

The Party System and Democratic Governance in Mexico

José Antonio Crespo

Policy Papers on the Americas
Volume XV, Study 2

March 2004



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This report was prepared under the aegis of the CSIS Policy Papers on the Americas series.
Comments are welcome and should be directed to:

CSIS Americas Program

1800 K Street, N.W.

Washington, D.C. 20006

Phone: (202) 775-3180

Fax: (202) 466-4739

E-mail: vvanni@csis.org

Web site: <http://www.csis.org/>

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The Party System and Democratic Governance in Mexico

José Antonio Crespo

Translated by *Monique Fernández*

Introduction

The defeat of the PRI in the presidential election of 2000 was an event of great historical significance for Mexico; never before in the country's history had a peaceful transfer of power taken place from one political party or faction to another without an intervening civil war, coup, or revolution. In addition to providing an opportunity for a profound (as yet unfulfilled) regime change from a semi-authoritarian system to a fully democratic one, this handover of power has modified the party system that had risen after the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920 and persisted until 2000. It was a hegemonic or dominant party system in which one party, the International Revolutionary Party (PRI), monopolized control over political institutions; this party coexisted with other legally registered parties but competed under conditions that ensured its absolute advantage and allowed it to preserve its power for seven decades, disregarding the will of the population. Gradually, the official party's dominance began to weaken, making it possible to achieve a slow but real approximation of a fully competitive political environment, in which the opposition parties began to occupy increasingly significant positions of power, eventually reaching the presidency of the republic. At this point it was no longer appropriate to refer to party hegemony as such because, by definition, a peaceful and institutional transfer of power could not have occurred under such a system. Yet this rotation of power has, in turn, generated dramatic changes within the party system, in the parties' relationship to each other and with the executive branch, and in the dynamics of the legislative branch itself. At the same time, these parties have inherited considerable rigidities, molded during the long period of PRI dominance. This has resulted in a certain

degree of difficulty in adapting to new political conditions as well as the encumbrance of the political decisionmaking process, whose center of gravity moved from the executive to the legislative branch. This essay analyzes some of the consequences of this dramatic transfer of power on the party system as a whole and in relation to other actors within the political system.

The End of PRI Dominance

A dominant party system existed in Mexico for almost 70 years; one party monopolized power and used the state's resources to ensure the permanence of its own power while sharing the political stage with legally registered parties that participate in official elections but under uncompetitive conditions. The PRI was the official party since its inception in 1929 (though founded under a different name), but Mexico officially never had a one-party system. President Plutarco E. Calles himself, when he called for the formation of the party in his last presidential report in 1928, also urged opposition forces to defend their ideas and programs in the electoral arena. Two main reasons led the Mexican revolutionaries to adopt a hegemonic party approach instead of a one-party system as, for example, the Bolsheviks did in Russia: the political legitimacy of the Maderista revolution of 1910 emanated from the triumphant liberalism of the nineteenth century, which included political democracy as a fundamental principle; and in order to be recognized by the United States, Mexican governments have always been compelled to maintain democratic forms, though the exercise of power may not have been democratic in reality.¹

The hegemonic party model satisfied these two conditions perfectly without sacrificing the advantages of a monopolistic exercise of power—a power won in the revolutionary trenches. The PRI also succeeded in keeping power sufficiently concentrated to allow it to continue the economic modernization process begun during Porfirio Díaz's rule—the Porfiriato—now, however, with expanded goals that included development and social justice. At the same time, during the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas, the PRI became a party of the masses, capable of incorporating within its structure the social organizations mobilized during and after the revolution, affording the new political regime a base of stability for decades. These two attributes are also seen in mass monopoly parties such as the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, the Chinese Communist Party, or the Nationalist Party of Taiwan.

In this kind of system, however, a dominant party faces a permanent challenge that is not always easy to negotiate: the need for a credible opposition that chooses to participate in a totally disadvantageous game in which its chances of winning are nonexistent. Thus, the hegemonic party swings between the two extremes it must avoid: the absence of any competition among parties, which would define it as a monopoly party and deprive it of the legitimacy it can derive from democratic formalities; and actual competition on a level playing field with the rest of the parties, which would eliminate the guarantee of its ability to perpetuate its power. For these reasons, the dominant party must find a way to keep the opposition in

the game, while retaining all the chips necessary to continue winning. This is not easy. It requires maneuvering to avoid sliding toward one of the poles flanking the dominance system: maintaining the absence of any official competition on one extreme and actual competition on the other. The party must remain in that middle realm of simulated competition—formal but not real.

The PRI regime succeeded in maintaining its hegemony for a long period of time through modifications to electoral legislation, whether designed to give the opposition a breath of air when it was looking weaker, or to stop its advance when it grew stronger. In general, we can divide the course of these electoral reforms into five chapters, beginning with the inauguration of the first electoral legislation that resulted from the revolution in 1918: 1) consolidation of hegemony (1946–1963); 2) limited openness (1964–1986); 3) hegemonic regression (1987–1993); 4) full democratization; 5) potential regression. Let us briefly review the characteristics and circumstances of each one of these phases of electoral evolution.

CONSOLIDATION OF HEGEMONY (1946–1963). The 1946 electoral reform concentrated the function of organizing elections in the federal government, depriving the governors and local leaders of that authority. In this way the president of the country gained power over the governors and the national party over its state-level representation. The effort also hindered the formation of new parties that could serve as a platform for dissidents within the PRI, who might break away and launch independent candidacies (as was the case in 1940, 1946, and yet again in 1952). Such fissures weakened the internal discipline of the party and gave nonconformists an incentive to seek other trenches on the outside, a situation that was incompatible with the concept of a functional hegemony.²

LIMITED OPENNESS (1964–1986). At the time of the 1958 presidential election, the PRI had succeeded in closing the schism in its leadership, and the existing opposition was exhibiting great weakness. The government grew concerned about remaining alone as the country's only party, without the legitimization provided by the presence of an opposition party. The National Action Party (PAN), founded in 1939, had alleged at the time a major electoral fraud and in protest had ordered the six majority deputies, or congressmen, elected under the party banner to abandon their seats in order to leave the PRI virtually alone in Congress. Although four of those deputies kept their seats, they were expelled by the PAN. The administration even anticipated the possibility that the PAN might withdraw permanently from the electoral arena (an option that was in fact being discussed within the party) and determined that it was necessary to offer new incentives for participation.

Thus, in 1964, the concept of proportional representation was introduced into the electoral formula. This produced proportional representation seats that were distributed to opposition parties that received a minimum of 2.5 percent of the vote (five seats, up to a maximum of 20 per party).³ Later, in 1970, the

minimum was reduced to 1.5 percent, which further favored congressional representation by the opposition. The reform was successful, as evidenced by the fact that the PAN desisted from the option of withdrawing permanently. In 1976 the PAN became debilitated once again and was unable to produce a presidential candidate, causing the PRI candidate to run alone amidst renewed concerns about being perceived as a monopoly party. These concerns led to a new electoral reform in 1977, aimed at reinvigorating the party system. Parties of the revolutionary Left were allowed to register; public funding of political parties was formalized; advertising space in the media was officially designated for party use; and a mixed system was designed with 300 majority deputies and 100 proportional representation deputies, with seats to be distributed according to voting percentages, basically among the opposition.⁴ The reform was a total success, and nine candidates ran for president in the 1982 election.

HEGEMONIC REGRESSION (1987–1993). With the economic crisis of 1982, the opposition (mainly the PAN) began to gain greater strength and electoral victories, particularly in the northern part of the country. In 1986 a serious post-electoral conflict ensued in Chihuahua when the regime responded to the PAN candidate's victory by perpetrating major fraud in order to retain control over the government of that state. This caused the PAN to radicalize its position. The shift in economic policy led by President Miguel de la Madrid, in turn, generated tensions within the PRI—between the traditional political class and the corporate sectors—resulting in the deepest split the party had ever experienced. The split was led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who would later run as a non-PRI candidate.

All of these events foretold a hard-fought electoral race for the presidential election in 1988, which led to a new electoral reform in 1987 that countered reforms of previous years. Now the goal was to check the advance of an opposition that had grown more robust and threatening and to artificially prolong the PRI's dominance by ensuring absolute majorities in the lower houses of Congress. To achieve this, the number of proportional representation deputies was increased to 200, with a new arrangement that allowed the PRI to gain whatever number of seats it needed to guarantee its own absolute majority in the lower house. The law providing for modification of the proportional representation formula was also amended in 1991 and again in 1993, giving the PRI an additional advantage. Therefore, these reforms might better be described as counter reforms. Yet some actual institutional progress was made as well, to make up for the relapse on the composition of the lower house. An example is the creation of the Instituto Federal Electoral (Federal Electoral Institute [IFE]) and the Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación (Federal Electoral Tribunal [TRIFE]); however, in both cases the entity's power was limited, and its composition was still designed to ensure its control by the ruling party.⁵

FULL DEMOCRATIZATION. A guerrilla movement in Chiapas surfaced in 1994, powerfully impacting the country's political climate. The Democratic

Revolutionary Party (PRD), which had been excluded from the electoral pacts of 1991 and 1993, indirectly gained negotiating power. The government realized its potential risk for the 1994 presidential elections in the event that the PRD refused to endorse the basic rules, competitive conditions, and electoral arbitration of the presidential race. The government hastened to implement some reforms that turned out to be real strides toward true competition in the electoral arena. The most important of these was the so-called *ciudadanización* of the IFE, which put the institute in the hands of Mexican citizens. Political parties, previously represented in the entity, now lost their votes in the IFE. A citizen council group was created, consisting of six politically unaffiliated citizens, in addition to the secretary of the interior (Gobernación), who continued to serve as the agency's president. This assured electoral impartiality to all the parties, including, of course, the PRD (even though Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, that party's presidential candidate, saw the reforms as insufficient). The 1994 election, which the PRI won by a broad margin, was successful and essentially fair.⁶

