

POLITICAL CHANGE IN MEXICO:
Institutions and Identity

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- GENERALS IN THE PALACIO: THE MILITARY IN MODERN MEXICO.* By Roderic Ai Camp. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992. Pp. 278. \$49.95 cloth.)
- MEXICO'S ALTERNATIVE POLITICAL FUTURES.* Edited by Wayne A. Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter H. Smith. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1989. Pp. 472. \$19.95 cloth, \$11.95 paper.)
- THE MEXICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM IN TRANSITION.* By Wayne A. Cornelius and Ann L. Craig. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1991. Pp. 124. \$11.95 paper.)
- EXITS FROM THE LABYRINTH: CULTURE AND IDEOLOGY IN MEXICAN NATIONAL SPACE.* By Claudio Lomnitz-Adler. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1992. Pp. 386. \$45.00 cloth.)
- CORRUPTION AND POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY MEXICO.* By Stephen D. Morris. (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1991. Pp. 202. \$18.95 paper.)
- THE PRESIDENCY IN MEXICAN POLITICS.* By George Philip. (New York: St. Martin's, 1992. Pp. 213. \$59.95 cloth.)
- THE EVOLUTION OF THE MEXICAN POLITICAL SYSTEM.* Edited by Jaime E. Rodríguez O. (Wilmington, Del.: Scholarly Resources, 1993. Pp. 322. \$45.00 cloth.)
- THE DETERIORATION OF THE MEXICAN PRESIDENCY: THE YEARS OF LUIS ECHEVERRÍA.* By Samuel Schmidt. Translated and edited by Dan A. Cothran. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991. Pp. 222. \$37.50 cloth.)

With the benefit of hindsight, the extent to which neoliberal economic policies have proved to be a bust for Mexico is becoming apparent. A significant drop in the value of the peso during a poorly managed devaluation, a resurgence of inflation, and the severe economic downturn at the outset of the administration of President Ernesto Zedillo all show that Mexico's development dilemma remains unsolved. Yet dismantling the economic institutions of the populist and nationalist economic

model has indeed brought an economic revolution to Mexico. Carlos Salinas (1988–1994) ended the state's vast ownership of industry and its protection of a weak industrial sector. Unfortunately for the vast majority of Mexicans, however, this approach did not ameliorate poverty (at least not yet) and only exacerbated Mexico's economic dependency on the United States. On the brink of the twenty-first century, Mexico continues to struggle with the challenge of economic modernization. The country has achieved neither economic independence from the Colossus of the North nor socioeconomic equality of condition or opportunity. Mexico's revolutionary impulse has petered out, and the current alternative to it—neoliberalism—is now revealing its costs: economic dislocation, unemployment, and a worsening distribution of income.

Although as yet unsuccessful in vaulting Mexico into the first world economically, the efforts of the Mexican state to produce prosperity by experimenting with new economic models over the past quarter-century have created a context in which political change can scarcely not occur. In the end, this outcome has stood the intentions of a series of Mexican presidents on their heads. Salinas's statement that political reform ought to be put off until economic liberalization had achieved its effects honestly admitted what had been concealed rhetorically by his predecessors: that economic reform has been pursued so as to forestall political reform.¹ Yet can it be true? Or has the quest to replicate the "Mexican miracle" only accelerated the forces of political change?

In various ways, the eight works selected for review here examine the forces of change in Mexican politics as well as the key institutions whose reaction to change will continue to be critical to a transition from a hegemonic party system to a more competitive, perhaps even democratic regime in Mexico. In their introduction to *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*, Wayne Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter Smith state their view of Mexican political change: "the Mexican political system has been undergoing a constant process of transition since its consolidation in the 1930s. . . . This process has undergone sharp acceleration in the 1980s. . . . During the 1980s Mexican politics also experienced a significant qualitative change . . . , [and] the basic process of change toward a more competitive system is irreversible, even though subject to short-term setbacks and periods of immobilism" (p. 3). Although events in Mexico often lead observers to overemphasize the country's political stability (remarkable by hemispheric standards) and the apparently unassailable position of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), most scholars now share

1. Salinas said, "When you are introducing such a strong economic reform, you must make sure that you build the political consensus around it. If you are at the same time introducing additional drastic political reform, you may end up with no reform at all. And we want to have reform, not a disintegrated country." Interview with Carlos Salinas, "A New Hope for the Hemisphere?" *New Perspectives Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (1991):8.

the view expressed by Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith. But how will change come to Mexico—by rupture or by an evolutionary process in which the hegemonic institutions, the PRI and the Mexican presidency, yield power to opposition parties and apparently anemic political institutions?

