was key means different things to different people. There are significant sectors within the PRI who believe that President Zedillo betrayed his own party or at least left it to its own fate so that he himself could gain international prestige as the man who had paved the way for alternation in power in Mexico. That accusation is fuelled by a variety of more or less justified feelings of resentment. The first one was the same one that prompted the 1987 split, i.e. the perception that the politicians, the professionals in politics with experience and careers as members of the PRI had gradually been displaced by technical experts or professionals with no political experience who had been co-opted by the presidential power to hold the highest offices.

That grievance is the one that Roberto Madrazo, former Governor of Tabasco, tried to capitalize on in his internal campaign to become the PRI's candidate for president although he was eventually defeated by Francisco Labastida —perhaps because of their very different levels of resources— and once again in 2002, this time to gain the presidency of the PRI. It is hard to know to what extent it was an inevitable grievance within a process to modernize the PRI and to what extent it reflects how the presidency defended its position as the head of the party. The only way to put it into context is to go back to the changes that had already been implemented during Carlos Salinas' term of office and the rebellion of the party grass roots which was already perceptible in the XIV Assembly (1990) and which came to a head in the XVI Assembly in 1996.

Contrary to what his adversaries seemed to believe initially, Carlos Salinas did not exactly think and act like a technocrat. He quickly re-established fear of the presidency by having Joaquín Hernández Galicia, La Quina, put in prison on a very debatable charge after La Quina, who was the leader of the powerful trade union in the State oil company (SHPH), had made the mistake of supporting and funding Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas' presidential candidate campaign. Salinas also reformed social policy by setting up the National Solidarity Program (Pronasol) on the basis of ideas he had developed in his doctoral thesis at Harvard (1978), with the two-fold aim of achieving greater efficiency in the use of resources and of capitalizing on that success to reinforce the legitimacy of the presidency.

Salinas appointed Luis Donald Colosio, his friend and collaborator, to head the PRI so that he could thoroughly overhaul the party and allow it to compete without any tricks or privileges in electoral processes. Part of that reform was the invention of a social liberalism, as the doctrine of Salinas' reforms. It combined the best of the 19th-century liberalism tradition —Juárez's legacy— with the social concern of the postrevolutionary regime which would in turn allow it to keep legitimacy in the new framework of an open economy and of a society

governed by market rationale.

But the key to the reform had to be the turning of the PRI into a party of the people, i.e. getting rid of the corporative structure whereby the sectors —the PRI workers and peasant organizations above all— acted as mechanisms to mobilize and control the grass roots in exchange for a share of power and elected or appointed posts in the State or the party. The documents of the XIV party assembly already took this idea quite far but the other side of the coin of emancipation of the sectors was the emancipation of the party itself as regards the presidency, a conflict-ridden process to say the least. The reason was that the sectors really did have the capacity to mobilize their forces, not just on paper but as the result of personalized old boy networks or power bases that could work for the opposition if their operators decided to change sides if and when they felt their interests in the PRI had been neglected. (That was to happen in the next six-year term of office when the candidates who had broken away from the official party won, with the support of the PRD, the 1998 elections for the governments of the States of Zacatecas, Tlaxcala and Baja California Sur, projecting an image of the strong rise in the polls of the PRD against the PRI).

After the favourable outcome of the 1991 election for the official party, the temptation to curtail the reforms in order to consolidate them (as one of the top leaders said) was very great. The PRI was once again in an election-winning position and there seemed no point in running risks by going any further as that would mean paying a high price in exchange for hypothetical future benefits. Moreover, Salinas demonstrated that he was prepared to make concessions to the PAN opposition party when it resorted to mobilization to condemn the unfavourable election result, preferring the legitimacy of the presidency over the truthfulness of the results (a deal known as the *concertación*, implemented in Guanajuato in 1991). As a consequence, the party rank and file felt increasingly frustrated and showed its resentment by imposing a number of requirements that candidates would have to meet, especially the person running for the presidency, in order to penalize those people who had government posts without having had any experience in party politics and electoral competition.

Although that particular resentment against the presidency had been simmering since the time when Salinas was president, Zedillo also earned himself two additional criticisms. The first one was the reaction against his drastic financial rationalization policy. In December 1994, when the newly ensconced President Zedillo tried to devalue the peso whose value had been pushed up so high by dollar receipts that the Government felt it was damaging for the competitiveness of the economy, he found himself facing a disastrous devaluation that wiped out in 1995 all the progress made in previous years. The GDP fell by 6.1%, compared with an average growth of under 2% over the previous decade. It is very likely that such a bad start to his presidency made him determined to leave his successor an economy that would not be blighted by the curse of the six-year term, the crisis facing new presidents to kick off their term in office that José López Portillo and Miguel de la Madrid had already had to face before him.

He certainly achieved what he set out to do because, according to HFOD data, the economy grew by 5.5% on average from 1996 and by 6.8 in 2000, and despite the North American recession, the Mexican economy only fell back by -0.3% in 2001. Consequently, the start of President Fox's term in office was not marked by any disaster on the scale of those suffered in the past.

The other side of this financial rigor, however, was probably the price paid in the polls because of stringent expenditure rationalization which prevented social policies being implemented on a level suitable for the country's needs and that even cut out or cut down some symbolic consumer support programs for the people. At the time, the Government was having to pay for the high cost of refinancing the private banks after the 1995 crisis. This was an extremely controversial issue because of the criticisms levelled at the lack of transparency and the arbitrary nature of the way the debts had been taken on —allegedly to cover up the secret financing of the PRI campaign in 2000. As a result, many party leaders stated either privately or publicly that the Zedillo Government's stringent expenditure limitation policy was dragging the PRI down to disaster.

The third reason for a feeling of resentment from within the party was Zedillo's attempt to put a "healthy distance" between the presidency and the PRI. This intention is hard to understand from the standpoint of parliamentary regimes but was quite reasonable within the rationale of presidentialism: as he is elected by universal suffrage and independently of the election of parliamentary representatives, the country's top leader cannot only be the party president, he must also be the president of all citizens. On top of that, in the case of Mexico, where the symbiosis between the PRI and the Government had for some time been seen as the key to the perpetuation of the PRI's regime, that reasoning was backed up by the desire to put forward a party that was independent of the presidential power, able to compete on its own and with no privileges over the other political forces.

Perhaps because of previous suspicions and distrust, right from the outset that intention was construed as a wish on the part of Zedillo to separate his personal fate from the fate of the PRI. If that indeed had been his wish, it would have come true completely. In 2000, whereas the PRI candidate was defeated, Zedillo's popularity as outgoing president was close to 70%, a fact that once again was far from what might be expected in a parliamentary regime. Nevertheless, Zedillo did go back on his wish to distance himself from the party on a number of occasions. He had to intervene to arbitrate—in biased fashion according to his critics—in the internal contest for his successor and he publicly stated his desire to "work flat out", as a member of the PRI in the election campaign. Such contradictions, however, did not make earlier criticisms disappear, and simply prompted new criticisms of the opposite kind.

When it comes to finding reasons for the PRI's election defeat in 2000, two spring quite easily to mind. Above all, there was the 1995 crisis for which the Mexican people had to foot the bill and then there was the internal crisis of the PRI itself which was revealed in the harshness

of the internal clashes over the presidential candidacy but also in the criticisms levelled at Zedillo from high profile figures within the party. It was also seen in the fierce confrontation Zedillo had with his predecessor, Carlos Salinas, following the arrest of Salinas' brother Raúl ~~—under serious suspicions of links with drug trafficking and charged with having ordered the~~ *Democracy in Mexico* murder of his former brother-in-law Francisco Ruiz Massieu, Secretary General of the PRI, in 1994— and about who was responsible for the 1994-95 crisis. Those two factors would very likely have been enough in any two-party system to bring down the party in government but in Mexico not only were there three parties to be contended with but also it had not yet been decided beforehand which one of the two opposition parties would make it to Los Pinos as the PRI's successor.

Fox's success in this respect was not only that he convinced the Mexican people that it was better to vote for him —and for the PAN— than for Francisco Labastida and for the PRI because he had already gone a long way towards doing that beforehand. His real achievement was to convince the voters that by voting for him they could take the presidency away from the PRI and that, on the contrary, the other candidate running for president, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, had no chance of doing the same. The results said it all: in the presidential poll, Fox won almost 16 million votes whereas in the election for members of parliament the PAN won 14,227,340 votes. Cárdenas, on the other hand, gained 700,000 fewer votes in the presidential election than the PRD lists in the legislative election.

