THE ELUSIVE DEMOCRACY

Political Parties, Democratic Institutions, and Civil Society in Mexico

Alberto J. Olvera
Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico

Abstract: The Mexican transition to democracy has not been completed in terms of either the destitution of the authoritarian regime or the establishment of a democratic regime, a situation that explains the continuity of authoritarian practices and culture in public life. Not only did the Partido Revolucionario Institucional preserve impressive veto power over constitutional reforms and even small changes in matters of public policy, but also the other two main political parties (Partido Acción Nacional and Partido de la Revolución Democrática) had no alternative democratic projects and reproduced the clientelistic and particularistic political culture of the past; civil society was (and is) both socially and politically weak, and its popular sectors suffered important strategic defeats along the process. Not surprisingly, democratic innovations have been scarce, and the few interesting ones are at risk. The emergence of new social and political actors, as well as new public spaces, is urgent and necessary to counter the paradoxical combination of depoliticization of public life and overpoliticization of democratic institutions the country suffers nowadays, a situation that explains the current simultaneous crisis of representation and governability.

INTRODUCTION

Mexico is living through a time of political uncertainty. The democracy so recently achieved appears weak before the threat of organized crime, powerless before the political strength of the old union and peasant corporate organizations, unable to produce an efficient government, and captured by political parties that make instrumental use of democratic institutions for the sake of their own private interests. Mexico's democracy suffers from the structural political and legal stalemate created by both a constitution and a political system that stand in the way of processes conducive to the consolidation and strengthening of democracy. And if all of the foregoing were not sufficient cause for concern, the country seems condemned to suffer, as a consequence of both political paralysis and economic stagnation, the worsening of the social and political cleavages that have historically characterized its public life.

The problems of democratic institutional consolidation and the weakness of both civil society and the cultures and practices that could push democratic innovation in Mexico require an explanation that considers

Latin American Research Review, Special Issue

both the legal and institutional obstacles that democracy confronts and the cultural processes that allow old values, practices, and methods of politics to survive. Existing literature on transitions to and consolidation of democracy has concentrated mainly on the institutional frameworks of politics and the power games of political elites, ignoring both the normative learning processes democratization entails and the emergence of social actors whose practices and cultures are the only guarantee of long-term, substantive democratization (for a complete theoretical discussion of this issue, see Avritzer 2002; for an analysis of the debate on the construction of democracy in Latin America, see Dagnino, Olvera, and Panfichi 2006). From the vantage point of these theories, transition to democracy in Mexico is a finished process (insofar as free elections have characterized the past two presidential elections), and democratic consolidation has been achieved insofar as it seems that "democracy is the only game in town" (Linz and Stepan 1996, 7). But elections can be carried out continuously without necessarily serving to develop citizenship or improve the quality of democracy.[1] Even if we agree with Whitehead (2002, 6) in understanding democratization as "a long process of social construction," we still have to explain what concept of democracy we are thinking of, what actors we look at, and what processes we analyze when we speak of democratization.

Avritzer (2002) has demonstrated that theories of transition to and consolidation of democracy share a common dual foundation: a sociological vision based on a diagnosis of mass society, which implies an analytical separation between a disordered and anarchic society and a political system whose autonomy from that society is its very condition of stability, and a minimalist concept of democracy defined solely in terms of the legal and free election of political representatives. It is not possible, within this theoretical framework, to explain the limits of actual democracies or to locate the actors and processes that may further the democratization of public life and the transformation of political culture. A more comprehensive concept of democratization requires a broader concept of politics and a better diagnosis of society.

The elite democracy approach shares with the still-hegemonic neoliberal project a concept of politics that defines it as the exclusive terrain of

1. The citizenship argument is from the influential *informe* coordinated by O'Donnell (2004), which correctly locates the weaknesses of citizenship in Latin America but fails to offer an explanation of such a drama. For a critique, see the introduction to Dagnino, Olvera, and Panfichi 2006. The burgeoning literature on the quality of democracy, in its different versions, evaluates the difference between the formal and legal foundations of democratic regimes and their practical shortcomings in terms of citizen rights, institutional performance, and effectiveness of public policies (see O'Donnell, Vargas, and Iazzetta 2004; Cansino and Covarrubias 2007).

political parties and governments. Social movements, protest, and mobilization belong to the sphere of the nonpolitical, being a mere expression of conflicts that must be channeled to the political system to be processed (for a thorough discussion of this point, see Dagnino et al. 2006); if they remain active outside the system, they become dangerous and must be criminalized.[2] Against this reductive paradigm a different concept of politics has emerged in Latin America in the past two decades, a concept whose main feature is its consideration of conflict and contestation as the center of politics. Social movements (and more generally, civil society in its heterogeneity) are political actors in the sense that they try to open up the closed space of electoral politics by calling public attention to new issues and demands; developing forms of social control over governments; and creating public spaces of civil participation in the definition, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. Social, ideological, and cultural conflicts can be recognized, debated, and resolved democratically through deliberation in public spaces (Avritzer 2002). Deliberation implies a process that connects civil and political society in a continuum of practices centered on public space, transparency, and participatory decision making in various areas of public policy. This is the core of what can be labeled the "democratic participatory project" (for a presentation of the concept and the types of political projects that dispute hegemony in Latin America today, see Dagnino et al. 2006). From this vantage point, the main spaces of democratization are the practices and institutions that define the relationships between state and society (for an analysis of concrete experiences of innovation in state-society relationships in Latin America in recent years, see Isunza Vera and Olvera 2006).

This perspective helps us understand what is at stake in processes of democratization: political projects whose carriers are actors situated in both spheres, that is, political and civil society. Against the elite democracy school and the transition and consolidation theories, which radically separate political society from civil society, this vision of democratic construction underscores the continuity of these spheres of social action and the fact that the struggle for hegemony is fought in both civil and political realms.

In this article, I interpret Mexico's contemporary political processes in this light. To do so, in the first section of the article, I briefly analyze the historical foundations of the Mexican authoritarian political regime and the trajectory of its crisis. In the second section, I characterize the nature of the Mexican transition to democracy. In the third section, I concentrate

2. This is a very common expression in Latin America today. Governments criminalize social protest by not recognizing its legitimacy or its legality. For a complete analysis, see Svampa 2008.

on the political processes that have occurred in the past two years, which jeopardize the process of democratic consolidation. In the fourth section, I analyze the composition and the spaces of action of contemporary civil society in an attempt to explain the shortcomings of the societal input to democratic innovation. In the concluding remarks, I suggest the more general elements of an agenda for the deepening of the democratization process.

FOUNDATIONS AND CRISIS OF THE MEXICAN AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

The long-lasting Mexican developmental-authoritarian regime was anchored in a corporatist model in which society was integrated into the state by means of state-controlled social corporations, which were at the same time the main components of the sole official party. Corporatism promoted a culture of clientelism and segmentation in the application of rights.[3] The formal democracy prescribed in the 1917 constitution was in open contradiction with the single-party political system, creating a rupture between legality and legitimacy.[4] The regime's legitimacy was based on its historical mission: to promote substantive justice through state promotion of economic modernization, which encouraged massive state intervention in the economy and official patronage of the business sector.

To guarantee governability, the regime developed informal but effective means of centralization of power in the hands of the president, which in turn required a weak legislative branch. This was achieved by mandating a short (three-year) tenure for federal and state deputies, without reelection. The no-reelection principle applied to all elected posts, such that the political class was in a condition of permanent rotation and uncertainty.[5] As a consequence, in Mexico, elections were held all the time, but their only function was to legalize the periodical renovation of the political class. The judiciary, moreover, was completely subordinated to the president's will.

After 1968, the Mexican authoritarian regime experienced increasing problems of legitimization in the wake of the massive repression of the

3. The workers' corporation (Confederación de Trabajadores de México), the peasants' corporation (Confederación Nacional Campesina), and the popular corporation (Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares) were the backbone of the official party, the PRI.

4. The regime claimed to be the carrier of a mission: the implementation of the project of the Mexican Revolution, seen as a combination of national sovereignty, political inclusion, social justice, and state-led economic development.

5. The no-reelection principle is heavily legitimized by the narrative of the Mexican Revolution: officially, the revolution was an uprising against the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who stayed thirty years in power (1880–1910).

student movement (Volpi 1998). But it was the presidential election of 1988 in which the government carried out massive electoral fraud, which launched the prolonged process of democratic transition. The massive protests of the time fed the emerging opposition parties and forced the regime to accelerate a process of internal reform (Olvera 2003b).[6]

In the period 1988–1994, three fundamental changes took place in Mexico. First, the turn toward neoliberalism that President Carlos Salinas actively strove for led to profound changes in the economy. The neoliberal turn deepened the legitimation crisis of a regime whose historical project was nationalist, antiliberal, and anchored in the promise of substantive social justice. Second, for the first time since the Mexican Revolution, a party system consolidated and electoral politics appeared as a potential means for regime change. Third, several civic-cultural movements spread across the country, creating a civil society centered on the struggle for political rights, democracy, and the rule of law (Olvera 2004).

