

FROM TRANSITION TO CONSOLIDATION: MEXICO'S LONG ROAD TO DEMOCRACY

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Este artículo analiza la transición y la incipiente consolidación democrática en México durante los últimos 23 años. Se argumenta que a pesar que la era de alternancia política en México sólo se instauró con el reciente proceso electoral, la transición del país se completó hace tres años. Así, la victoria de Vicente Fox en las elecciones presidenciales debiera ser vista como un hito en la consolidación de la democracia en México. El autor sostiene que la sinergia creada por los cambios en la legislación electoral, así como el aumento de credibilidad del proceso electoral, hicieron posible la transición mexicana incluso antes que las últimas elecciones presidenciales se llevaran a cabo. Además argumenta que la convergencia de actores domésticos e internacionales fue instrumental para la aceleración de la prolongada transición a la democracia, y que el caso mexicano ilustra una tendencia más amplia: la importancia creciente en regímenes transicionales de la interacción entre actores domésticos y extranjeros.

The electoral process, already considered by many as “foundational” in Mexico’s *transition* to democracy, took place only last year –and yet the country has been embarked in the process of democratic *consolidation* for three years now. The July 2, 2000 elections are certainly foundational in that they inaugurate the era of political alternation. Nevertheless, the events that arguably put an end to the transition took place in 1997. At that point not only were the national electoral processes competitive, they were also fully legitimate– as the performance of the newly independent Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and the institutionalization of international observers showed at the time. Thus, I argue that Vicente Fox was able to defeat a party that had been in power (under different names) for over 70 years because Mexico’s transition to democracy had already taken place. The apparent overlap of what are usually thought of as distinct phases in the passage from authoritarian to democratic regimes (transition and consolidation) is certainly an oddity. But it should not come as a big surprise to students of Mexican politics since, as Jesús Silva-Herzog has noted, “[f]or comparative political science, the Mexican ornithorhynchus has been what that animal with features of both reptile and mammal has represented for taxonomists” (Silva-Herzog: 30).

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In this paper I document Mexico's transition to and incipient consolidation of democracy in the last 23 years. I maintain that the synergy created by the changes in the electoral legislation (manufactured by political actors), and the increased credibility of the electoral process (achieved in part by the involvement of non-governmental organizations), made Mexico's democratic transition possible—even before the last presidential elections took place.¹ Although I focus on the electoral process, I do not fall in the “electoralist fallacy” that posits that free elections are a sufficient condition for a democratic regime. As will become clear in the discussion below, the kind of democratic regime I am talking about implies certain political freedoms. For instance, the struggle for free elections in Mexico has been based upon the idea of full citizenship rights for all, and upon the end of certain anti-democratic corporatist practices.²

Furthermore, since institutionalized free elections are the main component of a democratic regime, I take the progress made toward their realization to be indicative of the status of the transitional process (O'Donnell 1999: 16-7). The electoral question was at the center of the electoral debate in Mexico because without a transparent (i.e., democratic) electoral legislation, the fraudulent practices that prevented citizens from freely expressing their will and, consequently, the suppression of the underlying complexity and plurality of the Mexican society, was bound to continue (Woldenberg 1999). The electoral institutions in post-revolutionary Mexico evolved in tandem with the authoritarian regime, and consequently could not accommodate the demands of a differentiated society. Democratizing the electoral legislation thus amounted to the gradual dismantling of the authoritarian regime. As Terry Karl and Phillippe Schmitter have pointed out, “Electoral laws, once adopted, encourage some interests to enter the partisan political arena and discourage others” (Karl and Schmitter 1991: 273). That is the reason why the electoral question was fundamental in Mexico's long transition to democracy.

But the electoral arena is not coterminous with the rules that govern it. The rules themselves must enjoy a certain level of credibility among both political actors and citizens in general in order for the electoral process to become a legitimate arena of political contestation. Unlike pacts among political elites, the legitimacy of the electoral arena requires the active involvement of a mobilized sector of society willing to act both as a granter and conveyor of legitimacy to the electoral process. That is, although it is by now commonplace to say that the transition to democratic regimes does not necessarily require democrats (Linz and Stepan: 147), the construction of an ample basis of legitimacy for the fluid rules of the transitional game seems to require collective action imbued with democratic aspirations.

1 Following Phillippe Schmitter and Terry Karl, by a democratic regime I mean “a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives (Schmitter and Karl 1991: 78).” I will thus be working with a circumscribed definition of democracy, one that falls between the Schumpeterian idea of democracy as a merely procedural arrangement (Schumpeter 1975: 269), and more comprehensive definitions that deal explicitly with political freedoms (O'Donnell 1999). This intermediate definition is warranted for my purposes in this paper, since it emphasizes the importance of free elections—and it was precisely the construction of a competitive electoral system that was at the center of the Mexican transition in the last three decades.

2 For an account that focuses on the citizenship aspect of the transitional process see Fox 1994. As he rightly notes, “the right to associational autonomy does not simply follow from national electoral change” (Fox 1994: 155).

I argue that in the Mexican case not only was there a gap between elite-created electoral rules and their widespread support, but also that the convergence of domestic and international actors on a normative element—the right to democratic governance—has been instrumental in the momentum gained by the country's long transition to democracy (Franck 1992). The Mexican case thus illustrates a wider trend: the increased importance that the interaction of domestic and foreign actors has acquired recently in transitional regimes.

Methodologically, I draw on two political science sub-fields and their respective units of analysis. The fields are comparative politics and international relations; the units of analysis are, on the one hand, the domestic structure and, more specifically, the political institutions of the country I deal with, and, on the other, an emergent norm of the international system. My aim is to build a bridge between these two sub-fields in order to contend that that divide between them is, at least on certain issue-areas, not as clear-cut as it is usually assumed. As I show in this article, the boundary between domestic and international affairs is a porous and unstable one, always subject to contestation. Accordingly, the division of labor within our discipline should always be considered more an epistemological than ontological convenience.

I develop my argument as follows: in the first section I discuss the nature of the post-revolutionary Mexican regime, which is my baseline. In the second, I look at the evolution of the electoral configuration since 1977, focusing on two aspects: electoral legislation, and design of representative institutions. In the third section I trace the emergence of election monitoring in Mexico, in order to call attention to its contribution to the increased legitimacy of electoral processes in the country. In the fourth section I briefly summarize the findings, and make some remarks on the current political scenario in Mexico, as well as on the role played by international actors in the transition.