Fox based his campaign on whether the PRI could be ousted or not from the presidency which he regarded as the chief issue at stake. It was all about the possibility of alternation of power and the fact that there was already strong social momentum that could be mobilized if a candidate came on the scene that seemed capable of winning against the PRI if a vote for that candidate seemed to be a useful vote. To get those votes, even from voters who were in principle not at all close to the PAN stance on issues, Fox put forward a political program that focused above all on achieving and administering alternation. He repeated that his government would not be a party government (a PAN government) but rather a transition government which would include non-PAN political stances and even —at times of particular enthusiasm— the positions of the honorable sectors of the PRI. In fact, his close circle included both people from the left such as Jorge G. Castañeda, who was subsequently appointed Foreign Affairs Minister and from the PRI. For instance, Fox accepted the support of Porfirio Muñoz Ledo who was a convert to Fox's cause again after having failed in his attempt to fight Cárdenas for the PRD's presidential candidacy.

Fox's own candidacy had been imposed from outside the PAN. The party only named him as its candidate after the Governor of Guanajuato, as he was then, had waged a pre-campaign lasting months supported by his so-called Friends of Fox. (That position of independence held by Fox would lead to strain and disagreements between the President and his party of the kind that tend to trigger, in turn, mutual declarations of loyalty and support. Fox's own stance seemed

to draw on the ideas of Roberto Mangabeira Unger, the Brazilian philosopher who lectures in the USA, with progressive, pragmatic views also upheld by Castañeda and an emphasis on the fact that to carry out really innovative reforms a president should avoid the rationale of party negotiation. This approach, when added to the President's own character, might also explain his reluctance to accept any political intrigue behind the scenes and, therefore, his unhappy relationship with the Senate and the House of Representatives).

As well as putting himself forward as the candidate for alternation in power, over and above party politics, Fox offered Cárdenas a coalition to fight against the PRI. The foreseeable response from the PRD was a similar offer and the two parties plunged into a laborious debate to decide who should head the coalition of all the opposition parties to defeat the PRI. As could be imagined too, in the end both the PAN and the PRD promoted different coalitions, the Alianza por el Cambio and the Alianza por México, respectively. But Fox came out on top after this dealing, amongst other reasons because of the contradictions in the PRD's arguments to head the alternative coalition and reject the joint leadership with the PAN candidate.

Two kinds of arguments can be put forward to explain why Cárdenas could not leave the leadership of the opposition up to Fox: one, because their respective programs were incompatible in content and in the different social interests they represented; two, that the ideological gap between them could not be bridged. On the first point, with Fox's strategy to put himself forward as the president for the transition that left little room for manoeuvre as in principle he was willing to incorporate points from the PRD program or guarantees that the social interest the PRD said it represented would not be harmed. The PRD, therefore, only had to negotiate a possible transition program the two parties could agree on and thus, rationally, they had to set up a procedure to see if the candidate was to be Cárdenas or Fox depending on whoever had most possibilities of winning the election.

Either because of a well-founded suspicion that the most popular candidate was Fox or because of a deep-seated conviction, Cárdenas was not prepared to take up that option. The problem was how to give an explanation of that rejection that did not leave Cárdenas in the unimpressive role of someone who is actually against adding together the opposition votes—even with the risk of the PRI keeping the presidency— simply because of a personal desire to play the leading role. That explanation could only be based on the ideological gap between the PAN and the PRD, but in that area the PRD's position and that of Cárdenas was (and is) very much contradictory.

As mentioned before, the PRD was formed from the breakaway sections of the PRI in 1987 and factions from the traditional left or post-68 left reorganized into the PMS who saw in Cárdenas the possibility of taking on the PRI and defeating it from the left of the political spectrum. But Cárdenas, as a true follower of the revolutionary nationalism tradition, refused to see himself as a left-wing candidate as he felt he was the legitimate heir of the central school of thought in the regime, betrayed since De la Madrid's term of office and openly attacked

by the reforms implemented by Salinas. He was the true heir of the system, of what the PRI represented in the past, not a candidate from outside the system who was challenging it from the left like his new Socialist allies.

~~That idea was given legitimacy or at least reinforced by electoral calculations: the dividing line between left and right in ideological terms is not important in Mexico as a factor in voting choice and most voters who the PRD aimed to win over if it wanted to compete with the PRI belonged to a middle class that did not feel identified with the left. The problem is that nor does that middle class really identify with the condemnation of neoliberalism and globalization either, or with the flirtation with the Zapatistas in Chiapas or with the nostalgia for the pre-debt crisis economic and social model either. The PRD's rhetoric prevented it from being credible to those voters who it wanted to reach by rejecting a definition for itself as a left-wing party.~~

The outcome of all that was that when Cárdenas and the PRD tried to argue that the ideological gap between them prevented them from reaching an agreement with Fox and the PAN, that gap could not be asserted in terms of left and right in the political spectrum and if stated using Cárdenas' own words—the dispute for the soul of revolutionary nationalism—it wiped out any significant dividing line with the PRI at a time when the voters wanted to decide between a past—the revolutionary nationalism of the PRI—which had gone on longer than was acceptable and a future which had not yet been defined. When underlining the ideological distances, therefore, Cárdenas let Fox fly the flag of alternation, as he was willing to put off the definition of the new model of society provided he could achieve the goal of getting the PRI out of the presidency.

That was how the useful vote against the PRI focused on Vicente Fox's candidacy. But for the useful vote to exist there must be a widespread belief that voting is really effective and that the will expressed by voters is not going to be distorted by fraud or by any manipulation of the ballot. On this front, praise has to be awarded where praise is due to President Zedillo. He displayed systematic determination to push through agreements with the opposition so that the electoral procedure rules would be accepted by all the political players and would inspire complete confidence in the society at large. From 1996, that confidence would be embodied in the image of the Instituto Federal Electoral, whose impartiality and authority were acknowledged by the main parties over and above any circumstantial differences. The intelligent, cautious way the President and Board Member of the institution, José Woldenberg, steered the design and functioning of the IFE cannot be overlooked either when explaining the calm, unanimous reaction to the election results in 2000 that brought the PRI's 71-year regime to an end.

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Seminar on Democratic Transition and Consolidation 2001 - 2002

Round Table

Mexico: the alternation of power

December 13th, 2001

MAIN SPEAKER:

Ernesto Zedillo
President of Mexico (1994-2000).

PANELISTS:

Manuel Alcántara
Professor of Political Science and Director of the Instituto de Iberoamérica y Portugal
at the Universidad de Salamanca (Spain).

Laurence Withehead
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MODERATOR AND SEMINAR CO-ORDINATOR:

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Summary of Ernesto Zedillo's Lecture

Ernesto Zedillo began by pointing out he did not intend to give a reinterpretation of his experience as President of the Mexican Republic, or, for that matter, of his vision of Mexican politics. His intervention was going to be a reiteration of commitments made while he was a Presidential candidate, and a revisiting of the six years of his Presidency.

The objectives of the Zedillo Presidency

Ernest Zedillo referred to one of his election speeches, made on August 4, 1994, and, in keeping with his initial declaration of intentions, enumerated the reforms still pending – reforms which, at the time, occupied his political agenda: the need to transfer total autonomy to electoral bodies, the need to create conditions that would guarantee electoral fairness, the urgent need to discuss the financing of parties and access to the media of political parties and leaders, greater division of power, the reinforcement of federalism (through the redistribution of resources and responsibilities, from federal to state, local and municipal levels) and real respect for freedom of expression.

When he was a Presidential candidate, Ernest Zedillo also proposed fashioning a different concept of the Presidency, one based on the exercise of the powers bestowed upon the President of the Republic by the Constitution, through dialogue with all political parties and by reinforcing the powers and functions of the Congress of the Union. He also undertook to establish a different relationship with his party, one of healthy distance, in keeping with what is stipulated in the Constitution; one which did not necessarily mean the implicit support of the PRI for its Government at all times.

In short, Ernest Zedillo recognised that his electoral programme was based on the conviction that the Mexican transition had been begun decades ago, so that his task as President would

Ernesto Zedillo was President of Mexico (1994 - 2000).

be to focus on questions that were still pending at the time. Contrary to popular belief, Zedillo didn't even consider that his Presidency was the most important period of the Mexican transition.

The achievements of the Zedillo Presidency

His first initiative on coming to the Presidency, he said, was the reform of the Judiciary. Reform which, in his words, was designed to guarantee its full autonomy and independence, thanks mainly to the fact that such reform was agreed to and approved by all the parties with Parliamentary representation. Furthermore, in December 1994, one measure of reform, which was also negotiated by all the political parties, the Congress and the Government, established the national Commission for Human Rights, a totally independent body, created with the aim of investigating matters of corruption in the past, and the abuse of power.

Ernest Zedillo explained that there had been strong pressure on him, even from within the PRI, to delay the implementation of his reforms, given the severe economic crisis the country was facing at that time, which had resulted in political instability. It was, in his opinion, a truly unprecedented economic crisis, which was unfolding within the context of economic globalisation, where enormous quantities of money could move from one country to another at an alarming rate. After returning to international capital markets in 1989, Mexico had become an important destination of foreign investment; but, by the same token, any withdrawal of such capital immediately provoked an economic crisis. The Mexican crisis, and those that followed in Asia, Russia, Brazil and, at present, in Argentina, have shown, as far as Zedillo is concerned, that with regard to the economy, politicians have very little room for manoeuvre and can ill-afford to get things wrong.

