

Traversing the Mexican Odyssey: Reflections on Political Change and the Study of Mexican Politics

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This essay explains how the peculiar properties of Mexico's political system helped shape the approach to the study of Mexican politics. It assesses some of the strengths and limitations of the scholarship this produced, examines the political changes that fueled Mexico's democratic transition, and assesses their implications both for Mexico's recent market reforms and the study of Mexican politics in general. It finds that the demise of single-party rule and fundamental changes in patterns of governance have opened new research avenues, and suggests an emerging research agenda in light of these developments.

En este ensayo se explica la manera en que las propiedades peculiares del sistema político mexicano ayudaron a configurar el acercamiento al estudio de la política mexicana. Se valoran algunas de las ventajas y las desventajas en este enfoque, se examinan los cambios políticos que influyeron en la transición democrática mexicana y se analizan sus implicaciones en las reformas recientes del mercado y estudio de la política mexicana en general. El análisis concluye que, debido al cese de influencia del antiguo régimen del partido oficial y a los cambios fundamentales en los modelos de gobierno, se han abierto nuevas áreas de investigación, proponiendo un nuevo programa de investigación que tome en cuenta el giro de los nuevos acontecimientos.

July 2, 2000, marked Mexico's definitive transition to democracy when voters ended seventy-one years of continuous rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and, in a three-way race, elected Vicente Fox their new president. The election climaxed a tumultuous political odyssey which saw Mexico's economy transformed from statist to market principles, its economic performance punctured by crises, and its

hegemonic party system wracked by elite cleavages, opposition victories, mass unrest, and guerrilla insurgencies. While many Mexicans cheered the election outcome, analysts must ponder its broader significance both to the durability of economic reforms and the study of Mexican politics more generally.

This essay serves multiple purposes. For the uninitiated, it provides a primer on Mexican politics and market reforms. For scholars, it reviews much of the literature on Mexican politics, assesses some of the strengths and limitations of this scholarship, details the dynamic interactions between Mexico's economic and political changes, and outlines an emerging research agenda in light of the latter. In short, this essay analyzes where we have come in the study of Mexican politics and where we might like to go.

Mexican Politics: The Analyst's Dilemma

"Mexico," wrote Martin Needler, "presents the paradox of a country that has been extensively studied but which is little understood."¹ While many Mexicanists would dispute this latter claim, traditionally, Mexico did present scholars a unique analytic challenge. The core of the dilemma was simple: Mexico's eclectic political system defied easy classification and resisted easy application of widely used concepts.

A few examples help illustrate the dilemma. Traditionally, Mexico had the trappings of a pluralist system without pluralism, and a federalist system without federalism. It had free presidential elections that were always *won* by the ruling party. It was a *revolutionary* government that had been *institutionalized*, and an authoritarian government, but not of the classic bureaucratic authoritarian type. It was a system in which presidents dominated the legislature and courts, and political representation occurred through the PRI's corporatist structures, not congress. To compound these problems the Mexican regime often behaved like a moving target, shifting locations on the political spectrum (from limited pluralist to authoritarian), altering policy output (from progressive to conservative to centrist, then back), and adopting various political reforms. The more things changed, however, the more they seemed to stay the same. Consequently, for nearly two generations many scholars concluded Mexico was in transition, but transition to what was hard to say.²

The peculiar properties of Mexico's political system helped steer

1. Martin C. Needler, *Mexican Politics: The Containment of Conflict* (New York: Praeger, 1982), 1.

2. For example, see Robert E. Scott, *Mexican Politics in Transition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1964); Phillip Russell, *Mexico in Transition* (Austin: Colorado River

research toward some areas, but not others. Given its strong presidentialist system, for example, the Mexican presidency (and executive bureaucracy) commanded attention, while research on congress, the judiciary, and state governments atrophied. Similarly, the hegemonic party captured far more attention than its opposition. The same dynamics helped tilt scholarship away from certain research methodologies. In a context where corporatism stifled social group autonomy and non-competitive elections were the norm, group theory and behavioral studies of voting patterns lost relevance. To understand state policy, therefore, scholars logically focused on where power resided—the apex of the political system. Thus, elite interviewing (of political/labor leaders) and the careful retracing of coalitional interests became a standard and quite useful technique to assess policy dynamics.

In retrospect, the analyst's dilemma affected scholarship on Mexican politics in ways good and bad. On the up side, it helped produce a rich body of literature with detailed studies of the presidency, hegemonic party system, major public policies, social sectors, and state agencies, plus elite biographies and recruitment patterns, clientelism, and state-societal relations.³ This research extended our knowledge about Mexican politics considerably. The advances, however, did not come without costs.

Press, 1977); Judith Gentleman, ed., *Mexican Politics in Transition* (Boulder: Westview, 1987); Susan Kaufman Purcell, *Mexico in Transition: Implications for U.S. Policy* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988); and Wayne A. Cornelius, *Mexican Politics in Transition: The Breakdown of a One-Party-Dominant Regime* (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1996).

3. On the presidency, see Kenneth F. Johnson, "Mexico's Authoritarian Presidency," in *Presidential Power in Latin American Politics*, ed. Thomas V. DiBacco (New York: Praeger, 1977), 33–55. For examples of case study public policy research, see Susan Kaufman Purcell, *The Mexican Profit-Sharing Decision: Politics in an Authoritarian Regime* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), and Merilee S. Grindle, *Bureaucrats, Politicians and Peasants in Mexico: A Case Study in Public Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977). On sectoral studies see Kevin J. Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution: Labor, the State, and Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995). On state agencies see John Bailey, *Governing Mexico: The Statecraft of Crisis Management* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988). On the party system see Dale Story, *The Mexican Ruling Party, Stability and Authority* (Stanford: Hoover Institute, 1986). On elite biographical studies see Roderic A. Camp, *Mexico's Leaders, Their Education and Recruitment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980); and Peter H. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). On clientelism see Merilee S. Grindle, "Patrons and Clients in the Bureaucracy: Career Networks in Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 12, no. 1 (1977): 37–77. On state-society relations see Susan Eckstein, *The Poverty of Revolution: The State and the Urban Poor in Mexico* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977); and José Luis Reyna and Richard S. Weinert, eds., *Authoritarianism in Mexico* (Philadelphia: Institute for Human Studies, 1977).

One unfortunate result was a body of literature whose findings and contributions were hard to integrate completely under any one paradigm. Whereas students of American politics could base their research on the pluralist paradigm, then use that paradigm to apply a logically integrated set of tools to study political change (i.e., group theory, behavioralism, quantitative analysis, social choice),⁴ students of Mexican politics typically worked without a similar aid to anchor their research. In time, there did develop a general consensus that Mexico's was an authoritarian regime; but even scholars who used this term could not agree on its precise meaning (some described the regime as "limited pluralist," others as "semi-authoritarian," and still others as "electoral-bureaucratic authoritarian").⁵

The absence of a prevailing paradigm and set of tightly integrated analytic tools produced other results too. One was the generation of descriptive, speculative, and scenario-based interpretations, in lieu of more theory-driven, causal accounts of Mexican politics; another was the development of and reliance upon context-specific concepts to explain political dynamics (i.e., *camarillas*, *charrismo*);⁶ still another was a tendency to examine political change with reference to Mexico's movement along continuums (had it become more authoritarian or less? more corporatist or less? more clientelistic or less?).⁷ To be sure, such progressions and context-specific concepts conveyed meaningful elements

4. See the discussion by Robert Bates, "Letter from the President," *Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section in Comparative Politics* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1997): 1-2.

5. See Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Decision-making in an Authoritarian Regime: Theoretical Implications from a Mexican Case Study," *World Politics* 26 (October 1973): 28-54; Roderic Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 13; and Miguel Ángel Centeno, *Democracy within Reason: Technocratic Revolution in Mexico* (University Park: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1993), 32.

6. Some very high quality studies fall into the descriptive/speculative category. See for example, the essays in Wayne A. Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter H. Smith, eds., *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures* (La Jolla: The Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1989). For an example of analysis decidedly short on theory but long on description and narration, see Judith A. Teichman, *Privatization and Political Change in Mexico* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995).