The new president Ernesto Zedillo, however, understood that the lack of a full electoral democracy would continue to generate political instability, which in turn could trigger a new and deeper economic crisis (even worse than the one that erupted in 1995). For this reason he cleared the way for a new electoral reform, which he described as "definitive," and remains in effect today. The most significant step was the government's complete withdrawal from the structure of the IFE, which became fully autonomous. The presidency of the institution would no longer be held by the secretary of the interior, but rather, by non-politically affiliated citizen who would have the power along with eight fellow citizens to make all decisions at the institute's highest level. This can be considered the moment of transition from a semi-competitive system to a fully competitive one in which the ruling party would not be able to fabricate a verdict according to its needs or to revoke one that was unfavorable to it.⁷

POTENTIAL REGRESSION. In spite of the undeniable achievements of the 1996 reform, the 2000 electoral process revealed certain legal loopholes that legislators had not foreseen. Modernizing the electoral process calls for various adjustments of electoral legislation, not just in terms of ensuring a fair process but also for addressing certain distortions and deficiencies.⁸ The most serious problem was the unregulated environment in which presidential pre-campaigns took place (the presidential campaign begins in January of the year in which the election will take place), which allowed the parties to disregard applicable campaign laws, thus distorting the spirit and objectives of the electoral legal framework. It was this state of affairs which led to the political-financial scandals in connection with the diversion of funds from PEMEX, the state-run oil company, to the PRI campaign as well as the unreported private monies reaching the Fox campaign through the network known as "Friends of Fox." For these reasons, it is essential to regulate the pre-campaign phase (some state legislation has already been passed in this regard). Another issue was the high level of public funding, which approached the sums received by

political parties in Japan, a country with a per capita gross domestic product several times that of Mexico. Even worse, the funding formula that governed the 2003 elections doubled the amount of public funds received by the parties, even though that year only the lower house had elections, not the presidency or the Senate. The parties had a chance to amend the law before the 2003 elections through an initiative approved in committees by all the parties in late 2001. At the last minute the PRI backed out, however, and things remained the same.

This indicated a certain unwillingness of the parties to move forward on electoral matters; on the contrary, they tended to regress in some aspects. In October 2003, when there was to be a rotation at the IFE's highest level, the General Council, the positions were filled based on party quotas set according to each major party's power at the polls. The method contradicted the spirit of the 1994 and 1996 reforms, which were intended to foster an atmosphere of equality of partisan viewpoints through officials with no ties to the parties themselves. Now, instead, it was decided that the PRI, by virtue of its electoral victory in 2003, would appoint the president of the IFE and three of its eight electoral advisers; the PAN would appoint three, and the PRD would appoint two. This, in itself, marked an end to the *ciudadanización* process of the IFE and a return to the partisanship (*partidización*) that prevailed from 1991 to 1994. Furthermore, due to the lack of agreement between the PRI and the PRD on their respective proposals for the selection of the new General Council, the PRI persuaded the PAN to exclude the PRD from negotiations. In the end the PRI appointed five electoral advisers (one of them as president), and the PAN was left with the remaining four. This also altered the consensus reached in 1994 and 1996, although the PRI-PAN brokered selection process did abide by the law requiring a qualified majority in the lower house of Congress for the designation of advisers. By excluding the PRD, however, the PRI and the PAN diminished the credibility of the 2006 election process and its results. If the PRD candidate were to lose by a few points, the party would call for the election to be invalidated based on the partiality, in their view, of the IFE. For a defeat of the PRD candidate to be credible, the candidate would have to lose by several percentage points. Otherwise, a post electoral conflict would break out that would be marked by mutual denunciations, distrust, and political mobilization, similar to the climate that prevailed during Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration and was thought to have ended after the 1994 and 1996 reforms. The process does represent a regression, therefore. Regarding electoral reform, in December 2003 Congress slightly modified the guidelines for the registration of new parties, making the process more difficult than before. Twice the number of members are now required, and parties must register first under an entity that has been in effect since 1997, the National Political Association—all of which complicates registration and the chance for new parties to compete. Other regressions could occur in the electoral sphere in response to the interests of the registered parties themselves rather than those of the citizenry.

In any case, in the 1997 elections held under the new legislation, the PRI lost its absolute majority in the lower house of Congress for the first time and also lost the election for mayor of Mexico City, which was put to a direct citizen vote for the first time since 1928. In other words, the PRI lost its dominance, despite its continued incumbency as the ruling party. Relinquishing control of the electoral authority meant losing the guarantee of victory, as the 1997 elections made clear; and having lost absolute control of Congress, it could no longer ensure the approval of bills submitted by the chief executive as had been the case in previous decades. Under such circumstances, dismal prospects—even defeat in a presidential election—loomed dangerously on the horizon, especially because voting trends no longer offered the PRI any certainty of victory in the new, essentially competitive environment.⁹ And when the PRI lost its hegemony in 1997, it set off on the road to defeat in 2000 and the end of its tenure in the presidency. These events radically modified the dynamics of the party system, with visible repercussions on the political system as a whole as well as on relations between the executive and legislative branches.

Dynamics of a Divided Government

One of the inherent problems in a presidentialist, or presidential, system vis-à-vis a parliamentary system is that it opens up the possibility that the party controlling the executive may not have an absolute (or relative) majority in the congressional houses. This has not been a serious problem for the United States but it has often been one in other latitudes, particularly in Latin America.¹⁰ The reason is that a parliamentary system, by definition, gives rise to a unified government (emerging from the party or from a majority coalition) while in a presidential system, it is possible for the party controlling the executive branch to have no control over the legislative branch. To the extent that this occurs, the chances of legislative deadlock and even conflict between the branches become greater. Moreover, parliamentary systems have institutional mechanisms available to them for the resolution of potential disagreements between the two branches, whether through a vote of no confidence in the cabinet or the dissolution of Congress and a call for extraordinary elections.¹¹ In presidential systems no such mechanisms exist, so that when a conflict ensues between the branches, it must be resolved through negotiation between the parties and the government; otherwise they will face a stalemate, and maybe even the temptation on the part of one of the two branches to dissolve the other by unconstitutional means. (Recent examples include Abdalla Bucaram in Ecuador, Alberto Fujimori in Peru, and Hugo Chavez in Venezuela.) In Mexico, more than a few people, especially in academia, share the opinion of constitutional expert and former citizen counselor at Mexico's IFE Jaime Cárdenas: "For a Mexico of the future that aspires to be democratic, a presidential regime is not the best design for combining governance and democracy."¹²

Governments that form within a presidential system can be classified according to the degree of representation that the party that controls the executive branch has in the congressional houses as a dominant government, a unified government, a government without a majority, a minority government, or a true

divided government.¹³ A dominant government is one in which the party that controls the executive branch has a qualified majority in Congress and thus the ability to modify the constitution single-handedly, with no need for support from another party. A unified government is one in which the president's party has an absolute, although not qualified, majority in Congress and is thus unable to change the constitution by itself. In a government without a majority, the president's party has a relative, not absolute, majority in Congress. In a minority government, the president's party represents a minority in Congress, with the second- or third-greatest number of seats. Although the term is often used to describe governments that are not unified (in other words, those in which the ruling party does not have an absolute majority in Congress), a divided government is more precisely defined as one in which one particular opposition party does have an absolute majority in Congress and thus the ability to pass statutory legislation without another party's support.

The transition from the first type of government to the second and subsequent categories involves movement from one extreme, concentrated power, to another, dispersion of power. This shift along the continuum results in a more complicated decisionmaking process and hampers governance to a certain degree. (See Appendix, Diagram 1).

Of course, in countries with a bicameral Congress, various possible combinations are conceivable (unified government in the lower house without majority in the upper house; a government with no majority in the lower house and a minority in the upper house; or even a divided government in which the lower house is controlled by an opposition party and the upper house by a different opposition party).

In Mexico we have transitioned in a very short time from a dominant government to a minority government in both houses. For decades we went through a series of consecutive dominant governments in which the ruling party enjoyed a qualified majority in both congressional houses. That was the case at least during the institutionalization of the post-revolutionary dominant party regime during the "Maximato" period of Plutarco E. Calles and the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas; before that there had been greater plurality in terms of political currents in the Congress, whether within the same party, the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), or simply as a part of the far-reaching "revolutionary family"¹⁴ of smaller parties that were ideologically aligned with the PNR.

In 1988 a slow drift toward the dispersion of power began to become evident when the PRI lost its qualified majority¹⁵ in the lower house for the first time, although it did retain an absolute majority as well as a qualified majority in the upper house. In fact, the new 1990 electoral legislation made it illegal for any single party to hold a qualified majority in the lower house. The upper limit was established at 64 percent of the number of national deputies; later, in 1993, that percentage was reduced to 60 percent, creating a legal barrier to the formation of future hegemonic governments. In 1997, the political structure changed again; the government no longer had a majority in the lower house, and it had lost its

qualified majority in the upper house. The relationship between the legislative and executive branches changed significantly; the opposition, as a bloc, became stronger than ever and succeeded, among other things, in taking control of the steering committee and the majority of the congressional committees. Also, for the first time in decades, Congress rejected proposed legislation submitted by the chief executive. From that moment on, it is fair to refer to the end of party hegemony, although the PRI remained the ruling party in the executive branch.