Neoliberalism meant opening the doors to three great transformations: the integration of the Mexican economy with that of the United States, with Mexico as a subordinate partner; the privatization of public enterprises; and several amendments to the constitution intended to purge it of its antiliberal substance[7]. In the political sphere, liberalization was modest. The federal government retained the ability to recognize (or not) opposition victories, and campaigns were openly unequal, with the official party controlling all resources. Only after complex and prolonged negotiations were some opposition victories accepted. Thus, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), the historical right-wing party that had been since 1938 a sort of testimonial opposition, obtained for the first time in history three governorships and dozens of mayoralties,[8] whereas the recently created left-wing party Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) had to stage enormous popular mobilizations to defend its victories in municipal elections.[9]

6. A modest process of liberalization had begun early on, in the 1970s, when President Luis Echeverría allowed the emergence of independent class-based civil society organizations; in 1977, the first of a long chain of electoral reforms was launched to allow the left to participate in what were still noncompetitive electoral processes, guaranteeing it at least a modest proportional representation.

7. Between 1988 and 1994, 54 constitutional amendments and 225 amendments to secondary or regulatory laws were enacted. It was a virtual process of constitution making.

8. The PAN acted pragmatically, backing all the constitutional reforms promoted by President Salinas.

9. In mid-1989, the PRD was created through an alliance of communists, nationalists, social democrats, and social movement activists, all under the charismatic leadership of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of one of the creators of the modern Mexican state, former president Lázaro Cárdenas. The PRD seemed to offer a vehicle to recover old political identities that the neoliberal policies had deconstructed.

THE MEXICAN TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

Mexico's transition to democracy was a prolonged process of permanent electoral reform characterized by (often-violent) postelectoral conflicts, most of them in the period 1986–1995. The incremental nature of this process allowed opposition parties to become, during the 1990s, national electoral machines with competitive power vis-à-vis the official party. Electoral laws and institutions became the main focus of national debates and political negotiations monopolized by political actors. Up to this point, the Mexican transition had fit the rational-choice model in which the authoritarian elite negotiate with the democratic opposition the path to democratization. But the turning point of the process, the electoral reform of 1996, was the result not of the democratic elite's strength, or of the mobilization of a national pro-democratic civil movement (the pro-democratic movement is analyzed in the next section), but of the regime's fear of both the political radicalization of the popular sectors, desperate in light of the effects of the terrible 1995 economic crisis, and of the recently emerged Zapatista Army of National Liberation (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN) (on the 1995 economic crisis and its political effects, see Olvera 1997; for a suggestive analysis of the role of the EZLN in this process, see Trejo 2004). Trying to channel popular discontent toward the electoral field, President Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) agreed to lift government control over electoral institutions and to grant public financing to political parties to level the ground for political competition.

The 1996 Federal Electoral Law represented a major breakthrough insofar as, for the first time, it gave true legal and political autonomy to the entity in charge of organizing elections, the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, or IFE). The IFE was given a steering committee composed of nine "electoral counselors," all of them politically independent professors or recognized professionals (see Isunza Vera 2006).[10] At the same time, a new social policy was implemented that was designed to deal with extreme poverty, and in this way avert massive protest. The "targeted subsidies" reached poor families by means of the Programa de Educación, Salud y Alimentación (PROGRESA) (see Valencia 2005).

The elections of 1997 were the first to be carried out under the new law, and they resulted in a half transition to democracy. First, elections for the chief of government (an office akin to governor) of the federal district of Mexico City were held for the first time in sixty years, with the winner being Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, leader of the PRD. The left thus conquered a stronghold of utmost importance. Second, for the first time in seventy years, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) lost its absolute ma-

10. The new law authorized public financing of both political parties and electoral campaigns, severely limiting private donations to parties (Crespo 2004).

jority in the Chamber of Deputies. Suddenly, one of the pillars of the old political system, presidential control over the legislative power, was gone. This new situation exposed the legal precariousness of the formerly uncontrolled presidential power in Mexico. Indeed, according to the constitution, the president does not have real veto power over legislation and lacks a legislative capacity of his own (minimal authorization to issue decrees).

His control over the governors, meanwhile, was mostly informal and was diminishing insofar as a growing number of them had become opposition leaders. President Ernesto Zedillo himself had promoted early on, in 1995, a profound reform of the Supreme Court, whose past (and obedient) members were retired and new ones named by the legislative power, giving the Supreme Court for the first time true autonomy from the executive power (Magaloni and Zepeda 2004). The political class came to realize that the so-called absolute presidency in Mexico was of metaconstitutional character. However, President Zedillo still had control of the Senate, and the executive branch still held control of almost 80 percent of both the public sector's revenue and expenditures, an inheritance of the time of almost-absolute centralization of power in the hands of the president. However, step by step, President Zedillo negotiated with PAN the relative decentralization of public spending, a process that led to the empowerment of state governors (Díaz-Cayeros 2004).

In the elections of 2000, the PRI, weakened by the loss of control of electoral institutions and the decentralization of power, lost the presidency for the first time in seventy years. The PAN candidate, Vicente Fox, was elected president. But the democratic breakthrough was not complete even in electoral terms. First of all, local elections were still organized by state electoral councils, most of which governors controlled. Not surprisingly, virtually all the actually competitive local elections up to 2005 ended up being decided by the Federal Electoral Tribunal, an institution created along with IFE in the early 1990s, which slowly gained both autonomy from the government and recognition from the parties. There was a difference, of course, from the era of massive postelectoral protests (1986–1996). Now the parties accepted the established legal procedures, but political conflicts were still expected in almost every local election. The so-called judicialization of electoral politics meant that the informal pact the parties had reached at the federal level did not extend to local politics (for an analysis of party strategies and electoral institutions in the Mexican process of democratization, see Eisenstandt 2004). In a federal republic, such a situation called into question the profundity of the democratic transition.

The composition of the party system led to diverse governability problems. Indeed, the results of the 2000 presidential and congressional elections prolonged the stalemate experienced since 1997: the impossibility

for the president to build a parliamentary majority.[11] The party system's composition was as follows: three major parties (already mentioned), with around 30 percent of the votes each, and three minor parties, with very local and specific clienteles. The Green Party (Partido Verde) was (and is) a family business, a small organization with no background in the environmental movement, whose main merit was the early monopolization in Mexico of the international "green prestige." The Green Party allied with the PAN in the 2000 elections and with the PRI in the 2006 elections. It has also been the PRD's ally in some local elections. This opportunistic policy of alliances has been instrumental for the party to keep its legal recognition and, therefore, its public financing. The Workers' Party (Partido del Trabajo) emerged twenty-five years ago as a small leftist party and later allied with the neoliberal president Carlos Salinas de Gortari. From 1997 on, the PT allied with the PRD consistently, without risking going to national elections alone. It is not clear what its clientele is today (if any). Convergence for Democracy (Convergencia) is an extended-family business based mainly in the state of Veracruz. Convergence picks up local politicians whom the PRI does not support. Since the 2000 elections, Convergence has been the PRD's most trusted ally. It is unclear how many votes these small parties may be able to attract by themselves. The lack of agreements among parties since 1997 has led to the impossibility of building a workable majority. The only viable agreements have been ad hoc and temporary.

Vicente Fox seemed to understand that, to complete the transition, the legal foundations of the authoritarian system had to be removed and the bases of a new democratic governability lain. On February 5, 2001, President Fox called for the drafting of a new constitution. But the very constitution of 1917 prescribes a U.S.-style system called permanent constituent power (*constituyente permanente*), which means that a constitutional amendment needs two-thirds of the votes (i.e., qualified majority) in both chambers and two-thirds approval by state legislatures.[12] This system, under the authoritarian regime, allowed the incumbent president (who controlled both federal and state congresses by means of the PRI) to push forward the constitutional amendments he considered necessary. But in the new political correlation of forces, the construction of a qualified ma-

11. Vicente Fox, the PAN candidate, won the presidential election with 38.23 percent of the valid votes, whereas the PRI's candidate had 36.9 percent, and the PRD's 18.69 percent. The president's party obtained 42.1 percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and the PRI 42.2 percent, the proportions being inverted in the Chamber of Senators. The PRD was left with barely 10 percent of seats in both chambers (Aziz Nassif 2007).

12. This supermajoritarian system of constitutional change has worked in the United States as a guarantee of constitutional stability by making it almost impossible to amend the constitution without a strong national consensus (Eisgruber 2001). But in the authoritarian Mexican regime, it has worked in exactly the opposite way.

jority was almost impossible, given that a PAN-PRD pact was insufficient for that purpose (and unlikely given the ideological divide) and that a PAN-PRI pact was unlikely (after the neoliberal agreement), given that PRI wanted to preserve the old regime's remaining institutions. The political stalemate was further compounded by the results of the 2003 congressional elections, given that the PRI increased its veto power.[13]

The few reformist political actors remained isolated in civil society. Some of them worked together and developed a program called Reform of the State, which involved a vast collection of proposals for reforms in many areas: a French-style system of executive government (a president plus a prime minister), which was considered more adequate for a multiparty political system; the reelection of mayors and deputies; the legalization of independent candidacies to elected posts to circumvent an electoral law that favors the monopoly of politics in the hands of the registered parties; changes in the judicial system to allow for oral trials and to clean up a slow and corrupt system; new rights for women, indigenous peoples, and youths; new rights of access to information and new institutions for the promotion of transparency; a new media law (covering television and radio) to establish effective public regulation of broadcast media; the creation of the Professional Career Service in the public sector; and so on. Lack of ideas was not the problem in those years. The problem was that it was impossible to push the reforms through the political system.