7. For representative studies see José Luis Reyna, "Redefining the Authoritarian Regime," in *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, ed. José Luis Reyna and Richard S. Weinert (Philadelphia: Institute for Human Studies, 1977), 155-71; John W. Sloan, "The Mexican Variant of Corporatism," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 38, no. 4 (Spring 1985): 3-18; Enrique de la Garza Toledo, "The Restructuring of State-labor Relations in Mexico," in *The Politics of Economic Restructuring: State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico*, ed. Maria Lorena Cook, Kevin J. Middlebrook, and Juan Molinar Horcasitas (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego), 195-217; and Jonathan Fox, "The Difficult Transition from Clientelism to Citizenship: Lessons from Mexico," *World Politics* 46 (January 1994): 151-84.

of Mexican politics; however, they also tended to isolate the study of Mexico inside the comparative subfield, and render research findings context-bound. Consequently, even today, one is struck by the near absence of rigorous, theory-driven comparative studies on Mexico and other countries.⁸

These reflections are not meant to downplay the value and contributions of prior scholarship, and a fair assessment must recognize the literature's strengths as well as limitations. Under difficult circumstances researchers produced a large quantity of excellent treatises on multiple aspects of the Mexican polity; and Needler's assertion notwithstanding, what emerged from their efforts was a cogent portrait of what might be called Mexico's classic political model. Constructed around basic patterns of governance—centralized power, corporatist representation, limited contestation, and top-down decision-making—this model captured crucial aspects of Mexican politics for much of the twentieth century. A close examination of this model is useful in fleshing out the contributions of past scholarship, the reasons policymakers could displace statism with market policies so readily, the interaction between those reforms and Mexico's democratic transition, and how the model's demise in July 2000 will likely shape the emerging research agenda.

Mexico's Classic Political Model

The Nature of and Avenues to Political Power. In terms of patterns of governance, the Mexican state of the classic era was unique. Its formal institutions concentrated power vertically at the federal level, and horizontally, inside the executive branch.⁹ Mexicans referred to this phenomenon as *presidencialismo*—a reality in sharp contrast with the federalist framework of the national constitution.¹⁰ For much of the twentieth

8. Only two comprehensive crossnational comparative studies of Mexico and other countries exist: Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Richard S. Weinert, eds., *Brazil and Mexico: Patterns in Latin Development* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1982); and Merilee S. Grindle, *Challenging the State* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

9. Pablo González Casanova, *Democracy in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970). For a counter argument which asserts that centralized authority was not as strong or uniform throughout the republic as the classic model suggests, see Jeffrey W. Rubin, *Decentering the Regime: Ethnicity, Radicalism, and Democracy in Juchitán, Mexico* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997).

10. For a general discussion of Mexican *presidencialismo* see Jeffrey Weldon, "The Political Sources of *Presidencialismo* in Mexico," in *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Soberg Shugart (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 225–58.

century, presidencialismo's centralizing tendencies were evident. The judiciary remained subordinate to the executive.¹¹ The executive, not congress, dominated the legislative agenda.¹² The executive also could issue decrees that carried the force of law, and only the president—not semi-autonomous agencies—could authorize regulations interpreting congressional legislation. This pattern of governance privileged the president over other state actors, restricted the opportunity for those outside the executive to influence policy, and supported a logic conducive to top-down policymaking.

Concentrated power emerged in Mexico's party system as well, where the Institutional Revolutionary Party long held sway. Formed in the ashes of post-revolutionary power struggles, the PRI became the state's chief pillar of social support. As Stephen Morris notes, the party machinery "reached into the factory, the peasant community, the neighborhoods, the schools, and the bureaucratic offices."¹³ The PRI incorporated Mexico's major social sectors; its flexible ideology spanned the political spectrum; and for decades, it effectively monopolized the political space, leaving weak opposition parties at the margins.

Under Mexico's informal political rules the PRI became the official party, by which a symbiotic relationship evolved between the party and the state. The regime provided the PRI financial support, fashioned electoral laws to ensure its hegemony, and supported the party's various social groups. The PRI, in turn, mobilized electoral campaigns and provided the president a rubber-stamp majority in congress. Like the congress, however, the PRI remained subordinate to the president. It never controlled political decision-making¹⁴ or even the selection of its own major candidates (for example, traditionally, outgoing presidents hand-picked their own successors). Despite its ubiquity the party reinforced—rather than challenged—patterns of top-down decision-making. Two paths led to power in this highly presidentialist system: the bureaucracy (and increasingly, what some termed the technocracy), and the network of political allegiances commonly known as *camarillas*.

Since Raymond Vernon first marked the distinction between *politi-*

11. On the court's lack of independence see Alicia Ely Y Amin and Pilar Noriega García, "The Absence of the Rule of Law in Mexico: Diagnosis and Implications for a Mexican Transition to Democracy," *Loyola of Los Angeles International and Comparative Law Journal* 21 (July 1999): 467–518.

12. At least through 1993 roughly 90 percent of all bills emerged from the executive, not Congress. See Roderic Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 136.

13. Stephen D. Morris, *Political Reformism in Mexico: An Overview of Contemporary Mexican Politics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 18.

14. See Story, *The Mexican Ruling Party*, 131–2.

cos and *técnicos* in 1963,¹⁵ scholars have studied the composition and evolution of Mexico's political leadership. *Políticos* dominated Mexican politics through the 1970s. In general, their career paths included any or all of the following: education at a public institution with specialization in law, elective office, long service to the ruling party, and for some, affiliation with the security arms of the bureaucracy (i.e., the ministry of government, attorney general, defense). The *técnicos*, on the other hand, followed a different career trajectory.¹⁶ They were educated at public institutions (and increasingly at private ones), but received advanced training at prestigious foreign institutions in economics, administration, management, or engineering. Generally, they also lacked experience in public office, were party members but not party activists, and entered government service at high levels in the economic and technical bureaucracies (treasury, budget and planning, commerce, energy).

Over the last two decades Mexico's technically skilled power wielders advanced so dramatically they came to dominate not just the *políticos*, but consolidated their power over the bureaucracy itself.¹⁷ They did this first, by colonizing three principal government institutions: the treasury, the central bank, and the Ministry of Budget and Planning. They used these agencies to control key government functions like revenues, expenditures, fiscal policy, and planning; and from this position they eventually brought institutional competitors to heel.

Not surprisingly, the *técnicos*' consolidation of power transformed the economic ministries into conduits to high office, and reduced the chance of obtaining the ultimate prize through other institutional channels.¹⁸ If, as Peter Smith and Dale Story imply, the bureaucracy replaced the ruling party as the chief avenue to power in the late 1970s,¹⁹ the technocracy superseded both the PRI and bureaucracy itself, in this respect. In fact, Mexico's most recent PRI president, Ernesto Zedillo, was the *fifth* consecutive chief executive to assume office without prior elec-

15. Raymond Vernon, *The Dilemma of Mexico's Development: The Roles of the Private and Public Sectors* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 123–49.

16. On the rise of the *técnico*, see Roderic A. Camp, "The Political Technocrat in Mexico and the Survival of the Political System," *Latin American Research Review* 20, no. 1 (1987): 97–118; and Miguel Ángel Centeno and Sylvia Maxfield, "The Marriage of Finance and Order: Changes in the Mexican Political Elite," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24 (February 1992): 57–85.

17. Centeno, *Democracy within Reason*.

18. Indeed, between 1976 and 2000 every chief executive served as minister of Budget and Planning before becoming president.

19. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power*, Table 4.1–4.5; and Story, *The Mexican Ruling Party*, 21.

tive experience, after rising through the ranks of technocratic institutions. The technocracy, therefore, was one route to power, and individuals gained access to it by studying technical subjects at public and private institutions, and pursuing advanced technical training at prestigious foreign universities.²⁰ A second and complementary path to power was the Mexican *camarilla*.

Camarillas are loyalty-based, patron/client networks that link individuals of different political status, different ministries, different levels of government, and even different regions.²¹ *Camarillas* consist of a political benefactor, or patron, and any number of subordinate clients who aspire to higher political or administrative positions. They are pyramidal structures that are vertically and horizontally linked to one another; they advance their memberships up the career ladder en masse, generally in time with the six-year cycle of presidential terms; and as noted, they work on the basis of loyalty and confidence. Traditionally, the most important *camarilla*—and the one to which all significant *camarillas* were linked—was that of the incumbent president.²²

Camarillas served two key functions in Mexican politics. First, they promoted career advancement through reciprocal exchanges between patrons and clients. In exchange for a patron's protection and opportunities for upward mobility, clients provided patrons with loyalty, service, and occasionally, get-out-the-vote activities. As the patron moved up the ladder, he brought members of his *camarilla* with him. Second, *camarillas* functioned as information-gathering systems. They provided patrons critical information on political developments and policy discussions—within their own institution or elsewhere—information that often was crucial to the patron's career prospects. Some analysts claim that “more than any other variable,” *camarillas* determine “who goes to the top of the political ladder.”²³ Thus, for much of Mexico's recent history ca-

20. The principal public institution in Mexico is the National Autonomous University of Mexico. The private institutions include El Colegio de México, the Autonomous Technology Institute of Mexico (ITAM), the University of Anahuac, and the Monterrey Institute of Technology. The foreign institutions are chiefly American. These include those of the Ivy League (especially Harvard and Yale), the University of Chicago, and Stanford University.