Challenges to the Mexican Political Regime

In the 1970s, scholars moved toward an interpretation of Mexican politics that emphasized its authoritarian character, applying Juan Linz's categorization to a regime that had never seemed truly democratic, despite its formal institutional arrangements. As Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith point out, this authoritarian regime was moderate by comparison with its South American counterparts and was also inclusionary, civilian-dominated, and based on institutions rather than on personalism (p. 8).² Maintaining such an authoritarian regime depended on favorable conditions in the national environment and within the political elite. Those favorable conditions included maintaining "an equilibrium among the constituent groups," having enough economic resources for "the continuing distribution of material rewards," and cultivating "a mutually acceptable relationship with the United States" (Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, pp. 10–11). The economic difficulties of the 1970s and the economic crisis of the 1980s thus posed challenges that the regime had not faced since the 1930s. Economic stagnation was inhibiting distribution, creating constraints that divided the elite over the best means for restarting the engine of economic growth. The economic crisis also made Mexico more vulnerable vis-à-vis its northern neighbor. Elite divisions eventually produced the independent presidential candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in 1988 in an election whose outcome remains disputed. As a result, Carlos Salinas de Gortari entered the presidency with his own image and those of his party and the presidency tarnished.

Even now that Salinas's term is over, no new essay poses the challenges that faced him as well as the introductory essay by Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, and no other collection has brought together the quality of essays and essayists found in *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*.³ As the volume's organization makes plain, key issues facing the

2. The terms *institutions* and *personalism* are used in different ways by students of Mexican politics. If by *personalism* one means the capacity to create a personal dictatorship, Mexican politics are not personalistic. Hence *institutions* are the sites of authority in Mexico, not individuals. But if by *personalism* one refers to the pervasiveness of patron-client relationships, Mexican politics are very personalistic.

3. In *The Mexican Political System in Transition*, Wayne Cornelius and Ann Craig place the same issues in a historically and institutionally richer context, providing perhaps the best introduction for those new to the study of Mexico. That work is drawn from Cornelius and Craig's contribution to *Comparative Politics Today: A World View*, 4th ed., edited by Gabriel A. Almond and G. Bingham Powell (Boston, Mass.: Little, Brown, 1988). Another excellent

Mexican regime during the Salinas *sexenio* and continuing today are the character of relations between state and society, the nature of the economic development strategy and its consequences for social and political actors, and the future of the two most important institutions in Mexican politics, the PRI and the presidency. An additional dimension of change in Mexican politics concerns the national identity of a country that is still undergoing enormous changes in its social structure and its relationship to the outside world. This aspect is addressed in *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures* by Roger Bartra and more extensively in Claudio Lomnitz-Adler's *Exits from the Labyrinth*.

Does the Mexican Presidency Require a Liberal Machiavellian?

Two institutions have dominated Mexican politics since 1929: the presidency and the party of the institutionalized revolution, now the PRI. Both have contributed significantly to the perceived authoritarianism of the regime: the PRI by effectively sidelining other contenders for power and hence limiting the likelihood of alternation in power; and the presidency by centralizing power in the hands of one individual who, although limited to a single term of office, has been characterized as a limited-term dictator.⁴ If Mexico is to become more democratic, these institutions must change.

In *The Presidency in Mexican Politics*, George Philip builds on a theme articulated earlier by Susan Kaufman Purcell and John Purcell.⁵ Philip argues, "the Mexican system is a set of arrangements constantly being redefined (not necessarily in the direction of equilibrium) around its only fixed element—which is the presidency" (p. 183). This conclusion in a work that surveys the presidencies of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz (1964–1970), Luis Echeverría (1970–1976), José López Portillo (1976–1982), and Miguel de la Madrid (1982–1988) suggests two major dimensions of the Mexican presidency and the challenges facing those who advocate democratization. First, the presidency is the central institution in Mexican politics, but its institutional and internal structural features have not been studied thoroughly, in part because they have changed over time. Instead,

collection, although one benefiting more from hindsight than the one edited by Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, is *The Politics of Economic Restructuring: State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico*, edited by Maria Lorena Cook, Kevin J. Middlebrook, and Juan Molinar Horcasitas (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1994).

4. Frank Brandenburg, who labeled the office of the Mexican president "the Liberal Machiavellian," commented, "Mexicans avoid personal dictatorships by retiring their dictators every six years." See Brandenburg, *The Making of Modern Mexico* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1964), 141.

5. "State and Society in Mexico: Must a Stable Polity Be Institutionalized?" *World Politics* 32, no. 2 (Jan. 1980):194–227.

students of the Mexican presidency have focused on state-society relations rather than on the organization of the state itself.

Students of Mexican politics have long been discouraged from exploring the formal institutions of the regime in order to understand its operation. Much of Mexican politics transpires among those occupying positions in formal political institutions or interest groups but in ways not prescribed by those institutional arrangements. Hence the politics of *camarillas* (cliques), clientelism, corporatism, and corruption have long been the staples of analysis of Mexican politics. That “esoteric politics,” as Kenneth Johnson described it,⁶ is rather formless, at least in institutional terms. The lack of institutionalization, however, prevents those seeking to reform the regime from easily identifying what must be reformed.

Although almost all the authors under review here identify presidentialism as the central institution of the Mexican regime, most do not describe precisely the sources of presidential power—constitutional, political, or otherwise. Even such trenchant observers of the Mexican scene as Cornelius and Ann Craig note only briefly in *The Mexican Political System in Transition*, “The Mexican presidency possesses a broad range of both constitutionally mandated and unwritten, informally recognized powers that assure his dominance over all of the country’s other political institutions” (pp. 29–31). But they provide little exact description of why Mexican presidents historically have been able to do all that they have done. Cornelius and Craig argue in the same vein, “Even though the Mexican president wields great power, he does so within certain limits, perhaps the most important of which are unwritten, de facto constraints generally recognized and accepted within Mexico’s political and economic elites” (p. 33).