Though he acknowledged the extent to which the economic situation made negotiation of reform with the opposition parties difficult, Zedillo did express his satisfaction at what he considered one of the big successes of his presidency: electoral reform. Zedillo stated his absolute conviction that electoral reform allowed political forces to compete in more equal terms, since it served to change the rules of financing and spending by parties and candidates, as well as their access to the media. It was also a measure of reform that served to establish the autonomy of electoral bodies and the total independence of the electoral tribunal. The mechanisms necessary for the inhabitants of the Federal District to directly elect those who were to govern them were also put into place.

The ex-president also expressed his satisfaction at the significant progress made on the Federal question, as can be seen in the important transfer of powers and functions from Federal to state and local levels, though he also recognised that no significant tax reform was achieved. It was a major question that was still pending, which will have to be resolved by the country's present President, Vicente Fox.

~~Contrary to widely held opinion, Ernest Zedillo insisted that he was a President of the~~ *Democracy in Mexico* Republic clearly identified with the PRI. Which led him to try to convince those who, even within the PRI, did not fully share his political agenda. Zedillo felt that his party, as well as the majority of the other political parties, fully supported the way in which he had run the affairs of the country, as could be clearly gauged, in his opinion, from the support received for his economic reforms.

With regard to reform of the PRI, and in an effort to counter criticism about opportunism, Zedillo recalled a speech of his given at a PRI meeting during 1994 political campaign, in which he defended the selection of candidates from the party through democratic mechanisms. It was an idea he continued to espouse and defend when he became President, until it was eventually approved by the PRI. In his opinion, the internal democratisation of the PRI was not only beneficial to the party itself, but also to Mexican democracy on the whole. Ernest Zedillo expressed his conviction that Mexican democracy, having embarked, as it finally has, upon a process of democratic consolidation, needs an active and stable PRI, one that is able to function as a competitive, democratic party.

The challenges facing Mexican democracy

Ernest Zedillo celebrated the manner in which the PRI took defeat in the 2000 Presidential elections, and facilitated a smooth and civilised changeover of power, which was a true reflection of the character of the Mexican transition. Even so, Zedillo doesn't think that one can really talk of a true consolidation of democracy in Mexico. In this sense, Zedillo stated that a consequence of the new political pluralism and of the real possibility of power rotation in Government should be the quick construction of political agreements that were absolutely necessary for the Mexican transition to continue. Ernesto Zedillo declared that no party should be in government forever; or in the opposition, for that matter. So that should provide even greater incentive for all political forces to contribute to the present political reform of Mexico.

Going even further, Zedillo expressed his conviction that the political forces of Mexico have to show that democracy is not only a legitimate ideal, but also an effective instrument, especially at times of economic crisis. In this sense, he stated that the fiscal reforms proposed by Vicente Fox constitute a challenge for all the political parties of Mexico to show citizens just how democracy can properly serve the development of the country.

Ernest Zedillo insisted that the basic problem of Mexican democracy continues to be the putting into place of norms that regulate the division and balance of power. A fundamental

requirement of any democratic system is the existence of mechanisms and resources that allow it to face particularly extreme situations. In the Mexican context, Zedillo stated that a presidential system, with the appropriate division of powers, was the most adequate one. Altruism, ethics or even the skill of politicians aren't going to provide solutions to problems. Solutions to problems would come with the development of appropriate constitutional formulae. Further more, if political parties do not assume the responsibility of taking difficult decisions, such decisions must be assumed by the President.

Finally, Ernest Zedillo recognised several unfulfilled objectives of his Presidency: the questions of security and the rule of law. A culture of strict respect for the rule of law is fundamental to the construction and consolidation of democracy. However, the development of such a culture is not possible if the State is incapable of offering its citizens certain minimum security guarantees. In this sense, during his Presidency as well as that of his successor, Mexico continued to face serious problems, which need to be addressed.

Comments by

Manuel Alcántara

Political life in Mexico throughout much of the 20th century has been threaded through with two dual-sided themes. The first of those is the democracy-elections equation which has been the prevailing trend in the last quarter of the 20th century. President Zedillo, as a result, had good grounds for saying in his inauguration speech given on December 1st 1994 that “electoral democracy must cease to be a key concern of the political debate and the cause of acrimony and division”. However, that announcement, which unmistakably voiced a clear concern for the six-year term of office just commencing, was, in a way, the continuance of a slow process of democratic construction that had been underway since at least the previous decade. Whereas in 1982, 91% of the elected posts were held by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), in 1994 that figure was 64% and had fallen to 54% three years later and to 45% in the historic elections held in 2000. Although the 1994 elections were the watershed in that evolution insofar as they represented a clean break with the past, they still contained, however, a worrying lack of equity. That unfair balance was displayed by the fact that the PRI was responsible for outlaying all of the money spent in the electoral process, 71% in the presidential election, 77% in the election of senators and 81% in the case of deputies to the lower house. Six years later those percentages were cut by half.

The second dual-sided factor, the Government-PRI equation, which for decades constituted the cornerstone of the Mexican political system, began to undergo far-reaching change from 1994 onwards. That change could be seen by job reshuffles when Esteban Moctezuma was replaced by Emilio Chuayffet in the Secretaría de Gobernación, and Santiago Oñate took over from María de los Ángeles Moreno to head the PRI in 1995. All of these events pointed to

a different relationship that was being built up between the two poles. It was described as a “healthy distance” and was reflected in the silence of the PRI political group at the end of the last presidential report. Essentially, it was all about the victory of the liberal ideas that lay at the original heart of the Mexican Revolution itself and non-identification with the other major trend in the Revolution which meant revolutionary nationalism. All of this was to come to a head quite dramatically in the contradictions that tainted Labastida’s election campaign when he had to distance himself from a Government run by his own party without falling, as a result, into the clutches of the oldest party apparatus of them all.

The new scenario that emerged after the 2000 elections entailed an unmistakable step forward in what was not a typical democratic transition. As a result, the model of democratic transition did not sit easily alongside the models that were standard fare in the literature on the subject in the 1980s. But without any doubt whatsoever, there were two overriding issues that took priority over all others as the country stepped onto the road to democratic consolidation. Firstly, there was the issue of political reform, the reform of the existing relations in the triangle formed by the Government, the Congress and the majority party that were moving into a completely new arena dominated by new dynamics. The biggest issues by far hanging over the reform are the greater or lesser degree of parliamentarization of the regime, with the executive branch kept in check by the legislative branch of power one way or another, and the question of no legislative reelection which leads to short-term practices and a limited professionalization of the political profession in general.

Secondly, with regard to political parties, a number of different question marks arise. The first one alludes to whether the current number of majority forces is sufficient or not, even though they do cover the ideological spectrum. Moreover, although the PRI largely wins its votes homogeneously, from all over the country, and the electorate supporting the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) is essentially located in the north of the country and that of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) in the south, will that all change in the medium term? In addition to that, the disappearance from the political scene of a PRI president, that figure who generated discipline and guaranteed certain consideration of the groups in future share-outs, has unleashed the current confrontation: how can unity be maintained once the presidential umbrella has been folded and put away whilst still avoiding falling into the historic feudalization trap of its precursor party the Partido Nacional Revolucionario? Lastly, the role of the PRI is now being put forward as a feeder party in the current cases of Dante Delgado’s Convergencia por la Democracia and Manuel Camacho’s Partido de Centro Democrático and there is also the great unknown quantity of its ability to attract support or form a coalition if it wins in 2006. All of these points are question marks that hover over the immediate political future and need to be closely monitored.

To finish off, I would like to mention the new atmosphere that has built up inside the parties and in the relationship between them which can be described as extreme hostility with

scanty cooperation. That attitude is dragging on to such an extent that it makes agreements that in the long run look like being crucial highly unlikely. During the break following his speech, President Zedillo commented that the lack of agreement to undertake the reform of the electricity industry, the fact that the Constitution had not been amended and so the reform of the Federal Electricity Commission could not be tackled and private investment initiatives in electricity generation could not be accommodated as a result could have ended up being a very serious problem for the next president, President Fox. Although President Zedillo did not say it, I myself think that it may end up being a very serious problem for the Mexican economy since as we all know, it would not be the first case of an economy with high rates of development that has been pulled up short by a ceiling in power generation. The worrying thing is knowing that even after the lack of an agreement to reform the Constitution and address the entry of private capital into the electricity industry, it was not until after 1997 when it could no longer be said: “No, if it is necessary, do it yourselves and take on the cost”. That was something that could no longer be done after that year. What was needed by then was a commitment from at least the PAN which, as is natural, had to agree on the goal sought for different reasons, ranging from ideological to management ones. Nevertheless, that inertia of refusing to accept costs when their consequences are not necessarily positive still lingers on. It is striking to see how that attitude of someone outside the system looking in can be maintained afterwards or how the old habit of interpreting the political game in the terms of earlier phases can be carried on beyond seemingly rational limits. Perhaps, it is because what is at stake now is a struggle within the elite factions of the parties themselves. “Yes, I know that the rational thing to do is come to an agreement with you to implement that reform and accept my costs but the problem is that if I accept my costs, I will be thrown out of the leadership of the party, I will be pushed to one side and consequently I would be sacrificing myself personally for the future of the country and the national agreement”. The lack of responsibility and altruism that can be detected amongst professional politicians in this regard is quite astonishing.