21. For a concise portrait of the functions of these political alliance networks, see David Ronfeldt, *Witber Elite Cobesion in Mexico: A Comment*, P-7509 (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1988); see also Merilee S. Grindle, “Patrons and Clients in the Bureaucracy: Career Networks in Mexico,” *Latin American Research Review* 12, no. 1 (1977): 37–77.

22. Wayne A. Cornelius and Ann L. Craig, “Politics in Mexico,” in *Comparative Politics Today*, ed. Gabriel Almond and G. Bingham Powell (Boston: Little, Brown, 1988), 425–84.

23. Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 103.

marillas and the technocracy served as the major routes to political power in Mexico.

In the last twenty years *camarilla* dynamics influenced Mexican politics two ways: they strengthened the technocracy at large, and thereby, helped influence the content of major policy outputs. Beginning in the late 1970s, the *camarillas* that rose to the top promoted an increasingly homogenous power elite that shared similar socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, and was increasingly technically-oriented and neoliberal in its policy outlook.²⁴ Combined with the limited upward mobility of non-technocratic bureaucracies and the centralized power of the executive, the homogenization of Mexico's power elite gave policymaking in Mexico an ever stronger market orientation. This policy trajectory was readily evident in the government of Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988), extraordinarily so under that of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–1994), and continued under the government of President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León (1994–2000). To summarize, under Mexico's classic political model *presidencialismo*, the technocracy, and *camarillas* were central to political power in Mexico, and their combined impact resonated through three critical political processes: representation, contestation, and policymaking.

The Nature of Representation. Representation, A. Phillips Griffiths suggests, involves concrete “action on the part of the representative,” pursuant to the interests of those s/he represents.²⁵ In some form it is a process basic to all political systems, democratic or otherwise. In the classic Mexican model the centralization of power and the paths that led to it, influenced the type and extent of political representation, essentially by depriving congress of its representative functions. By controlling the legislative agenda, presidents left congress little influence over legislative output and marginalized representatives from the law-making process. The net effect was to transform the legislature into a ratifying—not decision-making—body, and shut down crucial access points where interest groups might otherwise influence policy decisions.

Like centralized power itself, the classic pathways to power also worked against a representative legislature. Because *camarillas* permeated the congress, representatives won their seats through formal elections, but generally owed their positions to a *camarilla* benefactor, and were accountable to that benefactor more than to the electorate.²⁶ This

24. Centeno, *Democracy Within Reason*, 149–71.

25. A. Phillips Griffiths, “Representing as a Human Activity,” in *Representation*, ed. Hanna Pitkin (New York: Atherton Press, 1969), 136.

26. Cornelius and Craig, “Politics in Mexico,” 439.

situation left citizens few incentives to lobby representatives over public policy matters, and little reason for lawmakers to respond to constituent pressures. Consequently, under the classic model “hardly any opportunity [existed] for effective interaction between citizens and their representatives during the lawmaking process.”²⁷ Stripped of its representative functions congress ceded this role to the PRI, whose corporatist structures forged a “limited pluralist” system that prioritized social control over interest representation.²⁸

Mexican corporatism arranged society into vertically structured organizations composed of legally recognized functional groups. In this vein, the PRI’s corporatist structures encompassed three crucial social sectors: labor, the peasantry, and the popular sector or middle classes. The party, in turn, represented each sector through a peak organization containing hundreds of smaller groups.²⁹ Unlike pluralist systems, classic Mexican corporatism did not facilitate open competition between organized interests nor restrict the state to being a neutral mediator between competing social groups. Instead of competing to influence public servants (and thereby, public policy), interest groups dealt with them directly—through the ruling party’s peak organizations, and *on terms the government itself established*.

These terms were straightforward. State sanction brought these groups into the governing coalition; it provided them political protection, a legal monopoly to represent their constituents, and guaranteed access to decision makers. In exchange, corporatist leaders accepted limits on their members’ behavior and demands. The result was a pattern of “upward-flowing obligations and loyalties” on the part of corporatist leaders rather than downward-oriented responsibilities to group constituents.³⁰ The net effect of these inducements and constraints was to restrict vigorous political representation, more than promote it, and com-

27. Daniel Levy and Gabriel Székely, *Mexico: Paradoxes of Stability and Change* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1983), 52.

28. On Mexico’s “limited pluralism” see John F. H. Purcell and Susan Kaufman Purcell, “Mexican Business and Public Policy,” in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America*, ed. James M. Malloy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 191–226.

29. The PRI’s peak organizations included the Confederation of Workers of Mexico (labor), the National Peasant Confederation (campesinos), and the National Confederation of Popular Organizations (middle-class professionals and state employees). On Mexican corporatism see Evelyn P. Stevens, “Mexico’s PRI: The Institutionalization of Corporatism?” in *Authoritarianism and Corporatism in Latin America*, ed. James M. Malloy (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), 227–58.

30. Roger D. Hansen, *The Politics of Mexican Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), 113.

bined with centralized executive power, this influenced the scope, type, and substance of political and policy contestation in Mexico.

Patterns of Contestation. Under Mexico's informal political rules, contestation occurred in two distinct realms. One was public, the other private. In the open, public sphere, electoral competition occurred at regularly scheduled intervals, and historically, PRI candidates prevailed handily in these contests. Yet these victories—sometimes a function of genuine popularity, sometimes of fraud, irregularities, and procedural chicanery—could not be viewed as credible contests over public policy. On the one hand, the PRI's hegemony limited voters' electoral choice; on the other, the party's lack of influence over policy constrained voters' capacity to influence policy content via the ballot. Outgoing presidents selected their own successor whose candidacy was tantamount to election, and once in power, incumbents often decided public policy with only passing nods to the public will. Consequently, elections seldom functioned as referendums on public policies, and election results conferred on presidents no particular policy mandate.³¹

Moreover, even when elections did offer real choice, the PRI's status as Mexico's de-facto government party encouraged voters *not* to cast ballots solely on policy preferences. Instead, the long-time government-PRI nexus forced voters to consider the *country's* future absent the PRI. Perhaps the best example of this was the 1988 presidential election where a viable opposition candidate (Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas) challenged the PRI and its market reforms. Despite the clear policy choice this provided, survey data revealed only a weak relationship between support for the anti-reform candidate and opposition to specific reform measures like privatization.³² Even in this crucial election, Jorge Domínguez and James McCann discovered that presidential candidates drew support from “people who held diverse views on the central issues of the day,” and that “attitudes on policy issues hardly mattered.”³³

That elections typically did not provide vehicles to contest public policy, however, is not to suggest the absence of policy-relevant public

31. Roderic Ai Camp, *Politics in Mexico*, 2nd. ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 170.

32. Survey research based on the 1988 and 1991 national elections found that Mexicans did not use the ballot to express their policy preference. Indeed, economic policy concerns had no direct impact on voter choice in either election. See Jorge I. Domínguez and James A. McCann, “Shaping Mexico's Electoral Arena: The Construction of Partisan Cleavages in the 1988 and 1991 National Elections,” *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 1 (March 1995): 35–48.

33. Jorge I. Domínguez and James A. McCann, *Democratizing Mexico: Public Opinion and Electoral Choices* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 113.

contestation under Mexico's classic political model. Public contestation did bear on policy issues in the struggles over policy implementation. Such matters as who would bear the costs of increased social security taxes (employers, employees, or the state?), or who would gain from subsidized credit (large or small farmers?) are two examples where the public was permitted, and expected, to influence how prior policy decisions were implemented.

But it is important to emphasize that public contestation was confined strictly to policy *implementation* (not policy content),³⁴ and it is in this respect we see the effects of *presidencialismo* and corporatism most clearly. Centralized power helped crowd issues of policy content and formulation into the executive domain, where decision-making was reserved to a small elite; meanwhile, corporatist restrictions on social mobilization simply reinforced this trend.³⁵

Limits on public contestation gave Mexican decision-makers great latitude over policy decisions, but not an entirely free hand. Parallel to (and largely hidden from) the public domain, more vigorous contestation occurred within a private, elite political sphere. Here, struggles ensued within the upper bureaucratic echelons over issues of policy content and formulation, as well as for political position and influence. In terms of policymaking, these contests were the more important, for it was here—within a closed, opaque arena—that state policy was made and policy content decided, and neither the public, the congress, nor the ruling party were central actors in this process.