The informal character of Mexican presidential power (which both George Philip and Samuel Schmidt start with but do not really discuss) gives great latitude to the individual occupying the presidency to define both the major policy initiatives of the state during the sexenio and the shape of the executive branch itself. Schmidt seeks in *The Deterioration of the Mexican Presidency: The Years of Luis Echeverría* to refute the “popular notion . . . that Mexican politics are transformed more by a product of the will of an individual than as the result of complex social, economic, and political relations” (p. 4). But he then goes on to say, “The Mexican president is at the apex of power, at the peak of the decision-making process. Even if he inherits a system influenced by his predecessors, he still has considerable latitude to impose both positive and negative, or veto, decisions on the system. The form in which he exercises his power within the system that is given to him becomes his personal style of governing, and that personal style may become a significant variable” (p. 4).

6. Kenneth Johnson, *Mexican Democracy: A Critical View* (Boston, Mass.: Allyn and Bacon, 1971).

Hence arises the enthusiasm with which the Mexican public and professional Mexico-watchers await the *destape*, the unveiling of the PRI's presidential candidate.⁷ This system also makes the presidency the focus of all pressure in the political arena. Pressure has been ample, largely because of the changes in Mexican society that have undermined the conditions for authoritarian rule described by Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith. Philip argues in *The Presidency in Mexican Politics*, "What seems to have happened since 1964—perhaps since 1958—is that each presidential term has seen the emergence of a newly confident and increasingly independent sector of civil society. The president has sought to repress or inhibit this emergence; this attempt has led to some form of crisis. The successor president has always gone at least some way to win over and reconcile the alienated group" (pp. 176–77). Hence arises the almost constant sense of Mexico being "in crisis."⁸ Hence also the near permanency of political reform on the presidential agenda.⁹

Schmidt suggests that Echeverría's failure to confront effectively a series of challenges arising from stagnation of the development model contributed significantly to the "deterioration of the Mexican presidency." That deterioration only compounded the sense of crisis and the difficulty of escaping it. Philip, in contrast, implies that the process of presidentially initiated reform, which was intended to "reconcile the alienated group," "has not just restored a balance but permitted the further evolution of the system itself." More specifically, "a central feature of the past generation has been the diffusion of infrastructural power through more sectors of Mexican society" (p. 177). But whether and how this

7. The *destapamiento* has been undergoing some change in the past two successions. Peter Smith describes the 1988 process in "The 1988 Presidential Succession in Historical Perspective," in Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith, *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*.

8. Alan Knight, in his contribution to *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*, observes about the Mexican crisis: "When did it start? Different dates have been suggested, going back at least to 1968 and even beyond. If this is indeed a period of endemic crisis, the product of serious structural faults rather than of recurrent crises, conjunctural events of the kind most political systems face, then it is a long-term crisis of at least twenty years duration. If you can have 'permanent revolution' . . . , then perhaps you can have 'permanent crisis' too. But eventually, 'permanent crisis' begins to sound self-contradictory" (p. 458). In Camp's "Political Modernization in Mexico: Through a Looking Glass" in *The Evolution of the Mexican Political System*, he argues that 1968 is the year from which the current political difficulties of the Mexican regime can dated. But as Jaime Rodríguez argues in the introduction to the same volume, scholars may be too inclined to interpret Mexican political history as discontinuous: "the tendency has been to interpret Mexican political history as a series of breaks with the past" (p. 7). The emphasis on crisis may grow out of an expectation of a new discontinuity, an expectation held by scholars and political actors alike.

9. Both Echeverría and López Portillo pursued electoral reform projects, and López Portillo also initiated an administrative reform program. Political as well as economic reforms have been items even higher on the agendas of de la Madrid and Salinas (1988–1994). For a discussion of political reform during the latter two presidencies and the Mexican propensity toward political reformism, see Stephen D. Morris, *Political Reformism in Mexico: An Overview of Contemporary Mexican Politics* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995).

diffusion of power has been institutionalized are questions that Philip does not address.

Thus Philip and Schmidt trace in their books state-society relations (as they affect the presidency), explaining them primarily as a result of modernization of the Mexican economy and society. Both authors emphasize that the exercise of presidential power has alienated citizens from the state and its projects. Neither, however, pays attention to the ways in which the institutions and agencies of the executive branch and the president's staff have evolved. In this respect, Philip and Schmidt follow the overall tendency of Mexicanists to emphasize state-society relations and the informal means of rule and to downplay the formal institutions of the state, specifically the presidency. As Steven Topik observes in his contribution to *The Evolution of the Mexican Political System*, "The organization of the state . . . merits more attention. To what extent did its various ministries cooperate or compete? What was the relationship between the congress, the president, and governors? Did bureaucrats serve principally their employers or themselves?" (p. 288). In short, political scientists need studies of the organization of the executive branch, especially now that Mexico seems on the verge of a democratic transition.