The tragedy of the Mexican transition, which in formal theoretical terms ended after the 2000 election, was twofold. On the one hand, opposition to the authoritarian system was divided between two radically opposite parties, one on the left and one on the right, whose leaders were completely blind to the historical opportunity (and urgent need) to build an alliance to carry out the political transformations required to consolidate democracy and to guarantee governability. On the other hand, the PRI retained veto power over constitutional amendments and the control of multiple authoritarian enclaves that populated both society and politics. The PRI still held the majority of state and municipal governments, as well as control over union and peasant corporations and influence over the rank-and-file bureaucracy. Moreover, the PRI governors and regional caciques were (and are) the carriers and beneficiaries of a dense web of agreements with the de facto powers, that is, the national and regional media, entrepreneurs, and even criminal organizations.

From a rational-choice theory point of view, the transition was too limited in two senses. In terms of the destitution of the authoritarian

13. The PAN lost votes, getting this time only 30.7 percent of the total, whereas the PRI kept its share of 36.6 percent and the PRD obtained 17.6 percent. Without the Fox effect, the PAN returned to its more or less normal share of 30 percent. Absenteeism reached 59 percent, against 36 percent in 2000.

system, the old regime's legal and institutional infrastructure remained untouched, and its political power was enough to survive both as an institution and as a culture in society and in politics (see Przeworski 1992; Cansino 2000). In terms of the establishment of a democratic regime, the process was mostly blocked insofar as it was not possible to change the authoritarian constitution, or most public policies and programs (for a complete theoretical discussion of this issue, see Cansino 2000). The pacts between the federal government as an institution and both the union corporations and most of the de facto powers remained in place by inertia, in a context of increasing fragmentation of political power.[14]

The federal and local elections carried out between 2000 and 2006 had as a central feature the unfolding of a very negative process: as long as all the parties received a share of power (at municipal, state, or federal levels), all of them made use of the resources, programs, and means of influence under their control to create their own clientele networks. Instead of the emergence of the new political practices that the PAN and the PRD had promised to promote, the PRI's methods and culture were generalized. Indeed, the very weakness of the former opposition parties in most states forced them, to be locally competitive, to attract local former PRI leaders, who brought with them networks, resources, and clienteles. Being small and relatively new national parties, the PAN and PRD lacked the capacity to develop their own networks in most regions of the country. They had no option but to receive former PRI cadres, but this practice meant the reproduction of clientelism, electoral manipulation, and pacts with the local de facto powers, precisely the political illnesses the democratic opposition was supposed to cure (for the PRD, see Sánchez 1999, 2001; for the PAN, see Middlebrook 2001). The generalization of the old regime's electoral practices and political culture undermined reconstruction of the links between legality and legitimacy achieved through legal and credible elections.[15]

Given the centrality of elections in the fragile process of democratization, IFE, the benchmark of the democratic transition, should have been protected from partisan and government pressures. However, the parties

14. An unexpected outcome of the partial rupture of the old regime's pacts with some de facto powers was the worsening of an internal war between drug cartels as well as a war of all of them against the state, an ongoing war that has caused thousands of casualties (Astorga 2005).

15. This fact has been demonstrated by the research carried out by civil organizations (Alianza Cívica 2006) and by the UN Development Programme (2006) during the 2006 presidential elections, and by the Council of Social Policy in 2005, which commissioned a poll in four states, governed by different parties, to find out whether the targeted subsidies to poor people (PROGRESA) had been used in clientelistic manipulation (FUNDAR y Berumen 2006). Even though the percentage of likely manipulation was not impressive (6–12 percent), the fact matters much in a context of competitive elections.

managed to achieve precisely the contrary in 2003, with the designation of new electoral counselors at the conclusion of the seven-year term of the previous counselors. The PAN and the PRI had been hit in 2001 by extremely heavy fines imposed by the IFE, as both parties had used illegal financing schemes in the presidential elections of 2000.[16] The parties decided they did not care for such independent, high-profile counselors who did not hesitate to punish parties for their legal transgressions. They opted this time for low-profile, less-open-minded counselors, even though this decision represented the institution's symbolic and political weakening. Even worse, the PRD insisted on the reelection of one of the former counselors and ultimately did not participate in the selection process. As a result, the new counselors not only were low-profile but also carried a problem of legitimacy from the outset of their tenure.

The Mexican transition to democracy, because of the previously mentioned reasons, was limited, in practice, to the political pluralization of the ruling elite. A transition without a pact, as in the Mexican case, implied a high degree of continuity with the past. The absence of relevant changes at the constitutional level blocked the creation of spaces of innovation. The monopolization of politics in parties' hands limited both civil society's influence over (and interaction with) the political system and civil society's capacity to control the state's action (or lack thereof). The fact that none of the main political parties represented a new political culture—but rather the rescue or reproduction of old political projects (PRD); an outdated version of conservative thought (PAN); or even worse, mere political opportunism (PT, Convergence, Green Party)—meant that the new political elite could not be a bearer of democratic innovation.

The only exception to this conservative trend was a legal reform that turned out to be important because of its promotion of elements of a new language of rights. In late 2003, the Chamber of Deputies unanimously approved the Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Public Information. Some states had already approved laws of access to information, taking a lead in the weak area of democratic innovation. To guarantee citizens' right to information, the law created an independent agency, the Federal Institute of Transparency and Access to Information (Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información, or IFAI), the leadership structure of which included five commissioners and was modeled after IFE's directive council (Ackerman 2007).[17] The law has met with much resistance from

16. The PRI had illegally received US$80 million from the oil workers' union. The PAN created a scheme that allowed Vicente Fox to receive almost US$50 million from private donors, circumventing electoral law. The only punishment for these crimes was a multimillion dollar fine to both parties. No one was indicted or legally condemned (Crespo 2004).

17. In the first three years of its application, the new law allowed the presentation of 159,639 petitions of information, of which 88.9 percent were addressed. The process is being replicated in all states (Alonso 2007).

municipal governments, political parties, and the legislative and judicial branches. Nevertheless, important cultural and political changes could take place in the long run if the new law is enforced.

President Fox's tenure was marked by his failure to transform politics as usual but also by economic stagnation. The gross national product (GNP) grew only an average of 2.1 percent per year in a time in which Latin America as a region grew more than 5 percent a year. Incredibly, slow growth coincided with historical increases in currency derived from higher oil prices and seemingly ever-increasing remittances from Mexican migrants in the United States. So the loss of opportunity was not only in the political field but in the economy as well. Fortunately enough, the Mexican recession coincided with rapid expansion in the United States, which meant jobs for up to 3 million Mexican migrants. Without this escape valve, the social crisis provoked by unemployment may have had unpredictable political consequences.

THE 2006 POLITICAL CRISIS: OBSTACLES TO CONSOLIDATION

The 2006 elections of president, federal deputies, and senators complicated the precarious process of democratic consolidation. A profound polarization of political forces marked the election. Early on, the leading presidential hopeful was PRD leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Mexico City's chief of government. In 2005, President Fox, supported by PRI, tried to bring López Obrador to court, allegedly because he had bypassed a Supreme Court order, which, under Mexican law, opened up the legal possibility of a *desafuero,* a process akin to impeachment.[18] The PRI and the PAN considered this an opportunity to get rid of the popular politician. However, this move proved a serious miscalculation, because most citizens saw it as an illegitimate way to force the left's leader out of the presidential competition.

The PRI and the PAN went through painful processes of internal primaries, thus appearing divided shortly before the presidential election. López Obrador was by far the front-running candidate all the way until one month before the election. But he made unbelievable mistakes, and President Fox, powerful entrepreneurs, and a sector of the media launched an impressive campaign against him. The end result was a close election, in which Felipe Calderón, the PAN candidate, won by a margin of 0.5 percent (35.89 percent against López Obrador's 35.31 percent). The PRI suffered a collapse, falling to only 22.26 percent of the votes, having

18. The problem was that the city government had not obeyed a Supreme Court order to pay a stratospheric price for an expropriated urban lot. López Obrador lost in legal terms but managed to win the public-opinion battle and even to force the Supreme Court to revise its own decision, which was certainly unjust.

lost 4.5 million votes relative to the 2000 elections. On the contrary, PRD won 8 million additional votes, a historical 18 percent increase in six years (Aziz Nassif 2007).