Comments by

Laurence Whitehead

Among the many interesting points made by Dr Zedillo in his address, I wish to point to three:

1. In countries such as Mexico the democratisation process has usually been quite a long one. Dr Zedillo was at pains to point out that democracy in Mexico only came after quite a long political process.
2. Democratisation in Mexico was also quite a drawn out process of apprenticeship. Dr Zedillo alluded to this in pointing out that the consolidation of full democracy in Mexico called for a deeper knowledge of its own ABC as it were, which then had to be transferred to the domain of interaction in daily life.
3. Crucial to such apprenticeship was the notion of responsibility. Dr Zedillo referred to the need to take proper care of one's own home, because in today's world anyone can easily assume responsibility for such a task. Co-responsibility has therefore become the fundamental issue.

Given the country's political track record (seventy-one years of government from the same party, and for sixty-one of those years no one elected to any political office anywhere ever acceded to such office without the approval of the dominant party and whoever happened to be the president) it was inevitable that the process of democratisation in Mexico should take some time to be established with any degree of efficiency. The PRI will continue to be a very strong political force in Mexico. And the other political forces and the different currents of public opinion, especially those in the opposition and those who feel excluded, - or even

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repressed - within the new democratic system, will not be easily convinced that the powerful untouchables of the past have suddenly become ardent democrats. Even for the reformists it has not been easy to adapt to the new rules of the game, which entail more open criticism of, and less a-critical respect for, those in high places. Events such as the recent Pemexgate scandal only serve to further feed mutual misgivings. So it may be some time yet before we can talk of true consolidation of the democratisation process. There will, no doubt, be progress in certain areas, as there will be regression in others. So in spite of the formal introduction of the democratic process, carried out during the seven years of Zedillo's presidency, there is still much to be done in the daily task of maintaining the construction of democracy in Mexico.

There is no doubt that in some countries the democratisation process was effected in a relatively short time (some ex-communist countries, for instance, where the withdrawal of the Soviet military presence removed the final obstacle to a process of democratisation that was already firmly established within). In Latin America, there are several examples of long and complex processes. In Brazil, the authoritarian regime gained a certain level of social support and successfully carried out many tasks fundamental to the running and management of the affairs of the country, which only put a spoke in the wheel of political democratisation. In Mexico, the PRI also managed to resist, and even succeeded in regaining some of the ground lost after the crisis of legitimacy that stemmed from the "fall of the system" in 1988. It was only after the Salinista experience fell into discredit that more space was provided for the promotion of full democratisation. President Zedillo was key to that opening to free democracy.

There can also be little doubt that democratic apprenticeship continues to be the biggest political challenge facing the country after the 2000 elections.

In certain areas, such as vote counting, freedom of the press and decentralisation, much progress has been made. But, the flip side of the coin is the level of mistrust and uncertainty that still prevails. It is prevalent in areas such as the financing of political campaigns, the abuse of corporate privileges inherited from an authoritarian past, and the persistence of the traditional practices of political intimidation in the more backward States and regions. The problems of these areas only serve to underline that there is still much to be done before democratic doctrine becomes norm, part and parcel as it were, of "daily co-habitation" in the country.

Finally, in all new democracies, a culture of responsibility must be cultivated. It is not at all desirable that the old practices of the exercise of power, which regard the legitimate complaints of the opposition with such disdain, should still prevail in the new Mexican democracy. Gradual rotation – initially at local government level, then in the Federal Congress and finally at the level of the Presidency – has begun to instil a culture of co-responsibility among parties and in Mexican society as a whole. The way president Zedillo acquitted himself during his seven-year office, and, most of all, in July 2000, stood out in sharp contrast to his predecessors. It no doubt contributed to paving the way towards power rotation. The pluralistic attitude of

the Mexican people reinforced such moderate and open tendencies. However, the institutional maze that is the 1917 Constitution doesn't exactly provide the ideal framework for the stimulation of a culture of political co-responsibility. Non-re-election, for instance, constitutes ~~a crucial de-stimulant to long term political responsibility~~. *Democracy in Mexico* From this perspective, certain key constitutional elements have to be brought into line with the competitive political reality of Mexico today, which could lead to the development of a spirit of co-responsibility through political apprenticeship. That can only have positive repercussions in so far as meeting the major needs of the Mexican people is concerned.

Seminar on Democratic Transition and Consolidation 2001 - 2002

Round Table

Mexico: the electoral transition

December 18th, 2001

MAIN SPEAKER:

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PANELISTS:

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Democratic transition in Mexico: an evaluation

José Woldenberg

The democratic process of Mexico is so long, it can be considered a historical period. It is a change fraught with difficulties in which both society and State had to confront simultaneously a chain of problems derived from the accelerated expansion of the demands of a growing population and the definitive decline of a developing model; culture and political changes that lead to a reform of real political systems and rules that control its correct working order.

Political transition is part of a more profound transition that embraces the society as a whole in its intricate and unavoidable connection with the world.

However, the political transition was specific and it adjusted to its own pace. In fact, it started even before anyone ever thought of an economic reform stimulated by the divorce between real politics and formal politics, which was causing conflicts in nearly every social life orders. Deep inside the political transition lies the emergence of a modernized society that no longer fits in the political framework arranged around the hegemonic party that dominated the national scene during the 20th century. In time and with social development, Mexico became a more complex, diverse and plural, country. As a result, one single party could not represent or reconcile all interests, projects and desires as it had done in the past. It was this growing modernization that stood behind, pushing the first great challenges against the status quo originated from the growing civil society. In this sense, the student movement of 1968 was a historical warning, for it constituted the first episode in which the democratic claim emerged firmly and massively.

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The 1968 contingents proved the urge of a change, the need to modify the political life of the country that would take place some years after. The students of 1968 noticed, with a high human cost, that the State's forms, management and habits needed to be transformed and adjusted to the difficulties and new plurality of Mexican society and culture.

The subsequent history confirmed this reality after the dissidence multiplication and the expressions of new pluralism. University local conflicts not only were intensified, but also a wave of "labor union rebellion" appeared in strategic sectors of the labor world. Agriculture mobilizations reached levels unseen since the Cardenist reforms of the Thirties, and a wide variety of rural organized options were developed. New independent publications were created. The electoral opposition, represented by the Partido de Acción Nacional (National Action Party), emerged from a period of internal conflict and advanced towards counties situated mostly in the northern regions of the country. New partisan parties appeared and with them an urban guerrilla and a peasant one, whose basic diagnosis – result from the brutal repression of 1968 – consists in affirming that countries have no other choice than use arms in order to change.

As a typical historic irony, in spite of the high spirit of dissidents, the only registered candidate, Jose Luis Portillo, from PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) won presidential elections of 1976. Reality dissipated any doubts: Mexico had one and only party that owned one hundred percent of the effective votes. The National Action Party was not able to present an alternative, for it had been blown by a powerful internal crisis and the Mexican Communist Party was artificially excluded from the legal contest. It is important to recapitulate the contrast: in 1976, just when the country was crossed by increasing and expansive conflicts, presidential elections were resulting to be somewhat a formalism: only one candidate, one option, one campaign, in a convulsive, closed and aggrieved country.

The legal framework did not include or reflect real politics. The different groups and movements, dissidents or nonconformists, did not have a national expression, nor did they have coherence or coordination; real national political parties did not exist.

Electoral life's weakness was a result of the absence of national parties and organizations able to present an alternative and a real challenge to the governing coalition. Just as Carlos Pereyra observed at that time, (1976) "the main indication of the hegemony of PRI lies in the non-existence of national parties developed apart from the thick trunk of the Mexican revolution".

Ideology, mechanisms and laws related to its working order, allowed PRI to cover almost everything: institutions, political trends, business groups, medium class organisms and peasant organizations, even internal political trends, whether identified with "Cardenism", revolutionary nationalism, or groups prone to a capitalist and market modernization. Within this vast coalition, which was an authentic combination of interests and projects, main decisions of politics were processed. One and only voice responded to the question of who

was governing at all levels (federal, state and local) and who must assume representation in the parliamentary elections. That was the modus operandi of the regime of the hegemonic party, with the President on the vertex of the pyramid.

~~Heir to armed movement, naturally embracing, modernizing and hegemonic, the State of~~ *Democracy in Mexico*
the Mexican revolution functioned over these two conditions: absence of competitive parties and lack of electoral rules for the society as a whole. This circumstance, representative of the Mexican revolutionary regime, started to change drastically from 1977 on.