1. A PECULIAR AUTHORITARIAN REGIME

The 20th century Mexican political regime was a *rara avis*.³ The product of the 1910 revolution, the Mexican regime became relatively soon an inclusive and stable one. As Miguel Centeno has noted, “in a pattern to be envied by almost all Latin American countries, the Mexican state by 1940 appeared to have resolved the problems of succession, praetorianism, governmental autonomy, and mass legitimacy” (Centeno 1994: 8). Especially relevant is the fact that, unlike most Latin American countries, the Mexican military has played a marginal role in Mexican politics since about 1940 (Ibid.: 47). Furthermore, the inclusionary nature of the post-revolutionary regime, which made tolerable a high degree of contention, also distinguished the Mexican political regime from

3 Following Guillermo O'Donnell, by regime I understand “the patterns, formal and informal, and explicit or implicit, that determine the channels of access to principal governmental positions, the characteristics of the actors who are admitted and excluded from such access, and the resources and strategies that they are allowed to use for gaining access (O'Donnell 1991: 16).” For the conceptual distinction between “regime” and “state” in the discussion of transitions to democracy, see Fishman 1990. Fishman's point that “the individuals and collectivities that fill the central roles in states are not always the same as those who do so in regimes” is particularly relevant for the Mexican case because, as he notes, “The military, a central institution in any state, is quite marginal in some authoritarian regimes” (Fishman 1990: 429)—a point that I make below about the Mexican regime. In this and the next section I draw on Santa Cruz 1998.

others in Latin America (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1999: 17). That is why Laurence Whitehead called the Mexican regime "*sui generis*" (Whitehead 1994), and Guillermo O'Donnell referred to it as "a type by itself." (O'Donnell 1989: 5). Its unique features notwithstanding, the postrevolutionary Mexican regime was rightly characterized, along with many others in Latin America and Southern Europe in the 1970s, as authoritarian.⁴

In this section I discuss three interrelated factors that made the Mexican authoritarian regime unique: 1) the concentration of power in the president; 2) the extent to which the regime permeated various arenas of civil and political societies (Córdova 1988), and 3) its party system. Since the PRI was the political space where the three factors converged, it will figure prominently in my discussion below.

Unlike most political parties, the PRI was not created in order to compete for power. It was established in 1929 as the National Revolutionary Party (PNR) by a group of victorious revolutionary leaders in order for them to remain in power by peaceful means. As Plutarco Elias Calles, the party's founder, was to put it in his 1928 state of the union address, the challenge for the "revolutionary family" was to "unite in order to nominate one candidate." The victors of the revolution were conscious that if they wanted to preserve the newly established regime, they had to solve the fundamental problem of any polity: the transmission of power. As Blanca Heredia has put it, "members of the revolutionary family agreed to share, rather than to compete for, political power" (Heredia 1994: 269).

But this sharing of power was a peculiar one. Perhaps the most intriguing (and effective) feature of this agreement was the one that emerged after Calles failed to establish himself as the "topmost leader" of the (institutionalized) revolution by appointing his successors in the presidency. It was then tacitly agreed that the president in turn would have the (unwritten) right to choose his successor by making him the party's candidate. In this way, like Minerva's owl, the president reached the zenith of his power at the moment when he designated his successor (since the president cannot be reelected). This process, known as *dedazo*, would be religiously repeated every six years, in the fifth year of each administration.⁵ In this way, the "circulation of the elites" (Mosca 1960) was guaranteed in the Mexican regime.

But the *dedazo* was just the most conspicuous practice of what made it possible: the immense concentration of power in the presidency. As Lorenzo Meyer has observed, "the ample constitutional powers conferred to the president, together with the great meta-constitutional power given to him by the almost absolute control of the state party, inevitably lead to the emergence of what could be called the anti-constitutional power of the presidency" (Meyer 1996: 23). This "imperial presidency" was at the core both of the stability and non-democratic nature of the Mexican regime (Krauze 1997).

4 According to Juan Linz's classic definition, "Authoritarian regimes are political systems with limited, not responsible political pluralism: without elaborate and guiding ideology (but with distinctive mentalities); without extensive nor intensive political mobilization (except at some points in their development); and in which a leader (or occasionally a small group) exercises power within formally ill-defined limits but actually quite predictable ones (Linz 1964)."

5 For an in-depth analysis of how this process worked in the last four administrations see Castañeda 1999.

Thus, for instance, the control of the president over the PRI was directly linked to the second factor I mentioned before: the extent to which the regime permeated various arenas of civil and political societies. To begin with, there was a historically tight relationship between the PRI and the state. A telling anecdote in this respect is that, a few years after the party was founded, Mexican President Portes Gil issued an executive order by which all federal employees were required to contribute financially to the it (Proceso 1993: 10). The PRI traditionally operated as a government department, both in terms of the resources it received from the government and of its formal leader, who in practical terms had the status of cabinet member.⁶ As Lorenzo Meyer and Hector Aguilar Camín put it, "The iron-clad presidential control of the party in power –the PRI– and its extreme dependence on governmental resources were such that it was not really a political party but rather part of the structure of the federal government" (Aguilar Camín and Meyer 1993: 239).

The PRI thus evolved not as an institution in which government leaders are formed, but rather as an instrument of the leaders in power. In post-revolutionary Mexico, the role of the political parties in providing political leaders was played by the public administration (Suárez 1991). Thus, as Centeno notes, "Grass-roots experience within the party (for example, local elections or work with sector organizations) was never a major factor in determining access to the cabinet" (Centeno 1994: 123). Mirroring the Mexican regime, the PRI was thus a *"sui generis party"* (Serrano 1996: 449).

But the distinguishing feature of the PRI was not only its relationship to the state. The party was also intimately linked to what in other contexts would be considered as civil organizations through a series of corporatist arrangements. The origins of this relationship go back to the Lázaro Cárdenas administration (1934-1940), when the party not only changed its name (from National Revolutionary Party to Party of the Mexican Revolution) but also its structure. It adopted an explicitly corporatist organization by means of which several societal groups were integrated into the party.⁷

Thus, for instance, entire industrial unions, peasant organizations, and small businesses associations were incorporated *en masse* into the different "sectors" of the party.⁸ This kind of corporatism falls within what Philippe C. Schmitter, calls "state corporatism" (Schmitter 1974). That is, it was a non-democratic arrangement intended to subordinate the legitimate interests of its constituencies through repression and concessions (Casar 1989). In fact, Schmitter mentions the Mexican case as an example of state corporatism.(Schmitter 1974: 104).⁹ In this way, the post-revolutionary regime permeated both civil and political societies.

6 To mention a recent example: during the Zedillo administration, the PRI had six party leaders, four of which have come directly from the cabinet. To that we should add the last change of party leadership before the 2000 elections, in which a former cabinet member (and arguably the closest Zedillo associate) became secretary general in order to be in charge of the presidential campaign. See de Uriarte 1999, and Delgado 1999.

