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Teaching About Mexico

This is another of a series of essays that David Merchant and I suggested could be used as background when trying to explain Mexico to international relations classes. Good luck to us, you might well say, but other teachers may find the outline and bibliography of use.

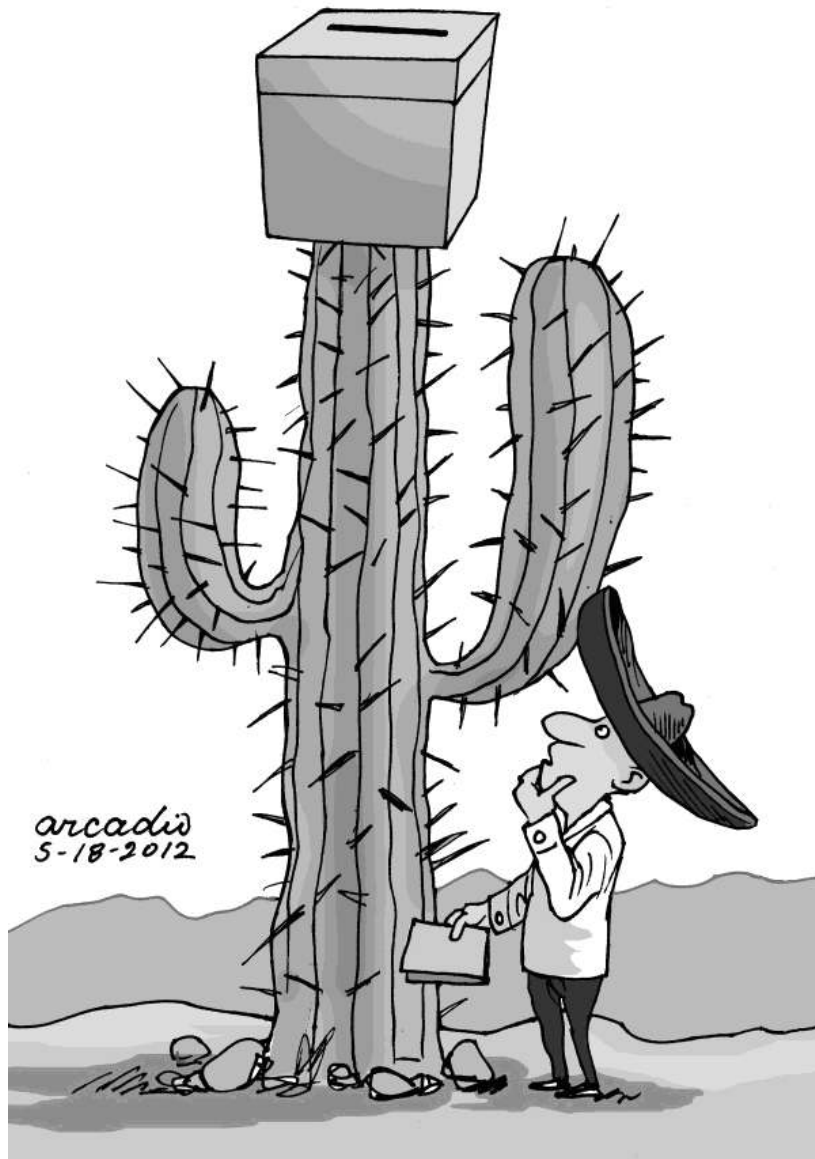
What we do urge is reaching out to find guests with recent experience in Mexico. Given the growing Latin population, it is likely that in the community there will be people with a political background in Mexico, and that can make for a spirited discussion. The great political parties, PRI and PAN, have their loyalists in the emigrant groups in the United States. Each side will be quick to blame the other for Mexico's problems. That does sound a little like what has been going on between Democrats and Republicans.

Mexico today is certainly a more democratic country than it was a generation ago, but that does not mean that everything is fine. Everything is not fine, and elections are by no means without their frustrations and manipulations.