López Obrador did not accept the results of the presidential election and did not dispute those of the deputies' and senators' races. Certainly, IFE made several mistakes during the electoral process. There were thousands and thousands of electoral acts (i.e., the documents recording the official results of each polling place) with "mathematical errors" that had to be corrected the day of the official recounting, which always takes place two days after the election. But IFE allowed only a few of those acts to be revised and corrected. The PRD appealed to the Federal Electoral Tribunal, which ordered the revision of 12 percent of the acts. The recount changed only marginally the final results, the arithmetical errors being distributed more or less evenly between parties. Therefore, after almost three months of debate, the Federal Electoral Tribunal decided that the presidential elections of July 2006 were valid and legal.[19]

During this prolonged legal process, the PRD occupied the main streets of Mexico City's center, a strategy that altered the life of many ordinary citizens for weeks. In a massive popular meeting in the city center, dubbed the "National Democratic Convention," López Obrador took oath as "legitimate president" and named a group of high-ranking officials to form the Government in Rebellion (Olvera 2007). The PRD's deputies and senators, as well as those of the PRD's allies, the Workers' Party and Convergence, which had formed the Coalition for Everybody's Welfare (Coalición por el Bien de Todos), decided not to recognize Calderón as president.

The radical and antisystemic character of the PRD's protest backfired. Most people rejected the occupation of the streets. López Obrador's radical discourse, calling President Calderón a puppet, illegitimate, and so on, was considered inappropriate; the calling of "conventions" in which only López Obrador spoke and in which "decisions" were made by acclamation, were considered disturbing demonstrations of the leader's tendencies toward the personalization of politics (Cansino and Covarrubias 2006). The PRD's major strength and its worst weakness were the same: López Obrador. The leader was the only factor of unity in an otherwise fragmented party. But at the same time, the extreme personalization of the left in the person of its leader further deepened the PRD's deinstitutionalization, its lack of a political program, and its isolation from civil society (Olvera 2007).

Once Calderón took office on December 1, 2006, a slow process of normalization began. The coalition's parliamentary groups started to work as

19. José Antonio Crespo (2008), Mexico's leading electoral analyst, considers that the accounting errors in the acts were so great that we cannot possible know the true results.

usual, even without recognizing Calderón, and thus the political process went on.

Once secure in office by mid-2007, Calderón and the PAN started their own internal civil war. Former president Vicente Fox had named the PAN's national leader and most of its deputies and senators. Calderón made it his priority to recover control of his own party. He distributed government posts on the basis of personal—not party—loyalty, with no concern for capacities or experience. The resulting government has been characterized by its dramatic political and operative incapacity. Yet Calderón did in fact achieve control of the PAN in late 2007, when the party's internal election took place. Now the PAN is, as in the time of the PRI, simply the president's party.

The PRI came out of the terrible defeat more divided than ever. Several power centers emerged, including the federal parliamentary coordinators, the governors, the formal party leader, and the union corporations' leaders. Notwithstanding its weakness, the PRI has become the true center of power in the current political situation. Given that the PRD refuses to negotiate with the government, the PRI is the president's only potential ally.

To bring the PRD to the negotiation table, the PAN and the PRI agreed on the change of electoral counselors, especially and immediately IFE's president, Luis Carlos Ugalde, whom the PRD blamed for the electoral "fraud" it had supposedly suffered. To do this, the Federal Electoral Law was amended in September 2007. Under the former law, the counselors were designated for a seven-year period, whereas as of 2007, their terms were reduced to four years. This destitution was illegal and created a negative precedent: parties could change inconvenient electoral counselors at will, thereby destroying the foundation of the electoral institutions' autonomy. Following this example, in the past two years, commissioners of institutes of transparency and access to information and counselors of local electoral institutes have been removed and the legal and operative capacities of the institutions weakened in several states.[20]

A new crisis in the PRD has worsened the current situation. In March 2008, elections were held for president of the party and for all state and even municipal party authorities. The election was riddled with all sorts of fraud.[21] If the PRD as a party had until then preserved some moral authority, this process exhausted it.

20. This is precisely what happened in 2008 in several states: Jalisco, Querétaro, Estado de Mexico, and even Mexico City. This trend has compromised the political autonomy of electoral institutions (Granados Chapa 2008).

21. For five months, there was no legal winner and the dispute was fought in the Federal Electoral Tribunal. Finally, the internal elections were declared invalid.

This unfortunate sequence of events in the past two years has deepened political polarization in Mexico and compromised the very consolidation of democracy. By rejecting IFE's and the Federal Electoral Tribunal's decisions in 2006, the PRD jeopardized the institutions of the democratic transition. By colonizing the institutions that are supposed to guarantee citizens' rights (IFE, IFAI, human rights commissions), all the parties have undermined the few democratic innovations that developed in Mexico during the transition.

In the context of this governability crisis, coupled with economic stagnation, the likeliness of the PRI's restoration grows. But this would not be the return to power of a renovated formerly authoritarian party, democratized by the process of transition, as some Eastern European transitions seem to suggest. The PRI remains the same. The party has come out in defense of the worse governors in Mexico's recent history, and its cadres are the same as before.[22] No generational change, no clear project, no new practices. Such a restoration would thus be a blow to years of democratic struggles.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN THE TIME OF POLITICAL TRANSITION

The politics of civil society was, during the prolonged period of the authoritarian regime's hegemony, a very limited practice. Official corporations engulfed social actors, or they were organized in state-sponsored entrepreneurial or professional organizations. Only associations strongly connected with the private worlds of religion, cultural affinity, sports, and some areas of private business remained autonomous, but these had a reduced public profile. Any conflict between social actors and the different levels of government implied a political confrontation, as there were no available spaces of mediation.

In the 1970s, President Luis Echeverría's politics of relative liberalization, combined with vast social transformations (urbanization, industrialization, demographic boom), opened some room for the creation of peasants', workers', urban dwellers', and entrepreneurs' independent organizations, without this trend menacing official corporations' hegemony. In the rapidly growing system of public universities, a politically radical culture prospered, creating a tradition of leftist activism that supported the activation of the popular sectors. The student movement contained elements of both revolutionary radicalism and pro-democratic orienta-

22. The governor of Puebla ordered the detention in another state of a human rights activist who had denounced one of the governor's friends on charges of child abuse (Cacho 2005). The scandal was enormous, yet the governor remains in office, defended by the PRI. The governor of Oaxaca is an even worse case, as we will see later.

tion. From this matrix there would emerge new cultural forces like the women's, environmental, and human rights movements (Olvera 2003b; Isunza Vera 2001).

As mentioned before, the 1988 elections opened up a new political period. Civil organizations whose leaders did not enter into party politics decided that their main task had to be to create a pro-democratic social movement to struggle for democratization. The actors involved were nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), conservative Catholic groups, and cultural groups with roots in the university system. Entrepreneurs' associations became a battlefield between pro-PAN and pro-PRI tendencies, though most professional associations preserved their private character. Civil society in the 1990s acquired a marked NGO profile, given that NGOs were its most organized and visible sector (Reygadas 1998).

In the early 1990s, pro-democratic movements emerged in several cities as a response to local electoral frauds. These movements were politically different from region to region. Simultaneously, a national alliance of NGOs, Convergencia de Organismos Civiles por la Democracia, was created to collectively resist the government's effort to tax income coming from international and national donations (Reygadas 1998). An agreement between these social actors to oversee the 1994 presidential elections led to the formation of the Civic Alliance (Alianza Cívica, or AC), the first national pro-democratic movement in Mexico's history (Olvera 2003a). This was quite an innovation insofar as it was plural in political and social terms. The movement's leadership was in the hands of professional NGO leaders living in Mexico City, but the movement was overwhelmingly situated in the states, especially those with recent experiences of electoral fraud. In the July 1994 elections, the AC was able to enlist the help of twenty thousand people who watched over almost a fifth of the polls, in the largest operation of this kind in Mexican history (Olvera 2003a). This huge mobilization was fed by both citizens' disposition to use the polls to get rid of the PRI and the fear of a likely violent collapse of the regime.

The sudden emergence of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) on January 1, 1994, in the armed takeover of the city of San Cristóbal de Las Casas, Chiapas, was a shock to the country. For the first time in decades, indigenous peasants dared to confront the state (albeit based on an old-fashioned revolutionary program). The government, which was celebrating the first day of the North American Free Trade Agreement's implementation, at first tried to repress the insurrection, but the killing of some indigenous Zapatistas caused outrage on the part of Mexican citizens and provoked the sudden and spontaneous formation of a national solidarity movement that demanded (of both sides) an end to the hostilities. The Mexican government reacted by suspending the military offensive and offering to negotiate, and the Zapatistas, surprised by

the citizen reaction, agreed to talk with the government, beginning a process of negotiation.[23]

The unprecedented surprise killing of the PRI's presidential candidate in March 1994 added anxiety to the electoral conjuncture. To make the electoral process internationally credible, President Salinas financed United Nations–supervised citizen electoral observation and even agreed to name new and independent electoral counselors to the Federal Electoral Institute. The bet proved effective, insofar as the PRI, against all odds, won both the presidential and the congressional elections. The PRI had an enormous advantage in terms of resources and political machinery, but there was no massive electoral fraud the day of the election, a fact that the electoral observation itself demonstrated (Aguayo 1998). Fear of the unknown, and the effectiveness of the PRI's electoral machinery, explained the unexpected PRI triumph.