The impulse of transition is placed that year, not because strong – and even heroic – democratic struggles hadn't unfolded, or because electoral reforms had not been granted and a certain relaxing of authority ties had not taken place, but it is because the change structure was configured in that time. That is, a process that was triggered with the strengthening of parties and that during its expanding moments it crystallized in negotiations that led to new and deeper electoral reforms. In 1977, for the first time, doors were opened to the development of organized options and its electoral participation. The original platform to the transition was built upon five pillars:

- 1) Political parties were declared “entities of public interest” and its constitution was initiated, that is, the recognition of the political parties' legal status and its importance in the constitution of state organs;
- 2) The door was open to electoral competition throughout the “conditioned register” of other political forces, among them, the Mexican left wing that had been margined until then;
- 3) The expansion of congress and the introduction of plural-nominal members of parliament is settled; the new formula includes 300 majority members and 100 proportional representatives, achieving in this way a greater and more intense pluralism for the Chamber of Deputies and enough incentives for parties to develop campaigns at a national level, seeking all possible, accumulating votes for the so called “plural-nominal bag”.
- 4) For the first time, the State assumes the obligation to grant resources for the support of all political parties. These acquire prerogatives in communication media and in public money;
- 5) With their register before federal electoral authority, political parties assume the chance to assist to different elections in other levels of political life: state and county. As a result, the electoral participation of different alternatives, legalized and recognized from the Constitution, multiplied itself all over the country.

The democratization process developed on this basis. The 1977 reform represented a

protecting umbrella with a very important feature: it was dedicated not only to players that already had a place within the legal system, but precisely to those who had never been inside. At present, these changes (which today, for some people, may seem insignificant or simply “liberalizing”) provoked a tremendous argument, resistance, criticizing, fear and a great public impact. But the intention of that reform was very simple: on one hand, to strengthen the existing organizational options, but also permit the entrance to the electoral game of real forces that spread out mostly in social and labor action (and still do by armed means).

Little by little and one by one, extensive contingents of all ideologies, in the past hermetic to electoral life, were incorporated and enlarged, building new alternatives or strengthening the existing ones. Specially, elections of certain regions of the country proved competitiveness from the Government and legislative positions. In only a few years, political and legal reality converged to form a regime of plural and competitive parties, laws, institutions and, most important of all, an increasing citizen culture of respect towards legality and democratic coexistence. This was a rather complicated trajectory that may be resumed as follows:

- 1) The political plurality of the nation increased. There was an unprecedented development of mobilization and social organization. New parties and labor unions were formed, as well as new groups, civil organisms, editorials, newspapers, and magazines.
- 2) Essential liberties began to be practiced: expression, demonstration, and organization.
- 3) An expansion and national strengthening of political parties was experienced.
- 4) Parties appeared before election campaigns over and over again. They occupied more legislative and government positions each time, and acquired a public influence and distinction never seen before.
- 5) A period of intense negotiations took place, which produced, at least six electoral reforms as well as other constitutional reforms. Central political litigation moved toward a dispute for a fair, transparent and reliable, legal and electoral regime.
- 6) Elections became a key to political change of Mexico. Parties attracted greater citizen contingents, groups and organizations. They demanded a more and more specific and developed legal framework; extension of their rights and prerogatives. In this way, parties grew more competitive and powerful each day; they moved towards elections with genuine winning possibilities. Their presence and demands increased: greater and fairer resources in order to expand, better instruments to regulate electoral competition, and improved formulas to constitute the Congress.

The greater the political force, presence in State, greater the institutional and legal demands and expansion of electoral rights.

- 7) Parties achieved more federal legislative positions in city councils, local Congress and finally conquered Government access. In this way, political parties settled in the mechanisms of the Mexican State.
- 8) Understanding codes changed. No force could ever abrogate more the representation of the whole nation. Plurality became the key of struggle and political coexistence.
- 9) Party presence and competition changed almost all relations and political practices: power of presidency worn out, new forms of relations between state governments and the federal government were set out, dynamics of political works of Union Congress were modified, and different parties are now processing, negotiating, and defining state policies in all orders.
- 10) There is no more one and only party. In fact, there are many different political parties that are the pillar of state life.
- 11) The change is radical: the crucial decision of politics, the decision of who governs had been encapsulated during decades and reserved to the internal coalition of one and only party. But today in Mexico citizens decide who governs with their vote and choose among strong and competitive options.
- 12) Such crucial change in political relations is hardly reversible. Mexico has a complex society, connected with a plural tirelessly world. Its transition to democracy was not the ideal of a group, a leader or a party; on the contrary: the democratic transition was a necessity of the nation.

In the case of Mexico, the electoral question was the first subject of the political debate. The greatest initial task of the transition was to reintroduce the old and justified distrust in the electoral proceeding in order to give it credibility and establish it as the only legitimate method of the political dispute on government posts and legislative body.

The democratization process had a basic premise: respect the vote, and clean elections. Without these conditions, the rest would be impossible, for the political energies would have been developed and perhaps overflowed in other directions, some of them violent and ominous.

So, Mexican democratization rests upon that electoral dimension of politics. Assuring it, for it to be possible to go on celebrating elections was the requirement, the condition in order to make possible a transition. For this reason, the electoral topic was number one in the

political agenda during almost twenty years, and in order to guarantee it the country embarked upon six electoral reforms: 1977, 1986, 1989-90, 1993, 1994, until reaching the most agreed, comprising and deep, the 1996 one.

In 1996, political parties set an extensive change operation regarding institutions and electoral laws of Mexico, which crystallized after one of the most intensive and prolonged political operations of the transitional period. It was a difficult and long period that ended without the expected consensus, but did launch a group of basic modifications for the advance and democratic consolidation of Mexico; changes that undoubtedly were at the base and represented the guarantee of legal, fair and transparent elections.

The extension of the electoral transformation makes impossible a specific description; nevertheless, the following points attempt to be an indicator of the extent of the reforming exertion:

- 1) The total autonomy of electoral organs was specified, that is, from that date on electoral authority had full independence in relation to the government. The eight electoral advisors and the President of Council, the only members with vote in the highest organ of the Electoral Federal Institute, were elected in the Chamber of Deputies by consensus of political parties. The idea was double: that the government abandoned the electoral organization and that it would pass on to people trusted by the political parties.
- 2) The Electoral Court, the organ in charge of resolving legal controversies, suffered important modifications. The appointment of judges of which it is composed of is no longer subject to the Senator Chamber proposed by the President of the Republic; now they are voted in the Senators Chamber and proposed by the Supreme Court of Justice.

On the other hand, the Court was no longer limited to attend federal problems, but they could be turned to because of local conflicts; the control of constitutionality was extended to acts of all state electoral authorities. The electoral report now is completely jurisdictional. And, finally, the law added new defense procedures, new legal paths to channel electoral-politic claims, both for citizens and for parties.

- 3) The electoral reform changed the legal regime of political parties: the requisite to enter the consensual representation was raised (only those parties with a national vote higher than 2% had a right to enter the Chamber of Deputies) and a new figure was created to organize different options: political groups.
- 4) Representation formulas were adjusted in the Congress, in such a way that the relation between votes and seats was better balanced. Envelope margins and under-

representation of parties in the Chamber of Deputies were subtracted. Specifically, the Chamber of Deputies would continue to be constituted by 500 legislators: 300 elected in unnamed districts by the relative majority and 200 by proportional representation of the votes, dividing national territory in five districts. Moreover, ~~it was specified that no party could count on a total number of congressmen on both principles that would add more than the 8 per cent regarding its national vote percentage.~~

The Upper House also achieved greater pluralism. The number of members of the Senate was set in 128: in each one of the 32 entities, two senators are elected on the principle of relative majority and the third is assigned to the first minority. The other 32 senators are elected by the proportional representation principle through a system of voting lists at a national level.

- 5) Electoral competition was open in Mexico City throughout direct election of their Head of State, heads of the 16 political delegations in which the capital is divided, and the faculties of the Legislative Assembly from the Federal District.
- 6) Finally, competition conditions improved substantially. This perhaps constitutes the most visible and decisive effect of the reform, and therefore I must explain this point thoroughly.

As for resources, it was established that public financing must outweigh private resources gathered by the parties. This scheme was inspired in the objectives of giving transparency to the origin of resources, guaranteeing the independence of parties, counting on the proper equity conditions in competence and avoiding the temptation of using illegal financing sources. Furthermore, in the same sense, limits to campaign expenses were established made by candidates to congressmen, senators, and the President of Republic.

Another element that necessarily complements the measures described before are the contributions of private citizens to parties. Limits set by law are: a) for the supporters of each party up to 10% of the financing total given for permanent activities during the year; b) one person, as an individual, may only contribute the 0.05% of total as ordinary activities, and c) anonymous contributions are abolished.

There were also extended and consolidated important restrictions: no entity of federal or state government can contribute to partisan finances; no forces of the Union; political parties or foreign organizations; nor international organisms or worship ministers, nor commercial enterprises, nor Mexicans residents in other countries. In this way, the law expects to bring to a close any possibility of private financing so substantial that it becomes a vehicle of a new unbalance between parties.