Those of us who believe that international relations calls for a great deal of cultural emphasis find that the Mexican situation is proof of the wisdom of that approach. The political life of the country is now enriched by the growth of multi party politics, and that has been a welcome step forward after the long single party dictatorship by the PRI. But for every step forward there seems to be a step back.

This paper is intended as a possible prelude to a discussion about contemporary Mexico, and we welcome inquiries about how Mexican studies can be incorporated into the curriculum.

Paul Rich
President, Policy Studies Organization



Pluralism and Associationalism in Mexico: Notes on its Immediate Past History

By Paul Rich and David Merchant, Policy Studies Organization

The recent past in Mexico still bears the scars of long domination by the Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*), which controlled by nefarious means the political system in Mexico for seventy years. Rugged collectivism and *corporativismo* were used by the PRI to achieve the dominance maintained during those seven decades. Every single sector of Mexico was part of the regime.ⁱ Real volunteerism was strangled in the cradle by deliberately oppressive policies.

That strangling of independent associationalism is a necessary background for understanding the recent prominence of the **National Action Party** (Spanish: *Partido Acción Nacional*), known by the acronym **PAN**, a conservative party and one of the three principal political parties in Mexico.

Mexican Roman Catholics, together with other conservatives, founded the PAN in 1939 after the *cristero* insurgency lost the Cristero War. They were looking for a peaceful way to achieve political representation, after the years of chaos and violence that followed the Mexican Revolution. The turning point in the Cristero War was when the Catholic Church reached an agreement with the National Revolutionary Party – the forerunner of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that dominated power for most of the 20th century – where under it turned a blind eye to the lack of democracy in the country and stopped supporting the Catholic rebels, threatening its members with excommunication if they disobeyed the government.

The PAN spent many years after its foundation in 1939 in opposition, as all presidents since the end of the Mexican Revolution were from the PRI or its predecessors. The party saw its chances grow during the 1980s and 1990s, as the PRI loosened control, leading to the first non-PRI governor in 1989 in Baja California. In the 2000 presidential elections, the candidate of the *Alianza por el cambio* ("Alliance for change"), formed by the PAN and a smaller party, the PVEM, Vicente Fox Quesada won 42.5% of the popular vote and was elected president of Mexico. In the senatorial elections of the same date, the Alliance won 46 out of 128 seats in the Senate of Mexico. The Alliance broke off the following year and the PVEM has since participated together with the PRI in several elections. Three years later in the legislative elections, the PAN won 23.1% of the popular vote and 153 out of 500 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. The PAN advocates free enterprise, reduced taxes, smaller government, and reform of the welfare state. Many of its members are also advocates of Roman Catholicism as a political inspiration. PAN claims to be a non-confessional party in a country that is 90% Catholic, but in 2000, Vicente Fox appeared holding a banner emblazoned with the revered icon of the

Virgin of Guadalupe – and was fined MXN \$20,000 for mixing religion and politics. As president, he continued to make appearances attending mass as well as kissing Pope John Paul II's ring upon his arrival in Mexico in 2002 and always ending his speeches with a “god bless you” and thus enraging several sectors of Mexican society for mixing politics and religion.

PAN mayors and governors banned public employees from wearing miniskirts (Guadalajara, Jalisco), clamped down on the use of profanity in public marketplaces (Santiago de Querétaro), and – in one case in the northern state of Baja California – brought extreme religious and political pressure to bear on a teenaged rape victim to dissuade her from terminating her pregnancy, as she was legally entitled to do.