7 Philippe C. Schmitter's classic definition of corporatism as "a system of interest representation in which the constituent units are organized into a limited number of singular, compulsory, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered and functionally differentiated categories, recognized or licensed (if not created) by the state and granted a deliberate representational monopoly within their respective categories in exchange for observing certain controls on their selection of leaders and articulation of demands and supports," fits the Mexican case. Schmitter 1974: 94.

8 The corporatist structure of the party was originally formed by four "sectors": peasants, workers, the military, and the popular. The military sector was eliminated during the Avila Camacho administration (1940-1946). On the history of the PRI see Garrido 1982.

9 For a discussion of corporatism in the Latin American context see Collier 1995. Collier notes that "The most striking case of persistence of corporative relationships is certainly Mexico" (Collier 1995: 155).

Similarly, the predominance of the PRI –as demonstrated by the fact that it stayed in power for over seventy years– points to the its ascendance on the nature of the third factor I mentioned above: the party system. In this regard, although multi-party elections have been regularly held in Mexico since the 1930s, until recently these electoral processes had not been competitive. Instead, the electoral process generally served to open a space of negotiation among the different factions of the governing coalition, with the outcome of the bargain reflected in the distribution of candidacies in the hegemonic-party. As Héctor Aguilar Camín has noted, what was important in the transfer of power every six years was not who was elected in the elections, but who was going to be PRI's candidate (Aguilar Camín 1999).

It is thus clear that the political regime that emerged from the revolution did not have –until very recently, as I argue below– an institutionalized party system. An institutionalized party system, as Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully define it, “implies stability in interparty competition, the existence of parties that have somewhat stable roots in society, acceptance of parties and elections as the legitimate institutions that determine who governs, and party organizations with reasonably stable rules and structures” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 1). Instead, the Mexican regime was a hegemonic party system in which opposition parties were legal but the electoral institutions prevented them from acceding to power (Diamond, Linz, and Lipset 1990). Unlike dominant party systems, such as those of Sweden and Japan, hegemonic party systems lack competitive electoral processes (Pempel 1990).¹⁰

According to Mainwaring and Scully, still in the first half of the 1990s Mexico had a “hegemonic party system in transition” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 1). The attainment of this stage was the story of a long process of severing the PRI's illegal ties to both the state and civil society, and of the creation of electoral institutions suitable for a multiparty system.¹¹ Only when this was fully realized the party-system rid itself of its transitional character, and the regime lost both its *sui generis* character and its authoritarian nature.

2. THE ELECTORAL CONFIGURATION

Mexico's transition to democracy took over two decades. It was not a transition by “Pact” (as in Spain), nor by “Reform” (as in Czechoslovakia).¹² The Mexican transition falls somewhere between those two categories. So in this respect the Mexican experience is not a textbook case either. The 1977 electoral reform is generally considered as the starting point of the transition process.

10 In hegemonic party systems, according to Sartori, “Other parties are permitted to exist, but as second class, licensed parties; for they are not permitted to compete with the hegemonic party in antagonistic terms and on equal basis” (Sartori 1976: 230).

11 Similarly, Mainwaring and Scully note that in order for Mexico to become democratic “some aspects of party politics– especially the intertwining of hegemonic party and state– must be desinstitutionalized” (Mainwaring and Scully 1995: 20).

12 Karl and Schmitter define a transition by Pact as the one that takes place “when elites agree upon a multilateral compromise among themselves,” whereas one by Reform occurs “when masses mobilize from below and impose a compromised outcome without resorting to violence (Karl and Schmitter 1991:275)”.

In order to show how the construction of a more democratic electoral system evolved in Mexico since the late 1970s, in what follows I refer to some of the most salient features of each the reforms undertaken since 1977. I briefly focus on two aspects when talking about each of them: electoral rules, and integration of representative institutions. None of these two areas is intrinsically more important than the other. Their relative weight has varied from reform to reform, depending on the political environment of the time. I elaborate more on the 1996 reform not only because it has been the most far reaching one, but also because it is arguably the most relevant one, because it establishes the current legislation. Since it is not my purpose to chronicle the political events that led to each reform, I only mention them briefly.

The 1977 electoral reform was a top-down reform, aimed at restoring the eroding legitimacy of the regime. After the 1968 student movement, the emergence of guerrilla groups in the early seventies, the economic crisis that followed the first peso devaluation in the last days of the Echeverría administration (1970-1976), and the sorry spectacle of being the only candidate in the 1976 presidential elections, president Jose López Portillo (1976-1982) decided to take swift action to improve the political environment. The electoral reform was pivotal in his project; it was mainly the work of an illustrious politician of the liberal wing of the PRI, Interior Minister Jesús Reyes Heróles. The proposed legislation was expeditiously passed by a Congress overwhelmingly controlled by the PRI.

The bill enacted was known as the Federal Law on Political Organizations and Electoral Processes (LFOPPE). Its most evident aim was to widen the political spectrum. Before it was passed, the party system was composed simply of the PRI, the conservative National Action Party (PAN), and two small satellite parties. The 1977 reform changed the electoral landscape by making it legal for some political organizations, such as the long-proscribed Communist Party, to participate in elections; it also eased the requirements needed to qualify as a political party, thus creating an incentive for more political forces to join the electoral game.

Not only the electoral rules, but also the composition of representative institutions were altered as a result of what could be considered the founding electoral reform. As the PRI's hegemony would have made it practically impossible for any opposition group to win a relative majority seat in congress, the LFOPPE created 100 seats (in addition to the 300 seats from the electoral districts) to be allocated according to proportional representation. In this way, groups formerly excluded from electoral process and parties that had already been taking part of it would have an opportunity to use congress as a sounding board.¹³

But some key elements of the political legislation remained unchanged. The PRI's relationship to state and society, such as the use of public funds and forced affiliations of union members, remained intact. The federal government remained in charge of organizing the elections (as it had been since 1947). Furthermore, the composition of the electoral body meant that the government and its

13 The 1963 electoral reform had already prefigured some of these changes by introducing what were called "party representatives." These were elected to the lower house based on the percentage of votes obtained by their party (which needed to be at least 2.5 points).

party were still in control of the electoral processes.¹⁴ Nevertheless, at least in one aspect the 1977 electoral reform might be considered a success: whereas in 1976 there were only four political parties, by 1979 there existed seven. For the 1982 presidential elections, the dismal scene of a lonely candidate campaigning across the country did not take place again: there were seven presidential candidates, supported by nine political parties.