The second dimension of Mexican political change identified by Philip concerns the role of the presidency in initiating democratic reform. Cornelius and Craig identify a dilemma: presidentialism will likely make a transition to democracy difficult, but many argue that "strong presidential leadership will be a necessary—though by no means sufficient—condition of political liberalization, because of the weakness of pro-reform opposition parties and the strength of anti-reform elements within the official party and its affiliated organizations" (p. 35). Perhaps only a strong presidency can impose democratic political liberalization on the Mexican regime.¹⁰ Perhaps Mexico requires a liberal Machiavellian to achieve democracy.

Yet critics perceive the matter otherwise. As Luis Javier Garrido argues in his contribution to *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*,

The presidentialist method of exercising power, which obviates political accountability to the electorate and allows extreme concentration of powers in the hands of the president, has produced at least three negative consequences, deleterious both for the government program and its adherents and for the general population. These are: the failure of public functionaries to abide by the law, allowing them to act arbitrarily when dealing with the public; extraordinary latitude in defining official policy, especially economic policy; and the institutionalization of corruption as a means to buy support and to grease the wheels of government. (P. 418)

10. This theme is pursued further in Cornelius, "Mexico's Delayed Democratization," *Foreign Policy*, no. 95 (Summer 1994):53–71.

A keen student of political institutions,¹¹ Garrido defines more clearly than Philip or Schmidt the powers of the Mexican presidency, which he labels as “constitutional, metaconstitutional, and anticonstitutional.” Regarding the president’s constitutional powers, Garrido notes: “The powers assigned to the president by the 1917 Constitution were incomparably broader and more extensive than those conferred by the reformed Constitution of 1857” (p. 422). Nothing has been done to pare those constitutional powers. Because the president’s party has consistently held a substantial majority in both houses of the Mexican Congress, Garrido argues, the president has also been able to exercise several metaconstitutional powers: amending the constitution, serving as “chief legislator,” acting as the “ultimate authority in electoral matters,” designating his successor, and essentially appointing as well as removing “governors, mayors, and legislators at the federal and state levels” (pp. 422–25).

The narrowness of the PRI majority in the Cámara de Diputados after the 1988 elections forced Salinas to find common cause with the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) during the first three years of his sexenio. A constitutional amendment now limits the majority party to 63 percent of the seats in this chamber,¹² thereby inhibiting any single party from amending the constitution. So the first of Garrido’s metaconstitutional powers no longer carries its full weight, but the others he mentions did not weaken under Salinas. If anything, Salinas strengthened the presidency, at least during his term in office, as shown in various actions: his willingness to remove governors,¹³ amend the constitution, nullify PRI electoral “victories” that were political liabilities and victories by the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) that were threatening, and engage in a vigorous program of legislation to enact the neoliberal program he favored. Salinas’s most significant political venture, the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONASOL), provided another route for the presidency to penetrate to the local level and develop political support.¹⁴ Indeed, Salinas chose to put off political liberalization (other than the steps he was forced to concede to the opposition to bolster the regime’s legitimacy, especially after the Chiapas rebellion), even while “political modernization” was one of his campaign slogans. Writing at the midpoint of Salinas’s term, Roderic Camp noted in his contribution to

11. For example, see Garrido, *El partido de la revolución institucionalizada: La formación del nuevo estado en México (1928–1945)* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno, 1982).

12. The Council of Freely Elected Heads of Government, *Elections in Mexico*, 3d report, 1 Aug. 1994 (Atlanta, Ga.: Carter Center, Emory University).

13. Camp notes that Salinas set a record for the most governors removed in his first year in office, exceeded only by Miguel Alemán (1946–1952) among presidents in the past half-century. See “Political Modernization in Mexico,” *Evolution of the Mexican Political System*, 261.

14. The most complete work on PRONASOL is *Transforming State-Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy*, edited by Wayne A. Cornelius, Ann L. Craig, and Jonathan Fox (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1994).

The Evolution of the Mexican Political System, "Whatever accomplishments Salinas has engineered in support of political modernization, his decision-making style contradicts his own definition of it" (p. 260).

In contrast, Zedillo may have been so weakened by political scandal (not of his making) and economic difficulties that he may not be able to push Mexico into democracy by himself. Events of the past two years suggest that he may have to accept a more democratic regime on terms imposed on him by resurgent oppositionists. Thus Zedillo's presidency may be more constrained than Salinas's, mainly because the PRI's capacity to win elections (legitimately or otherwise) no longer seems certain, whether for executive offices at the state and local level or legislative offices in federal elections. PAN governors and local governments headed by the PAN and the PRD have already begun to provide one buffer between the central government headed by its ultimate leader and the Mexican citizenry.¹⁵ The central government's control of the purse will set limits on the activities of local and state authorities, but opposition governors and mayors have sought new sources of revenues.¹⁶