Moreover, resources were distributed in a more balanced way. The distribution formula is

as follows: the 70 per cent of resources is assigned according to the votes reached by each party in previous elections, the other 30 per cent is equally divided. Parties that are registered and have not participated in previous elections receive 2 per cent of total resources of parties with representation in Congress.

In the year 2000, the total sum of public money assigned to political parties was 350 million dollars. From this total, the two electoral coalitions, Alianza por Mexico (Alliance for Mexico), -proposed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and integrated by parties of Revolución Democrática del Trabajo (Democratic Revolution of Labor), of Sociedad Nacionalista (Nationalist Society), Alianza Social (Social Alliance), and Convergencia por la Democracia (Convergence for Democracy), La Alianza por el cambio (Alliance for Change), and whose candidate for president was Vicente Fox and was formed by the parties of Acción Nacional and Verde Ecologista de Mexico - and the Institutional Revolutionary Party received approximately 100 million dollars respectively. The improvement of money distribution is considerable: in 1994, PRI gathered the 49.3 % of public financing, in year 2000 it decreased to 30.3%, but PAN received 14.3% and last year 22.3%, but with its alliance with the PVEM, it reached 30.2%. Likewise, PRD reached a 10.2% in 1994, 25% in the year 2000; to this we must add the sum of their allies' financing, that made it earn the 34.1 % of the total of public resources for campaign expenses.

In turn, their financing inspections have become more acute. Law permits political parties the execution of direct audits, and reception and verification mechanisms have been refined. At the same time, the sanction regime has improved for violations of the law.

As for media, parties, and only parties, that is, no third party, may freely buy time and space in radio and television with their own resources. Thus, with public resources granted to them and with other means collected with their own sources, parties may spread out their campaigns in the massive media without any other restriction except not surpassing expense limits. Moreover, Mexican electoral legislation determines that permanently all parties have a right to a monthly program of 15 minutes in radio and another one in television, as well as a joint program of one hour of debate among all parties. So, in electoral campaign period, the Electoral Federal Institute also buys a time package with ten thousand promotions in radio and four hundred in television that are added to the permanent prerogatives of the parties. Thus, political parties were provided with special programs, spots and complementary spaces for a total of 1.620 transmission hours in radio and 420 in television without cost to their finance throughout all campaigns during the year 2000 and through permanent programs. The distribution of that time, in percentage, was as follows: Alliance for Mexico occupied 19 per cent of the time in radio and 22 per cent in television; PRI, 20 per cent in radio and 26 per cent in television; Alliance for Mexico 18 per cent in radio and 21 in television; Centro Democrático (Democratic Center), Auténtico de la Revolución Mexicana (Authentic of Mexican Revolution) and Democracia Social (Social Democracy) had 14 per cent in radio and

11 in television each one. In this way, the balanced access to massive media was guaranteed from the legal design, regarding competence conditions.

To say it in short way, those were the most relevant outlooks of the electoral reform. Its work was very extensive. It dealt and improved all aspects that had formed part of the electoral debate in Mexico. Therefore, it has an important place in the vast circle of political and institutional change that Mexico has experienced in the last two decades.

The new electoral mechanism that emerged from the 1996 reform was the scene that channeled the democratic conflict in 1997 that caused a political reality, unprecedented until then in the history of Mexico: a Lower House where the President's party didn't have majority, a real counterweight to the Executive Power. This is a clear example of how changes in the electoral system reach other spheres, impact and generate other changes in the government system. Federal elections of July 2, 2000 operate on the same legal bases. Thanks to the confidence in the electoral organization and respect towards vote that day lead to a succession of new scenes in a country of authority tradition.

In that historical electoral process, a singular competence was experienced, uncertain but with clear rules. There was alternation in the government. The opponents admitted the winner. Candidates won or lost in equal conditions by their own merits. They were followed, broadcast or criticized by radio and television. The media made a systematic scrutiny of their behavior, proposal and performances. Voters determined the results perfectly, and produced a geography and plural political arithmetic full of weights and counterweights. A natural civism, and return to normality in social life followed the tough, strong and sometimes prickly conflict after a long electoral campaign. The losers admitted their defeat in public, immediately, starting with the then President of Republic who assumed the loss of their party's candidate and offered the winner a close collaboration. Parties carried out with civil-mindedness, there were no incidents and the elected president acted respectfully with his opponents.

All these things together, which are strictly democratic routines, happened in Mexico, on July 2, 2000 for the first time. For this reason it was not only a model day, but also a foundation day. The endless challenging had come to an end and Mexico entered thoroughly in a new political period.

As any observer may verify, the change in political life and democracy of Mexico during the last years has been intense. The arrival of alternation to Federal Executive Power was the crowning achievement of a wide democratization process established in reforms of Constitution, laws and institutions that developed during two decades. Mexico changed from having a political life processed under an almost unique partition option to a real party system. Slowly and systematically, these parties have been inserted in the main decisions of the Mexican State. It has been a change that has reached almost every corner of the country and all government areas and political representations: town and city councils, local congresses, Union Congress, governments, Federal District and Federal Executive.

With these transformations, resorts that placed one and only figure wore down to one only figure: the president, as a crown of political decisions; they started to walk towards independence and balance of power. Moreover, federalism was activated when the old unanimity gave rise to a series of governors with different party origins.

The confluence of politicians of different parties in different legislative spheres disarranged understanding codes: the different options learned to recognize each other, process their differences, consider others reasons, and coexist with plurality.

This trajectory made it possible to establish a political regime that was able to represent, channel, and recreate plurality of a society considerably diverse, such as the Mexican is. However, in history there are no last terminals. When an objective is reached, other challenges appear. Now it is appropriate to assume that democracy generates new problems like those that result from divided governments, shared power, the need of agreements among conflicting forces, and the uncertainty that accompany legislative work.

In order to understand such transformation it is convenient to take a look at the essential features of the previous political world: hegemonic party; presidency with great constitutional capacities and “metaconstitutional”; the president in the crown of the decision and negotiation mechanism; subordination of Legislative and Judicial powers to the Executive; formal federalism, real centralism; subordination of social, labor and business organizations to the political power; the decision of who governs in all levels was in hands of a closed coalition; elections with no rivals; symbolic or germinal opposition parties; and restrictive electoral laws.

With this outlook, today Mexico has a pluralist and competitive regime; limited presidency; Executive, Legislative and Judicial powers, which are each independent; different levels of government also multiply their autonomy degrees; social groups and its organizations are also independent; elections are highly competitive; electoral laws have been opened and the decision of who governs is in the hands of the citizens.

The Mexican transition did not lead to a unique regime, historically unexplored, or to an original constitutional invention. It changed from an authoritarian regime that concentrated its central decisions of politics to another that was a combination of renovated rules and institutions. It “simply” reached a democratic system, where the normal citizen’s vote decided the essential things in politics; who governs and how the legislative body is constituted. However, this change mostly reports a real renovation process of political culture and creation of citizenship, although not exempt of complexities and contradictions: Mexicans that no longer embody passive or authoritarian attitudes, who have become experts in their use of vote, in election and sanction of governments, that more and more know and practice in a wider way their civil and political rights.

It is not a hundred, neither a thousand, but millions of people willing to influence in the march of the country. However, in order to do so they have to improve their intervention

capacities in the public spheres.

Such is the magnitude of the change that Mexico has lived after some years. It has been a slow, extensive transformation, but it is feasible to affirm that the Mexican transition was also channeled by the legal, peaceful road and because of the enlargement of institutional and democratic spaces for the deliberation and the prosecution of political differences. Mexico is no longer the country of a majority political trunk but a boldly plural one; and such plurality inhabits and reflects itself in the government and in nearly the whole national State. Thus, in the long-term political horizon, an essential certainty emerges, a fact that is necessary to assimilate with each one of its consequences: none of the three important political forces of the country can govern it alone.

In federal elections of the year 2000 in Mexico the Congress and the Senate of the Republic were also renewed. The votes of the 38 millions of Mexicans that went to the urns, produced a new legislative arithmetic that can be summarized under four conditions of the parliamentary game: a) no party has majority; b) small parties are not enough, not even all together; c) any initiative that should be approved by the Congress should result from a parliamentary agreement, and d) moreover: if PAN and the President want or must change the Constitution of the Republic, they will only achieved it with the selection process of PRI.

Not even in case they united all groups would they reach enough votes to change it. With PAN as government and PRI as opposition, was the key of the constitutional change. This means that the president has to negotiate in two separate tracks. There are eight parties in the Congress and six in the Senate. All have their own space to defend, a role, and their own complaints to negotiate in the multicolored cloak of the Congress. In the light of these new balances among powers, it is possible to say that the change in the electoral sphere was in fact motor and vehicle for a far-reaching democratic training. It is worthwhile to underline it because we there were arguments that criticized the course of the Mexican democratization or looked down on the fruits of the transition for its “electoral” nature. But they were not true: the fairness in elections and the electoral reforms were the necessary pieces to carry on a series of political and cultural changes that surpassed the electoral environment and the representation map, the form of government, the working order of State, vitalized public liberties and worn down each one of the authoritarian influences. For the road of the elections, Mexico entered into a political regime of democratic nature and completely different.