Five years after this foundational electoral reform, the political environment had become much more heated. The opposition parties began to create an anti-PRI bloc in the Federal Electoral Commission (CFE). The severe economic crisis of 1982, which meant the end of a short-lived oil-based boom, and put Mexico at the brink of declaring a moratorium on its foreign debt, caused popular discontent. Thus, under the administration of Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), the electoral legislation was amended again in 1987. This reform introduced the principle of proportionality in the CFE. The PRI was thus assigned 16 representatives, which gave it more votes on the electoral body than all other parties together. This change in the electoral rules was a big step backward in the transition process. Through it, the regime was trying to regain control of the process of reform. But there were some positive changes also. For the first time, party financing was legislated. The reform created an electoral tribunal to deal with electoral violations. The composition of the lower house of Congress was modified again, with its proportional component increased to 200 seats. Nevertheless, a "governability clause" was introduced, by means of which the party with the largest proportion of votes would automatically be granted 51 percent of the seats in the lower house.¹⁵

The same year this reform was passed, the worst political crisis within the "revolutionary family" took place. A faction headed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the son of former president Lázaro Cárdenas, split from the PRI. Cárdenas then became the presidential candidate of several opposition parties, including the successor of the Communist Party, and the satellite parties that had traditionally supported the PRI's candidate. Amidst widespread protests of electoral fraud, Cárdenas officially received 33.5 percent of the votes. This was an unprecedented situation. Never had the government conceded that an opposition candidate had won such a high percentage of the popular suffrage—and never had a PRI candidate officially obtained such a low percentage of votes: 50.7. Thus, with the 1988 elections, as Blanca Heredia has put it, "Conflict among political elites overflowed the bounds of party and state and spilled into the electoral sphere" (Heredia 1994: 280).

This volatile political environment was the context in which, at his inaugural speech, Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) proposed a *National Accord for the Enhancement of our Democratic Life*. Its stated objectives were "to improve the electoral processes, bring up to date the party system, and modernize the practices of the political actors, beginning with the government itself." Another electoral reform was thus negotiated. Significantly, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), the political party formed by Cárdenas, played a marginal role in the 1990 electoral reform. This

14 The Federal Electoral Commission included the Interior Minister as its president, one representative from each house of Congress (controlled by the PRI), one from each registered party, and a notary public, appointed by the government.

15 For a discussion of the governability clause see Molinar 1996 (especially, pp. 144-145).

was due largely to the open animosity between the PRI and the PRD. The PAN thus became the privileged interlocutor with the government and its party.¹⁶

As a result of the new legislation, the IFE was born as an autonomous body (i.e., no longer within the Interior Ministry), replacing the CFE. Six magistrate counselors, proposed by the president and approved by qualified majority in Congress, became members of its governing body, the General Council. In addition to the counselors, the IFE was composed of the Interior Minister, two representatives from each house, and a variable number of representatives per party, depending on the votes obtained in the previous election. The electoral rules were changed so that parties could not propose common candidates, as had occurred in 1988 with Cárdenas' candidacy. On the other hand, the composition of the lower house was partially improved by establishing a floor of 35 percent before the governability clause could go into effect.

The 1990 reform did not cool the heated political environment. The 1991 midterm elections, conducted according to the new electoral law, produced not fully reliable results.¹⁷ –The PRI obtained 320 seats in the lower chamber, the PAN 89, and the PRD 41. As Roderic Ai Camp put it at the time, “[t]he group that is currently in power has not evolved to the point at which it would be willing to respect the results of the elections, which is the definitional point of a true democracy.”¹⁸ Shortly after the elections, the PAN denounced the “non-fulfillment” of Salinas’ above-mentioned offer of a national accord for the enhancement of the democratic life. Its fallout with the Salinas administration notwithstanding, the PAN emerged from the 1991 elections as a more consolidated party, and retained its condition of being the main interlocutor of the government (Serrano 1996: 451).

In his 1992 state of the union address, Salinas accepted that new electoral legislation would be necessary. The result was the 1993 electoral reform, which was certainly a disappointing one. It reinforced the governability clause, by taking the percentage of votes obtained in the districts as the basis upon which to assign the number of representatives under the principle of proportionality, up to 60 percent. Thus, in the 1994 elections, the PRI was given 60 percent of the seats in the lower house, even though it obtained only 50.2 percent of the congressional vote.

Still another electoral reform was made necessary before the 1994 presidential elections took place. On January first 1994, a guerrilla uprising broke out in the southern state of Chiapas.¹⁹ As the rebel movement gained popular sympathy throughout the country, the Salinas administration was led not only to initiate peace talks with the guerrillas, but also to offer a new electoral reform. That same month of the uprising, the main political forces and the government signed what came to be known as the Barcelona Agreements, in which they agreed to change the structure of the

16 The PRD voted against the 1990 electoral reform.

17 Significantly, though, the PRI-dominated LV Congress was one of the most active in Mexico's history. It amended more than 34 constitutional articles, which covered areas ranging from the privatization of the banking system and the autonomy of the central bank, to land tenure, the establishment of the Human Rights Commission, and the relationship between the state and the churches—in addition, of course, to electoral legislation. Francisco Gil Villegas argues that this congress, turned itself *de facto* into a constituent assembly (Gil Villegas: 159).

18 *Este País* 1993: 10.

19 For the genesis and development of the Chiapas uprising see de la Grange and Rico 1998.

electoral bodies at the federal, state, and district level. Since the political campaigns had already started, this meant that the rules would be changed in the middle of the game.

The rationale for such an extemporaneous initiative was clear: the government wanted to restore the legitimacy of non-violent means for political contestation. The electoral process needed to be presented as the only viable and acceptable way of gaining power. Thus, in only four months a new electoral law was negotiated and passed. The main changes it introduced had to do with the credibility of the electoral institutions. Thus, the IFE was to be formed by six "citizens counselors" (approved by consensus among the PRI, PAN, and PRD), two representatives from each house of Congress, and the Interior Minister. By virtue of the 1994 reform, political parties no longer had a vote in the electoral body—only a voice. Furthermore, although the Interior Minister remained the president of the top electoral body, he was no longer allowed to vote to break a tie. The electoral institution was thus becoming a different body, one in which independent citizens played a cardinal role.

In what is widely recognized as the cleanest electoral process in post-revolutionary Mexico, the PRI's candidate, Ernesto Zedillo, was elected president in 1994 with 48.8 percent of the votes; Diego Fernández of the PAN received 25.9 percent, and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the PRD came third with 16.6 percent. The lower chamber of the LVI Congress was thus composed by 300 representatives of the PRI, 119 from the PAN, 71 from the PRD, and ten from the Worker's Party.²⁰

Nevertheless, there was still a widespread perception that the electoral process had not been fair.²¹ In an analogous manner to Salinas' term, Ernesto Zedillo suggested in his inaugural address the need for yet another electoral reform. Less than two months into his administration, and less than a month after the devaluation of the peso had sparked the worst economic crisis in post-revolutionary Mexico, a document called "Commitments for a National Political Accord" was signed by the political parties and the government.