The seldom-mentioned point about presidential power in Mexico is that it has rested on the PRI super-majority in the congress and on the PRI's capacity to overwhelm all opponents in state and local contests for executive office. This deceptively simple point has been captured by Martin Needler in a single sentence: "The dominance of the PRI in the legislature, and the president's position as head of the PRI, mean that the Congress passes all government legislation."¹⁷ President Zedillo can count on neither a PRI-dominated congress nor easy PRI victories in state and municipal elections in the future. Hence to understand Mexican politics in coming years, scholars will need studies of executive-legislative relations and Mexican federalism. Given the immense outpouring of work concerning executive-legislative relations in the rest of Latin America,¹⁸ it is surprising that Mexicanists have not contributed to this classic theme in political science. Regarding studies of institutions, Jaime Rodríguez goes so far as to comment in *The Evolution of the Mexican System*, "Although there is a vast narrative political literature, the paucity of studies of elections, national and regional political institutions, and political groups. . .

15. See the studies in *Opposition Government in Mexico*, edited by Victoria E. Rodríguez and Peter M. Ward (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995).

16. See Victoria E. Rodríguez and Peter M. Ward, *Political Change in Baja California: Democracy in the Making?* (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1994), esp. 106–16; also, Rodríguez and Ward, *Policymaking, Politics, and Urban Governance in Chihuahua: The Experience of Recent PANista Governments* (Austin: U.S.-Mexican Policy Studies Program, Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, 1992).

17. Martin C. Needler, *Mexican Politics: The Containment of Conflict*, 3d ed. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995), 82.

18. *The Failure of Presidential Democracy*, edited by Juan J. Linz and Arturo Valenzuela (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994).

is so great that no sound explanation of nineteenth- and twentieth-century politics is currently possible" (p. 8). The lack of a solid understanding of the organization of the Mexican executive branch and the possible evolution in relations between the president and congress could even be threatening to political stability. If divided government comes to Mexico in 1997, as it almost did in 1988, or if the PAN wins the presidency in 2000, these opposition politicians will need to know how to operate within the central institutions of presidential democracy. Current studies offer them no guide.

The PRI: The Revolution Deinstitutionalized?

As has already been suggested, the deterioration of the PRI's hegemony also threatens presidential rule. Electoral politics at the beginning of the Zedillo sexenio indicate a PRI almost unable to win any major gubernatorial or mayoral election, except perhaps where the party can spend enormous sums of presumably state-provided campaign funds. Discussion of the evolution of the party system in recent years has centered around whether the PRI will gradually change from a hegemonic party to a predominant party along the lines of the Indian Congress Party or the Japanese Liberal Democratic Party,¹⁹ or whether a two- or three-party system will emerge that will permit true alternation in power. The latter would require more significant change in the character of the PRI. In either case, as Lorenzo Meyer observes in his contribution to *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*, "Internal democratization is necessary if the PRI is to gain life and power of its own, to cease being a mere tool of the president, and to construct an authentic social base of its own. External democratization is needed for true party competition" (p. 325). Meyer poses the question well in the title of his essay, "Democratization of the PRI: Mission Impossible?" As he argues, the presidency itself represents the most significant obstacle to genuine democratization of the party because "a PRI in which regional and sectoral interests would have a voice in determining party platforms and in rewarding or disciplining party activists—now one of the president's most important extraconstitutional powers—[would] thereby undermin[e] the president's current role as the undisputed leader of the state party" (p. 343).

Salinas put forward two initiatives to "modernize" the party. One aspect of modernization involved creating a more democratic image for the party. A more democratic PRI would use internal primaries to select its candidates for office and would recognize electoral losses when they

19. For discussion of these possibilities, see Leopoldo Gómez and Joseph L. Klesner, "Mexico's 1988 Elections: Beginning of a New Era of Mexican Politics?" *LASA Forum* 19, no. 3 (Fall 1988):1–8; and José Antonio Crespo, "Dominación y hegemonía en los sistemas partidistas de México y Japón," *Foro Internacional* 34, no. 3 (July–Sept. 1994):437–56.

occurred. Moreover, this new improved PRI would replace its sectoral organization and the bloc affiliation typical of the sectors with individual affiliation and geographical organization, similar to the organization of parties in the United States. These efforts for the most part failed. Internal primaries were used sparingly. They tended to exacerbate divisions already existing in state and local party organizations, and the president was unwilling to relinquish entirely the opportunities for distributing patronage offered by the more traditional presidential designation of PRI nominees.²⁰ This aspect of modernization threatened presidential power in promoting genuine internal democratization.

A more successful aspect of PRI modernization under Salinas involved introducing more sophisticated campaigning tools: computers, polls, and better campaign organization. Under the leadership of Luis Donaldo Colosio, a massive effort was unveiled in 1989 to create a network of promoters to get out the vote, coordinated by the PRI's state organizations with connections down to the most intimate level of Mexican society. The plan used a system of national surveys designed to allow the PRI organization to tailor its candidates and their campaigns to meet the demands of particular districts. Although the PRI has always been able to mount a far larger and better-funded campaign than its opposition, this move was an unprecedented effort to reclaim the grassroots. Such a massive effort could not have been undertaken without the backing of government resources.²¹ But whether or not the PRI played fair in this effort, it produced results in 1991 as PRI congressional candidates swept to victories across the country. This aspect of party modernization had nothing to do with compromising presidential power or democratizing the party.