The Nature of the Decision Making Style. The patterns of governance that characterized Mexico's classic political model strongly influenced the decision-making process. It could hardly be otherwise. Centraliza-

34. This is as true for labor and peasants as it is for business. As Peter Smith observed, policy disputes between the private sector and the state typically centered on the implementation of existing law, not the formulation of new laws. See Peter H. Smith, "Does Mexico Have a Power Elite?" in *Authoritarianism in Mexico*, ed. José Luis Reyna and Richard S. Weinert (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1977), 129–51.

35. In-depth case studies of major public policies in Mexico underscore how limited an impact public contestation had on the content of policy decisions. With respect to rural development policies, for example, Merilee Grindle found that "demand-making behavior of citizens and parties in support of policy alternatives play[ed] a very insignificant part in the development or approval of government plans"; similarly, David Mares discovered little evidence that organized labor, business, or peasants directly influenced the government's 1980 decision not to join the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. See Merilee S. Grindle, *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Peasants in Mexico: A Case Study in Public Policy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 109; and David Mares, "Explaining Choice of Development Strategies: Suggestions from Mexico, 1970–1982," *International Organization* 39 (Autumn 1985): 667–97.

tion reserved power for the few, corporatism insulated decision-makers in a layer of autonomy by demobilizing societal actors, and contestation over policy content was confined to select elites. The result was a strong top-down decision-making pattern characterized by closed, elite deliberations, and marginalized, relatively ineffective demand-making among organized interests.³⁶ These factors were integral to Mexico's economic reforms. They allowed the government to pursue initiatives that departed radically from past statist policies—divestment, deregulation, and trade liberalization—and especially under Salinas, to do so rapidly and largely unhindered by countervailing forces.

From Statism to Neoliberalism: Policy Reform and Political Change

The Reforms. The basic story of Mexico's transition from statism to neoliberalism is well rehearsed. Post-revolutionary governments played an active, interventionist role in economic development, creating a host of enterprises and constructing complicated frameworks to regulate trade, foreign investment, and commercial transactions.³⁷ In the long run, statist policies changed Mexico's political landscape. They helped shape social classes (both labor and capitalists), the size of government bureaucracy, and patterns of state-societal interaction. They also provided a (sometimes erratic) stream of benefits that gave important actors—labor, business, the middle class, political elites—a stake in the prevailing development model.

For decades statism paid handsome dividends and from the mid 1950s to the early 1970s Mexico's economy grew on average, by six and a half percent per year. But ultimately, excessive borrowing, external shocks, economic mismanagement, and other factors (capital flight, inflation)

36. This pattern of decision-making was evident across a host of issue areas. See Guy E. Poitras, "Welfare Bureaucracy and Clientele Politics in Mexico," *Administrative Science Quarterly* 18 (March 1973): 18–26; Guy Benveniste, *Bureaucracy and National Planning: A Sociological Case Study in Mexico* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Terry L. McCoy, "A Paradigmatic Analysis of Mexican Population Policy," in *The Dynamics of Population Policy in Latin America*, ed. Terry L. McCoy (Cambridge: Ballinger Publishing Co., 1974), 377–408; Grindle, *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Peasants in Mexico*; Susan Kaufman Purcell, "Business-Government Relations in Mexico: The Case of the Sugar Industry," *Comparative Politics* 13 (1975): 211–31; and Stephen Mumme, C. Richard Bath, and Valerie J. Assetto, "Political Development and Environmental Policy in Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 23, no. 1 (1988): 7–34.

37. See Douglas C. Bennett and Kenneth E. Sharpe, *Transnational Corporations Versus the State: The Political Economy of the Mexican Auto Industry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).

brought this golden era to a close. With the onset of the 1982 debt crisis, foreign credit dried up and prolonged economic contraction ensued.

To stabilize the economy, the de la Madrid administration restricted public spending, and addressed exchange rates and inflation via a crawling peg rate and wage and price control pact. Structural adjustment measures (privatization and trade liberalization) soon followed. Beginning in 1989 the Salinas administration greatly expanded the privatization project, initiated deregulation, and later, deepened Mexico's commitment to free trade via the North American Free Trade Agreement, NAFTA—measures that broke sharply with past policies.³⁸

Mexico's policy transformation constitutes one of the most remarkable reform achievements in the developing world. In large part, this achievement and the inability of policy losers to derail the reforms,³⁹ turned on the advantages that classic governance patterns conferred on technocratic reformers. Limited pluralism, centralized authority, and top-down decision-making all helped insulate policymakers and made effective anti-reform activities difficult (though not impossible). Ironically, the very success at reversing past policies sparked social and political changes that accelerated the decline of Mexico's classic political model.

The Social Impact of Policy Reform. In ways large and small, a decade of reform touched millions of Mexicans' daily lives, but by 1995, for many the net social effect was negative.⁴⁰ On the whole, living standards had dropped, job creation lagged, union strength declined, and income/wealth inequality widened dramatically.

A principal factor behind this development was the tendency of some policies to cancel the benefits of others. Between 1983–1994, fiscal discipline—and later wage/price controls—cut inflation significantly to the benefit of all Mexicans (from 98.9 to 7.1 percent). But for the poor and working class, austerity budgets and deregulation offset this advantage by eliminating subsidies on a range of foodstuffs and in some cases, restricting public service provision. Some market policies also concen-

38. For a general review of Mexico's reform experience see Nora Lustig, *Mexico: The Remaking of an Economy*, 2nd. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998); and Mark Eric Williams, *Market Reforms in Mexico: Coalitions, Institutions, and the Politics of Policy Change* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2001).

39. Market reforms typically generate high short-term costs for concentrated groups like labor, state agencies which supervised parastatals and administered regulations, and the private sector; these costs include lost jobs, rents, subsidies, protection, and institutional interests.

40. Guillermo Trejo and Claudio Jones, "Political Dilemmas of Welfare Reform: Poverty and Inequality in Mexico," in *Mexico Under Zedillo*, ed. Susan Kaufman Purcell and Luis Rubio (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 67–99.

trated benefits in select groups but failed to yield anticipated positive externalities beyond them. Trade is a case in point. In the early Salinas years trade liberalization sparked a non-oil export boom, especially in manufactured goods where exports rose 38 percent between 1989 and 1992. Many analysts expected trade growth to bolster employment levels; but in the end, export expansion produced no appreciable upsurge in job creation. By March 1994 manufacturing employment had declined roughly 33 percent from 1980 levels,⁴¹ as increasing competition forced private firms to produce more efficiently and take steps to lower labor costs.

Slack job growth in manufacturing was symptomatic of a larger employment problem. Since the late 1980s over one million people entered the economically active population annually, of which, the formal economy absorbed less than 30 percent (most turned to the informal economy). One keen Mexico watcher estimates that while the economy created 1.5 million new jobs between 1988 and 1993—far below the required annual target—it lost 500,000 in the corporate shake-out induced by Mexico's debt crisis.⁴² Paradoxically, measures designed to resuscitate the economy weakened job prospects further: fiscal austerity and privatization helped fuel un- and underemployment by downsizing the public enterprise sector and general bureaucracy.⁴³

These trends, of course, affected organized labor in ways hardly benign, and labor's position continued to deteriorate as the reforms deepened. Syndicates linked to the ruling party via corporatism bore heavy burdens under policy adjustment, and for the most part, reformers turned a deaf ear to union complaints as divestment erased labor's sheltered public sector positions, diminished its political clout, and eliminated tens of thousands of union members. The upshot was a dramatic decline in unions' material, organizational, and political strength.⁴⁴

41. See Manuel Pastor Jr. and Carol Wise, "Mexican-Style Neoliberalism, State Policy and Distributional Stress," in *The Post-Nafta Political Economy: Mexico and the Western Hemisphere*, ed. Carol Wise (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 41–81; and Diana Alarcón and Terry McKinley, "Increasing Wage Inequality and Trade Liberalization in Mexico," in *Poverty, Economic Reform, and Income Distribution in Latin America*, ed. Albert Berry (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 137–53.

42. Wayne A. Cornelius, "Foreword," in *The Politics of Economic Restructuring: State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico*, ed. Maria Lorena Cook, Kevin J. Middlebrook, and Juan Molinar Horcasitas (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1994), xi-xx.

43. See Enrique Dussel Peters, "Cambio estructural y potencialidades de crecimiento del sector manufacturero en México (1982–1991)," in *México: La nueva macroeconomía*, ed. Julio López (Mexico: Centro de Estudios para un Proyecto Nacional/Nuevo Horizonte Editores, 1994), 149–229; and Enrique Quintana López, "La bancarrota de Fundidora: Dimes y diretes financieros," *El Cotidiano* 3, no. 12 (1986): 27–31.

44. See Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution*, 297.

The reforms also aggravated an already unequal distribution of income and wealth.⁴⁵ Between 1984 and 1994 the richest 10 percent of Mexicans increased their share of national income from 34.26 to 41.24 percent, and between 1988 and 1994 the number of Mexican billionaires spiked from 1 to 24 (their combined asset base represented 12 percent of Mexico's gross domestic product).