The return to power of the PRI should be understood in terms of such matters. On July 4, 2004, the PAN lost several state elections, including those to elect governors for the states of Zacatecas, Chihuahua, and Durango, to candidates from the PRI and PRD. Coupled with defeats in other gubernatorial elections in 2003 (particularly the northern industrial powerhouse of Nuevo León, and a bitterly fought election in Colima that was cancelled and later re-run), this development was interpreted by some political analysts to be significant for the 2006 presidential election. The defeat was considered especially severe in Chihuahua because that state was where PAN won its first electoral victories in 1983, when PAN mayoral candidates won in the border city of Ciudad Juárez and state capital Chihuahua. In contrast, 2004 did see the PAN win for the first time in Tlaxcala; it also managed to hold on to Querétaro and Aguascalientes. However, in 2005 the PAN lost the elections for the state governments of Estado de Mexico and Nayarit. The former is usually considered one of the most important elections in the country because of the number of voters involved.

For the presidential election in 2006, Felipe Calderón, the former president of PAN, was selected as the PAN candidate for the office of President. He beat his opponent, Santiago Creel, in every voting round inside the party.

When pluralism and associationalism in Mexico is considered, one must always recall that PAN has origins in the one institution, the Church, that had at the time some degree of independence during the long night of PRI rule, and this is relevant to the discussion of the condition of civil society in Mexico. Obviously independent political parties are part of the civil society that creates a democracy.

The 2006 election was a test of the maturity of Mexican political culture. Despite policy changes that favor the emergence of true civil society, there remained counterfeit civil associations created as an adjunct of government under the PRI. For instance in the State of Puebla where the majority of its population consists, as elsewhere in Mexico, of young people—mostly students at different levels—there is an educational organization betoken to the federal government, the *Colegio de Bachilleres* — led by people linked directly with the State administration. There also

exists a Workers Union (*Sindicato Único de Trabajadores del Colegio de Bachilleres-Puebla*) which is supposed to provide help to workers if required. During the administration of Mr. Alberto Guerrero as General Director of the *Colegio de Bachilleres*, he served as advisor *vitalicio* for the Workers Union. In addition to that, there is a civil association called *Progreso con Democracia*, PRODEM, of which he was president. As a consequence of Mr. Guerrero's ability to be simultaneously General Director, Advisor for the Workers Union, and President of PRODEM, he exacted the obedience of the employees. Rather than worrying about classroom conditions, he exploited his position for self-advancement. Therefore, in spite of everything such tricks still have worked for the PRI in some states.ⁱⁱ

Through the years most Mexicans have hoped that the solution to all of this is not violence. Although voluntary organizations can foment violence, they can also be a substitute for violence, channeling passions. V. O. Key wrote: "...democratic standards exclude reliance on force and violence in domestic politics. Indeed, a great accomplishment of democratic orders consists in their contrivance of substitutes for force. Yet even in democratic orders violence and the threat of violence play a part. In political conflict the use of violence is almost always an underlying potentiality."ⁱⁱⁱ

Part of the continuing frustration of Mexican political life has been that political parties that are looking for power do not consider that the whole system needs change. Key states: "To the political parties falls the task of keeping the peace among group interests. Political parties both comprehend and transcend the special interests of society: they must take into account the demands of interest groups; they must also consider aspirations not represented by organized groups; they must seek to speak for the nation as a whole—or at least for a substantial majority—and not merely for a small part of it."^{iv}

There is no question about the fact that civil society in Mexico has been weak.^v Evidence suggests that a result is that many Mexicans in their political life are cynical.^{vi} This has not only social but economic consequences. Donald E. Eberly comments "Fukuyama concludes that societies with strong bonds of social trust and collaboration will gain important advantages over those characterized by individual isolation and social fragmentation."^{vii} Therefore it is hard to understand how the future of Mexico can be considered without considering the health of its civil society.

Past troubles in Mexico are partly a consequence of a lack of policies encouraging the formation of social capital. Acosta-Silva claims that the "vertical participation" of citizens in the electoral processes does not produce automatically reasonable hopes in order to achieve the "horizontal" civic behavior that would add to social capital. In sum, a main problem of Mexico is the lack of a true and meaningful social capital, a lack of trust.