The 1994 election marked the emergence of an active, urban, prodemocratic civil society, which acted mainly in two fields of a new political public sphere: on the one hand, electoral observation and the promotion of democratic reforms; on the other hand, the defense of indigenous rights and solidarity with the Zapatista movement. At the same time, other sectors of this modern civil society became more public: the feminist, environmental, and human rights movements, all of which achieved new levels of visibility.

The AC postulated the need for an electoral reform (basically achieved at the federal level in 1996) but also developed projects in three decisive areas: public consultations, access to information and transparency, and civil society agendas (Olvera 2003a). The AC extended its sphere of action from 1995 on in an effort to develop a more comprehensive concept and practice of democracy. It was not a conscious and planned effort, but an intuitive one. Public consultations were a symbolic attempt to press the government and political parties on specific issues that political actors did not consider relevant; the struggle for transparency and access to information was a result of an effort to force the president to publicly explain the use of the public budget; and the civil society agenda was both the end result of a process of NGO unification and an attempt to publicize the NGOs' democratic, rights-oriented agenda.[24]

In the elections of 1997, in which a half transition to democracy was achieved, a process that is natural in all democratic transitions began.

23. Hundreds of articles and books have been written about the EZLN, most of them supporting the movement. The first serious research on the issue is by Estrada (2007).

24. The most successful of the consultations was the Zapatistas', which attracted almost 1 million people to the informal polls in which opinions were collected. The three others ranged from 350,000 to 570,000 voters (Olvera 2003b).

Some civil society leaders were chosen as high-level officials, which led to political confusion about the false problem of the boundaries between civil and political society. The confusion was greater within the ranks of the left, given that the political culture developed therein had always been one of opposition to, struggle against, and resistance to the regime. In the NGO world, antipolitics was a culture as well, but it derived from a moral critique of illegality, corruption, and cynicism as politics' constitutive features (Olvera 2003b).

For the right-wing sectors of civil society, the problems were of a different nature. Conservative Catholic associations, emergent entrepreneurs' associations, and even ultraconservative quasi-clandestine cliques nurtured the PAN's ranks and offered it administrative cadres. But the PAN's ideology did not recognize the contributions of civil society. For the party, the intermediary bodies were important for social integration, the generalization of a conservative morality, and the creation of bonds of solidarity. But those practices were not public—or political. They belonged to the private realm. So, politics could only be a matter of parties (Loaeza 1999). This radical separation between public and private, politics and civil society, was (and is) a feature of right-wing Mexican political thinking.

This and other programmatic limitations were clearly visible in all the PAN's state governments.[25] The PAN was not able to create a new relationship between society and government, not even where it had a congressional majority. However, by the late 1990s, some interesting new laws were issued in some of those states, notably laws of transparency and access to information (Jalisco, Baja California) and the so-called laws of citizen participation, which legalized forms of direct democracy, such as plebiscites, referenda, and popular legal initiatives, this being the case in Jalisco, Morelos, and Baja California (Ramírez 2002).[26]

The only important PRD government, that of Cuauhtémoc Cardenas in Mexico City (1997–2000), tried with limited success to create new models of relationships between civil actors and government. There were some collaborative experiments in local development, health, education, women-oriented, and youth-oriented projects (Sánchez-Mejorada and Álvarez 2003). Advisory councils were created in the areas of social policy, public safety, and women's rights. There were experiments with local participatory planning (Ziccardi 2002). Several former civil society leaders

25. Baja California, from 1989 on (Guillén 1993; Hernández 2000); Jalisco, from 1995 on (Ramírez 1998); Guanajuato, from 1991 on; Chihuahua, 1992–1998 (Aziz 2000), Nuevo León, 1997–2003, Morelos, from 1998 on; Querétaro, from 1998 on (Díaz 2007). For an overall vision up to 1998, see Cornelius, Einsestadt, and Hindley 1999.

26. As a matter of fact, in the past ten years, several state governments of all parties, including the PRD and the PRI, have promoted the legalization of forms of direct democracy, but these legal achievements have barely been applied in practice: the few experiments of this kind have been extremely limited (Ramírez Sáiz 2002; Garduño 2008).

assumed relevant positions in the local government, such as the recently created Women's Institute. The Law for the Promotion of the Activities of Civil Society Organizations was approved in 1999, and the Law of Social Development (2000) created spaces and forms of recognition of civil society actors (Sánchez-Mejorada and Álvarez 2003; Canto 2002). The Law of Citizen Participation (1998) created a system of neighborhood representatives (which failed completely) and legalized forms of direct democracy (Zermeño 2006). But the daily practice of government ran in a different direction, especially in the city's delegations (*delegaciones,* urban quasi-municipal districts). Clientelism, paternalism, and favoritism were the local government's main way of dealing with citizens in daily life, not necessarily because the local officials (*delegados*) wanted it that way, but mainly because most organized social actors wanted special privileges or tried to mediate between government and society, following the political tradition (Álvarez 2005; Zermeño 2006). Ideologically and programmatically, the modern, urban, sociocultural civil society had no influence on the PRD as a party or on popular civil society. A democratic participatory project existed on the fringes of real politics, sometimes in discourse but not in practice (Zermeño 2006).

Poder Ciudadano (Olvera 2003a), the only national social movement pressing for some kind of citizen participation in the 2000 electoral process, disappeared after the elections (surviving only in the state of Jalisco) (see Almeida, Guzmán, Farías, and Martín 2001). The civil elite that carried out this project was soon absorbed by both the new democratic federal government and the government of Mexico City (almost half and half) (for an analysis of this kind of process and its political effects through the lens of trajectories, see Dagnino et al. 2006), but without this representing a translation of political projects from civil society to the government. Only a few leaders remained autonomous, and some of the most notorious had already embarked on the project of creating a new political party, México Posible, which launched in 2000 the presidential candidacy of feminist leader Patricia Mercado. Very soon the party was riddled with internal conflict and was unable to maintain its legal registration.

In the federal government, during the Fox administration, there were some benchmarks in terms of rights and some democratic innovations, all of them promoted by civil society actors: the creation of the federal Women's Institute, following Mexico City's lead (Riquer 2005); the granting of government permission for the first internationally backed monitoring of human rights in Mexico, which produced an important diagnostic on this issue (although no significant action was taken in this area afterward) (Oficina de Alto Comisionado de las Naciones Unidas para los Derechos Humanos en México 2003); the approval in 2003 of the Law to Support the Activities of Civil Society Organizations (as in Mexico City previously), which publicly recognized for the first time that civil society actors pro-

moted the public interest (Tapia 2006). The Federal Law of Transparency and Access to Information was also enacted, and the Federal Institute of Transparency and Access to Information (2003) was created, following the example of Jalisco, Baja California, and other states (Alonso 2007). Finally, some (weak) mechanisms of social accountability were created, specifically in the area of transparency and monitoring of public policies (Hevia 2005; Hevia and Isunza Vera 2006).[27]

These achievements were too limited compared with expectations. Civil society actors assumed that the first democratic government in decades would open up many new public spaces and experiment with citizen participation in grand scale. None of this happened, given both the government's programmatic and political limitations and civil society's lack of concrete proposals and political strength.

López Obrador's government in México City (2000–2006) meant a setback to even the limited experimentation of the previous city government. The pacts with civil society organizations were reduced to local cases and microprojects; the elections of neighborhood representatives were canceled, violating the Citizen Participation Law (Zermeño 2006). The concentration of power in López Obrador's hands was extreme, thus leading to a kind of local presidential regime. López Obrador called for a referendum, which only 6 percent of voters attended, and later put into practice several telephonic public consultations, which were openly manipulated (Olvera 2007). He did not allow the local Institute of Transparency to act effectively and entered into frequent conflicts with Mexico City's ombudsman, the country's best (Monsiváis 2007). Nevertheless, López Obrador managed to characterize himself as the embodiment of the moral opposition to both the PRI and the excesses and frivolity of the Fox government (Krauze 2007). Paradoxically, in some delegations, there were some interesting participatory experiments (Flores 2005).

In the meantime, the Zapatista movement waned. In fact, the EZLN defeated itself by not knowing how to manage its stellar moment in 2001. The EZLN's leaders spoke before the Chamber of Deputies after a prolonged national tour that President Fox had allowed them to carry out, but they did not propose an indigenous rights charter. The parties were left with the responsibility of writing such a charter, having as a reference the San Andrés Agreements, the result of the earlier negotiations with the government (Hernández y Vera 1998). The PRD's senators did not know what terms of the law the EZLN was prepared to accept in a final political agreement, a situation that facilitated the unanimous approval in the Chamber of Deputies of a too-limited indigenous rights law. After that,

27. Political parties negotiated most of these legal and institutional innovations without consultation with civil society actors. The symbolic advance, however, was very important.

the EZLN broke with the PRD and with the political system more generally, considering itself to have been deceived. From then on, the EZLN limited itself to a kind of distance politics, with its leaders disappearing for long periods. The EZLN's leaders did not assume the direction of a national indigenous movement (which was a possibility in 2001), and even worse, they never allowed other leaders or social actors to do so. As a consequence, from 2002 on, the movement lost momentum, visibility, and centrality. The EZLN had proposed a new political culture, based on radical democratic ethical principles and on a critique of politics as usual (in fact, a critique of politics), but had failed to build an effective national indigenous movement, a task that would have required a dose of structure, organization, and leadership, that is, some kind of (democratic) politics.