One factor that helped concentrate wealth was the pattern of privatization. Unlike the popular capitalism of Chile or Margaret Thatcher's Great Britain, where governments sold state assets on the capital market, the Salinas administration auctioned off most parastatals to large industrial groups and financial conglomerates.⁴⁶ Salinas insisted this pattern of divestment would ensure newly privatized firms the capital needed to reinvest, modernize, and gain a stronger global competitive posture. However, by forgoing so-called popular capitalism, the administration also forfeited the chance to share the wealth, enlarge the middle class, and give Mexicans outside the elite a greater stake in the new development model. These developments contributed to one of the reforms' greatest political consequences, namely, the reconfiguration of the PRI's historic governing coalition. From the mid 1980s onward, the coalition's elite base split and narrowed, its mass base grew less secure, and in large measure, Mexico's financial giants displaced popular sectors (organized labor, segments of the peasantry) as the cornerstone of regime support.

The Political Impact of Policy Reform. As early as the mid 1980s the pursuit of reform policies helped fracture the PRI's internal cohesion, as populist *priistas* chafed at de la Madrid's increasingly orthodox economic program. These dynamics gave rise to the Corriente Democrática (Democratic Current)—a faction inside the PRI that was ideologically committed to statist policies, and whose inability to influence the party's presidential nomination eventually sparked party defection.⁴⁷ In 1987

45. See Pastor and Wise, "Mexican-Style Neoliberalism"; Carlos Marichal, "The Rapid Rise of the *Neobanqueros*, Mexico's New Financial Elite," *NACLA Report on the Americas* 30 (May/June 1997): 27–30; Blanca Heredia, "State-Business Relations in Contemporary Mexico," in *Rebuilding the State: Mexico after Salinas*, ed. Mónica Serrano and Victor Bulmer-Thomas (London: Institute of Latin American Studies, University of London, 1996), 131–50; and Hector E. Schamis, "The Politics of Economic Reform: Distributional Coalitions and Policy Change in Latin America," *Working Paper* 250 (Notre Dame: Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 1998), 20–5.

46. See Marichal, "The Rapid Rise of the *Neobanqueros*"; and Celso Garrido, "National private groups in Mexico, 1987–1993," *CEPAL Review* 53 (August 1994): 159–75.

47. See Kathleen Bruhn, *Taking on Goliath: The Emergence of New Left Party and the Struggle for Democracy in Mexico* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997).

disaffected priístas broke ranks, as Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas led anti-reform elements out of the PRI to run for president against de la Madrid's hand-picked candidate, Carlos Salinas. This split produced the closest, most controversial election in history, and gave birth to a new political force—the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). In less than a decade the PRD would hand the PRI a stinging defeat in Mexico City's first-ever mayoral election.⁴⁸

Besides promoting cleavages at the top, sustained reform also strained the regime's popular base of support. In the case of labor, policies like privatization (which often required massive layoffs and contract give-backs) drove a wedge between the government and important segments of the labor movement, undermining the political utility of corporatism in the process.⁴⁹ Among the PRI's peasant base, meanwhile, some segments took umbrage at reforms like the privatization of communal *ejido* lands and NAFTA.⁵⁰ The former marked the end of Mexico's land reform program and dashed many small farmers' hopes of receiving legal recognition of their land claims; the latter promised to expose small farmers to foreign competition. In Chiapas, peasants responded with the Zapatista National Liberation Army, Mexico's first guerrilla insurrection in two decades.⁵¹ The rebels not only captured popular sympathies throughout the republic, but upset the image Salinas had carefully crafted of a stable, progressive, and modernizing Mexico, enticing to foreign investment. The repercussions proved damag-

48. The Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) grew out of a coalition of smaller parties and social movements (the National Democratic Front) which sponsored Cárdenas's 1988 presidential bid. Six months after the election, the coalition had crumbled and the PRD was born. On the party's rise see Bruhn, *Taking on Goliath*.

49. On labor's diminishing role in the governing coalition, see Middlebrook, *The Paradox of Revolution*, chapter 8; see also Judith Teichman, "Economic Restructuring, State-Labor Relations, and the Transformation of Mexican Corporatism," in *Neo-liberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future*, ed. Gerardo Otero (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 149–66.

50. To stimulate investment and production in agriculture and prepare this sector for North American economic integration, the Salinas administration amended Article 27 of the federal Constitution in 1991. The amendment redefined rural property rights from communal to private holdings, and in traditional top-down fashion, the government devised and imposed the reform without consulting peasant farmer organizations or their representatives in the PRI. See Merilee S. Grindle, "Reforming Land Tenure in Mexico: Peasants, the Market, and the State," in *The Challenge of Institutional Reform*, ed. Riordan Roett (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1996), 39–56.

51. To be fair, NAFTA was only one factor behind the Chiapas rebellion. Zapatistas also cited repression and corruption among their complaints. See Neil Harvey, "Rural Reforms and the Zapatista Rebellion: Chiapas, 1988–1995," in *Neoliberalism Revisited: Economic Restructuring and Mexico's Political Future*, ed. Gerardo Otero (Boulder: Westview, 1996), 187–208.

ing: in a country whose leaders insisted that first world status was on the horizon, the Zapatistas' sudden appearance spooked many foreign investors and contributed to the December 1994 currency crisis that brought the economy—and nearly the government—to its knees.⁵²

Although Salinas could hardly anticipate the dramatic events of 1994, from the beginning he understood that radical reform would, most likely, transform allies into antagonists. To compensate, the president pursued two tactics. The first centered around the National Solidarity Program, PRONASOL—a gigantic pork barrel project designed to bolster the regime's political support by funneling billions of dollars toward grassroots anti-poverty programs in regions where the PRI ran poorly in 1988.⁵³ For several years the PRONASOL strategy helped retain a measure of popular support in many regions (even as labor support ebbed) and contributed to the PRI's electoral resurgence in the early 1990s.

In addition, Salinas actively courted Mexico's large, private sector conglomerates and exporters, and as Edward Gibson notes, used pro-business reforms to build "a new strategic relationship with the most diversified, concentrated, and internationally competitive sectors of business."⁵⁴ Toward these ends Salinas sold the lion's share of industrial/commercial public enterprises to large consortiums, and encouraged new linkages between the conglomerates and policymakers during the NAFTA negotiations to protect business interests under the trade accord.⁵⁵ As the coalitional transition crystallized the conglomerates increasingly placed their financial resources at the party's disposal.⁵⁶

Through the July 1994 presidential elections the party's new political coalition (plus the "political spending" of PRONASOL) helped bring victory at the polls. But once the 1994 peso crash erased the PRI's electoral appeal and reputation for economic competence, its political fortunes turned south. In July 1997 the PRI was trounced in Mexico City's mayoral election by the PRD, lost control of the lower congressional house for the first time in nearly seventy years, and lost gubernatorial races in Querétaro and Nuevo León to the center-right National Action Party (PAN).

52. Maxwell A. Cameron and Vinod K. Aggarwal, "Mexican meltdown: states, markets and post-NAFTA financial turmoil," *Third World Quarterly* 17, no. 5 (1996): 975–87.

53. Denise Dresser, *Neopopulist Solutions to Neoliberal Problems: Mexico's National Solidarity Program* (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1991).

54. Edward Gibson, "The Populist Road to Market Reform: Policy and Electoral Coalitions in Mexico and Argentina," *World Politics* 49 (April 1997): 356.

55. See Manuel Pastor and Carol Wise, "The Origins and Sustainability of Mexico's Free Trade Policy," *International Organization* 48 (1994): 459–89.

56. Teichman, *Privatization and Political Change*, 188.

These electoral setbacks occurred under Salinas's successor, Ernesto Zedillo, and foreshadowed the PRI's resounding defeat in July 2000. They were born of the economic and political turmoil of the times, and facilitated by a set of sweeping political reforms. With its political capital depleted by the peso crisis, the Zedillo administration accepted opposition demands of self-rule for Mexico City residents (mayoral elections), public financing of election campaigns, fairer media access to opposition parties, and an independent election monitoring agency to safeguard the integrity of the vote. These measures, plus Zedillo's own democratizing inclinations brought fundamental change to Mexico's traditional patterns of governance, and paved the way for an opposition victory in July 2000.