Another issue is the minimal political education available to Mexican citizens. Individuals in Mexico limit their political participation to the electoral process, as recalled by Acosta-Silva. There is no equivalent of an organization like the American

Association of Retired People with a billion dollar budget to push such issues of the elderly as pensions and medical care, or a watchdog like the American Civil Liberties Union with an army of attorneys to respond to challenges to individual rights.

In order to create a truly democratic system, not only individuals but associations should be involved – making good and better citizens by encouraging volunteerism should be a target of the democratic consolidation.^{viii} We need to focus on the so-called “civic deficit” in Mexico stressed by Acosta-Silva and by Leo Zuckermann. The latter cautions about the heritage left by a repressive regime. Zuckerman uses the results of the “Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas”^{ix}, a survey that demonstrates that 46% of Mexican citizens have an interest in solving a difficulty in their community, while 41% show a willingness to help provide a solution to those problems face by the government. The truth — he sustains — is that their “interest” is not put into practice. So there is a willingness to participate on the part of millions but few vehicles for that participation.

The other side of the coin is that a majority of Mexicans have been apathetic about participating in common concerns. He gives as an example the lack of attraction for resolving problems in the commune or the little participation in public demonstrations. This is a worrying situation if one wants to believe that civil participation helps to develop and assure a real democracy.^x Tocqueville showed in his studies that Americans of different ages have the capacity and the desire to associate. Until now Mexicans are only trying to do so.

Zuckermann is not entirely pessimistic. He explains that there is an optimistic part of all this, the belief in a democratic regime versus a dictatorship. Although few Mexicans are excited about democracy as the ideal system, things have changed enough to be hopeful about the opportunity to overlap the existing civic deficit caused by an authoritarian government.^{xi}

Mexico hopefully will retain its cultural uniqueness while reforming its politics: “Civil societies in any context have a history and must develop in tune with their particular historical, cultural, and political rhythms.”^{xii} We need a great deal more research into Mexican associationalism so the voluntary movements in Mexico have the past they deserve. An example is provided by Ramos-Escandón who studied the women’s movement attempting to achieve the right to vote in Mexico. Her research is useful for the understanding of the interaction of a non-governmental organization with the state, the United Front for Women’s Rights (*Frente Único Pro Derechos de la Mujer FUPDM*). She also analyzes the influence of the National Revolutionary Party (PRN, later to be the PRI), promoting in its by-laws the women’s need to vote. Basically, voting was encouraged as a consequence of the party’s fear of women’s support for the church. The FUPDM had more than fifty thousand members organized in eighty-eight feminine associations all over the country and its main mission was to get the right of vote for women. This is one of the few studies we have, and we need many more.^{xiii}

San Juan-Victoria gives an account in his essay *Tendencias de la sociedad civil en México: la puja del poder y la sociedad a fin de siglo* of what Mexican civil society was facing at the end of the last century.^{xiv} He mentions that the most active organizations in Mexico got together as early as July 1995 with the purpose of promoting diverse social and political action. In his words: “Esta asamblea plural intentaba un experimento de cara al futuro, pero con escaso arraigo y confianza, por un pasado de desencuentros: la novedosa, aunque un tanto apresurada configuración de un actor de la política, los ciudadanos organizados, y la ampliación de los espacios de representación que, en la asombrosa transición mexicana, parecía dirigirse en sentido contrario, hacia un nuevo monopolio, atrincherado ahora en un Estado tecnocrático y en un sistema de partidos.”^{xv}

That meeting was a loud cry to be considered politically influential: “los ciudadanos y las organizaciones reclamamos un espacio en la construcción de la nación.”^{xvi} San Juan-Victoria warned that step the political formula was not working profitably any longer, and therefore a new actor was needed, civil society.^{xvii} The invitation to this encounter demanded: “Un diálogo nacional abierto y público. Un diálogo nacional en el que participe el gobierno, los legisladores, los partidos, las organizaciones sociales y civiles, mujeres, obreros, campesinos, indígenas, empleados profesionistas, funcionarios públicos, intelectuales, académicos, artistas, deportistas, periodistas y todos aquellos ciudadanos y ciudadanas que tengan algo que decir en la construcción del Nuevo México al que aspiramos.”^{xviii}