Nineteen months later, all political parties represented in Congress passed by consensus an initiative amending the constitution in order to make possible the most far-reaching electoral reform ever. Among the most significant changes of this amendment was the exclusion of the executive branch of government from the IFE. Thus, the IFE's governing body, the General Council, would be formed by eight "citizen counselors", a president (who would be also an independent citizen approved by two-thirds vote of the lower house), and two representatives from the legislative power, one from each house.²²

The 1996 constitutional amendments also introduced the principle of proportional representation in the Senate, and placed the Federal Electoral Tribunal within the Supreme Court. They established as well that no party could have more than 300 of the 500 seats in the lower house, and that the level of over-representation should not exceed eight percentage points.²³ Significantly, the

20 For an assessment of the 1994 elections see Scherlen 1998, and Camp 1994.

21 President Zedillo himself would later recognize that the 1994 electoral process had been clean but not fair.

22 This means that the state continued to be represented in the electoral institution through the representative of Congress; it was only the executive branch which was expelled from it.

23 That is, if a party gets 41 percent of the votes, it will not have more than 49 percent of the seats in the lower house, unless it obtains that difference by winning relative majority districts.

amendments established that for the first time in the 1997 elections the mayor of Mexico City would be chosen by the people, rather than appointed by the president. Especially significant was the amendment establishing that party membership must be a free and private decision of citizens, thus making massive affiliations illegal. This reform was intended to sever the PRI's illegitimate links to society through its corporatist structure.

Public financing for political parties was also included in the constitutional amendments. These stipulate that public funds should predominate over private ones in party finances. The specificities of these guidelines were left to the secondary legislation, which does not require a qualified majority. Four months after the constitutional amendments that would make the electoral legislation possible were passed by consensus, the electoral law was passed only by the PRI. The reason was that the governing party had broken previous agreements dealing with campaign spending limits it had reached with both the PAN and the PRD (*Jornada* 1996). Although some positive elements in the financial realm were included, such as a requirement for the parties to present an annual financial report, regulation of private contributions, and campaign spending limits, some serious problems exist in the new legislation. To begin with, exceeding campaign spending limits is not considered a criminal violation.

PRI negotiators wanted abundant public funds for the electoral race. The agreement established that 30 percent of the public funding would be distributed equally among the registered political parties, and the remaining 70 percent according to the percentage of votes obtained by each party in the previous election for the lower house. Most importantly, the PRI was able to push its demand for an extremely high amount of money be distributed among the parties: more than 280 million dollars in 1997. This meant that the resources the PRI was entitled to receive from the government rose from 179.9 pesos in 1994 to 873.3 million pesos in 1997, an increase of 385 percent.²⁴ As one of the PRI's chief negotiators acknowledged, "In the financing issue, it was the party's life itself that was at stake" (*Proceso* 1996: 16).

The mid-term elections that took place on 6 July 1997 completely transformed the political landscape of Mexico. With 39 percent of the congressional vote, for the first time the PRI no longer held an absolute majority in the lower house: it only had 239 of the 500 seats. The PAN obtained 121 seats, the PRD 125, and the recently created Green Party 8. Thus, by making a congressional alliance, these three parties were able to effectively prevent the PRI from taking control of the government bodies of the lower chamber, and to vote as a bloc on some issues.²⁵ With the principle of proportional representation introduced in the Senate, the opposition came to control 53 of its 128 seats. Furthermore, Cárdenas won the election in Mexico City with more than 40 percent of the votes, and his party (the PRD) 38 of the 40 plurality-winner seats in the city council.

24 It is important to point out that all parties funding increased on the same proportion—not only the PRI's. Nevertheless, both the PAN and the PRD gave back an important proportion of the resources allotted to them.

25 The most recent example of how the opposition exercised its majority was its refusal to grant permission to president Zedillo to leave the country in order to meet with US president William Clinton. *Jornada* 1999.

It has been widely recognized that the IFE organized its first elections as an autonomous body successfully. About 85 percent of those polled in the days after the 1997 elections expressed their satisfaction with the performance of the IFE.²⁶ Furthermore, cleaner electoral processes have effectively served to bring out Mexico's plurality. Whereas in 1982 the PRI controlled 91 percent of elected positions (including the presidency, seats in congress, governorships, local congresses, and mayoralties), in 1997 it controlled only 54 percent (Casar and Raphael in Begne 1999). Thus, as John Bailey and Arturo Valenzuela pointed out shortly after the mid-term elections, Mexico, in contrast to the transitional regimes of Eastern and Central Europe and South American countries such as Brazil and Peru, is experiencing a democratic opening that features fairly coherent parties. The three largest parties –the PRI, the PAN, and the PRD– combined for more than 80 percent of the vote in July 1997, heralding the emergence of a 'three-plus' party system that will serve as a stabilizer of political expression (Bailey and Valenzuela 1997: 47).

This emergent plurality and consolidation was corroborated in the 2000 elections. Not only did Vicente Fox, as the candidate of the "Alianza por el Cambio", formed by his PAN and the Green Party, win the presidency with only a plurality of the votes (42.5 percent, vs. 36.1 percent of the PRI's candidate Francisco Labastida, and 16.6 percent of Cárdenas, running as the candidate of the "Alianza por México", formed by the PRD and four small parties), but also no party emerged as the absolute winner in Congress either. In the lower chamber the PRI ended up with 211 seats, the PAN with 207, the PRD with 50, and the Green Party with 17 (the other four small parties that supported Cárdenas won 15 seats all together). In the Senate, the PRI received 59 seats, the PAN 45, the PRD 17, and the Green Party five (two of the small parties that joined the PRD got one seat each).

Similarly, the PAN won the two governorships that were at play on July 2 (Guanajuato and Morelos), and the PRD kept Mexico City (although it lost the majority in the legislative body). Furthermore, in the first post-July elections, those of August 20 in the state of Chiapas, a broad coalition that included both the PAN and the PRD defeated the PRI. Thus, 23 years after the electoral reform that marked the beginning of Mexico's transition to democracy was passed, the PRI governs only 44.4 of the population living in the 2422 municipalities in the country, and it retains 19 of the 20 state governments (and, as I noted before, since 1997 is opposition in the Federal District). The political map that emerged from the last electoral process confirms Bailey and Valenzuela's optimistic remarks on Mexico's "three-plus" party system. Yet, as I will argue in the next section, the good fortune of the emergent party system has been predicated upon the credibility of the electoral processes—an achievement in which domestic and foreign non-state and non-partisan actors played an important role.

26 "Prueba Superada," *Voz y Voto* 1997: 35.