The Collapse of Mexico's Classic Model

As noted, Mexico's classic political model concentrated power vertically at the federal level, and horizontally within the executive; under Salinas this trend accelerated.⁵⁷ By contrast, Ernesto Zedillo chose to redefine the function of Mexico's presidency by limiting its discretionary power. Claiming to have been a democratic "all my life,"⁵⁸ Zedillo pledged to govern by the rule of law (i.e., the Constitution) rather than traditional unwritten rules, abdicate the president's historic role as leader of the ruling party, relinquish the right to hand-pick his own successor, promote fairer party competition, and encourage an independent judiciary and legislature. In the end, he not only kept most of these promises, but also accepted demands for electoral reforms, plus launched a series of "New Federalism" measures that increased the autonomy, resources, and responsibilities of state and municipal governments.⁵⁹

By limiting the presidency, however, Zedillo's governing philosophy weakened a central component of Mexico's classic political system and created power vacuums that social forces, legislators, PRI rank-and-file, and even some PRI governors rushed to exploit. In the chaos unleashed by the 1994 peso crisis, citizen protests erupted in the streets; con-

57. Throughout his term Salinas exercised the full range of constitutional and extra-constitutional powers—dominating the legislative agenda, dismissing seventeen state governors, hand-picking his successor, and injecting the presidency directly into electoral politics via the National Solidarity Program. See Wayne A. Cornelius, *Mexican Politics in Transition*, 36; and Centeno, *Democracy within Reason*.

58. Sallie Hughes, "A long climb back," *Macleans*, June 24, 1996, 25.

59. Luis Rubio, "Coping with Political Change," in *Mexico under Zedillo*, ed. Susan Kaufman Purcell and Luis Rubio (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 5–36; Ernesto Zedillo, "Address by Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León," *Publius: The Journal of Federalism* 29 (Fall 1999): 15–22.

Table 1: *Mexico's Classic versus Post-Classic Political Models*

Classic Model	Post-Classic Model
<i>Political Power</i>	
highly centralized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vertically concentrated at federal level • horizontally concentrated inside executive 	increasingly decentralized <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • new federalism stresses decentralization • axis of politics shifts from president to Congress
<i>Representation</i>	
corporatist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • peak organizations incorporated into PRI (labor, peasantry, middle classes) • prioritized social control over interest representation 	post-corporatist <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social and civic groups work increasingly outside party organizations • growing opposition parties • increasingly independent Congress
<i>Contestation</i>	
public arena <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • confined to policy implementation • engaged in by disparate social groups 	public arena <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • both policy content and implementation • engaged in by Congress, social groups, partisan affiliates
private, elite arena <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite realm in executive branch • issues of policy content 	private, elite arena <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • elite realm in executive branch • issues of policy content
<i>Decision-Making Style</i>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • closed, top-down • reserved for executive elite 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasingly open, porous • executive-congressional negotiations • inter-party negotiations

gressional deputies demanded that the government abandon neoliberalism and fought the president's budget priorities; PRI senators vowed to vote their constituents' interests rather than genuflect to the executive and party leaders; and PRI rank-and-file revamped the party's candidate selection criteria in ways that made nearly all technocrats ineligible to run for high offices (thus, reducing the viability of technocratic camarillas as pathways to power). Some state governors, meanwhile, assumed independent (even defiant) postures vis-à-vis Zedillo that under

Salinas would have been unthinkable.⁶⁰ Collectively, these dynamics induced fundamental changes in patterns of governance with respect to political power, contestation, representation, and to some extent, decision-making patterns (see Table 1). It is in this context that questions arise regarding the durability of Mexico's neoliberal reforms and the study of Mexican politics more generally.

Wither Mexico's Market Reforms?

If classic governance patterns aided the adoption of new market policies, what are the prospects for these reforms given the classic model's collapse and the dramatic sociopolitical developments the reforms occasioned? On the up side there is prima facie evidence to suggest the policy shifts will endure. The Fox administration is committed to market policies and, save for the PRD, contemporary intellectual currents in Mexico pull strongly against a return to what many believe are the discredited concepts of statism. There are other impediments as well. The Mexican state remains deeply indebted. Even if its leaders did seek to re-embrace statism, the government lacks the financial resources to recreate a large public sector and, perhaps the stomach to face down likely pressures from international lenders to stay the course.

Besides these factors, important institutional changes that accompanied new policies make a return to statism difficult. NAFTA locks Mexico into a liberalized trade regime whose benefits—guaranteed access to the U.S. market, over \$9 billion in foreign investment since 1994, and a 67 percent spike in trade with Canada and the United States—generate strong incentives not to pull out anytime soon.⁶¹ It is notable that none of Mexico's principal political parties have called for NAFTA's outright repeal. Moreover, the complementarity and interdependence of policies like divestment, deregulation, and trade liberalization create potent and mutually reinforcing incentives that most likely will steer policy along market paths for some time.

In short, a number of factors work against policy reversal. Never-

60. See Wayne A. Cornelius, "Subnational Politics and Democratization: Tensions between Center and Periphery in the Mexican Political System," in *Subnational Politics and Democratization in Mexico*, ed. Wayne A. Cornelius, Todd A. Eisenstadt and Jane Hindley (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1999), 3–16.

61. Deborah L. Riner and John V. Sweeney, "The Effects of NAFTA on Mexico's Private Sector and Foreign Trade and Investment," in *Mexico's Private Sector: Recent History, Future Challenges*, ed. Riordan Roett (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 161–87

theless, Mexico's reforms are hardly set in stone. First, in actively courting various winners among private business and incorporating them into the governing coalition, Mexico followed the path of reform-consolidation prescribed in scholarly literature;⁶² but whether the government can sustain its market model in the face of significant (and increasing) inequality is an open question. Much will depend upon expanding the pool of beneficiaries beyond what currently is a rather small sacred circle.

Second, while wholesale abandonment of neoliberalism seems unlikely, modifications to the existing development model do not. Despite its achievements, Mexico suffers under a backlog of pressing, but unaddressed problems whose resolution will help promote economic prosperity and improve social well-being. Education, health care, housing, employment, poverty, and inequality all require substantial improvement to facilitate the accumulation of human capital increasingly recognized as central to long-term, equitable growth and governability.⁶³ Because solutions to these problems require a more activist than minimalist government, the situation could, to quote Moisés Naim, force leaders to "re-discover the state," just as reformers rediscovered the market.⁶⁴

Third, the PRI's stunning presidential defeat sparked a power struggle between old-line populists, pro-democratic reformers, and the party's technocratic wing. Though still unresolved as of this writing, the outcome of this struggle will shape the PRI's policy philosophy for years to come. According to Pedro Joaquín Coldwell, the party's former secretary-general, by converting the PRI into "a political instrument for the

62. Scholars of economic transitions contend that coalitions between state reformers, business, and/or labor are required to build social consensus around new policies, provide reformist governments the support they need to go forward effectively, and thereby help ensure the policies themselves are durable. See G. John Ikenberry, "The International Spread of Privatization Policies: Inducements, Learning, and 'Policy Bandwagoning,'" in *The Political Economy of Public Sector Reform and Privatization*, ed. Ezra N. Suleiman and John Waterbury (Boulder: Westview Publishers, 1990), 88–110; John Waterbury, "The Political Management of Economic Adjustment and Reform," in *Fragile Coalitions: The Politics of Economic Adjustment*, ed. Joan M. Nelson (Washington, D.C.: Overseas Development Council, 1989), 39–56; and Stephan Haggard and Steven Webb, "Introduction," in *Voting for Reform: Democracy, Political Liberalization and Economic Adjustment*, ed. Stephan Haggard and Steven Webb (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 1–36.

63. See Trejo and Jones, "Political Dilemmas of Welfare Reform." For discussion of how governments might incorporate social policy goals into broader neoliberal frameworks see Nancy Birdsall, Carol Graham and Richard H. Sabot, eds., *Beyond Trade Offs: Market Reform and Equitable Growth in Latin America* (Washington, D.C.: Inter-American Development Bank, 1998).

64. See Moisés Naim, "Latin America's Journey to the Market: From Macroeconomic Shocks to Institutional Therapy," *ICEG Occasional Paper* 62 (San Francisco: ICS Press, 1995).

government's neoliberal project," the technocrats left the party's unreconstructed populists suffering "profound ideological confusion."⁶⁵ Old guard priistas not only loathe the technocrats' policy program but blame them for their party's electoral defeats. It is hard to imagine an old guard-dominated PRI—returned to power in subsequent elections—would not seek to modify or reverse Mexico's market model.

Finally, given the significant changes in patterns of governance, some policy slippage is possible. The decentralization of power, expansion of contestation, and erosion of traditional corporatism constitute a political climate the opposite of which facilitated Mexico's rapid policy transformations. Absent a partisan majority in congress, executive-congressional and inter-party negotiations will shape the course (and content) of policy far more than in the past. Yet, because policy output will likely reflect the interests of any legislative coalitions that emerge—and because a defeated, faction-ridden PRI may be disinclined to support a pure, pro-market Fox program—strict fidelity to neoliberalism cannot be assumed.