The EZLN's radical antipolitical politics led to a new experiment in the 2006 electoral conjuncture. Subcommander Marcos, the EZLN's spokesperson and visible leader, launched in late 2005 La Otra Campaña (The Other Campaign), a movement aimed, on the one hand, to denounce the corruption of political parties, and on the other hand, to construct a new field of politics from below by means of a national alliance of hundreds of small radicalized and marginalized local social movements. Marcos toured the country to denounce politicians' corruption and their lack of interest in the real problems of the people. Hundreds of followers showed up in almost one hundred towns (Sandoval 2007). But their discontent was not channeled toward specific forms of collective action. Marcos proposed simply self-organization and the building of local political autonomy.

Most citizens attracted to The Other Campaign abstained from voting in the 2006 elections as a sign of rejecting the entire political class, something that affected López Obrador's chances of winning the election. But The Other Campaign failed in organizational and political terms. The loose network built during the Marcos tour lacked capacity to act collectively and to open up new spaces of politics beyond those of mere public expression. There was no clear political project behind The Other Campaign, as the notion of building parallel and autonomous political power in every community made no sense. Whereas in the liberated areas in Chiapas some small communities could build political autonomy through autonomous municipalities, whose conditions of possibility were their very isolation and a politically constructed homogeneity,[28] in the real world, urban and rural, indigenous or not, it is not possible to get rid of plurality, difference, conflict, and multiple power relations, which have to

28. Estrada (2007) demonstrates that in the Zapatista communities in Chiapas there were (and are) numerous internal conflicts, some of which were in the past resolved by means of the expulsion of those who opposed the EZLN. Sonnleitner (2001) rightly criticizes the "community myth" as an antidemocratic reduction of the complexity and richness of Indian communities' political life. For a different vision, see Harvey 2000.

be processed politically (in a democratic way). Marcos's project was not participatory but antipolitical.

During this process, in the southern state of Oaxaca, a true popular uprising occurred. Starting in May 2006, the local chapter of the teachers' union, Section 22 of the Education Workers National Union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, or SNTE), staged a long protest in demand of higher salaries. On May 26, the union went on strike, occupying the historical center of Oaxaca's capital city. In the meantime, several repressed conflicts came to the fore, and massive demonstrations against Governor Ulises Ruiz were staged in Oaxaca and other cities of the state. The political confrontation escalated. A front against Governor Ruiz formed, calling itself the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (Asamblea Popular de los Pueblos de Oaxaca, or APPO), which united different local popular fronts, social movements, and the teachers' union. The confrontation lasted several months, turning violent after the July 2006 elections, in which the PRI lost for the first time a federal contest in the state (Beas Torres 2007).

The movement occupied and used several radio stations. An alternative press was created, and Oaxaca's city center turned into a political public space. Some neighborhoods put into practice for a brief time a sort of autonomous local government (Martínez 2009). A socially and politically plural front opposed Governor Ruiz's violent authoritarianism, open corruption, and political incapacity. But Ruiz controlled both the local legislature and the judicial power, and the national PRI decided to protect him, given that if he was impeached, the PRD would be sure to win a new election. The PAN and President Fox needed the PRI as a counterweight to López Obrador's challenge. The PRD, meanwhile, was busy with the occupation of Mexico City's streets and the overall postelectoral protest. So there were no available local or national political allies for the APPO movement, which was unable to break its political isolation.

The situation remained the same after President Calderón took office. The new government desperately needed the PRI's support, which came at a cost: the protection of Governor Ruiz. Therefore, against the Oaxacan people's will, the hated governor remained in charge. In the process, a six-month strike left thousands of children without classes; the prolonged occupation of Oaxaca's center destroyed tourism, the city's economic base; and the popular front divided as a result of the radicalization of some of its factions. The economic and human cost of the prolonged mobilization became unbearable for the participants in the movement and for Oaxaca's citizens in general. Then, in mid-2007, APPO's main leaders were detained, dealing a final blow to the movement. The APPO's defeat meant the survival of the country's worst subnational authoritarian regime.

This unfortunate chain of processes weakened an already-weak civil society. The movement of leaders from civil society to political society did

not serve to introduce new public policies or to create innovative public spaces in the democratic regime. Parties rapidly colonized the few legal and institutional successes. The demobilization of the AC in a too-early stage of the democratic consolidation weakened the power and influence of civil society over the political system. The defeat of the radical popular movements further isolated the popular sectors from the middle-class urban components of civil society and from political society.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The Mexican transition was weak in terms of both the destitution of the authoritarian regime and the installation of a democratic regime, a situation that explains the continuity of a nondemocratic culture in public life. The 1917 constitution remains in place, as the PRI retains veto power over constitutional reforms and the other parties do not have a project to transform it; institutions and most public policies are those the last neoliberal PRI government designed; the old corporations still exist and are able to block the modernization of labor law and to resist the slightest internal democratization of unions and peasant organizations; the governors and mayors of all parties reproduce the PRI's practices in the exercise of government; political parties lack alternative political projects and are riddled with internal conflict; and civil society is weak and its popular sectors have suffered important defeats. Democratic innovations are scarce and the few interesting ones are at risk.

The political system is full of perverse incentives. Multiple electoral reforms have not changed the frequency and dispersion of elections, or the no-reelection principle. Political representation is therefore terribly deficient in its formal elements (Pitkin 1967): authorization and accountability, insofar as citizens cannot choose from political alternatives but only from different, politically undistinguishable names; moreover, citizens cannot force elected politicians to be accountable because they do not seek reelection. Permanent electoral competition reduces the time span for interparty negotiation at both local and federal levels. The sheer number of elections leads to multiple intraparty struggles, given the parties' lack of internal institutionalization and the urgent need to come up with hundreds of candidacies all the time. Thus, all the parties are in permanent flux, without clear direction, without control over their cadres, and without capacity to maintain a minimum ideological common ground among their members.

The no-reelection principle and the frequency of elections have several negative consequences: among others are that the legislative and the executive powers cannot develop cycles of professionalization and specialization; elected officials are not accountable to their constituencies; the political class is in the hands of a few governors, the president, and some

de facto powers who manage their careers; and the cost of the electoral system is enormous, which creates dependency on those who finance the campaigns. The problem is compounded by the monopoly of candidacies the parties have given themselves in the electoral law, because civic leaders and politicians without party affiliation—who might otherwise introduce some innovation—cannot compete in electoral processes.

No existing party represents a true break with the past. The PAN is in a way the logical extension of the neoliberal PRI wing, whereas the PRD is the rescuer of the old PRI's national-popular discourse. The three small parties are merely opportunistic.

However, civil society has managed to introduce in the political agenda some democratic innovations. Even in the absence of relevant public spaces—given the monopoly of the public sphere by governments, parties, and private entrepreneurs—some new institutions for the promotion of rights have been created, including institutes of transparency and |access to information, women's institutes, public policy councils, and pro-accountability programs.

But the fact is that political parties have ended up controlling even these modest democratic innovations. They decide who will be the citizen counselors in electoral institutions, which has led to a crisis of legitimacy of such institutions; they decide, without consultation, who will be the commissioners in institutes of transparency and access to information, the directors of women's institutes and of human rights commissions, and even the staff in supposedly autonomous institutions of control and oversight, such as the *contralorías* (comptroller's offices). Moreover, the political elite has managed to select on party lines the members of the multiple councils that exist alongside the public administration. This massive political colonization of the institutions and spaces in which civil society should have some voice and capacity to control the state can be explained only by the weakness of civil society itself and the effective monopolization of politics by political parties.

The political radicalization of the most important popular social movements in recent years has led to their isolation and ultimately to their defeat. Only an alliance of these movements with the scarce democratic civil society and with at least one major political party could have protected them. But there was a problem of political projects. A hegemonic sector of the APPO was close to the EZLN's antipolitical project, and these and other civil society actors felt that a democratic transformation would have to be pushed without alliances with parties or even against them. This is understandable, given that the PRD has been captured by cliques and populist leaders and is ideologically alien to the project of participatory democracy.

An open and profound discussion of the political projects defended by different political, social, and civil actors is necessary to create a consen-

sus regarding the reforms the country needs and the learning processes that should be promoted to change the hegemonic political culture. The creation of new public spaces seems urgent and necessary to counter the paradoxical combination of depoliticization of public life and overpoliticization of democratic institutions from which the country suffers today. Such a project could be possible as a result of a democratic reform of the state, a political process that can be carried out only by an alliance of civil society and political actors. The agenda is clear and known. The problem is that the actors who could carry out this task are not yet in sight.