President Vicente Fox, while still a candidate, foresaw the danger of an excessive weakening of the presidency: “In the immediate future we will witness a pendulum effect; we will go from extreme presidentialism to parliamentarism.”¹⁶ However, he was confident that he could obtain a sufficiently large majority to avoid excessive weakening of the presidential system.

Then in 2000, when alternation in power at the presidential level, the change was even more dramatic than expected as the country was shifting to a government that not only did not have a majority but was in fact a minority government. The new ruling party, PAN, had emerged with the second greatest number of seats in both congressional houses. Later, in the 2003 federal mid-term elections, the PAN also failed to improve on its position in Congress and instead found itself—in absolute terms and in percentages—in a weaker position vis-à-vis the PRI, which, although it did not achieve an absolute majority, did achieve a widening gap between its percentages in Congress and those of the PAN. (See Figure 1.)

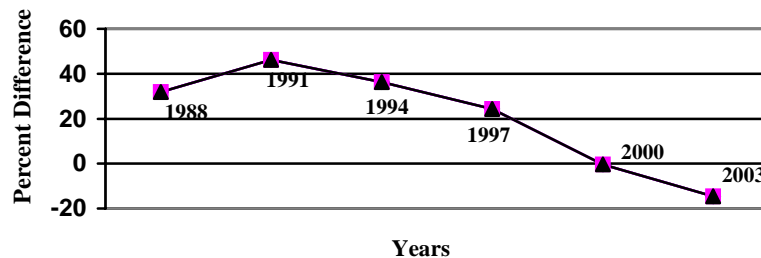
Figure 1. Congressional Strength of the Ruling Party: Lower House

Year	Ruling Party	Percent	Main Opposition	Percent
1988	260 (PRI)	52	108 (PAN)	20.2
1991	320 (PRI)	64	89 (PAN)	17.8
1994	300 (PRI)	60	119 (PAN)	23.8
1997	248 (PRI)	49.6	126 (PRD)	25.2
2000	209 (PAN)	41.8	211 (PRI)	42.2
2003	151 (PAN)	30.2	224 (PRI)	44.8

Source: Instituto Federal Electoral.

In 2000 the difference between the PRI and the PAN had amounted to a few tenths of a point, because both parties had approximately 42 percent of the seats. By 2003, a 14.3 percent gap had appeared between the main opposition (PRI) and the ruling party (see Graph 1).

Graph 1. Distance Between Ruling Party and Main Opposition: Lower House



The Senate experienced a stronger ruling party during the PRI administrations, even during those last years before the PRI lost the presidency. Even as an opposition party, the PRI has a much stronger presence than the PAN does as the new ruling party.

Figure 2. Congressional Strength of the Ruling Party: Upper House

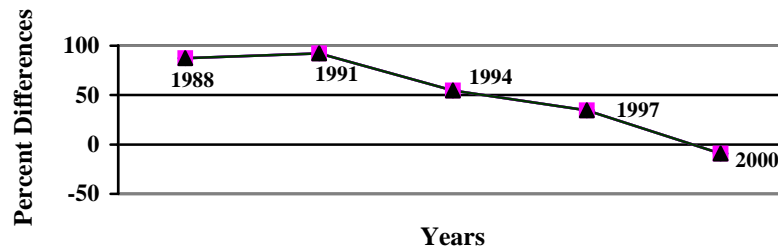
Year	Ruling Party	Percent	Main Opposition	Percent
1988	(PRI) 60	93.7	(PMS) 4	6.3
1991	(PRI) 61	95.3	(PRD) 2	3.1
1994	(PRI) 95	74.2	(PAN) 25	19.5
1997	(PRI) 77	60.2	(PAN) 25	25.8
2000	(PAN) 48	37.5	(PRI) 60	46.8

Source: Instituto Federal Electoral.

An explanation of the electoral formula is called for at this point. Due to the fact that the formula for representation in the Senate involved a relative majority for two senators of the same party in each state (*first past the post*), the majority party ended up with an enormous overrepresentation. This explains why in 1988 (when opposition senators emerged for the first time) and 1991 (when the concept of senatorial representation for the first minority was included, with staggered rotation in the Senate), the percentage difference between the majority party and the main opposition remained enormous. That difference lessened in

1994, reflecting the advance of the opposition in senatorial representation as well. In 1997 an additional legal feature was introduced: 32 proportional representation Senate seats, based on the cumulative votes of each party. This was intended mainly for the PRD to increase its access to the upper house (although such a model violated the federal pact governing the composition of that chamber). Yet, the PRI retained the majority in most of the bodies. The most dramatic drop in this indicator, which reached negative numbers, occurred in 2000 when the PAN, as the ruling party, only managed to win 48 of the 128 Senate seats, while the PRI made out with 60. Therefore, from the ruling party’s perspective, the difference between its presence and that of its main opposition was now negative; this has been the case in the lower house as well, particularly since the 2003 election.

Graph 2. Relationship Between Ruling Party and Main Opposition: Upper House



This evolution reflects the migration of concentrated power (absolute presidentialism) to dispersed power (weak presidentialism)—a process that started gaining momentum in 1997 (see Appendix, Diagram 2).

The 2003 elections produced a structure that, in practice, already closely resembled a divided government, although not formally labeled as such, because the PRI managed to form alliances with several minor parties and control the absolute majority in both houses. Together with its new ally, the green environmentalist party (Partido Verde Ecologista [PVEM]), the PRI has had control of 65 out of 128 Senate seats since 2000. In the lower house, the PRI’s 222 seats, the PVEM’s 17, the 6 that belong to the Labor Party (Partido del Trabajo [PT]), and the 5 of the Convergence Party (Partido Convergencia [PC]) add up to a total of 250 seats of the 496 available. (Results were left pending for four seats after the election was voided in two districts, which caused two plurinominal Chamber of Deputies seats to be withheld as well.) This bloc imposed its will when it reversed the *juicio de procedencia* process, a trial in which the lower house votes on the revocation of a public official’s congressional immunity, in this case, that of PRI senator Ricardo Aldana. The senator was involved in the diversion of PEMEX funds to the PRI during the 2000 presidential campaign.

The PRD could also join the PRI to form a broad majority on other issues, making it a real possibility that both houses of Congress could operate as part of a true divided government. In this sense it can be said that the 2003 mid-term elections reflected a decision by the electorate (or the 40 percent of registered voters who voted) to deprive the executive of the power of political initiative, transferring it to the PRI through the legislative branch. The national leader of the PRI, Roberto Madrazo, went so far as to refer to Congress-based governance under the aegis of the PRI and its allies. He spoke of advancing the structural reforms proposed by the government, but only after adapting them to the PRI's legislative agenda. Speaking on the party's strengthened position in the lower house, Madrazo said:

We are not talking about the same reforms as they were introduced today because some of them seem incomplete to us, others untimely, others lacking in content to benefit the Nation and the people. I see the reforms as benefiting the next administration. Basically, I see that the three years the Government has wasted before initiating reforms will prevent these reforms from favoring the current administration.¹⁷

Therefore, the fate of these reforms is now basically in the hands of Congress. Is this a sign of the new congressional autonomy? It is in part, but it is also an indication of great weakness in the institution of the presidency in minority government situations such as the one it has faced since 2000, with the minority nature of the ruling party becoming even more marked in 2003. Yet the possibility of a divided government emerging can also lead to a sort of "government schizophrenia" arising from the forced coexistence of different and mutually contradictory electoral platforms, both chosen by a majority of the electorate and therefore considered part of the popular mandate. A good example is found in the debate on reforms in the electricity sector. The Fox administration's agenda calls for an amendment to articles 27 and 28 of the constitution in order to allow private investment in the sector. This was the winning platform at the executive level, with 42 percent of the vote in 2000. But that same year the PRI platform also won a majority of the votes in both houses of Congress. The PRI platform, while not expressly forbidding the amendment of those articles of the constitution, did take a more reserved approach than the PAN's energy proposal. In principle, however, the two platforms are not necessarily at odds with each other, even though they are different. Then came the PRI's platform for 2003, which differs from that of 2000 due to a radical modification of several points of the party's Declaration of Principles during its 18th National Assembly (November 2001). The new declaration contains an explicit defense of articles 27 and 28 of the constitution in a literal interpretation of their precise wording (which translates to a party prohibition on a contrary vote by PRI deputies). Because the PRI won a majority in the lower house in 2003, its platform can be considered a majority mandate of the people. But what is the actual mandate of the people under such circumstances? Is it the PAN's platform, which was voted into the executive branch by a majority of the electorate? Is it the PRI's 2000 platform, with which

the PRI won its majority in the Senate? Is it the PRI's 2003 platform with which a PRI majority was elected to the lower house, and which differs from the same party's 2000 platform on several points?

Another example of this confusion regarding the popular mandate was seen during the tax reform process of late 2003. The chief executive's draft bill was modified somewhat to make it acceptable to a group of PRI deputies led by coordinator Elba Esther Gordillo. The issue deeply divided the PRI because a good number of deputies refused to accept a direct or indirect levy on food and drugs as had been proposed by the Fox administration. (National party leader Roberto Madrazo took advantage of this disagreement as an opportunity to remove Gordillo from her posts as PRI coordinator in the Chamber of Deputies and secretary general of the party for political reasons). The bill was modified by a technocratically inclined PRI group that was close to Gordillo. It was introduced and defeated by a vote of 251 votes against (from 150 PRI deputies, 94 from the PRD, and the rest from various small parties) to 234 in favor (71 PRI votes, 150 PAN votes, and the rest from the remaining parties). It was another manifestation of a divided government: the president, elected with 43 percent of the vote, saw his tax reform defeated by a combination of parties that together represent a majority in the lower house. (The PRI's 36 percent of the vote and the PRD's 20 percent add up to 56 percent.) The vote that defeated the bill introduced by the administration and its party, the PAN, was a reflection of that party's minority status in Congress. This highlighted once again the difficulty in advancing the administration's agenda in the absence of a unified government.