The logic of increasing political contestation should push the PRI toward internal reforms that will make it more competitive. Rodríguez and Ward report that in some states and municipalities with more competition, particularly in the north, the PRI has made internal changes that have produced different candidates, more open governance, a distancing from old patterns of patronage, and better relationships with citizens.²² But whether this approach can become characteristic of the national party seems unlikely to Meyer:

The PRI . . . was created to complement the institutional structure of the new regime, not to do battle with its political adversaries at the polls. It provides the forum for internal negotiations among the governing elite, for the distribution of political patronage awards, and for recruiting (fewer and fewer) and socializing

20. See Leopoldo Gómez and John Bailey, "La transición política y los dilemas del PRI," *Foro Internacional* 31, no. 1 (July–Sept. 1990), 57–87, esp. p. 73.

21. Jorge Alcocer V. and Rodrigo Morales M., "Mitología y realidad del fraude electoral," *Nexos*, no. 166 (Oct. 1991), 27–33, p. 30.

22. "The New PRI: Recasting Its Identity," in *Dismantling the Mexican State*, edited by Rob Aitken et al. (London: Macmillan, 1995).

new members. During electoral campaigns it acquaints the populace with its soon-to-be-elected officials, and it mobilizes specific sectors of society as needed for the preservation of the system. Between elections—excepting those occasions when government leadership needs limited mass mobilization—the official party practically disappears. Its activities are determined almost exclusively by the president and by the electoral calendar, not by grassroots interests or demands. (*Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*, p. 335)

Zedillo claims to be attempting to separate the party from the state, thereby annulling many of its electoral advantages. In some places (such as the state of Tabasco), that is proving to be a difficult task. The electoral record of the PRI thus far in the Zedillo sexenio suggests that the PRI will not do well in fair electoral contests, at least not when the government's economic record appears to the average voter to be a disaster. Demoralization among activists in a party long accustomed to automatic victories may further disintegration of the PRI. Defection has also been playing a role since 1987. At this point, what once seemed to be a gradual evolution of a hegemonic party system into a predominant party system like that of Japan or India appears to be accelerating toward a two- or three-party system.²³ Whether the PRI will survive intact to contest the next presidential election is not certain. Still more worrisome is that this evolving party system does not seem to be transcending the pro-regime–anti-regime axis of definition that Juan Molinar Horcasitas identifies in his contribution to *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*. To achieve a healthy multiparty system that can structure citizens' interests, Mexico needs to develop a party system in which parties define themselves in terms of policy inclinations and ideology. The PRI's current malaise contributes little to such clarification of the party spectrum.

Corruption: Concomitant of Lack of Institutionalization?

Two of the deleterious consequences of Mexican presidentialism highlighted by Garrido in *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures* are the arbitrariness of public officials in dealing with citizens and the widespread corruption often cited by Mexicans and foreigners alike as endemic in Mexico. Although social scientists have been more reluctant to explore corruption than journalists,²⁴ Stephen Morris provides a sustained effort to understand the sources of corruption and its functional

23. One could argue, based on the 1994 elections, that Mexico had developed two separate two-party systems, with the PAN facing the PRI in the north and the PRD facing the PRI in the south, and all three competing in a multiparty system in the Mexico City area. See Joseph L. Klesner, "The 1994 Mexican Elections: Manifestation of a Divided Society?" *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1995):137–49. More recent state-level elections seem to indicate that the PAN is penetrating the south too, while the PRD continues to sputter.

24. For a useful account by a journalist, see Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbors: A Portrait of the Mexicans* (New York: Vintage, 1984).

meaning in the Mexican political system in *Corruption and Politics in Contemporary Mexico*. In his opinion, "reducing the scope and role of personalistic politics in Mexico is crucial in shrinking the environment in which corruption flourishes" (p. 139). Recent revelations show that the concentration of power in the president's hands in the last sexenio encouraged those closest to Salinas to take advantage of the unusual opportunities available during restructuring of the economy to enrich themselves and their families. Morris suggests that the lack of an effective civil-service system and weak civic associations at the grassroots level have made corruption more likely. The weakness of other social organizations (notably business, labor, and peasant groups) vis-à-vis the state also fosters corruption of their leaders and distortion of interest representation throughout the polity.

Morris argues further that researchers must understand corruption in the context of the regime as a whole. Reforms targeted at simply eliminating corruption may in fact produce pressures in other places in the political system precisely because corruption functions in Mexican politics "to grease the wheels of government," as Garrido points out. Perhaps this function explains the pattern in which each president enters office with a public anti-corruption campaign, only to step away from it, as Morris details for the last four presidencies (pp. 82–101). In one insightful chapter of *Corruption and Politics*, Morris describes how the dismantling of the Mexican state should cut significantly into corruption by reducing the resources available for lining one's pockets and diminishing the appeal of a government career as a means of social mobility. Civil society has also become more powerful in the balance between state and society, permitting investigative journalists, civic associations, and opposition parties to contribute to anti-corruption efforts. But corruption has been functional in Mexican politics, principally in attracting ambitious people to serve the PRI and the state. Morris suggests that adding anti-corruption campaigns on top of the dismantling of the state only threatens to eviscerate the electoral organ of the presidency, the PRI, thereby making the regime less stable and encouraging other actors to enter the fray.