Recognizing that Mexico now counts on a regime that is accurately democratic, it is necessary to assume that democracy generates a new type of problems: divided governments, shared power, search of pacts among apparently antagonistic forces, and uncertainty in the approval of laws and initiatives.

What has taken place in Mexico is the closure of a political time, of a system of political relationships, a working practice of National State institutions.

Such as Dieter Nohlen points out, regarding legal and constitutional faculties, the president

from Mexico is in fact, quite less powerful than his counterparts in all Latin America. The power of the Mexican president came from the organization elaborated thanks to the power, networks and practices of the hegemonic party. It came from Chambers with absolute or qualified majorities, determined governors within the ruling coalition and a political class disciplined to their imperatives.

But as we can see, that reality has vanished. That is why the political agenda of Mexico has changed drastically: from expression subjects and appropriate representation to govern topics. The political parties and their legislative factions have to be in charge of the task of forming majorities in a presidential system. That is, in parliamentary models, every government, by its own nature, should be majority and able to govern: approve general budgets, for example, and it is able to carry out modifications of different laws. But in Mexico today we have a Congress inhabited by plurality to such degree that the holder of the Executive Power lacks absolute majority, and even less, a qualified majority.

Furthermore, the electoral horizon suggests that, once seen the results of last federal elections and those held in different entities of the Republic, the map of representation doesn't change all of a sudden: there are three major forces with an extensive citizen support that will continue to summon the main body of the adhesions, which are not able to obtain absolute majority in the Congress. This problem, this novelty characteristic of democracy, had not been expected or foreseen in the previous system in which one single coalition, headed by the president, processed all politics and was supported in his decisions as well as by local and federal Congresses.

It is time to assume that Mexico was too concentrated in the analysis and proposals of how to erect a proper representation and a clean and equal electoral competition, but on the other hand, gave less attention to the review of the conditions for an effective government, in an modified economy, with a new institution scheme and a democratic base. The democratic emphasis was comprehensible, but it is more and more clear that to speak of Mexico's future necessarily involves dealing all those matters related to the exercise of the power and government's level. Moreover, the democratic movement didn't occur in a laboratory gap. The argument was framed by two other complex processes that started up and were developed simultaneously in the eighties: the crisis process, adjustment and economic restructuring and the redefinition of the function and scope of state structures in terms of what was called "State reform". All this pressures the government's sphere in different ways and demands a more elaborated and rigorous reflection.

It is now time to have an open-minded discussion on those balance points that are necessary for the stability and subsistence of democracy: between stability and change, freedom and order, expansion of political participation and effectiveness in taking decisions, government obligations and civic responsibility. If assumed in a democratic key, these elements are not excluding but rather they should be conjugated and positioned in a coherent and functional

institutional design from which the guarantees of a correct working order of democracy in its double dimension are able to emerge: on one hand that the operation of its own institutions is guaranteed, and on the other hand that those institutions may be able to assist the society's necessities and demands. Both sides of the equation are translated in a "good government", and in both there are significant challenges.

It is necessary to define a type of republican engineering more suitable to the new pluralistic conditions. It is not a re-establishing debate with constitutional recipes and even less, choosing among ideal types; but it seems obvious that it is necessary to explore the accumulated experience, the regimes and legal and political devices rehearsed in other parts of the world from which it is feasible to learn from. The Mexican democracy already faces several problems, one of them is the lack of consensual majority, which, can also become a permanent feature of the political system. There is no doubt that it is a sign that clearly expresses the democratic process but also constitutes a risk of the presidential regime: when losing majority in the Chamber of Deputies, there are no devices to moderate differences and preserve an effective public administration.

They are legal and institutional inadequacies that have shown up harshly in the last five years. Evidently, preserving devices were not necessary when majority was guaranteed, but now it has become indispensable to find them, to discuss them and agree on them.

In this way, the agenda of the political elaboration in Mexico is changing abruptly. Now it is possible and necessary to speak seriously and frankly about problems generated by democracy. Paraphrasing an idea, a very useful term within the discussion circuits about the economic pattern of Latin America and transferring it to the institutional politics field, Mexico needs the chance of a second generation of reforms also in political matters. How to induce political coalitions for the legislative work and for a productive relationship with the Executive? How to offer an institutional support base for whoever exercises the presidency? What influences does a president need in order to give impetus to his initiatives? How to improve relationship among powers? What mechanisms should be adopted in case of ties or paralysis? How to improve the elaboration processes of public politics that include the greatest amount of interests? How to meet the necessities and demands of better-organized and more demanding society?

These are the new problems. To solve them is an unavoidable requirement for a good government.

It is essential to expose the situation, to recognize it, because the subsistence of democracy in Mexico will be an important factor for the democratic maintenance of the rest of Latin America.

It is necessary to generate that intellectual context, inside of and outside of the country; to promote an abrupt change soon, intelligent, and precise in the elaboration of politics. It is a condition in order to have the certainty, not only that rulers are chosen freely in Mexico, but also, that the country will continue being ruled by presidents elected at the poles.

Comments by

Manuel Alcántara

José Woldenberg, President and Board Member of the Instituto Federal Electoral in Mexico, says he is convinced that his country is traversing a period lasting more than 20 years in which certain structures are being built up and others are being torn down on the road to democracy. When I met José Woldenberg for the first time, some ten years ago now, at a seminar we held at the Political Sciences and Sociology Faculty at Madrid's Universidad Complutense, he already expressed that conviction in opposition to other colleagues of his who maintained a much tougher stance on the ability of Mexico's political system to change and evolve. That same conviction, which appears in black and white in a book I was fortunate enough to co-edit, published under the title of *México frente al umbral del siglo XXI*, is absolutely clear and fully coincides with his words today. This former political scientist as he was then and civil servant now, working for the Mexican Administration, thus displays a consistency of thought and words that can rarely be maintained. Today, I am delighted to be able to publicly acknowledge one of our own, a political scientist who now works in the public arena doing an excellent job heading an institution that has a significant role to play in the process of political change Mexico has been undergoing since 1994, the date when Woldenberg was appointed IFE Board Member.

At the meeting of the Seminar on Democratic Transition and Consolidation at which Ernesto Zedillo was present, the problem of lack of equity in the 1994 election was mentioned, as was the question of how to solve that problem when the 2000 election came round. The discussion also touched on the more theoretical problem of to what extent Mexico fitted into

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the classical democratic transition mould. I think that both questions may give rise to two thematic threads allowing us to continue the discussion that commenced at the earlier Seminar meeting.

The problem of lack of equity or fairness has obviously been replaced by the problem of lack of trust or, if you prefer, turning it around the other way, by the problem of how to build up trust and confidence in electoral processes. The debate on whether the Mexican case can be slotted into the theoretical models of transition to democracy is still open-ended. Today, one particular author in our discipline has emphatically pointed out the cases and the assumptions for change in the electoral system without actually coming up with the correct solution to the problems of the Mexican scenario. Arend Lijphart, the author I am referring to, does not get it right in Mexico's case with respect to electoral change. His view is that the build-up of trust in the Mexican electoral process has had something to do with the setting up of electoral bodies tailored to the circumstances and the change in those bodies is not a substantive component of electoral changes. Moreover, if we listened to theory alone, it would tell us that it is better to set up autonomous electoral bodies. The Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) does not fulfil that condition although it is very likely that it will do in five or six years time. That scenario that Woldenberg pictures with a small and highly professionalized IFE is highly plausible but today we are talking about an IFE shaped by a triangle of Citizen Directors or Board Members reporting to an important majority of two thirds of the Deputies at Congress, career professionals in that line of administration (it should be pointed out that together with the diplomatic career, it is the second biggest corps of career professionals in Mexican bureaucracy) and political parties.

This triangle is the one that has shaped the IFE over these last six or seven years and is the one that has successfully generated trust. Through its conduct, the IFE has broken with a very traditional belief, a theory expressed by the left about the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures (COFIPE) saying that it was the institutionalized electoral lack of trust code. That comment was evidence of just how widespread the lack of trust was. The rough edges were gradually smoothed away and, little by little, that radical change in which the world of politics has been caught up was shaped, as José Woldenberg has pointed out. As a result, Mexican politics today is facing new problems of democracy that are far removed from the electoral dimension, a key theme during this long voyage taking us from 1967, through 1976 and right up to 1996.

As a conclusion, I would like to raise a couple of questions concerning the functions being performed by the IFE in the framework of its own future development which have to do with the future of the Institute.