To make matters worse, legislative rules for the ratification of decisions are more complex in Mexico than in other countries (initiatives are approved in general terms first and then in specific terms). As William Heller and Jeffrey Weldon point out, this was not a problem in the days of party hegemony. When the PRI lost its absolute majority in the lower house in 1997 (the first divided government), it became clear that the old rules were no longer adequate in the new context of congressional plurality. However, according to these authors, the new rules seem designed to induce even more instability rather than to reduce it, as they encourage parties to break agreements that had been incorporated into legislation.¹⁸ Moreover, Mexican electoral legislation does not promote the formation of permanent congressional alliances, but rather discourages them. For example, article 58-8 of the Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales (Federal Code of Electoral Procedures and Institutions) establishes the following:

Once the results and declaration of validity stage is concluded in elections of senators and deputies, the partial coalitions which the candidates represented will terminate automatically, in which case the coalition's candidates for senator or deputy who are elected will be included in the political party or parliamentary group indicated in the coalition agreement.¹⁹

In other words, electoral coalitions among two or more parties, although they espouse a common platform, do not last beyond the electoral process. Legislators elected under such coalitions are then free to act independently, within their party lines. This explains, for example, the behavior of the PVEM legislators who quickly distanced themselves from the government and its party to act in their own interest (often in alliance with the PRI, the main opposition party), after their party had allied with the PAN for the 2000 elections. The story was repeated with other small parties that were brought into the Congress through alliances with the PRD but did not always support that party's position. Thus, coalitions are intended only as a way to provide a certain advantage to the parties during the electoral process, not to form permanent congressional alliances that would facilitate the consolidation of majorities. Clearly, this feature tends to complicate legislative governance and to magnify the defects of non-majority governments. It can be inferred that not only presidentialism per se, but also certain regulatory arrangements inherited from the hegemonic party regime, exacerbate government fragmentation and complicate the political process and decisionmaking in general to an even greater degree than under various semi-parliamentary arrangements in other Latin American countries.²⁰

How do the Mexican people feel about this institutional difficulty? Do they prefer a divided government with checks on the previously formidable power of the president, or do they already perceive the hindering effect of a divided government? Prior to the onset of divided government in 1997, a majority of the population seemed to favor a divided government in principle, as it represented the end of the absolute presidentialism that had prevailed for decades thanks to PRI hegemony. That position was articulated in the words of writer Gabriel Zaid before the 1997 mid-term elections, when the prospect of a non-majority government was emerging for the first time:

Would [a divided government] be a disaster? Of course not. What has been disastrous is the ease with which the Chief Executive can change the Constitution, laws, regulations and even then trample his own rules, without the deputies doing anything to stop it or demanding accountability. This excess, with no restraints or penalties, is a destabilizing factor.²¹

According to a survey conducted in late 2003, however, the idea that Congress should cooperate with the president has gained support (See Figure 3).

At the same time, support for a divided government shows a gradual but systematic decrease (see Graph 3).

Both of the above trends are also reflected in perceptions of the 59th Congress's actions during its first three months of work (See Graph 4).

In any case, public preference for unified government is not enough to ensure unified government in the future; at most, individual citizens can unify their votes (voting for the same party for both the executive and legislative branches), but the formation of a divided government depends on the percentage of citizens who support the party that is to win the presidency. If the ruling party receives less than

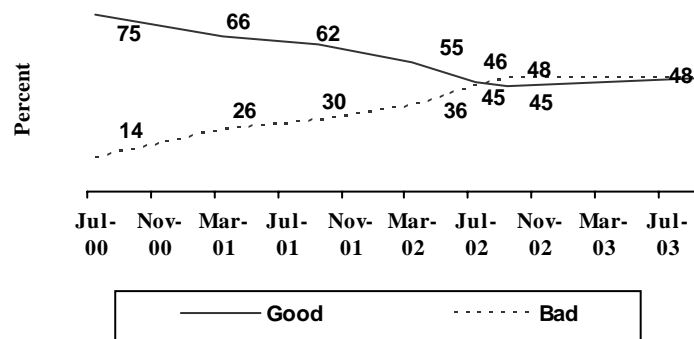
50 percent of the vote (and that percentage is roughly mirrored in the congressional election), opposing parties will represent a majority in the legislative branch. This means that a non-majority, minority, or divided government will result, depending on how the ruling party places relative to others in Congress. Given the relative strength of the three major parties in Mexico, all indications are that in the coming years or decades, more non-majority governments will emerge, regardless of which party succeeds in winning the presidency.

Figure 3. The Congress and Fox (in percent)

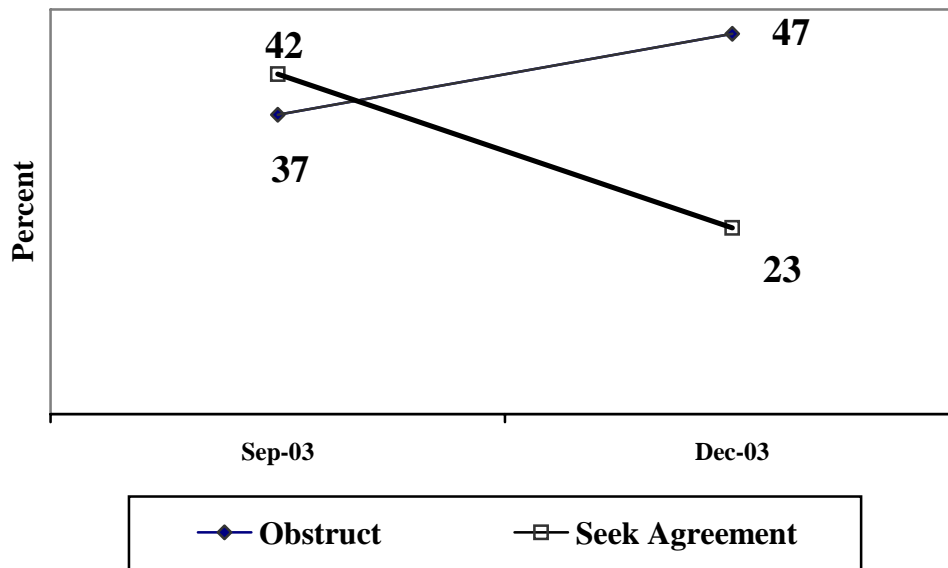
Role of Legislators	August 2002	August 2003
The deputies should cooperate with the president's decisions	56	65
The deputies should be a counterbalance to the president	29	26

Source: *Reforma*, September 1, 2003.

Graph 3. Is Divided Government Good or Bad For a Country?



Source: *Nexos*, no. 310, October, 2003.

Graph 4. What Does Congress Do?

Source: *El Universal*, December 1, 2003.

The Parties' Internal Crises

As mentioned in the previous section, Mexican political life has become more complex due to the divided government structure that emerged from the 1997 elections and deepened after the 2000 presidential election and especially after the 2003 mid-term elections. In addition to this factor is the identity and adjustment crisis that the political parties experienced as a result of the drastic changes brought about by the transfer of power in 2000. Every party has encountered difficulties in adapting to its new role in a party system that has ceased to be hegemonic and is suddenly wide open to plurality. The process has obstructed the formation of majorities in Congress, and it has complicated relations among the parties and also between them and the executive. The PRI, for example, rose to power as the monopolistic though not the only party of the state, and it held on to power for seven decades under a vertical and authoritarian system of governance. The source of authority, direction, and arbitration for settling internal conflicts lay in the presidency of the republic; the president acted as the party's "born leader." Decisions and the party line flowed from the summit—the presidency—to the base through a solid and virtually unchallengeable political pyramid in which the Congress, the judicial branch, the governors, and various sectors of society were embedded in the party and were all subordinate to presidential will.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)

Upon losing the presidency, the PRI was forced to face the challenge of finding a new method of internal governance. It could no longer be a vertical structure (because the top component of the model had vanished). It would have to be horizontal, that is, based on agreements among various leaders and party *caudillos* with the inherent risk of rifts and division that could destroy the party's integrity, as occurred when other monopoly parties of the world lost power for the first time. Yet the PRI, as the dominant party, was a hybrid halfway between the single-party model on one side—more rigid, less capable of adapting to the role of opposition party—and the democratic dominant model on the other (similar to what existed for decades in India, Japan, and Sweden). The latter type did not suffer any drastic changes, much less a fatal disintegration, after losing power. Even before the PRI lost the presidency, the question naturally arose whether it would share the fate of monopoly parties displaced from power or whether it would be able to adapt as an opposition party, survive under new democratic conditions, and eventually regroup and return to power.²²

The only certainty was that it would not be easy for the PRI to embrace a new, horizontal approach to governance after having ruled under a vertical system for decades. Like single state parties, it would lose its internal support structure as well as that unquestionable presidential chain of command once the presidency was lost. This would generate a high risk of confrontation between leaders and currents within the party, which could make it unviable as an opposition party. Also like monopoly parties, the PRI would bear the historical burden of an image tainted with corruption, fraud, repression, and bureaucracy, which could significantly sap its strength at the polls. In order to avoid stigma, many former Communist parties of Eastern Europe went through a radical restructuring process, changing their names, logos, statutes, and ideology. They also updated their leadership, adopting younger leaders who were less closely associated with the party's dark past. The strategy worked very well in countries such as Poland, Hungary, and Slovakia in which, once reformed, the former Communist parties returned to power within a relatively short time.²³ Other Communist parties that opted to retain their original identities have either disappeared or been marginalized from power; some, such as the Russian Communist Party, have continued to operate as such but have failed to return to power. The Nationalist Party of Taiwan, which was voted out of power in 2000, has also avoided collapsing or losing its identity. The Mexican PRI has been something of an exception thus far; without changing its basic identity (as in Poland or Hungary), it managed to retain a majority of the power in more than half of state governments, and it has been the majority party in both houses of Congress. This can be explained in large part by the relative flexibility of the institution compared to the structural rigidity of single parties.