The Military, Guarantor of Whose Security?

Latin Americanists are too familiar with military rule to need a long discourse on why the military's attitude toward politics is crucial at a time of impending change. Roderic Camp's *Generals in the Palacio: The Military in Modern Mexico* provides the only major recent monograph on the Mexican military, although recent edited volumes on Mexican politics and U.S.-Mexican relations have devoted sections to the military and

civil-military relations.²⁵ Camp supplies a timely corrective to the scholarly literature on Mexico, important at least because of scant knowledge of a key institution in the Mexican state, timely because the military's involvement in internal security affairs grew under Salinas, as Camp shows for at least the first half of his administration. The concept of national security has occasioned much debate in Mexico.²⁶ Stephen Wager has argued, "The government has correlated national security with internal security."²⁷

Since Salinas became president, the military has become more involved in three tasks with implications for civil-military relations. First, according to Camp, "Election violence, especially at the state and local level, has become a hallmark of Salinas's administration. The government has used troops to maintain order and, in some cases, to effect election fraud" (p. 34). Second, the military has been used more extensively against drug traffickers. As recent revelations indicate, this trend has made the military vulnerable to temptations of corruption. Also, higher-level members of the political elite have been implicated in drug trafficking, potentially complicating civil-military relations. Third, the Zapatista uprising caused the military to be deployed to put down a rebellion by those dislocated by neoliberal economic restructuring, and the military has come under much scrutiny about its methods of doing so.

What does this situation portend for civil-military relations? As Camp notes, "Implicitly, analysts have equated an expansion of the military's role with greater political influence, and greater political influence with a decline in respect for civil authority. Clearly, the former is possible without a significant alteration in the latter" (p. 212). Camp finds that the civilian political elite has labored to keep the military out of the decision-making process even when Salinas increased the military's internal security role and created a national security group within his technical cabinet. But Camp worries that the increased role of the military will lead to greater political influence and politicization (pp. 222–23). More ominously, Camp suggests, "the most influential element in retaining military

25. See, for example, Martin Edwin Anderson, "Civil-Military Relations and Internal Security in Mexico: The Undone Reform," in *The Challenge of Institutional Reform in Mexico*, edited by Riordan Roett (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995); Stephen J. Wager, "The Mexican Military Approaches the Twenty-First Century: Coping with a New World Order," and Wager and Donald E. Schultz, "The Zapatista Revolt and Its Implications for Civil-Military Relations and the Future of Mexico," both in *Mexico Faces the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Donald E. Schultz and Edward J. Williams (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1995). The most recent book-length treatment was *The Modern Mexican Military: A Reassessment*, edited by David Ronfeldt (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1984).

26. For a variety of views, mostly of Mexican scholars, on what should define Mexican national security, see *Mexico: In Search of Security*, edited by Bruce Michael Bagley and Sergio Aguayo Quezada (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction, 1993).

27. Wager, "The Mexican Military Approaches the Twenty-First Century," p. 66.

loyalty is the officer's belief in the civilian leadership's ability to maintain order. As long as the government demonstrates that ability, and retains at least limited popular respect, the military will support civilian authority" (p. 45). Electoral and other political violence, rural rebellions, and the widespread perception of the political elite's involvement in drug trafficking do little to demonstrate the capacity of the central political institutions to maintain order. Whether the intense socialization of young officers designed to create unquestioned obedience to the president can keep the military out of politics remains to be seen.

Mexican Identity: Many Mexicos?

This review has suggested that scholars know too little about Mexican political institutions, especially given their changing character over the past decade. Mexico's most critical institutions, the presidency and the PRI, seem less stable and more vulnerable than they did two decades ago. The consequences of this institutional change for Mexican political stability would be less ominous if Mexico's revolutionary nationalism still provided the consensus that could continue to legitimate the regime. In a provocative essay in *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*, Roger Bartra asks, "Is nationalist political culture today capable of fulfilling the legitimizing function called for by the systemic crisis?" (p. 62). He concludes that it is not.

Revolutionary nationalism does not provide legitimacy for the current rulers because Zedillo, Salinas before him, and de la Madrid even earlier have actively sought to tear down the policies that buttress revolutionary nationalism. Bartra labels them as "agrarianism, syndical populism, and protectionism" (p. 64). He argues, "Revolutionary nationalism and the technocratic search for efficiency represent two entirely different, openly antithetical political cultures" (p. 66). That is true even of the corrupted institutions of revolutionary nationalism associated with *caciquismo*, *charrismo*, and the PRI in general. Salinas may have used all of these occasionally to bolster his power, but they do not really fit into the worldview of the specialists of the technocracy. What is replacing revolutionary nationalism?