The fact that PAN was defeated by the PRI and that the PRI once again controls the Presidency might be interpreted as Mexico still being a long way from having its civil organizations be the strong participants in policy-making that such groups are elsewhere.^{xix} Kumi Naidoo and Rajesh Tandon point out that “It is civil society's participation in political life, in that realm of public life in which societal decisions are made and carried out, that provides the conditions for sustainable development and a healthy public life.”^{xx}

Retrospectively it is now apparent that in 1988 the Mexican political system experienced a tremendous change as a consequence of the empowerment of a left-wing political party, the PRD, which Dan will discuss, and the longtime opposition party, PAN. The controversial victory of Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the PRI candidate for President lead to a more prolonged discussion of the way in which politics were being done, and 1988 also marked a breakout in the way people were organizing. With the excuse of helping democracy, more associations came to life and into the political arena. People had a chance to undergo through different channels.^{xxi}

What does this mean to the policy process? One can say that the alteration between the PAN and PRI in power regardless of still existing problems demarks a major change for the benefit of democracy. More and renovated agents would participate in this contention to be in power, and as a result new policies were to be implemented in a different perspective from those created by the long ruling party. A political choice would be offered to the population.

Recapitulating, under the PRI, people were herded into a corporatist structure, organized into three main divisions — the peasants, the workers and the rest of the population. The structure sustained a stable PRI masked as the political party in power. This stunted civil society.^{xxii} In the words of Manuel Fernández de Villegas and Naomi Adelson, “the PRI corporate structure weakened civil society participation in development.”^{xxiii} Some battles were fought against, although with limited success: “...the development of Mexican civil society is a reflection of the slow political transition the country is undergoing in the move away from one-party authoritarian rule”^{xxiv}.

PRI or PAN, volunteerism in Mexico is not robust but is growing: nonprofit work accounts for just 0.4 percent of Mexico’s economic activity.”^{xxv} However, there are signs that Mexico is changing and that “civil society is becoming more organized, diverse, and independent”^{xxvi} There remain a number of challenges that must be faced by everybody: government, citizens in general, political parties, and all institutions of the civil society. As maintained by Fernández de Villegas and Adelson in their study *Civil Society participation of the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank in Mexico*, “large networks of community and civic economic organizations could be utilized in MDB [multilateral development banks] projects to make them more effective and to increase good governance practices”^{xxvii}

The civil society issue is related to the development of a democratic political life, and so is the poverty issue. The main alarm to sound about future Mexican stability comes from the discouraging poverty levels in the country. The United Nations Statistics Division has estimated that at least 15.9% of the population, roughly sixteen million, lives in what could be called absolute poverty. Millions more exist only day to day.

i “The growth of interest in civil enable one to examine largely society means that Masonic historical studies take on a new relevance, as they unstudied attitudes towards volunteerism and associationalism. (...) [Lázaro Cárdenas] involvement with Freemasonry perhaps confirms those views that he had mixed motives when he refigured other Mexican NGOs (non governmental organizations) such as the unions. It clearly illustrates how he had his ‘finger in every pot’, and, as the historian Enrique Krauze remarks, that ‘the division of power at any level were not important to him.’” Paul Rich and Antonio Lara. “Civil Society and Freemasonry: The Cardenista Rite & Mexico”, *Freemasonry on Both Sides of the Atlantic. Essays Concerning the Craft in the British Isles, Europe, the United States, and Mexico*. William Weisberger et al eds. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, 717.

ii See La Jornada de Oriente, *CUITLATAN*, Tuesday May 7, 2001. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2002/may02/020507/cuitlatlan.htm> And La Jornada de Oriente, *CUITLATLAN*, Thursday November 29, 2001. <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2001/nov01/011129/cuitlatlan.htm>

iii V. O. Key Jr., *Politics, Parties, and Pressure Groups*. Thomas Y. Crowell Company: New York, 1942, 16-17.