Although not without difficulty, the PRI has succeeded in building a new horizontal governance structure, which, despite being formally democratic, in practice has shown a prevalence of fraud and irregularities surrounding major decisions, thus far without related fatal ruptures in the party. Thus, immediately

after its presidential defeat and, faced with the danger of disintegration, the PRI decided to ratify as its national leader the person who held the post at the time, Dulce Maria Sauri. This would allow some time for the party's main currents to agree on new rules for settling their differences, making decisions, and competing for power. The rules were to be drawn up at a new General Assembly (the twenty-eighth of its kind), held in November 2001. The result was a new set of guidelines for horizontal governance (formally democratic), a new ideological direction (abandonment of so-called neoliberalism in favor of a return to the old revolutionary nationalism that prevailed in the party until 1985), and procedures for renewing their national leadership for the first time without a decision from the chief executive. The contest for national party leadership positions took place in February 2002 between two tickets: Roberto Madrazo and Elba Esther Gordillo for president and secretary general of the party, respectively, against a team headed by Beatriz Paredes. The universal, direct vote victory went to the Madrazo-Gordillo team by a less than 2 percent margin, but it happened amidst the resurfacing of substantial electoral irregularities from the past. For example, the state of Tabasco was under the political control of Madrazo, who is a native of the area; the proportion of votes in his favor was 17 to one. Madrazo led in that state by 4 percent of the total vote, which means that his landslide victory there was enough to determine the final result. Paredes figured that refusing to concede victory and breaking her ties to the party would hurt her own political future, so she reluctantly yielded to the shady maneuvers of Madrazo and Gordillo. It was an unfair election that did, however, allow the PRI to avoid fragmentation while settling the contest for national party leadership.

New frictions surfaced later, but they were not fatal. The first involved discord over the distribution of candidacies for plurinominal (proportional representation) seats, triggered by the national party leader's failure to fulfill previous agreements made on the subject with various governors. Madrazo also took the opportunity to exclude those with ties to ex-president Ernesto Zedillo and his former rival for the presidential candidacy in 1999, Francisco Labastida. These events also brought to light the first hint of conflict between the two official leaders of the PRI (president and secretary general), when Madrazo attempted to discard the deputy quota proposed by Gordillo. He yielded to her on that occasion. After the federal mid-term elections (favorable to the PRI, as mentioned), the PRI deputies chose Gordillo for the position of coordinator. Her competitor had been Manlio Fabio Beltrones, former governor of Sonora and a close associate of Madrazo. Gordillo represented a liaison with the Fox administration, whose favor she enjoyed as a result of personal friendship with the president (they met in a political group in 1994). She was to promote structural (tax and energy) reforms proposed by the government. In December 2003, soon after taking her post as coordinator, Gordillo fell victim to a political trap set by Madrazo, who had publicly supported a tax proposal spearheaded by Gordillo, only to repudiate it later as an underhanded deal that favored the government but countered the PRI platform and the interests of Mexico. It can be inferred that in reality, this was nothing but an excuse to deal Gordillo a political coup de grace,

remove her from her post as coordinator, and take more direct control of negotiations with the Fox administration. A majority of the PRI deputies (120 out of 222), encouraged by Madrazo, rejected Gordillo as their coordinator, replacing her with Emilio Chuayfett, a traditional political ally of Madrazo and a former governor and former secretary of the interior (*Gobernación*) during the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo.

With the support of approximately 100 deputies and several PRI governors, Gordillo refused to recognize the procedure, calling it illegal. She accused Madrazo of treachery and of betraying his word (when their ticket won the national leadership of the PRI, Madrazo had offered Gordillo the post of PRI coordinator). In the end, the group that had clustered around Chuayfett, plus some of the deputies who earlier had supported Gordillo, voted against the tax reform proposed by Gordillo's group and the PAN. The bill was defeated by a margin of 17 votes. Presumably, Madrazo had agreed to support the reform in exchange for the administration's full recognition of the change of coordinator in the PRI bloc (which depended partly on PAN party member Juan de Dios Castro, chairman of the lower house's steering committee). This was despite a provision in the PRI group's internal regulation allowing changes only in the event of total absence or voluntary resignation of the incumbent coordinator, which were not the circumstances under which Gordillo was removed. But Madrazo did not keep his part of the bargain. Gordillo denounced the PRI leader's conduct, claiming that just two days earlier, in the presence of the president of the republic, Madrazo had committed his support for promoting the tax reform."²⁴ President Fox responded with anger at what he considered foul play stemming more from a power struggle within the PRI than from any ideological or programmatic motives. After the tax reform bill was defeated in the lower house, the president made the following statement:

I take the liberty at this time of calling for an exercise of soul-searching in every political forum of the Chamber of Deputies and in the parties themselves, regarding two core issues: Firstly, whether all reasonable chances for reaching consensus have been considered; secondly, whether the interests of a group or party have served clashing and divided factions more than they served the needs of the Nation and the citizenry.²⁵

Secretary of Government Santiago Creel also reproached the PRI leaders who apparently failed to fulfill agreements regarding the tax reform: "Being dishonest and diluting one's word of honor is not acceptable because that is where the value of a democracy lies, in one's word. Where there is deception there can be no democracy; credibility is the most valuable asset politicians must cultivate."²⁶ The national leader of the PRI responded, "What has failed in the current administration—what the President lacks—are good political brokers. Its brokers have failed; there is no policy of compromise, of consensus." The PAN attempted to push through a new tax reform bill that was not very different from the one that had just been defeated, calculating that a few modifications would ensure the PRI votes that had kept it from passing the first time. However, Chuayfett, in his new

capacity as coordinator, removed Gordillo's supporters (*Elbistas*) from the revenue committee and replaced them with others loyal to his cause. For this reason the bill was aborted in the committee itself and thus was never introduced in a plenary session. Once again, the president reprimanded the PRI, ascribing the bill's failure to a power struggle within the party:

I did everything within my power, in the belief that it is essential for us to overcome a decades-long backwardness in fiscal matters. However, there are political forces that put their factious interests before those of the Nation. The country cannot be held hostage to the conflicts of groups within a party that, thinking only of its own interests, went back on a commitment it had made and publicized. The government of the Republic kept its word; they did not.²⁷

Once again Madrazo responded deftly to the accusations:

I agreed to explain to the PRI deputies the reasons behind the Federal Government's reform proposal; that is my role as national party leader, and that is the role I fulfilled. If others interpreted that my commitment was to convince them to support positions they do not agree with, they were wrong; I should not and cannot do that... The *prístas* and their leadership have fulfilled the only commitment we have: tending to the demands of the constituencies we represent, who made us the majority in the Chamber of Deputies.²⁸

In other words, Madrazo appealed to the individual freedom the legislators have theoretically, while ignoring a fact known to all: the great majority of deputies act according to parameters established by a superior—formerly the Mexican president and today, their governor, corporative leader, or the national leader of the party. Fox, on the other hand, implicitly acknowledged resorting to the real threads of power rooted in the “Old Regime,” which officially and theoretically should have ceased to exist as a result of democratic change. In any case, the issue ignited a war of sorts between the federal government and the national leadership of the PRI. In some way this implied the administration's recognition of the failure of the strategy it had implemented from the start: trying to negotiate with the PRI on the basis of a civilized, rational relationship to secure its support for the government's economic reforms, basically in exchange for forgetting about the PRI regime's recent and not so recent past (e.g., the Truth Commission, impunity following the so-called *Pemexgate* scandal, the virtual handing over of the General Council of the IFE to the PRI, and so on). It was a strategy developed by the *Gobernación* and promoted by its minister, Santiago Creel, who at one point justified it in the following terms: “The PAN does not want to cut off our adversary's legs to make him a dwarf, to make him smaller than we are; rather, it seeks a responsible and constructive political relationship in order to find common ground for the reforms the country needs.”²⁹ Apparently, the PRI did not reciprocate. After the defeat of its tax reform, the PAN adopted a more belligerent position than the one described by Creel. At least that is what statements made by the PAN's secretary general, Manuel Espino, would seem to indicate:

The ‘tricolor’ [the PRI] is determined to prevent democratic consolidation in Mexico; therefore, from now on, the greatest obligation of democratic forces is to stop the Institutional Revolutionary Party... Moving toward the future, political parties committed to democracy and to the well-being of the Mexican people must be ready, resolute—for the good of our democratic consolidation—in our goal of removing the PRI from the political contest... Today the PRI is bent on regression, on preventing democratic consolidation in Mexico, on achieving an individual objective even at an economic, political and social cost for the Mexican people.³⁰

These words may foreshadow a cold and distrustful relationship between Fox/the PAN and the PRI, which will likely not allow the structural reforms promoted by the government to advance, for the second half of the Fox administration.