3. THE CRAFTING OF ELECTORAL CREDIBILITY

In this section I go back in the narrative in order to introduce two kinds of factors that do not figure prominently in the literature on democratic transitions: domestic and international election monitors.²⁷ Their appearance in the scene in the early 1990s suggests that it was at this point that electoral processes were beginning to become meaningful for certain groups in civil society—that is why they were worth monitoring. I argue that by involving thousands of non-partisan observers, election monitoring not only might have had some real effect on the cleanliness of the elections (something which is hard to show), but more importantly, granted them credibility. Thus, for instance, a prominent Mexican diplomat argued that the 1994 UN mission in Mexico concentrated its efforts in “contributing to the solution of the central problem of the elections in Mexico, its credibility (quoted in Benitez 1996: 561).” It is for this reason that I said before that non-state and non-partisan actors have played an important role in the good fortune of the emergent party system.

The emergence of election monitoring in Mexico is the result of the convergence of domestic and international factors. On the international front, it is worth noting that Mexico had traditionally been (at least until 1993) one of the staunchest supporters in the international arena of the principle of non-intervention in domestic affairs. For instance, when in 1992 the Organization of American States (OAS) General Assembly voted to amend the Charter so that a government which overthrows a democratic regime can be suspended from the organization, Mexico cast the only dissenting vote (Millet 1994: 14). As late as December 1993, in UN resolution 48/124, Mexico expressed its opposition to foreign election monitors (Benitez 1996: 541).

The Mexican government's concern with foreign observation was a sign of the times. Significantly, it was a non-issue only a decade before. The emergence of election monitoring in the early 1990s is part and parcel of the post-Cold War international politics.²⁸ Although the OAS had pioneered election monitoring in the continent since the early 1960s, the practice remained sporadic until the bipolar world came to an end. As Heraldo Muñoz has put it, “Only the passing of the Cold War left Latin American governments more favorably disposed to act, through regional and subregional institutions... to defend and promote representative democracy (Muñoz 1998: 14).” Thus, the OAS created in 1991 the Democratic Promotion Unit. Since its establishment, the Unit has undertaken 37 electoral monitoring missions in over half of the OAS member states (OAS). Following the steps of the regional organization, in 1992 the United Nations (UN) created the Electoral Assistance Unit, which since that time has been involved in more than 100 electoral processes world-wide.²⁹ It is thus clear that election monitoring has become a global practice in the post-Cold War world.

But how did this global practice come to take place in Mexico? As I said before, election monitoring in Mexico is the result of the convergence of domestic and international factors. Thus, for instance, in 1988, when election monitoring was not yet a prominent issue in the international arena, it was

27 In reconstructing the emergence of electoral monitoring in Mexico I rely primarily on three sources: Aguayo 1995, Alcocer 1997, and Benitez 1996.

28 On this topic see Franck 1992; Padilla and Houppert 1993; Pellicer 1995; Pastor 1998; and Middlebrook 1998.

29 The Unit was upgraded to Division in 1994. The data come from the Division's web page.

not an issue in Mexico's presidential election either. But after the uproar caused by the fraudulent elections of that year, which was an implicit endorsement of the electoral path, involvement in electoral issues entered the agenda of domestic non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Significantly, though, it was only after the head of the non-governmental Mexican Human Rights Commission, Sergio Aguayo, was invited by an international NGO to observe the 1990 Haitian elections, that the idea of domestically monitoring Mexican elections emerged. As Aguayo puts it: "Monitoring by outside observers seemed to me an effective way to promote fair elections, but I found that exercise expensive, and not enough in any case to consolidate a culture of democracy. The logical alternative for Mexico was electoral observation by the country's own citizens" (Aguayo 1995: 158).

Although Aguayo's preference for domestic observers was more a pragmatic than a principled issue, the mere possibility of external monitoring aroused suspicion in the Mexican government. In October 1990, Mexico's Foreign Minister declared that the country's problems regarding democracy would need to be solved by Mexicans "and not by importing specialized observers from Atlanta or Milwaukee who tell us how to do things" (quoted in Chabat 1991: 14). As Jorge Chabat put it at the time, "it would seem as though the Mexican states's [sic] traditional concept of sovereignty has found its last refuge in the ballot box" (ibid.: 17).

Thus, with a grant from Canada's International Center for Human Rights and Democratic Development, the Academy was able to put a 300-observer team for the 18 August 1991 elections in San Luis Potosí. This was the first case of election monitoring in Mexico. Between then and 1993, a the Academy and other NGOs monitored 15 local elections. Significantly, domestic observers had no legally recognized rights to engage in their activities.

As the practice of domestic monitoring began to spread, the issues of inviting foreign observers reappeared more forcefully. Some NGOs invited them without government consent to watch local elections. This was the case of some Canadian legislators who observed the 1992 elections in the states of Michoacán and Morelos. The pressure on the Salinas administration to reconsider its position on foreign monitors began to increase. But the Mexican government remained firm. Although the 1993 electoral reform for the first time legislated on the issue of domestic observers, recognizing them as legitimate actors in the electoral process, foreign observers remained explicitly banned from it.³⁰ In October 1993, on the eve of the formal start of the 1994 presidential race, Foreign Minister Fernando Solana declared: "the Mexican government will not allow foreign observers in the electoral processes, only Mexican ones. The most fundamental exercise of sovereignty are the elections, which should always be in the hands of the citizens of Mexico" (quoted in Benítez 1996: 539). Nevertheless, once again foreign observers defied the government's policy. The Carter Center, for instance, sent a mission when the presidential campaigns started.

It was in this context of increased domestic and international pressure that the Mexican government, at the UN General Assembly, in December 1993, reiterated its opposition to the participation of foreigners in the electoral processes of other countries. But a few weeks later, when the peasant

30 But even the legislation on domestic observers imposed such strict regulations on them, that it apparently violated constitutional guarantees (see Alcocer 1997: 693).

uprising in Chiapas broke out, the political environment in Mexico changed so dramatically that, as I pointed out before, the government was forced to make concessions in several fronts. In a move closely related to the last-minute electoral reform discussed above, the Salinas administration ended up changing its position on election monitoring.

Reflecting the symbiosis between the PRI and the government in Mexico, it was in a partisan act that a hint about the eventual governmental reversal on foreign monitors came about. On March 6, 17 days before he was assassinated, the PRI's presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio said in a massive rally: "The election belongs to society and consequently it can not be a closed matter. Its transparency demands the participation of observers, and does not exclude that ample testimony might be given about it, both from our citizens and from international visitors" (Ibid.: 539). Soon after Colosio's speech, Mexico's ambassador to the UN declared that accepting foreign observers "does not mean abandonment of sovereignty, but declaring that there is nothing to hide and that electoral processes in Mexico can be observed freely."³¹ Taking advantage of the new environment, the PRD pushed in its negotiations with the government on electoral reform for the presence of foreign monitors.