REFERENCES

Ackerman, John M.
2007 *El Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información Pública: Diseño, desempeño y sociedad civil*. Cuadernos para la Democratización 10, Mexico City: Centro de Investigación y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and Universidad Veracruzana.

Aguayo, Sergio
1998 "Electoral Observation and Electoral Democracy in Mexico." In *Electoral Observation and Democratic Transitions in Latin America*, edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook. La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies, University of California, San Diego.

Alianza Cívica
2006 *Promoción de la participación ciudadana en la observación electoral 2006*. Mexico City: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, Secretaría de Desarrollo Social and Programa de Coinversión Social.

Almeida, Orama José V., María Luisa Guzmán, José Bautista Farías, William A. Martín, eds.
2001 *Una agenda ciudadana en construcción: La experiencia de poder ciudadano Jalisco*. Guadalajara: Acción Ciudadana para la Educación, la Democracia y el Desarrollo (ACCEDDE).

Alonso, José Rubén
2007 "Leyes de transparencia y acceso a la información pública gubernamental locales: La emergencia del derecho a la información." Cuadernos para la Democratización No. 9. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and Universidad Veracruzana.

Astorga, Luis
2005 "El tráfico de drogas, la seguridad y la opción militar." In *Globalización, poderes y seguridad nacional*, edited by Alberto Aziz Nassif and Jorge Alonso Sánchez, 405–431. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and M. A. Porrúa Editores.

Avritzer, Leonardo
2002 *Democracy and the Public Space in Latin America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Aziz Nassif, Alberto
2000 *Los ciclos de la democracia: Gobierno y elecciones en Chihuahua*. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, and M. A. Porrúa Editores.
2007 "El retorno del conflicto: Elecciones y polarización política en México." *Desacatos, Revista de Antropología Social* 24 (May–August): 13–54.

Aziz Nassif, Alberto, and Jorge Alonso, eds.
2005 *El estado mexicano: Herencias y cambios*, 3 vols. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and M. A. Porrúa Editores.

Beas Torres, Carlos
2007 *La batalla por Oaxaca*. Oaxaca: Ediciones Yope Power.

Cacho, Lydia
2005 *Los demonios del Edén: El poder detrás de la pornografía.* Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo.
Cansino, Cesar
2000 *La transición Mexicana 1977–2000.* Mexico City: CEPCOM.
Cansino, Cesar, and Israel Covarrubias, eds.
2006 *Por una democracia de calidad.* Mexico City: CEPCOM.
Canto, Chac Manuel
2002 "Las organizaciones civiles en la transición." In *La sociedad civil ante la transición democrática,* edited by Lucia Álvarez, 53–70. Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés.
Cornelius, Wayne A., Todd A. Eisenstadt, and Jane Hindley
1999 *Subnational Politics and Democratization in México.* San Diego: University of California Press.
Crespo, José Antonio
2004 "Party Competition in Mexico: Evolution and Prospects." In *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico,* edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook, 57–81. London: Institute of Latin American Studies.
2008 *2006: Hablan las actas. Las debilidades de la autoridad electoral mexicana.* Mexico City: Random House Mondadori.
Dagnino, Evelina, Alberto J. Olvera, and Aldo Panfichi, eds.
2006 *La disputa por la construcción democrática en América Latina.* Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica-Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and Universidad Veracruzana.
Díaz-Cayeros, Alberto
2004 "Decentralization, Democratization and Federalization in Mexico." In *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico,* edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook, 198–235. London: Institute of Latin American Studies.
Eisgruber, Christofer
2001 *Constitutional Self-Government.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Estrada, Flores, Arturo
2005 *Local Democracy in Modern México: A Study in Participatory Methods.* York, U.K.: Arena Books.
FUNDAR y Berumen
2006 Monitoreo de Programas Sociales en Contextos Electorales (available at http://www.fundar.org.mx/programassociales/2encuesta.pdf).
Granados Chapa, Miguel Angel
2008 "Institutos electorales en retroceso." *Reforma,* September 14, 16.
Guillén López, Tonatiuh
1993 *Baja California 1989–1992: Alternancia política y transición democrática.* Tijuana: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
Harvey, Neil
2000 *La rebelión de Chiapas: La lucha por la tierra y por la democracia.* Mexico City: Ediciones Era.
Hernández, Luis, and Ramón Vera, eds.
1998 *Acuerdos de San Andrés.* Mexico City: Ediciones Era.
Hernandez Navarro, Luis, and Laura Carlsen
2004 "Indigenous Rights: The Battle for Constitutional Reform in Mexico." In *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico,* edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook, 440–465. London: Institute of Latin American Studies.
Hernández, Tania
2000 *De la oposición al poder: El PAN en Baja California, 1986–2000.* Mexico City: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte.
Hevia de la Jara, Felipe
2005 "La contraloría social mexicana: Participación ciudadana para la rendición de cuentas. Diagnostico actualizado a 2004." Cuadernos para la Democratización No. 2. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and Universidad Veracruzana.

Isunza Vera, Ernesto
2001 *Las tramas del alba.* Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and M. A. Porrúa Editores.
Isunza Vera, Ernesto, and Alberto J. Olvera
2006 *Democratización, rendición de cuentas y sociedad civil: Participación ciudadana y control social.* Mexico City: Universidad Veracruzana, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, and M. A. Porrúa Editores.
Isunza Vera, Ernesto, and Felipe Hevia de la Jara
2006 "Relaciones sociedad civil-estado en México: Un ensayo de interpretación." Cuadernos para la Democratización No. 4. Mexico City: Universidad Veracruzana—Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social.
Krauze, Enrique
2007 "Izquierda y liberalismo: Un desencuentro." In *Izquierda, democracia y crisis política en México,* edited by Roger Bartra, 17–27. Mexico City: Friedrich Ebert and Nuevo Horizonte.
Linz, Juan, and Alfred Stepan
1996 *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
Loaeza, Soledad
1999 *El Partido Acción Nacional: La larga marcha, 1939–1994. Oposición leal y partido de protesta.* Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
Magaloni, Beatriz, y Guillermo Zepeda
2004 "Democratization, Judicial and Law Enforcement Institutions and the Rule of Law in Mexico." In *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico,* edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook, 168–197. London, Institute of Latin American Studies.
Martínez, Víctor Raúl, ed.
2009 *La APPO: Rebelión o movimiento social?* Oaxaca: Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales de la Universidad Autónoma Benito Juárez de Oaxaca.
Middlebrook, Kevin J.
2001 *Party Politics and the Struggle for Democracy in México: National and State-Level Analyses of the Partido Acción Nacional.* San Diego: University of California, San Diego.
Monsiváis, Alejandro
2007 "El desempeño de los órganos públicos autónomos y la rendición de cuentas en México: Un análisis de la Comisión de Derechos Humanos del Distrito Federal (1993–2006)." Cuadernos para la Democratización No. 6. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and Universidad Veracruzana.
O'Donnell, Guillermo, ed.
2004 *Informe sobre la Democracia en América Latina.* Buenos Aires: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo.
O'Donnell, Guillermo, Jorge Vargas, and Osvaldo Iazzetta, eds.
2007 *The Quality of Democracy.* South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.
Olvera, Alberto J.
1997 "De la economía a la política: El carácter terminal de la crisis general de 1995". In *El impacto de la crisis financiera en México,* edited by Angélica Gutiérrez, 27–45. Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana.
2003a "Gobierno democrático, sociedad civil y participación ciudadana en la ciudad de México, 1997–2000." In *Sociedad civil, esfera pública y democratización en América Latina,* edited by Alberto J. Olvera, 205–283. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica and Universidad Veracruzana.
2003b "Las tendencias generales de desarrollo de la sociedad civil en México." In *Sociedad civil, esfera pública y democratización en América Latina,* edited by Alberto J. Olvera, 39–69. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica and Universidad Veracruzana.
2004 "Civil Society in Mexico at Century's End." In *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico,* edited by Kevin J. Middlebrook, 403–439. London: Institute of Latin American Studies.

2007 "Resistencia política y sociedad civil: El PRD, López Obrador y los límites programáticos y políticos de la izquierda mexicana." In *México ante los retos del futuro,* edited by Gustavo Vega, 175–200. Mexico City: COLMEX.

Pitkin, Hanna
1967 *The Concept of Representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarollo
2006 "Diagnostico sobre la vulnerabilidad político-electoral de los programas sociales federales." Mexico City: Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarollo.

Przeworski, Adam
1992 "The Games of Transition." In *Issues on Democratic Consolidation,* edited by Scott Mainwaring, Guillermo O'Donnell, and Samuel Valenzuela, 105–151. South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press.

Ramírez Sáiz, Juan Manuel
2002 *Democracia directa: La primera iniciativa popular de ley en México.* Mexico City: ITESO.

Ramírez Sáiz, Juan Manuel, ed.
1998 *¿Cómo gobiernan Guadalajara? Demandas ciudadanas y respuestas de los ayuntamientos.* Guadalajara: Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente.