Meanwhile, the power struggle in the PRI continued. Gordillo (*la maestra*) did not surrender to Madrazo after the blow but regrouped instead, founding a dissident current within the PRI with 70 of the deputies who remained loyal to her. The movement, known as *Fuerza Reformadora* (Force for Reform), has the stated goal of “providing a forum for those within the PRI who seek new alternatives for political action and wish to promote a constructive agenda of reform for the country and the party,” but without risking the unity of the party.³¹ The inevitable question is what will happen with this new faultfinding group? Will the story be similar to that of the *Corriente Democrática* of 1986 (led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo), which resulted in a major rift in the party and was essentially a prelude to the electoral insurrection of 1988? Or will it be more like the various currents that have emerged subsequently within the PRI with no serious consequences? There are elements for drawing a parallel (distant though it may be) to *Corriente Democrática*, given the circumstances under which the rupture took place. Cárdenas and Muñoz Ledo were opposed to the shift in economic policy initiated by Miguel de la Madrid and the resultant displacement of traditional politicians by the new technocratic class.³² This led to a struggle for power within the party in the context of the 1988 presidential election. The current situation is somewhat similar, only reversed; Gordillo has garnered the support of a substantial number of technocrats or PRI party members for a reform plan that is closer to liberalism than to revolutionary nationalism—priístas who are convinced that this is the only way to integrate the country successfully into the globalization process.

The traditionalists have displaced the technocrats within the PRI as a result of the party’s defeat in the 2000 presidential election; the technocrats were blamed for the defeat. This was a source of growing discomfort within the party. A struggle for power came along with it, not because of aspirations to a presidential candidacy on Gordillo’s part but because she would have been a key player in the party’s presidential candidate selection process. And Madrazo preferred to remove her while the debate over tax reforms was raging, taking advantage of her closeness to the Fox administration to accuse her of treachery. As in the case of the *Corriente*

Democrática, *Fuerza Reformadora* will fight first within the party itself, motivated by the advancement of those economic reforms in which it believes, and also, by a desire to get even with Madrazo and his people (now including Emilio Chuayffet) although it has not said so officially. The movement, in turn, plans to “encourage PRI sympathizers and active members (senators, officials) to ratify their party membership and be a part of these actions.”³³ Thus, it could become a unifying banner to cluster together several anti-Madrazo currents that now run haphazardly through the party. From this we can infer that we will most probably witness a cold war within the PRI between now and 2005, which might include Gordillo’s expulsion from the office of PRI secretary general (on charges of violating the new party statutes, which bar legislators from simultaneously holding administrative positions in the party). We may see the Elbista bloc, assuming it is able to maintain its cohesion, vote against Emilio Chuayffet’s faction more than once. In any case, despite their insistence that unity is one of their basic concerns, some of the members of this new current still express the rivalry and animosity that remain between them and Madrazo. For example, Deputy Carlos Rojas wrote:

We look to the future and believe that part of the PRI still has a great capacity to adapt to our new reality... We are against the irresponsibility and levity of groups that, blinded by the struggle for power, resort to inappropriate practices that could divide the party.³⁴

Yet only when the party’s new presidential candidate is chosen in 2005 will the true outcome of this battle be known. *Fuerza Reformadora* will not nominate Gordillo as a candidate for president (it seems that was never the intention), but it could wield influence by putting its weight behind one of Madrazo’s potential rivals. If, in the end, Madrazo succeeds and gets his way by pushing and breaking the rules, then we could see *Fuerza Reformadora* split off, causing the party unforeseeable damage for 2006. In other words, in light of its origins and potential political impact, *Fuerza Reformadora* seems to more closely resemble the patterns of *Corriente Democrática* of 1986 than those of the many critical currents that followed, which did not leave the party but also failed to reform it. What is beyond any doubt is the fact that, of the various conflicts plaguing the PRI since it lost the presidency, the Gordillo-Madrazo war of late 2003 has been the most dangerous in terms of its potential for causing a split.

It is not easy to determine what impact the clash within the PRI will have on the process of designating a presidential candidate, although it seems clear that it will complicate it. For now, it is evident that the PRI national leader has known how to take advantage of his position to promote himself as a pre-candidate. It has made him more visible in the eyes of the public and among the party activists themselves so that, in terms of voting intentions, he is clearly ahead of any other potential candidate aspiring to run for the presidency under his party’s banner. At least that is what most of the polls suggest. One example follows (See Figure 4).

Figure 4. Position of PRI Pre-candidates

	Todos		Priísta	
	August 03	October 03	August 03	October 03
Roberto Madrazo Pintado	25.1	24.7	43.4	44.5
Beatriz Paredes Ranel	9.3	7.5	14.9	9.0
Arturo Montiel Rojas	6.7	7.1	8.7	7.8
Miguel Alemán Velasco	7.7	6.0	7.1	7.0
Patricio Martínez García	1.3	1.8	1.3	4.4
Juan S. Millán Lizárraga	2.4	2.1	6.7	4.3
Elba Esther Gordillo	1.6	2.0	1.4	2.0
Manuel Ángel Núñez	1.6	2.0	2.1	2.0
Tomas Yarrington Ruvalcaba	1.4	2.4	1.9	2.0
Others	0.2	0.1	0.0	0.1
None of the above	24.6	23.8	2.6	4.6
No response	18.1	20.5	9.9	12.3
Total (in percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *Consulta Mitofsky*, October 2003.

Of course, the designation of a candidate will not be based solely on the pre-candidates' popularity among party members or the general public, but rather it will reflect the outcome of the struggle among the various groups and currents to establish the rules and terms under which the decision will be made. For example, a proposal that is beginning to gain momentum involves national party leader Roberto Madrazo resigning his post a certain period of time before the selection of the presidential candidate; the idea is to prevent him from benefiting inappropriately from the political and financial resources available to the party leader by virtue of his office. Because there are no regulations on the subject, Madrazo will strongly resist the proposal. This, however, could be one more reason for a confrontation within the PRI, which eventually might debilitate him in view of the 2006 presidential election.

The National Action Party (PAN)

The PAN, for its part, seems to have been unable to find its way as the ruling party, or to function as such. After 70 years of playing the role of the opposition, dispensing moral and political criticism of the PRI regime, it has not found it easy to determine the country's political agenda. There are several reasons for this. The first is its distaste for the formula followed by the PRI when it was in power, in which the party was totally subordinate to the executive. In this regard PAN party

president Luis Felipe Bravo Mena made the following statements soon after the victory of the PAN presidential candidate: “The PAN will not interfere with or encroach upon the duties of Vicente Fox Quesada’s administration, but nor will it allow the Guanajuatan [Fox] to interfere or attempt to take charge of the business of the party. Therefore, there will be a democratic relationship between the party and the Chief Executive.”³⁵ In fact, Bravo Mena has not always supported the initiatives and draft bills introduced by President Fox. The most serious discrepancy between the PAN and the president came in the first few months of the new administration, when Fox submitted to Congress a draft for an Indigenous Peoples Law. The Chiapas guerrilla group, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN), had demanded this bill as a condition for signing an armistice that Fox desperately wanted. He acted without first securing the PAN’s agreement, however, and because the proposed *zapatista* indigenous peoples law countered the PAN’s plan and vision, the party joined the PRI in voting for a different law, thus preventing a conclusive resolution to the conflict in Chiapas.³⁶

A second reason for the distancing between the government and the PAN dates back to an older issue; Fox is part of a current known as *neopanismo* that tends to attract entrepreneurs or managers of private enterprise with a more pragmatic vision of power than the one held for years by the established PAN. The party’s adherents typically came from the more moral and legalistic educational tradition, but they were limited in their capacity to attain positions of political power (particularly governorships and, of course, the presidency). For years, traditional *panismo* had looked upon this current with distrust, fearful that it might distort the principles and ideals that had inspired the party since its inception. This concern is reflected in a speech by Abel Vicencio Tovar in 1984, during his tenure as president of the PAN:

I believe we must be more cautious in the selection of candidates for elected office. I believe that we are too naive at times; we are impressed by someone because he speaks well, because he has a certain personality, and he may move up quickly to the important management posts and sometimes also succeed in winning the candidacies. So we must be more rigorous in our selection process, which is not meant to suggest that we should not keep our doors open.³⁷

The *neopanistas*, for their part, saw traditional *panismo* as lacking the drive to achieve what a political party is supposed to be after: political power. As a candidate, Fox himself referred to the matter: “In the PAN there is not enough courage and hunger for victory yet.”³⁸ For this reason they sought to integrate more social leaders (whose background was actually private enterprise) in order to achieve more political successes. The *neopanistas* would be the ones to achieve success in the electoral arena:

The PAN received nourishing new blood that gave it new balance and pragmatism; ethics and skill came together, providing us for the first time in history with a real chance to shape the country’s future... It is a change that the

PAN must accept. The electorate is not moved at all by doctrine or ideology... What the population is interested in is having food to eat and having a job.³⁹

When Fox announced his intention to run for president in 1997, the PAN sought alternative candidates who were in closer step with its political vision, but the party was unable to position anyone capable of defeating Fox in an internal contest. (Francisco Barrio, the governor of Chihuahua who lost his state to the PRI, was considered; also Carlos Castillo Peraza, who entered the electoral contest for the capital city's local government in 1997 and suffered a catastrophic defeat; as well as Carlos Medina Plascencia, coordinator of the PAN bloc in Congress, who failed to stand out as a contender). It was even said that the party was not choosing its candidate, but rather that the candidate (Fox) had chosen his party. Fox explained during his candidacy: "My intention was not to overpower the PAN or prevent other candidates from participating in the internal election. I was confident in my capability and simply decided to start early."⁴⁰ He also identified the differences and connections between himself and the PAN, first during his presidential candidacy, when he wrote, "I may not be the best promoter of those values [of the PAN]... [but] My task is to implement the principles; let others be the ones to do the talking and promote the doctrine."⁴¹