It has been five years since any electoral reform took place in Mexico, quite a surprising fact when compared to the events of the previous twenty years when reforms were much more frequent. It is also true that in 1999, the Mexican Senate aborted an electoral reform which

raised two aspects that are still problematic in Mexico's electoral process.

The first problem refers to what could be called the rather hazy dividing line that exists between the IFE and the Federal Electoral Tribunal, (TRIFE). ~~Given that some of the IFE's functions have to do with public financing and even~~ *Democracy in Mexico* more importantly, with inspection, it seems obvious that the IFE may end up performing a supervisory role. This is the situation that may be problematic. The role played by the IFE in all electoral disputes that it not only participates in but also might initiate would move in the same direction. Might this fact lead to some kind of confrontation giving rise to a situation that would open up a non-governability crack in the system?

The second problem is a more technical issue, the votes of Mexicans abroad. I heard the Board Member and President of the Institution discuss this issue last August in Mexico on Héctor Aguilar's programme. This is a highly significant question because we are talking about a possible total of seven million voters, more or less 10% of the current electoral roll. The standpoint adopted by the IFE on this question will be important. Perhaps the interest political parties had before in the question when they saw it as one of the major instruments to get the PRI out of power is now waning and will eventually be forgotten.

Comments by

José Ignacio Wert

I must start by confessing that I know very little about Mexico. What's more, my ignorance will be made even more patent alongside Jose Woldenberg's knowledge and erudition. The truth is, when we were preparing this round-table discussion, before the beginning of the session, we agreed on two things, but have only respected one of them. The first was that Pepe Woldenberg was not going to read and that his intervention would be something spontaneous (I think we managed that one), in no way bound by a written text. The second thing we agreed on, which we didn't quite manage, was that he was going to give his text to Manuel Alcántara and yours truly, so we could properly study it and say something worthy of the level of his undertaking. Since he didn't keep his part of the bargain here, I now find myself obliged to search for something provocative that would allow, Pepe especially, to lead the discussion into some of the mysteries and new avenues opened up by the July, 2000, process and, more specifically, the role played in that process by the new political arrangements and profound instrumental and procedural changes that have come over the political system.

That would, of course, not be in keeping with his desire to be a historian and not a prophet, but if he'd thought he was going to get away so easily with that one, he certainly has another think coming. I'd like to begin by saying that one of the questions that was rather abruptly - though by no means discourteously - left pending on the table of the first session of this seminar about President Zedillo, was what sparked off the process that culminated on July 2, 2000. In this sense, and although academic production on the subject is by no means abundant, the predominant reading is an interpretation of the role played by that electoral process in the change that has come over the Mexican political system; such a view purports, rather exaggerated and perhaps somewhat misleadingly, that democracy came to Mexico on July 2, 2000. No better testimony to this is provided than by the paragraph in which Joseph Klessner summarises one of his own articles, published ten years ago, in the international

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review, Electoral Studies: “With a President that doesn’t belong to the PRI and who has to negotiate legislation in the Congress, Mexico has now joined the ranks of the democracies of the world”.

This is the big question raised, not for the historian or the prophet, but definitely for someone of the calibre of Jose Woldenberg, a “learned prophet” fully equipped with the background and knowledge garnered over six years at the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico (FEI). For four of those six years he has been director of that institute. I think that the issue is in some way linked with something said almost en passant by President Zedillo the other day (though it might have been a simple slip of the tongue on his part) when he alluded, somewhat ironically, to the mistake he made in verbally hoisting the flag of change during his official swearing in as president. He then lamented, again not without a slight hint of irony, just how much that “patrimonial appropriation” of the flag had helped Vicente Fox to win the elections. President Zedillo said something along these lines, I don’t remember his exact words, but it was something like “had I known what change was going to bring, it’s the last thing I would have mentioned in my speech.”

Simple anecdote though this is, it does raise a very relevant question. The entire dynamic of change, which necessarily entails a certain amount of negotiation, give-and-take, and pressure-lobbying, against the crucial backdrop of the request to all the players involved to renounce violence (a constant element throughout the entire process, whose roots can be traced back to the 70s and 80s and which came to concrete fruition in the 90s) could only lead, as Jose Woldenberg has so clearly stated, to the creation of certain conditions of fairness, endowed with all the elements - formal and material – necessary for fair competition, which are conducive to the full and meaningful expression of the real political pluralism that now exists in the Mexican system.

With all these procedural and instrumental changes, some of whose results are perceptible as they are produced, such as the way political power is now more widely distributed (the tangible effects can be seen in the kind of political equilibriums that were prevalent in Mexico before the July 2, 2000 elections; for example, half the population of Mexico on July 1st had some form of regional government run by a party that was not the PRI, or the presence of eleven local governments run by parties other than the PRI as well) one is left to wonder what Joseph Klessner would have written had the presidential elections not produced power change.

That is to say, had there not been a change in power, would the creation of the prerequisites or conditions for fairness permitted the development of what had been designed for the reinvention of the Mexican political system and a definitive leaning towards democracy? I think this is an important question which is, of course, linked to many other questions that have to do with the party system, with the parties’ capacity of representation, with the challenges facing Mexican society, and probably with certain historical anomalies from the perspective of

representation. They are questions that probably derive not so much from the extremely long period of PRI governments, as from the occupation, through saturation, of all the political spaces by one single party.

~~—It is my view that the fact that elections have produced a change in the State's highest office~~ *Democracy in Mexico*
for the first time in seven decades, as well as a greater distribution of seats in the two chambers (something which, it must be said, had already existed since the 1997 congress elections, when the PRI lost its overall majority) provides a firm platform for the democracy that is achieved as a result to be an irreversible conquest. I say “apparently” because there are many things that go back to way before the 2000 elections. However, the question of the stability of the party system in terms of the capacity for the articulation of social, cultural and politico-electoral blocks, etc., is a particularly relevant one.

Another important question within the context of this election, and which instrumental and procedural changes and the presence of public opinion hinge upon, is the role of surveys in elections and the elements designed to provide electoral checks, which are also based on statistics, as well as quick-counts. In Mexico there has been virtually no tradition of political surveys, and there really is no point in wondering what the reason for that might be, because, until relatively recently, the knowledge that might have been provided by such elements was virtually nil. I shall, drawing on personal anecdote, after the Mexican elections of 1988, name the sin, but not the sinner. I was visited by someone who was part of the PRI public opinion consulting machinery, who had come to Spain to observe the technical evolution of these instruments. It was, to be precise, on the eve of the Spanish general elections of 1989, and we were about to do exit polls. Without getting into any great detail, I explained the technical features, as well as how it worked and our relationship with the media that had asked us out to carry out such a task. I began to notice that the expression on my interlocutor's face changed from surprise to perplexity. So, I thought, either I'm not explaining myself well, or we're not on the same wavelength. But something's definitely up here. Anyway, at a given moment, that person said to me:

“Everything you're telling me is very interesting, but if that's the way you do things over here, what's the point? What's it for?”

“What do you mean what's it for? The idea is, by eight o'clock in the evening, to be able to provide the press with a more or less accurate advance on the outcome of the elections.

That person then said to me:

“Ah, so you mean during the day you don't do anything with it?”

To which I said:

“No, basically because it’s just not done. It can’t be divulged during the day.

“I see. It’s just that we use it chiefly for the portable vote.

“The what?

“Yes, for the portable vote. If we see things aren’t going too well on during the day, we grab a few lorries, round up some folks and take them down to vote.

So surveys in Mexico at that time were fundamentally an instrument of action, not of information. The 2000 elections brought a very substantial change, something which was already perceptible in the Federal District elections of 1997.

Electoral surveys played a key role in the 2000 elections. In fact, in the six months leading up to the elections, no less than 118 different surveys were published. Their importance, whatever their level of accuracy (many of the variations in results reflected the oscillations in the preferences of citizens) lay in the fact that they gave rise to the widespread conviction that the electoral process would really be fair. This is very important with regard to the mobilisation of citizens and to getting the entire electorate to develop a new concept of the electoral process. The same can be said about quick counts, of which there were many on the night of July 2 (no fewer than ten were carried out). All of them pointed to a Fox victory. In terms of accuracy, there was a one-to-two point variation between one candidate and the other.

As a result, something which is so often called into question, (more than it should be) can now be reasonably stated; it regards the contribution of the tools used to study public opinion and for the elaboration of polls and surveys to the process of democratisation.

Finally, I should like, above and beyond all these interpretations and analyses of the 2000 presidential elections, to raise a very important question; something which, Jose Woldenberg, in his great modesty, has not dealt with as extensively as he might have. With regard to the essential objective of the creation of confidence and the forging of something irreversible for the future, the processes and changes that have come over the FEI have, as far as I am concerned, been most crucial in dealing with something that has so plagued elections in Mexico: the systematic practice of fraud. Not only has it rendered it difficult. It has now prevented it. So much so that fraud is now extremely unlikely among citizens. I think that the confidence factor, in terms of political culture, and in terms of the future, is essential to the attainment of democratic maturity, and is something that can never be overstressed