^{iv} Ibid, 37

^v “El lenguaje populista, explotado hasta el hartazgo durante el siglo XX, resultaba bastante arcaico; no obstante, los mismos argumentos morales, la misma lógica puso el armazón para el descubrimiento de la Sociedad Civil. El adjetivo tuvo un éxito sorprendente. Como antes el Pueblo, la Sociedad Civil del fin de siglo era sufrida, valiente y virtuosa, heredera de luchas multiseculares, partidaria de la Democracia y enemiga del PRI. Fue necesario atribuirle además toda otra serie de virtudes, porque se le asignó un papel fundamental como motor del cambio, garantía de transparencia, honestidad y vocación democrática. Esa ilusión está en el origen de nuestro republicanismo reciente, que tuvo su parte de fantasía pero también el desencanto de hoy.” Escala scalante-Gonzalbo, “El déficit cívico”, Nexos. Año 24, Vol. XXIV, Num. 298, Mexico: Publicaciones CITEM, October 2002, 36.

^{vi} “Tenemos más y quizá mejores ciudadanos que hace un siglo pero son ciudadanos más contradictorios, complejos y desconfiados. Ciudadanos amorales, incívicos y demandantes coexisten con ciudadanos participativos, interesados y activistas de la vida política. Son pálidas sombras del ciudadano virtuoso que imaginaron nuestros liberales decimonónicos.” Adrián, Acosta-Silva. “El déficit cívico”, Nexos. Año 24, Vol. XXIV, Num. 298, Mexico: Publicaciones CITEM, October 2002, 36.

^{vii} Eberly, *Op. cit.*, 18.

^{viii} “La democracia significa no sólo el derecho de participar con base en el propio interés o la obligación propia, sino también con base en el conocimiento. Formar mejores ciudadanos es un punto pendiente de la agenda de nuestra consolidación democrática (...). Todo ello forma el capital social indispensable para nutrir comportamientos cívicos democráticos y consolidar el cambio político.” Acosta-Silva, *Op. cit.*, 37.

^{xi} See Ministry of Interior: Encuesta Nacional de Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas. Federal Executive Branch, Mexico, 2002, cited by Leo Zuckerman, “Súbditos o ciudadanos”, Nexos. Año 24, Vol. XXIV, Num. 298, Mexico: Publicaciones CITEM, October 2002, 41-44.

^x “Aunque el 46% de los mexicanos dice que tiene interés por resolver alguna dificultad de la comunidad y el 41% se dice dispuesto a hacer algo para tratar de resolver los problemas que enfrenta el gobierno, la realidad es que su ‘interés’ es de dientes para afuera. A la hora de inquirir sobre aspectos reales de participación, salen a relucir los verdaderos niveles de apatía. Más del 90% de la población no ha platicado con ningún tipo de autoridad en los últimos 12 meses. 94% no ha participado en manifestaciones políticas en los últimos 3 ó 4 años. Aproximadamente el 90% de la gente no ha ido a ningún tipo de reuniones participativas en bien de la comunidad (junta de vecinos, de iglesias, ejidales, etc.). Sólo el 10% ha asistido a su ayuntamiento o delegación para proponer, idear, apoyar proyectos o poner demandas. El 8% ha intentado mandar una carta o entrevistarse con el gobierno para plantear algunos problemas o necesidades. 68% dice que no simpatiza con algún partido político. 91% confiesa que no se ha involucrado para ayudar a resolver algún problema social. 95% no pertenece a ninguna organización civil.” Zuckermann, *Op. cit.*, 41-42.