The Evolving Research Menu

For analysts, Mexico's historic 2000 election and the demise of its classic political model have opened a number of new research avenues. These avenues center around three sets of inter-related topics whose assessment is difficult via traditional context-specific concepts, but whose examination will tend to link scholarship on Mexican politics more tightly to a broader body of research within comparative politics.

Parties, the Judiciary, Congress, and the Media. One cluster of issues centers around parties, the judiciary, legislature, and media. Political parties give content to public interests, establish linkages between government and civil society, help order legislative processes, and engender legitimacy of political systems.⁶⁶ During Mexico's classic period, most research rightly gave pride of place to the PRI;⁶⁷ however, understand-

65. Leslie Crawford, "Zedillo under fire as peso wobbles: Political troubles add to problems facing Mexico's president," *Financial Times*, August 31, 1995, 3.

66. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968); Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, "Introduction," in *Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America*, ed. Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 1–34.

67. For one of the few early works on the PRI's chief opposition, the PAN, see Donald J. Mabry, *Mexico's Acción Nacional: A Catholic Alternative to Revolution* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1973). For recent works on both the PAN and PRD see Jean-Francois Prud'homme, "The National Action Party's (PAN) Organizational Life and Strategic Decision," *Documento de Trabajo* 59 (Mexico: CIDE, 1997); and Bruhn, *Taking on Goliath*.

ing Mexico's contemporary democratic politics will require greater scrutiny of each major political party.

Although parties typically mirror the demands and preferences of societal groups that comprise them, group allegiance to those parties is not permanent. Whether parties lose, retain, or expand the core constituencies that sustain their internal coalitions bears directly on their electoral competitiveness⁶⁸ and can be influenced by their philosophical message, internal dynamics, organizational capacities, and candidate selection procedures. Thus, during the 2000 presidential election, Kathleen Bruhn discovered that such factors—endogenous to party operations—played a decisive role in the candidates they fielded, the type of campaigns they waged, and ultimately, their electoral fortunes.⁶⁹ The influence these dynamics exert over the parties' continued vitality should constitute an important aspect of future research.

As with political parties, Mexico's evolving multi-party system warrants greater scrutiny too. In the past the political system served to legitimate the regime, mostly by creating the appearance of competition against the PRI, and giving social forces willing to play under fixed rules a chance to contest elections. By contrast, because competition in Mexico's post-classic party system is real, the system now serves more normal democratic functions whose effects on politics and policy invite close examination. Joseph Klesner, for example, has called attention to the party system's increasingly important regional dimension—one in which three-party contests in Mexico City and at the national level mask

68. On the concept and importance of core constituencies see Edward Gibson, *Class and Conservative Parties: Argentina in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 7–14.

69. As Bruhn notes, throughout the 1990s the PAN's social conservatism, internal organization, and procedures hindered its ability to leverage state and municipal victories into an expanded national core constituency; and in defiance of candidate selection procedures, Vicente Fox employed a parallel organization outside the party's control to orchestrate his presidential bid (i.e., Amigos de Fox). This strategy helped Fox capture Los Pinos, but cost the PAN a precious opportunity to strengthen its national party organization. Meanwhile, during the 2000 presidential season, internal factions and voting irregularities compelled the PRD to annul its own primary election, and anoint the one figure whose stature and commitment to old-line populism could mollify disparate factions—twice-defeated presidential candidate, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. Only the PRI managed to select its candidate via primary, yet to some Mexicans, this process and the party's get-out-the-vote maneuvers still smacked of *dedazo* and authoritarianism. See Kathleen Bruhn, "The Making of the Mexican President, 2000: Race to Los Pinos" (paper presented at the Mexico's 2000 Elections conference, Harvard University, December 8–9, 2000). See also Prud'homme, "The National Action Party's (PAN) Organizational Life and Strategic Decisions"; and David Shirk, "Vicente Fox and the Rise of the PAN," *Journal of Democracy* 11 (October 2000): 25–32.

intense two-party struggles at the state and municipal levels (i.e., PRI vs. PAN in the north, PRI vs. PRD in the south).⁷⁰ These contests hold powerful implications not only for state and municipal governments, but also for the make-up of Mexico's national legislature (hence, *regional* interests, as much as partisan ones, may increasingly influence congressional behavior). Moreover, as Jonathan Hiskey recently discovered,⁷¹ they also can profoundly affect the efficacy of demand-based, anti-poverty initiatives—a growing concern in countries such as Mexico that are undergoing dramatic market reforms.

Another area open to deeper scholarship is the study of the Mexican judiciary. As Mexican legal scholar, Hector Fix-Fierro, notes, "Mexico's Supreme Court is perhaps the least well known and understood of her public institutions [and] its social and political significance, especially in recent times, has been scarcely studied."⁷² Given the court's historic subordination to executive power, the paucity of research is understandable. However, over the last decade Mexico's high court has acquired more independence and new powers of constitutional/electoral review. Constitutional amendments in 1994 and 1996 allowed the court to adjudicate constitutional disputes between the federal, state (and inter-state), and municipal governments,⁷³ and armed with this authority the high court has ventured increasingly into a political realm

70. Joseph Klesner, "Electoral Politics and Mexico's New Party System" (paper presented at the 1998 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, The Palmer House Hotel, Chicago, Illinois, September 24–26, 1998).

71. Hiskey discovered that competitive local elections affect demand-based anti-poverty programs two ways. They provide politicians incentives to establish strong performance/policy records, and make politicians more responsive to citizens' demands; they also encourage greater citizen participation in project implementation (a common feature of most demand-based programs). See Jonathan T. Hiskey, "Does Democracy Matter? Electoral Competition and Local Development in Mexico" (paper presented at the 2000 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Hyatt Regency Miami, March 16–18, 2000).

72. See Hector Fix-Fierro, "Judicial Reform and the Supreme Court of Mexico: The Trajectory of Three Years," *United States-Mexico Law Journal* 6 (Spring 1998): 1–21. Close studies of Mexico's Supreme Court are few and far between, and most research has been undertaken by legal scholars, not political scientists. See, for example, Hector Fix-Zamudio, "El ejecutivo federal y el poder judicial," in *El sistema presidencial mexicano: algunas reflexiones* (Mexico: Instituto de Investigaciones Jurídicas, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988), 269–365; and *La Suprema Corte de Justicia y el pensamiento jurídico* (Mexico: La Corte, 1985).

73. Jorge A. Vargas, "Mexico's Legal Revolution: An Appraisal of Its Recent Constitutional Changes, 1988–1995," *The Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law* 25 (Summer 1996): 497–559; Fix-Fierro, "Judicial Reform and the Supreme Court of Mexico"; and Pilar Domingo, "Judicial Independence: The Politics of the Supreme Court in Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 32 (2000): 705–34.

it long eschewed. In 1996 it struck a blow against Mexico's traditional corporatist representation system, ruling that laws which mandated state employees affiliate with a single government-sanctioned union were unconstitutional; the same year it struck down laws obligating business membership in chambers of commerce and industry.⁷⁴ The Court also has involved itself in highly charged partisan contests: in 1997 it upheld a PRD challenge to the electoral code in the state of Oaxaca, and in 1998, it again supported the PRD's challenge of Quintana Roo's electoral code.

These decisions suggest that even as presidential authority and ruling party dominance declined during the 1990s, constitutional and electoral rules assumed greater importance in reshaping arenas of political contestation. Given the readjustments occasioned by Mexico's democratic transition, there is good reason to believe the court will continue to play a role in evolving patterns of state-societal relations, tactics of partisan competition, and the transformation of political representation.

Like the court, Mexico's newly resurgent congress offers additional research possibilities; also like the court, close studies of the legislature are rare.⁷⁵ Constitutional prohibitions against reelection still impede full congressional independence and robust representation.⁷⁶ Nevertheless, changing patterns of governance, plus a growing multi-party presence in congress, raise a host of issues. How will congress recreate itself (committees? resources? financing?), and what role will legislators carve out in policy and decision-making matters? In a congress lacking partisan majorities, can Mexico's parties maintain sufficient internal discipline to forge effective legislative coalitions? More research on these themes is needed to understand Mexico's evolving patterns of governance.

Finally, greater knowledge of how media coverage affects voting behavior is needed to augment our understanding of competitive election outcomes and congressional composition. Through the 1980s Mexico's print media labored under severe constraints including state control of

74. Domingo, "Judicial Independence."

75. For recent offerings see Alonso Lujambio, *Federalismo y Congreso en el Cambio Político de México* (Mexico: UNAM, 1995); and Roderic A. Camp, "Mexico's Legislature, Missing the Democratic Lockstep," in *Legislatures and Democratic Transformation in Latin America*, ed. David Close (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 17-36.