By that time, the work of domestic NGOs to mount a massive observation campaign was well under way. Civic Alliance/Observation 1994, an umbrella organization that came to unite more than 300 NGOs, was legally constituted in April 1994. Earlier that month, several of its founding organizations had approached the National Endowment for Democracy to request funds. In the months leading to elections, the Mexican Academy for Human Rights and the Washington Office on Latin America elaborated a report on the forthcoming elections, calling their joint effort "one symbol of the growing desire of civil society in Mexico and the United States to promote more democratic and humane societies" (Dresser 1995: 330).

At that point the Salinas administration was aware that there was nothing it could do to prevent the presence of foreign observers. As a former adviser to the then Interior Minister put it: "It soon became clear that contrary to the Mexican government sentiment's, international observers would be in Mexico, despite the absence of supervision by Mexican electoral authorities or rules governing their behavior. The risk of diplomatic incidents resulting from the activities of international observers could not be ignored. For example, what would happen if the Carter Center decided to send an observation mission and it was expelled from Mexico under Article 33 of the Constitution?" (Alcocer 1997: 699).³² Finally, the 1994 changes in the electoral legislation expanded the rights of domestic observers, but left the (non)status of foreign observers unchanged.

Thus, in April the Mexican government informally invited the UN to provide assistance for the forthcoming elections.³³ Significantly, the Mexican request to the UN omitted the issue of foreign observers. The Mexican government wanted the UN to play an indirect role in the monitoring of election. Its task was confined to two areas: to elaborate an analysis of the political and legal conditions of the electoral process, and to provide technical assistance to national NGOs engaged in election monitoring. The UN provided technical and financial assistance (between 2.5 and 3

31 Ibid, p. 547.

32 Article 33 states that "Foreigners will not be allowed, in any way, to interfere in domestic political matters."

33 It formalized this invitation as late as May 10.

million dollars) to 16 organizations, of which the most conspicuous was Civic Alliance. Although both kinds of assistance provided by the UN proved valuable, its significance was of a different order. As Sergio Aguayo, one of the most prominent leaders of Civic Alliance put it, "the greatest contribution of the outside world was the recognition that it granted to the Civic Alliance as a legitimate representative of the Mexican society" (Aguayo 1995: 162). UN recognition went not only to Civic Alliance, but also, as I said above, to other 15 election-watching organizations. Thus, with their function recognized in the amended electoral laws, and with the support of the UN, 81,620 domestic observers registered at the IFE for the presidential elections.

Finally, facing increasing external pressure from several NGOs, the Mexican government decided to allow the presence of "foreign visitors" (the euphemism used to refer to foreign observers).³⁴ According to Aguayo, the Salinas administration "came to realize that it needed a certificate of 'good democratic conduct' from the outside world" (Aguayo 1995: 162). Thus, on 23 June 1994 the IFE issued the guidelines for international visitors. Significantly, a former advisor to the Minister of the Interior has recognized that the existence of the UN Electoral Assistance Division played an instrumental role in the government's acceptance of "international visitors" (Alcocer 1997: 702). In the absence of an UN institution, the Mexican government would have been unlikely to accept international monitors. It is important to note that although the Mexican government ended up inviting more than 200 organizations involved with election monitoring, the "international visitors" that went to Mexico did not formally represent their organizations; they were accredited individually at the IFE. In the end, 777 foreign observers registered with the IFE attended the electoral process. Significantly, more than half of them were affiliated with Civic Alliance.

Thus, when election day arrived on 21 August, a vast network of domestic and foreign observers stretched across the country. Although the elections were far from perfect, they represented a huge step forward in the road toward democratic normality. Significantly, voter turnout on election day was much higher than expected: almost 76 percent—the highest voter turnout in at least 15 years (CEPN). This was clearly a sign that the voters thought the electoral path was worth pursuing. Furthermore, this time there was no widespread post-election mobilization, as had happened six years before.

Civic Alliance's report on the electoral process, although circumspect, demonstrates that the electoral process in which Ernesto Zedillo came out as the winner was a significant improvement over the ones that resulted in the official victory of Carlos Salinas. The conclusion of the report stated: "The quantitative impact of [the documented irregularities] cannot be calculated with certainty and precision. It is likely that they did not alter the outcome of the presidential election. Nevertheless, they did alter the correlation of the national forces at the national, regional, and local levels, the composition of the Chamber of Deputies, and possibly that of the Senate, generating an overall impression of governing-party predominance" (cited in Aguayo 1995: 166). Similarly, a report from the joint delegation of the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs and the International Republican Institute concluded that, despite some irregularities on the electoral process, it could

34 The weekly *Proceso* reported that, in the weeks previous to the house of representatives' vote on the North America Free Trade Agreement, former secretary of state Warren Christopher suggested to his Mexican counterpart Fernando Solana the acceptance of foreign observers in order to gain some votes for the approval of the agreement (*Proceso* 1994: 11).

be considered legitimate.³⁵ Thus, as Jorge Carpizo, Interior Minister when the elections took place, wrote: “the global results of the observation in 1994 are very positive and it contributed towards the credibility of the elections” (cited in Alcocer 1997: 698).

Although the watershed for electoral observation in Mexico was undoubtedly the 1994 electoral process, election monitoring also figured prominently in the congressional mid-term elections, and particularly in the inaugural (and concurrent) election for the mayorship of Mexico city in 1997. In order to monitor the electoral process in the capital city, Civic Alliance obtained a \$300,000 grant from the European Union. Significantly, after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs tried to prevent the funds from reaching the NGO, the IFE was able to assert its autonomy and jurisdiction over electoral observation, thus allowing the funds to flow (Proud'home 1998: 153-4). In any case, the overall 1997 electoral process involved 391 accredited “international visitors” from 33 countries, and 24,291 national observers registered at the IFE (Parraguez 1997 27).

As I noted in the previous section, the first test of the new IFE in organizing elections proved to be a success. As Delal Baer has argued, since the 1997 elections, Mexico's transition to democracy did not revolve anymore around the regime's capacity to hold free elections (Baer 1997: 141). Thus, for instance, only two complaints were filed with the Federal Electoral Tribunal, and none of the losing candidates complained about serious electoral irregularities after voting day. Lending credibility to this process were again a myriad of national and international observers. Over 30,000 national and 862 international observers distributed all over the country monitored the elections. Leading the Carter Center mission, Carter himself met in the days previous to the elections with the three main contenders to the presidency, who assured him that they would respect the election results.³⁶ Global Exchange and the Washington Office for Latin America, among other international NGOs, engaged in a comprehensive effort to monitor the presidential elections.³⁷ In this way, domestic and international observers helped the nascent credibility of the electoral processes gain momentum.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The building of an autonomous apparatus that not only is capable of organizing competitive electoral processes, but that is also legitimate was central in the transition. Whereas members of political society were the main actors in building the institutional edifice required for competitive elections, actors in civil society were instrumental in bringing credibility to them. But also if we look at the two more informal arrangements that served as pillars of Mexico's authoritarian regime, the concentration of power in the executive, and the ties between the PRI and the government and society, we can see that they also were dramatically altered in the last twenty-three years.