Riquer, Florinda
2005 "Del movimiento feminista a la institución: ¿Una historia que aún no puede contarse?" Cuadernos de la Sociedad Civil No. 10. Jalapa: Universidad Veracruzana.

Reygadas, Rafael
1998 *Abriendo veredas, iniciativas públicas y sociales de las redes de organizaciones civiles.* Mexico City: Convergencia de Organismos Civiles por la Democracia.

Rodríguez, Victoria E., and Peter M. Ward
2005 *Opposition Government in México.* Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press.

Saavedra, Marco
2007 *La comunidad armada rebelde y el EZLN.* Mexico City: COLMEX.

Sánchez, Marco Aurelio
1997 *PRD: La élite en crisis.* Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés Editores.
2001 *PRD: El rostro y la máscara.* Mexico City: Centro de Estudios en Política Comparada.

Sánchez-Mejorada, Cristina, y Lucía Álvarez
2003 "Gobierno democrático, sociedad civil y participación ciudadana en la Ciudad de México, 1997–2000." In *Sociedad civil, esfera pública y democratización en México,* edited by Alberto J. Olvera, 205–283. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica and Universidad Veracruzana.

Sandoval, Rafael
2007 "La Otra Campaña: Subjetividad Emergente." In *Los movimientos sociales y el poder,* edited by Jorge Regalado, 227–277. Guadalajara: La Casa del Mago, Cuadernos de la Resistencia.

Svampa, María Stella
2008 *Cambio de época: Movimientos sociales y poder político.* Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI-Consejo Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales.

Tapia, Mónica
2004 "Retos institucionales del marco legal y finaciamiento a las organizaciones de la sociedad civil en México." In *Mecanismos para evaluar la participación ciudadana.* Mexico City: CESOP.

Trejo, Guillermo
2004 "Las calles, las montañas y las urnas (notas sobre la participación social y la transición a la democracia)." In *Los retos de la democracia: Estado de derecho, corrupción y sociedad civil,* edited by Alberto Ortega Venzor et al., 519–531. Mexico City: IBERGOP and Editorial Porrúa.

Valencia, Enrique
2005 "La reemergencia de las políticas sociales en México." In *El Estado Mexicano: Herencias y cambios, Vol. II,* edited by Aziz Nassif and Jorge Alonso Sánchez, 103–130. Mexico City: Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social and M. A. Porrúa Editores.

Volpi, Jorge
1998 *La imaginación y el poder, una historia intelectual de 1968.* Mexico City: Ediciones Era.
Whitehead, Laurence
2002 *Democratization: Theory and Experience.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Zermeño, Sergio
2006 "La participación ciudadana en el Distrito Federal." In *Democracia y exclusión, caminos encontrados en la ciudad de México,* edited by Lucía Álvarez, Carlos San Juan, and Cristina Sánchez-Mejorada. Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Plaza y Valdés Editores.
Ziccardi, Alicia, ed.
2002 *Planeación participativa en el espacio local.* Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

GONZALO DELAMAZA es chileno, sociólogo por la Universidad Católica de Chile y Diploma de Estudios de Profundización (DEA) en la Escuela de Altos Estudios en Ciencias Sociales, París. Actualmente, cursa estudios de doctorado en la Universidad de Leiden, Holanda. Investigador de la Universidad de Los Lagos en Santiago, donde dirige el Programa Ciudadanía y Gestión Pública. Ha sido profesor visitante en el Centro de Estudios Latinoamericanos de Harvard University. Entre sus libros están *Juventud chilena: Razones y subversiones* (coeditor, 1985); *Tan lejos tan cerca: Políticas públicas y sociedad civil en Chile* (2005) y *Gestión municipal participativa: Construyendo democracia cotidiana* (coeditor, 2009).

JORGE HERNÁNDEZ DÍAZ es sociólogo por la Universidad Autónoma "Benito Juárez" de Oaxaca (UABJO); maestro en antropología por la Universidad de Brasila, Brasil; y doctor en antropología por la Universidad de Connecticut. Es investigador titular del Instituto de Investigaciones Sociológicas de la UABJO. Entre sus publicaciones más recientes se encuentran *Reclamos de la identidad: La formación de las organizaciones indígenas en Oaxaca* (Miguel A. Porrúa, 2000), *Grupos indígenas en Oaxaca* (Plaza y Valdés, 2006), *Ciudadanías diferenciadas en un estado multicultural: Los usos y costumbres en Oaxaca* (Siglo XXI, 2007), *Dilemas de la institución municipal: Una incursión en la experiencia oaxaqueña* (Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 2007).

ROBERTO LASERNA is an economist and regional planner. He earned his Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley (1995). He has taught at Princeton University; Universidad del Pacífico, Lima; and San Simón, Cochabamba. He is currently a researcher in the Centro de Estudios de la Realidad Económica y Social (CERES) and president of Fundación Milenio. Among his books are *20 (Mis)conceptions on Coca and Cocaine* (1995), *La democracia en el ch'enko* (2004), and *Ciudades y pobreza* (2005). His most recent book is *La trampa del rentismo* (2006), written in cooperation with José M. Gordillo and Jorge Komadina.

PATRICIO NAVIA is Master Teacher of Global Cultures in the Liberal Studies Program and adjunct assistant professor in the Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies at New York University. He is also a researcher and associate professor of political science at the Universidad Diego Portales in Chile. He has published scholarly articles and book chapters on democratization, electoral rules, and democratic institutions in Latin America. As founding director of the Observatorio Electoral at the Universidad Diego Portales, he edited *El genoma electoral chileno: Dibujando el mapa genético de las preferencias políticas en Chile* (with Mauricio Morales and Renato Briceño, 2009). He also authored *El discolo: Conversaciones con Marco Enríquez-Ominami* (2009), *Que gane el más mejor: Mérito y competencia en el Chile de hoy* (with Eduardo Engel, 2006), and *Las grandes alamedas: El Chile post Pinochet* (2004). He is a columnist at *La Tercera* newspaper and *Poder* magazine in Chile and regularly writes for the Infolatam Web site.

ALBERTO J. OLVERA is professor-researcher in the Instituto de Investigaciones Histórico-Sociales, Universidad Veracruzana, Mexico (of which he

was director from 2001 to 2006). He has worked as invited professor at universities in Brazil, Colombia, the United States, and Mexico. He has written extensively on civil society, citizen participation, and democratic innovation in Mexico and Latin America, and he is the author of numerous book chapters and articles published in Mexico, Brazil, Colombia, Argentina, Spain, and the United States. He is editor and coauthor of several books, among others *La sociedad civil: De la teoría a la realidad* (Colegio de Mexico, 1999); *Sociedad civil, espacio público y democratización en América Latina: Mexico* (Fondo de Cultura Económica and Universidad Veracruzana, 2003); *La disputa por la construcción democrática en América Latina* (with Evelina Dagnino and Aldo Panfichi; Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2006); *Democratización, rendición de cuentas y sociedad civil* (with Ernesto Isunza; Vera Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Universidad Veracruzana, and .M.A. Porrúa, 2006); *La democracia frustrada: Limitaciones institucionales y colonización política de las instituciones garantes de derechos y de participación ciudadana en México* (Fondo de Cultura Económica, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, Universidad Veracruzana, 2010).

ADRIANA ORTIZ-ORTEGA fungió como rectora de la Universidad Politécnica de Guerrero entre agosto 2008 a agosto de 2009. Actualmente funge como asesora académica del Secretario General de la Universidad Autonóma de México. Doctora en ciencias políticas por Yale University, Ortiz-Ortega es miembro de la Asamblea Consultiva del Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación (CONAPRED) y especialista en temas de género. Ortiz-Ortega cuenta con postdoctorado de la Universidad de Rutgers, y es maestra en economía política por la Universidad de Essex, Inglaterra. Ortiz-Ortega ha publicado más de treinta capítulos de libro y artículos científicos. Su libro más reciente es *Poder, mujeres y liderazgos: Una guía en contextos globalizados,* que salió en 2009, publicado por el Instituto de las Mujeres de Nuevo León. Otros libros de la autora son *Los derechos reproductivos de las mujeres: Un debate sobre justicia social en México* (Population Council y Editorial EDAMEX, 1998). Asimismo pronto publicará *Aportaciones en el campo de la salud, los derechos y las sexualidades en México.* En 2003 recibió la beca Soros de la Universidad de Columbia como reconocimiento a sus publicaciones en el terreno del aborto, los derechos y la salud sexual y reproductiva. Adicionalmente, ha recibido premios y distinciones de la American Association of University Women, las Fundaciones Ford y MacArthur, Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT), el Overseas Research Council de Inglaterra y el Center for Advanced Study (Wissenschaftskolleg) de Berlín.

NANCY POSTERO is associate professor of anthropology at the University of California, San Diego. Previously a human rights attorney and a radio journalist, she received her Ph.D. from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2001. Her work focuses on the intersection of multiculturalism, neoliberalism, and citizenship. She is the author of numerous articles on these topics, as well as *Now We Are Citizens: Indigenous Politics in Postmulticultural*