^{xi} “Pero hay indicadores que son alentadores. Sobre todo los que tienen que ver con la percepción de las ventajas de vivir en un régimen democrático. 62% dice que la democracia es preferible a cualquier otra forma de gobierno. Cuando se pregunta la preferencia entre la democracia, aunque ésta no asegure el avance económico del país, o una dictadura que sí asegure el avance de la economía, 55% dice que es mejor la democracia, 13% la dictadura, 10% no importa y 23% no sabe. 52% de los entrevistados piensa que México vive en una democracia. (...) Ciertamente no son números que permitan descorchar la champagne para brindar por la solidez de las percepciones

sobre el régimen democrático mexicano. Pero sí nos dice que hay un segmento importante de la población que ya interiorizó el ideal democrático." Ibid, 42.

xii Howell, *Op. cit.*, 121.

xiii "La plataforma política del FUPDM rebasa así los intereses femeninos, puesto que se inscribe en un programa amplio de reforma política y democratización."

Ramos-Escandón, Carmen. "Mujeres de ayer: Participación política femenina en México, 1910-1960", *Estudios Políticos*, Cuarta Época, No. 15, May-August, 1997, 43.

xiv Carlos San Juan-Victoria. "Tendencias de la sociedad civil en México: la puja del poder y la sociedad a fin de siglo", Alberto Ojeda, ed. *La sociedad civil: de la teoría a la realidad*. Mexico: El Colegio de México, 1999, 157.

xv Ibid, 158-159. With this sort of attention, we can notice a change in the behavior of Mexicans towards their political life and responsibilities.

xvi Ibid, 161.

xvii "(...) tanto la vieja oferta [corporación-partido único-presidente fuerte] como la nueva oferta [sistema de partidos-ejecutivo acotado] resultaban insuficientes para llevar a cauce a las aguas sociales desbordadas".

Ibid, 161.

xviii Encuentro Nacional de Organizaciones Ciudadanas, "Convocatoria ciudadana al diálogo nacional para la reforma del Estado", Ciudad de México, fotocopia, 1 de Julio, 1995 cited by San Juan-Victoria, Carlos, *op. cit.*

xix An analysis of the Consejeros ciudadanos electorales can be consulted in San Juan Victoria's work.

xx Kumi Naidoo and Rajesh Tandon. "The Promise of Civil Society", *Civil Society at the Millennium*. Connecticut: Kumarian Press, Inc., 1999, 9.

xxi "De manera sorpresiva, en 1988 hubo una insurrección electoral que prefirió a la oposición, y de manera especial, al hijo del general Cárdenas [Cauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano] y a su coalición de grupos y partidos, el Frente Democrático Nacional, desestimando al partido oficial y a su candidato, Carlos Salinas de Gortari. De ahí nació una renovación del sistema electoral, pero también de los métodos para inducir el voto y violentar el sufragio. También movilizaciones, convergencias y organizaciones que se propusieron conquistar el espacio difícil de la democracia mínima e ir más allá, cuestionando el régimen de representación controlada. [Además] este bipartidismo [PRI-PAN] transita en 1995 hacia un esquema tripartidista con fuerte competencia interna. La convivencia entre el PRI y el PAN se fracturó al arrear la competencia por el poder, y el PRD recuperó espacios crecientes." Carlos San Juan-Victoria. "Tendencias de la sociedad civil en México: la puja del poder y la sociedad a fin de siglo", Alberto Ojeda, ed. *La sociedad civil: de la teoría a la realidad*. Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2001, 199-200.

xxii "When the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) became the ruling party in the late 1930s, it established a corporatist structure, affiliating the population to mass party organizations in three sectors: peasants, represented by the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC); workers, represented by the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (CTM); and popular, represented by the Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP). These organizations acted as a

control and support apparatus for the ruling party.” Manuel Fernández de Villegas and Naomi Adelson, “Civil Society Participation in World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank Programs: The Case of Mexico”, *Global Governance. A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Vol. 6, No. 4, October-December, 2000. 474.

xxiii Ibid, 474.

xxiv Ibid, 475.

xxv Ibid.

xxvi Miguel Fernández de Villegas and Naomi Adelson, *Op. cit.* 489.

xxvii Ibid.