Later, having won the presidency, he established his distance from the PAN, announcing that his administration would have a more pluralistic flavor, similar to that of his campaign team, which included very few old-style *panistas*:

The PAN knows it needs to respect the right, the authority of the president of the Republic to select his cabinet. They must respect those decisions! At the end of the day it is Vicente Fox who is governing, not the PAN! When things go wrong or mistakes are made, it is Vicente Fox, not the PAN! When the right choices are made, it is Vicente Fox, not the PAN! I look at the party a bit in the terms described in that book, *Hug Them and Let Them Go*. It provides us with values, principles, an ideology, and it prepares us politically to take us to power... Once we are there, it must let us go.⁴²

In fact, President Fox's cabinet, which he described as first-rate, was scantily representative of the traditional PAN. Probably the panista with the most extensive track record was Comptroller Francisco Barrio. Rodolfo Elizondo, a panista with traditional roots, was assigned to a very minor and irrelevant post, coordinator of *Alianza con la Ciudadanía* (Partnership with the People) although later he was put in charge of social communications for Los Pinos, and he eventually was appointed secretary for tourism. Both Barrio and Elizondo, however, despite their many years of party service, have profiles that are not so different from those of the private enterprise neopanistas. Moreover, the post of interior secretary was given to Santiago Creel who, despite his panista lineage, had only recently joined the party himself, a fact that at times has kept him from being regarded positively or as trustworthy by traditional panistas. Lastly, another panista, Josefina Vazquez Mota, was appointed to the position of secretary of social development, but her presence there was more the result of a need to fill the

female quota than anything else (the position originally had been offered to members of the PRD as a way to achieve a more pluralistic government and to obligate the aztec sun party). Other members of Fox's campaign team who were appointed ministers, such as Pedro Cerisola (communications) or Luis Ernesto Derbez (economy), decided to join the PAN but clearly they would have to be considered neopanistas with limited ties to traditional panismo. The rest of the secretaries were either independents, such as Jorge Castañeda for the Foreign Ministry, experts in their field (e.g., Leticia Navarro for tourism, Julio Fenk for health, and Victor Lichtinger for the environment), or official PRI members (e.g., Francisco Gil, treasury, and Alfonso Durazo, private secretary and then head of social communications for Los Pinos). By the middle of Fox's six-year term, three panistas were added to the cabinet: Fernando Canales Clariond, who had been governor of Nuevo Leon (and lost the position to a PRI challenger) as economy minister (replacing Ernesto Derbez, who in turn replaced Castañeda as foreign affairs minister); Alberto Cárdenas, former governor of Jalisco as environment minister (replacing Lichtinger) and Felipe Calderón as secretary of Energy (entrusted to advance the energy reform, given his substantial record in political negotiations). Of the three appointees, however, the only true traditionalist is Calderón (who, upon joining the cabinet automatically became the presidential candidate of the PAN's traditional current, opposite Santiago Creel, who was assumed to be the PAN's natural choice for a presidential candidate). In a sense, making these changes was Fox's way of acknowledging that he needed his party more than he had realized.

A clash between these two pre-candidates of the PAN, Creel and Calderón, is beginning to emerge. The leadership of the PAN bloc in the lower house (Germán Martínez Cazares and Juan Molinar, now acting in the context of a fading Francisco Barrio—himself once a pre-candidate but now practically out of the running) is clearly inclined in Calderón's favor. In fact, the four IFE advisers appointed by the PAN are quite close to Calderón as well as to the negotiators of the process: Martínez Cazares and Molinar. Creel, meanwhile, is relying on two main sources of support: President Fox himself (despite speculation about his wife, Marta Sahagún, as another potential pre-candidate) and Diego Fernández de Cevallos, coordinator of the PAN bloc in the Senate, who still exerts considerable influence on some significant sectors of the PAN. Creel has been forced to strike a difficult balance; it is no secret that a longstanding rivalry exists between Fox and Fernández de Cevallos. It has been ongoing since 1991 at least, when Fox's presumed victory as governor of Guanajuato was the object of negotiations by Fernández de Cevallos with Carlos Salinas de Gortari's administration on the issue of transferring the governorship to a panista other than Fox, Carlos Medina Plascencia. Creel is banking on the perception that he is the "official" candidate (that is, the one with the president's seal of approval although this is no longer the guarantee that it was in the days of PRI dominance). At the same time, through Fernández de Cevallos, he expects the support of a considerable part of the PAN's traditional wing. Creel has sought to reinforce his ties to the traditional PAN by making some changes in the Ministry of the Interior, bringing in active panistas as

undersecretaries; two examples are Armando Salinas Torre (religious affairs) and Ricardo García Cervantes (communications).

Creel also thus far has the advantage of having the highest popularity ratings of all the PAN pre-candidates (although more than one poll actually shows Martha Sahagún ahead of him). Calderón has received low scores, although that may be explained by the fact that he is a recent addition to the cabinet, and presidential candidacies are more viable when launched from the cabinet, according to a tradition from the PRI years that still carries weight, even among the panistas (See Figure 5).

Figure 5. If the Presidential Elections Were Held Today, Who Would Receive Your Vote?

	All Respondents		Panista Respondents	
	August 03	October 03	August 03	October 03
Santiago Creel Miranda	24.3	21.0	31.6	32.2
Marta Sahagún	13.2	18.5	23.2	26.2
Diego Fernández de Cevallos	13.8	9.3	14.3	9.8
Francisco Barrio Terrazas	3.6	3.3	5.1	3.4
Luis Felipe Bravo Mena	1.4	1.9	0.7	3.4
Felipe Calderón Hinojosa	2.4	2.5	0.7	3.2
Carlos Medina Plascencia	0.9	0.8	0.7	1.4
Others	0.6	0.2	1.2	0.4
None of the above	21.9	21.3	7.1	4.6
No response	17.9	21.2	15.4	15.4
Total (in percent)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: *Consulta Mitofsky*, October 2003.

Figure 5 illustrates Calderón’s relative progress as compared to the other PAN pre-candidates after only three months in the cabinet, but he lags far behind Creel. A change in the PAN presidency is also coming, although there may not be enough time for such a change. The party wants to avoid any overlap between this process in 2005 and the designation of their presidential candidate, because the tensions generated by the combined processes could spin out of control. The names that are being mentioned as possible replacements for the current national leader of the PAN, Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, are Humberto Aguilar, the current undersecretary of the interior and a Creel supporter and, on the other side, Alejandro Zapata Perogordo or Germán Martínez Cazares, who are both close to Calderón. The new president of the PAN could be an influential factor on

succession but probably not the deciding factor, as there are more elements and groups that will impact that decision.

What does seem clear is that the PAN, considering the setback it suffered in the 2003 mid-term election and current poll figures, has a low chance of winning the presidency again in 2006. And it is likely that the rift between the party and the president will widen as the end of the six-year term approaches, as the party will try to separate itself from the administration's poor performance (unless that changes, which seems unlikely at this point). Within the party, at least, such a process could favor Calderón as a candidate who is not strongly associated with the president, vis-à-vis Creel, whose ties are more clearly identified and who could be perceived—within the party and externally—as a continuation of the current administration.

The Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD)

As for the PRD, it is the youngest of the three major parties, but it brings together two political currents with long traditions behind them: the so-called historic Left, whose roots go back to the founding of the Mexican Communist Party in 1919 (and was enriched, in turn, by other Marxism-inspired currents of thought), and a part of the PRI's traditional wing that decided to leave the party in 1987, led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (son of the revered president Lázaro Cárdenas, who ruled from 1934 to 1940), and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, an active politician who distinguished himself in several cabinet posts during the regimes of Luis Echeverría and José López Portillo.⁴⁵ The PRI's breakup in 1987 and the alliance of the dissidents with the historic Left (and some parties that traditionally had been PRI satellites), set off an electoral insurrection in 1988, which forced the PRI regime to resort to major fraud to secure the victory of its candidate, Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

In contrast to previous rifts in the party, such as those in 1940 by Juan A. Almazán, in 1946 by Ezequiel Padilla, and in 1952 by Miguel Henríquez Guzman, the 1987 split gave rise to a permanent party, the Democratic Revolutionary Party in May 1989. This represented a historical first that was, of course, unfavorable to the PRI and its hegemony because any divergence arising from the presidential succession process (as was the case in 1940, 1946, and 1952) would leave the party open to losing senior leaders, ideological cadres brandishing the same banners as the PRI, corporative sectors, and voters previously identified with the party. And if a permanent party emerged from the breakup, then each time active party members, currents, or sectors of the PRI expressed dissatisfaction or dissent toward to the party's leadership, they could migrate to their twin party. In order to consolidate the PRI's dominance, it was necessary to build hermetic sealing mechanisms for the party, so that it would be clear to members that they had no real political future outside of the PRI. This was the logic behind some of the measures included in the 1946 electoral reform (as the first section of this text shows), such as those designed to obstruct the formation of new parties on the eve of the presidential election in an attempt to discourage any rifts within the official

party. Then in 1954, the decision was made to revoke the registration of the party that had served as a support platform for the movement led by Miguel Henríquez and survived even after the 1952 race. That party was accused of attacking a military base in Chihuahua, and its registration was revoked. This sent the message to PRI party members that, outside of the PRI, nothing of significance could be achieved, and that the best course of action was to accept the decision of the party leadership. With that, the open gash caused by the Henríquez movement in 1952 was closed again, and successfully, because no new split within the PRI emerged over the issue of the 1958 presidential succession. The measures aimed at preventing schisms were effective and a steely discipline and unassailable unity prevailed for many years.