76. Some scholars contend that while the Congress lacks sufficient resources and staff to legislate effectively, the prohibition against reelection is the single most important constraint on its autonomy and capacity to co-govern. This constraint promotes distance between Congress and the electorate, guarantees lawmakers remain inexperienced, and ensures they fail to develop loyalty to their constituents and institution. See Michael C. Taylor, "Constitutional Crisis: How Reforms to the Legislature Have Doomed Mexico," *MS/ES* 13 (Summer 1997): 299-325.

the importation, production, and sale of newsprint, dependence on state advertising revenues, and self-censorship.⁷⁷ Since then, political liberalization, economic reforms, and a new culture of civic journalism have transformed important segments of the print media.⁷⁸ By the 2000 election its transition from a regime mouth piece into a genuine fourth estate was virtually complete. Today, Mexico's print media exhibits a new consciousness and sense of empowerment. Many journalists at dailies like *Reforma*, *El Norte*, *El Financiero*, and the newsweekly *Proceso*, have adopted a role toward reporting qualitatively different than in the past; increasingly, they view themselves as watchdogs of government accountability, guardians of objective political information, and active participants in democratization. Close inspection of the influence objective reporting, scandal exposés, and sophisticated survey research polls exert on political attitudes and behavior (public and partisan) will deepen our understanding of contemporary Mexican politics.⁷⁹

Decentralization, Federalism, and Civil Society. A second cluster of issues centers on decentralization, federalism, and Mexico's enhanced civil society. In recent years decentralization (and more broadly, federalism) have attracted growing scholarly attention.⁸⁰ By virtue of Zedillo's "New Federalism" reforms and prior initiatives, new relationships are emerging between the federal, state, and municipal governments.⁸¹ The issues

77. M. Delal Baer, "The Press," in *Prospects for Mexico* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Service Institute, U.S. State Department, 1988), 93–111.

78. See Sallie Hughes, "Culture Clash in the Newsroom: News Media Transformation in A Liberalizing Regime. The Case of the Mexican Press" (paper presented at the 2000 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Hyatt Regency Miami, Miami, Florida, March 16–18, 2000); and Chappell Lawson, "Building the Fourth Estate" (Ph.D. diss., Stanford University, 1999).

79. For insights into these issues see Miguel Basa ez, "Public Opinion Research in Mexico," in *Latin America in Comparative Perspective: New Approaches to Methods and Analysis*, ed. Peter H. Smith (Boulder: Westview, 1995), 257–74; see also Chappell Lawson, "Media Opening and Political Scandal in Mexico" (paper presented at a meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, Hyatt Regency Miami, Miami, Florida, March 16–18, 2000).

80. See for example, Merilee S. Grindle, *Audacious Reforms: Institutional Invention and Democracy in Latin America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000); George E. Peterson, *Decentralization in Latin America: Learning through Experience* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 1997); Eliza Willis, Christopher da C. B. Garman, and Stephan Haggard, "The Politics of Decentralization in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* 34, no. 1 (1999): 7–56; Christopher Garman, Stephan Haggard, and Eliza Willis, "Fiscal Decentralization: A Political Theory with Latin American Cases," *World Politics* 53 (January 2001): 205–36; and Teresa Ter-Minassian, "Decentralizing Government," *Finance and Development* 34 (September 1997): 36–9.

81. Peter M. Ward and Victoria E. Rodríguez, "New Federalism, Intra-governmental Relations and Co-governance in Mexico," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 31 (1999):

raised here are many. How is the devolution of political power, administrative responsibilities, and financial resources transforming political dynamics? To what political ends are state governors using the greater authority they enjoy? Will federalism and decentralization help consolidate Mexico's democratic transition, or simply provide means and opportunity to consolidate local authoritarian enclaves, contrary to national democratizing trends?⁸² Finally, are greater autonomy and responsibilities at lower government levels creating space for civic organizations to influence democratic processes and public programs?

Since the mid 1980s Mexican civil society has flourished as new social movements, civic groups, and non-governmental organizations proliferated outside the ruling party.⁸³ The quantity and diversity of these organizations reflect corporatism's declining utility as an effective mechanism of interest representation and social control. How groups that explicitly rejected the PRI's inducements and constraints will function within Mexico's new multi-party system has direct bearing on its viability, the nature of Mexico's civil society, and the prospects of governability and democratic consolidation.

Democratic Consolidation. The processes of democratic consolidation constitute a final set of research topics. For some scholars these processes involve creating a situation in which democracy becomes the only game in town; that is, where all political principals accept democratic procedures as the only legitimate means to conduct politics.⁸⁴ Yet, because consolidation is conditioned by the effective operation of democracy's

673–710; Victoria E. Rodríguez, "Recasting Federalism in Mexico," *Publius* 28 (Winter 1998): 235–48.

82. See Jonathan Fox and Josefina Aranda, "Decentralization and Rural Development in Mexico" (paper presented at the 19th International Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., September 1995); Kaufman and Trejo, "Regionalism, Regime Transformation, and PRONASOL"; Wayne A. Cornelius, Todd A. Eisenstadt, and Jane Hindley, eds., *Subnational Politics and Democratization in Mexico* (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1999); and Chappell Lawson, "Mexico's Unfinished Transition: Democratization and Authoritarian Enclaves in Mexico," *MS/ES* 16, no. 2 (Summer 2000): 267–87.

83. See Diane E. Davis, "Social Movements and Mexico's Crisis," *Journal of International Affairs* 43 (Winter 1990): 343–67; David Thelen, "Mexico, the Puzzle: A Conversation about Civil Society and the Nation with Ilan Semo," in *The Journal of American History* 86 (September 1999): <http://historycooperative.org/journals/jah/86.s/semo.html> (January 30, 2001); Gabriel Quadri de la Torre, "Una breve crónica del ecologismo en México," *Ciencias* 4 (1990): 56–64; and Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig, *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1990).

84. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, "Toward Consolidated Democracies," in *Consolidating Third Wave Democracies: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. Larry Diamond, Marc F.

underpinnings—institutionalized parties, an independent judiciary, effective rule of law, objective media, and participatory civil society—research on consolidation will of necessity entail close scrutiny of many issues discussed earlier. Political parties, for example, are integral to democratic consolidation (indeed, E. E. Schattschneider believed that democracy was “unthinkable save in terms of parties”);⁸⁵ the horizontal accountability of executive power required to safeguard democracy is purchased only by effective checks and balances among government branches and ancillary agencies;⁸⁶ vertical accountability, meanwhile, is conditioned by a robust federalism, politically independent media, fair, competitive elections, and a vibrant civil society.⁸⁷

Mexico clearly boasts a number of factors conducive to sustaining democracy; this however, is no guarantee of its consolidation. The fate of Mexico’s multi-party system hangs, in part, on the vitality of its major political parties, and the outcome of internal leadership struggles inside the PRI. An increasingly independent Supreme Court bodes well for democracy but is not equivalent to the effective rule of law operating throughout Mexico’s judiciary and justice agencies. A media that encourages voters to perceive it as *the* objective authority on political information (government behavior, public opinion) still remains an electorally unaccountable political force, and through constant scandal exposés, can undermine public confidence in democratic institutions. A mobilized civil society that operates consistently beyond the moderating effects of political parties can pose enormous problems to democratic consolidation and effective economic policy implementation.⁸⁸

Just as the peculiar qualities of Mexico’s classic model influenced the study of Mexican politics, so too, should the evolving patterns of governance discussed in this essay. Exploring these themes and exploiting their complementarity may enhance our understanding of Mexican politics considerably. To the extent these developments have helped

Plattner, Yun-han Chu, and Hung-mao Tien (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 14–33.

85. E. E. Schattschneider, *Party Government* (New York: Rinehart, 1942), 1.

86. On horizontal accountability, see Guillermo O’Donnell, “Horizontal Accountability in New Democracies,” in *The Self-Restraining State: Power and Accountability in New Democracies*, ed. Andreas Schedler, Larry Diamond, and Marc F. Plattner (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999), 29–51.

87. Catalina Smulovitz and Enrique Peruzzotti, “Societal Accountability in Latin America,” *Journal of Democracy* 11 (July 2000): 147–58.

88. See Alison Brysk, “Democratizing Civil Society in Latin America,” *Journal of Democracy* 11 (July 2000): 152–165; and Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*.

Mexico shed its excessive exceptionalism, they facilitate the application of methodologies more often applied elsewhere (i.e., behavioralism, pluralism, institutionalism, rational choice, and quantitative analysis). They also raise the prospects of reintegrating the study of Mexican politics into the broader body of comparative politics research.