This becomes clear if we briefly consider the six components of Meyer's above mentioned notion about the “anti-constitutional power of the presidency”. These had to do with a) discretionary

35 For a summary of the final reports of other national and international monitoring groups see Pérez Fernandez del Castillo 1994.

36 *Publico* 7/02/2000, p. 18.

37 See www.globalexchange.org/campaigns.mexico/ and www.wola.org.

transfer of resources from the government to the PRI during the electoral race; b) control of the legislative power; c) censorship in the media; d) control of the Judicial Power; e) control of governors and mayors; f) immunity granted to public officers who engage in illegal use of their attributions; and g) repression of political opponents (Meyer 1996: 23).

While not completely vanished, as the 1999 PRI's presidential primaries and the 2000 elections showed (Meyer 1999),³⁸ the government was no longer able to engage in a massive transfer of resources to the PRI. Similarly, as I mentioned before, since 1997 the executive power no longer dominated congress. Regarding the media, the situation was also been far from ideal, but there is no doubt that by that time Mexico had a more independent press and radio than ever before. Television lagged behind, but even there the situation improved substantially over the last years.³⁹ The Judicial power also gained greater independence from the executive, as a result of the reform proposed by Zedillo himself during the first week of his administration (Begne 1995). The most salient example of the autonomy of the judicial power was the Supreme Court's ruling, the month following Fox's victory, ordering president Zedillo to hand over to Congress information related to the multibillion bailout of the banking system, which his administration had refused to do (*New York Times* 2000; *Público* 2000). As to the president's control of state affairs as practiced in the traditional center's discretionary removal of governors, a dramatic example of how this had changed came when the Zedillo administration was unable to remove the governor of Tabasco in 1995.

The record on the decrease of the immunity of public officials is problematic; the Zedillo administration was reluctant to prosecute corrupt officials, perhaps fearing for the instability they could cause.⁴⁰ Finally, illegal repression of political opponents diminished substantially at least since 1995. Telling in this respect is the fact that the PRD's complaints regarding the repression of its activists during the Salinas administration practically ceased during the Zedillo administration. Thus, the "anti-constitutional power of the presidency" saw its end with the Zedillo administration.

Since elections in Mexico became increasingly competitive and legitimate in the last decade, the consolidation of the democratic regime did not depend on the PRI's defeat. If, as Adam Przeworski has suggested, "The decisive step toward democracy is the devolution of power from a group of people to a set of rules" (Przeworski 1991: 14), then Mexico closed its protracted transition three years before the era of political alternation was inaugurated. Since that time, Mexico has been slowly consolidating its democratic regime, as the progress in the human rights area, as well as

38 Interestingly, even the PRI invited international observers to its first presidential primary. See Gachuzo 1999.

39 An instance of this opening is the series "Mexico Siglo XX," directed by historian Enrique Krauze, which has dealt with topics never dealt before in Mexico's television, such as the 1968 Tlateloclo massacre. Regarding the coverage of the last presidential campaigns, the treatment given to the three main candidates was mostly fair, as shown by the media monitoring reports issued by the IFE. See www.ife.org.mx.

40 For instance: it has been shown that Roberto Madrazo, the above-mentioned governor of Tabasco who Zedillo was unable to remove, received illegal funds from an indicted banker, Carlos Cabal Peniche (a beneficiary of the previous administration privatization of the banking system). Nevertheless, Cabal has made public that part of his contributions went to the presidential campaign of Zedillo. This seems to be the reason why Zedillo was unwilling to prosecute Madrazo. Incidentally, the information the Supreme Court ordered Zedillo to hand over to Congress has to do with the bankruptcy of Cabal's bank, Banco Unión, through which the banker in disgrace funneled resources to Zedillo's presidential campaign.

the gradual establishment of an independent judiciary, and the normalization of clean electoral processes show. This is not to suggest that Mexico does not face daunting challenges in the years to come, or that the transfer of power to a new political party will not have considerable salutary effects—among them precisely the speeding of the pace in the consolidation process. But in terms of the procedural definition of democracy I have been using, more important than the defeat or victory of any particular party on July 2 was the normalization of competitive and legitimate electoral processes. But since that goal had been achieved since 1997, it was not at stake on election day on July 2, 2000, and therefore it was unrelated to any specific distribution of the votes.

Interestingly, Mexico's accomplishments in building a competitive party system have largely taken place despite the relatively unchanged position on the part of the United States government regarding the nature of the Mexican political regime.⁴¹ At least since the 1940s, Mexico has enjoyed a sort of benign neglect from the United States in issues relating to its political regime. As long as it had a stable and non-communist regime, Washington did not traditionally care much about the internal politics of its southern neighbor (Meyer 1991). This of course reflected the logic of a bipolar world, in which the main concern for the United States was to promote and/or maintain stability, not democracy, in the Americas. It was not until the mid 1980s (that is, after the López Portillo administration had nationalized the banking system in 1982, after Mexico had played an active role in Central America, and after the electoral emergence of the PAN in northern Mexico), that the United States government began to push more actively for the democratization of Mexico. Nevertheless, as Jorge Chabat has observed, "US concern over the state of democracy on its border appeared to disappear during Mexico's presidential elections in 1988 (Chabat 1991: 10)".

Thus, as I illustrated, it can be argued that the international system's main leverage on Mexico's transition to democracy has been exercised by international non-governmental actors. It was those groups, after all, that sparked the election monitoring movement in Mexico. In this respect, the Mexican transition is reminiscent of the Chilean one. In the latter, as Paul Drake has observed, "The Chilean democratic forces tapped into a global network of activists in favor of democracy and human rights" (Drake 1994: 28). The emergent international norm of democratic governance has undoubtedly been a key factor in the momentum gained by Mexico's transition in the 1990s.

Furthermore, I would argue that the institutionalization of election monitoring at the level of inter-governmental organizations such as the OAS and the UN, cannot be understood without considering the role played by NGOs. Thus, the instrumental role that the UN came to play in the 1994 elections, can be seen as the crystallization of the efforts of domestic and international non-state actors in their support for the construction of democratic regimes. Mexico is just one example of this puzzling new trend.

41 I thus think that McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 1999, overstate the importance of external factors when they write that "the same opening to international gaze [i.e., resulting from internationalization] nudged the government to accept a series of electoral reforms that have helped the opposition parties to contest national elections (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly : 29)."

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