Although political scientists should not deny the appeal of technocratic values to a segment of the Mexican population, Bartra identifies another kind of political culture as the substitute for revolutionary nationalist patriotism. Following Luis González, Bartra calls this element "matriotism," the allegiance primarily to localities and regions:

This regionalism is not a reanimated version of old, centripetal, caciquist tendencies; it is, rather, the consequence of the modernizing experiences of the hundreds of thousands of Mexicans who have traveled and worked in the United States. . . . It is a postmodern conservatism that has lost faith in progress and dreams of

tranquility. It is a conservatism that is much closer to its counterpart in myriad small cities, towns, and suburban neighborhoods in the midwestern and southwestern United States than to the stale conservatism espoused by military men such as Almazán or movements such as *sinarquismo*. The quiet evolution of the party that picked up the *sinarquista* banner, the Mexican Democratic Party, is symptomatic of this new arena of conservatism: in many regions (the Bajío, Michoacán, etc.) it went from being a quasi-fascist, militant party to being perhaps the clearest organic political expression of the new patriotism. The PAN, especially in northern Mexico, attracts much of this regionalist, conservative element. . . . (P. 69)

One could add Zapatismo in Chiapas to this litany. The Zapatista rebellion and the examples Bartra cites clearly reject a revolutionary nationalism that exalts the state. They call for democracy, understood in various ways, but democracy nonetheless. Regionalism of this type contributes to undermining the two institutions at the heart of the regime, the presidency and the PRI.

In the past, political scientists have paid relatively little attention to politics at any level other than the national one.²⁸ The work of Rodríguez and Ward and their collaborators on the experience of opposition parties in power in states and municipalities is beginning to fill this lacuna.²⁹ Anthropologists have long focused on the local while remaining interested in national culture, but as Lomnitz-Adler explains, “the case-study tradition in Mexico was making anthropologists into technicians and leaving the view of the ‘whole’ to others” (p. 255). He points to essayists such as Octavio Paz and Samuel Ramos, whom Lomnitz-Adler believes “turn history into psychodrama” and vastly underrate the role of dominant classes in defining the national project (p. 2).

Lomnitz-Adler seeks to bridge the two by developing tools for analyzing cultural regions within the larger nation. This review cannot do justice to the complex and sophisticated analysis set forth in *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in Mexican National Space* nor even its analytical framework. In its case studies of Cuernavaca and the Huasteca Potosina, this ambitious work demonstrates how understanding the spatial relationship between regions and the national state helps scholars appreciate the different forms that power assumes from place to place and the role played by nationalist and localist ideologies in establishing hegemony in any specific place. As the ideology of revolutionary nationalism loses its capacity to legitimize the rule of the technocrats now in

28. My sense is that this observation is a little less true in Mexico than among those writing about Mexico in English. In studying a centralized authoritarian regime, scholars have analyzed politics at the center.

29. An example is Rodríguez and Ward's *Opposition Government in Mexico*. An earlier example of a break with the centralist tendency in political analysis is *Electoral Patterns and Perspectives in Mexico*, edited by Arturo Alvarado (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1987), in which mostly Mexican scholars explored electoral developments in particular states and regions of Mexico in the 1980s.

power, this cultural and ideological relationship between those ruling in Mexico City and those ruling in the many Mexicos outside the capital (not to speak of those whom they rule) will only become more complex. Careful appreciation of this relationship will be essential to understanding Mexican politics.

Conclusion: Must a Stable Polity Be Institutionalized?

Writing at a time when the Mexican regime's stability impressed almost everyone studying Latin America, Purcell and Purcell asked, "must a stable polity be institutionalized?" They argued that the Mexican regime "never evolved from its original bargain into an institutionalized entity" and that it is "less a set of institutionalized structures . . . than a complex of well-established, even ritualized, strategies and tactics appropriate to political, bureaucratic, and private interaction throughout the system."³⁰ Purcell and Purcell pointed to political discipline and political negotiation as the principles of political action that allowed Mexico to avoid the twin alternatives of repressive authoritarianism and political instability.

I have argued in this review essay that contemporary studies of the Mexican presidency and other institutions reveal the lack of institutionalization in the Mexican regime. Perhaps an authoritarian regime, even one ruled by civilians, need not be institutionalized, especially if an ideology like revolutionary nationalism can provide legitimacy for the rulers. This generalization may be even truer if economic resources are abundant enough that most of those politically involved can be rewarded by a state that, as Schmidt describes it, "godfathers" capitalism (pp. 22–26). But when that state is challenged, as Cornelius, Gentleman, and Smith describe, by economic crisis, and when the development of increasingly complex regional political cultures complicates legitimation, the lack of institutionalization can become a liability, especially to those who seek to reform the system.

In the end, a democracy must be institutionalized because democracy is essentially a set of rules that define which institutions are allowed to make authoritative decisions and how. As Mexico moves toward democracy, we will need more studies of political institutions, specifically of the internal structure of the executive branch, executive-legislative relations, and relationships between the central government and subnational governments. Mexicans themselves will need these studies if they are to build democratic institutions and to operate as responsible political actors within them.

30. See Purcell and Purcell, "State and Society in Mexico," 195.