In 1989, the open gash left by the PRD would prove very difficult to close. Conditions at home and abroad (in terms of economic openness and increased promotion of democracy and human rights) made overt repression of the new party practically impossible. It was harassed in political discourse, and the decision was made to deny the party some of its presumed successes at the polls, for example in the 1989 congressional elections and the 1992 gubernatorial elections in Michoacán. This official policy of closing the door on the PRD contrasted with the new openness toward the PAN. The emergence of the PRD led to a tactical alliance between the PAN and the technocratic wing of the PRI headed by president Salinas (Muñoz Ledo called it the “Holy Alliance”), based on a common ideological enemy, the PRD. Given the widely questioned election results of 1988 and the subsequent loss of legitimacy of the resulting government, the PRI needed the support of a party with credibility, such as the PAN, to move its economic policies forward and artificially prolong the PRI’s hegemony through new modifications to electoral legislation (passed in 1990 and 1993, analyzed in the first section). The PAN was willing to accept this for several reasons: the PRI’s economic policies were fundamentally in agreement with their own; in exchange for legitimizing Salinas’s policies, the PRI offered to open certain political doors for the PAN (Baja California, Guanajuato and Chihuahua); and the PRD had emerged as a threatening common enemy that was making strong inroads after Cárdenas’s excellent showing in the 1988 election. In fact, the PRD represented for the PAN a melding of two traditional ideological enemies: the old state-party PRI and the revolutionary Left. Why would the PAN enter into such an alliance? Because it was the best way to promote neoliberal policies close the PRD’s political avenues and, at the same time, open up some political opportunities for itself.⁴⁴ The alliance between the PRI and the PAN resulted in gains for both sides; the PRI managed to implement its political and economic reforms, the PAN achieved unprecedented electoral success, and both were able to stop the electoral advance of the PRD, which in 1991 received only 8 percent of the vote. However, it also provoked a more radical stance on the part of the PRD and the Left in general, polarizing the political atmosphere with the 1994 presidential election in the offing. The catalyst for the events of that year was the rise of the EZLN, the guerrillas in Chiapas. Although the group had formed years earlier, by early 1994 it had gained the acceptance and understanding of broad sectors of society. One of

the justifications for the EZLN's decision to take up arms was precisely the fact that the PRD and leftist organizations were being shut out of the political arena. In a statement made when the movement had just recently come to public light, the visible leader of the EZLN, *subcomandante* Marcos said: "The reforms and counter-reforms the PRI made in complicity with the PAN give no chance to opposition political parties, much less to other citizens' movements or movements of any kind."⁴⁵ Nobody, either within the PRI or outside of it, refuted that accusation. In fact, years later, Salinas de Gortari himself acknowledged the negative consequences of his policy of shutting out the Left:

If the political reforms we achieved in 1994 had been implemented earlier and they had gone even deeper, we might have had a broader margin of response for the emergencies that arose that year. For example, one of the initial complaints that resonated the most when the guerrilla conflict broke out in Chiapas—the demand for more transparent elections like the ones achieved later in August of 1994—would not have been supported.⁴⁶

The movement lent political strength to the PRD, but in the end it did not translate into a large number of votes in the presidential election—17 percent of the total—explained in part by the presidential debate of May 12, 1994, in which Cárdenas was crushed by his rival Diego Fernández de Cevallos of the PAN. This put the PRD in third place, with a technical draw between the PAN's standard-bearer and the PRI candidate, Ernesto Zedillo.⁴⁷ The truth is that the political shake-up sparked by the zapatista uprising brought with it the danger of an electoral blow-up (which explains the 1994 electoral reform, reviewed in the first section). In some way, it also may have been related to the tarnishing of the PRI's original candidate, Luis Donald Colosio, and his assassination in March. The assassination and other political events of that year eventually weakened the economy by triggering massive capital flight (estimated at 20 billion dollars) and a subsequent drop in international reserves. This elicited a new and profound economic crisis as well as a devaluation of the currency in early December, with Zedillo already in office. In light of these events, Zedillo realized that unless real and convincing political openness was achieved, the country's economic stability would remain in jeopardy. He decided to implement a new electoral reform that would bring the system completely into the realm of true competition (the 1996 reform) and fully included the PRD in the arena of partisan struggles—the opposite of the strategy followed by Salinas.

I am convinced that recovery from our economic emergency must be accompanied by substantive, immediate and fully participatory steps forward, to build the democracy that all Mexicans yearn for. We must acknowledge the validity of the views of those who are dissatisfied with the limitations of our democratic life; we must join forces to advance in building a democracy that will allow us to overcome the wrongs of the past and strengthen the exercise of the rights of the Mexican people.⁴⁸

The reforms made it possible to ease tensions in the political environment, generate political and electoral credibility, and moderate the stance of the PRD (which won the race for the capital city's local government in 1997 after 70 years of administrations designated by the president and also won 26 percent of lower house seats). These changes assured a credible presidential election, regardless of who won, and a true chance opened up for an opposition party to replace the PRI in the presidency. For various reasons that party was the PAN. Vicente Fox's charisma as a candidate, compared to a deteriorated Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (who, ensconced in the local government of Mexico City since his 1997 electoral victory, opted for immobility) explains the outcome to a large extent. As mentioned, in 1997 as in 1999, Fox favored an electoral alliance between the PAN and the PRD, designed to overpower the PRI. Cárdenas (running for president for the third time) appeared to have accepted that possibility, but in reality he did everything he could to frustrate the strategy, especially in 1999. Not just because he had not ruled out the possibility that he might win the election (he has never trusted poll figures, which at that time had him in third place), but also because of his ideological rejection of what the PAN stands for. Given the low number of votes received by the PRI in 1997 (39 percent), it was conceivable that the opposition candidate who was ahead could attract the other side's strategic vote to defeat the PRI. Among the first to recognize this was Porfirio Muñoz Ledo: "By the year 2000 the PRI will have dropped so far that there will be no temptation for opposition groups to unite; any of the two (PAN or PRD) can beat the PRI."⁴⁹ So it was the PAN that reaped decades of efforts by many citizens, dissidents, and opponents to win the presidency in 2000.

At this point a paradox emerges. The PRD was founded as the opposition to the PRI, with the clear objective of replacing it in power. Yet when a real opportunity arose to defeat the PRI, the PRD established an unspoken and informal but real alliance with the PRI candidate during the campaign aimed at stopping the PAN candidate.⁵⁰ The reasons for it were basically ideological. Although Cárdenas rejected the neoliberal policies embodied by the PRI technocrats (a group to which Francisco Labastida, PRI candidate in 2000, also belonged), his rejection of the PAN ideology, which he saw as completely rightist (or rather ultra-rightist), was greater (See Appendix, Diagram 3).

This also generated an identity and strategy crisis within the PRD, an experience shared by the PRI and the PAN for different reasons. The crisis compounded the fragmentation the PRD had suffered since its inception.⁵¹ Unlike the PRI or the PAN, the PRD did not change its situation dramatically (from ruling party to opposition party in the case of the PRI, or from perennial opponent to ruling party in the PAN's case). It continued to be the opposition party, in disagreement with the neoliberal policies of the last PRI administrations (which had provoked the secession of the PRI current led by the PRD). And it now focused its opposition on the PAN, which in essence was continuing the neoliberal policies of the PRI technocrats. In this context, it was poised to accept or seek alliances with one part of the PRI, the current that is consistent with the old revolutionary nationalism that drove the party until 1985 and that remained

latent through the rise of the technocratic presidents. Thus, the PRD and the PRI were soon seen joining forces on some causes against the policies of Fox and the PAN. The PRI was divided on these issues; a faction led by Elba Esther Gordillo and some of the technocrats decided to start supporting the government in 2003, while the other powerful current adopted a thoroughly contrary position. Yet the PRD displayed a clear affinity for the national-revolutionary (traditional) current of the PRI. This was apparent, for example, in the party's handling of its opposition to the energy reform in general and to electricity reforms in particular: Cárdenas went as far as to form a Patriotic Front with PRI senator Manuel Bartlett, who led the anti-energy reform camp of the PRI but also was responsible for the fraudulent defeat of Cárdenas in 1988. The PRD also squelched a tax reform crafted by the PAN and the technocratic current of the PRI in late 2003 by voting with the traditional wing of the PRI (together, the PRD and the traditional priístas had a total of 251 votes, compared to 234 by the PAN and the technocratic priístas). The PRI has become a party divided along the lines of ideological currents, each one seeking to forge tactical alliances with the party with which it shares the most common ground: the technocratic PRI with the PAN, in an attempt to recreate the 1988–1994 alliance, and the traditional PRI with the PRD, based on the ideology they both shared before the arrival of the technocrats (see Appendix, Diagram 4).

Thus, the tax reform first proposed by Gordillo's wing of the PRI, and later a new proposal submitted by the PAN, were defeated by the bloc formed by Chuayffet's PRI and the PRD—the first time in a plenary session of the assembly (as stated earlier) and the second time in the revenue committee itself, where the PRI and PRD make up the majority and were able to block the PAN initiative's passage to the assembly. In any case, such alliances seem to be short-term and highly volatile. This was evident when the PAN and the PRI voted (across all the factions) to lower the public debt ceiling for the PRD government in Mexico City from \$2.5 billion to only \$500 million, causing the PRD bloc to feel betrayed by the PRI.

There are a few final points to consider regarding the PRD's chances as a viable option for the government in 2006. The party received 29 percent of the national vote in the 2003 mid-term elections (compared to 33 percent for the PAN and 37 percent for the PRI), which in principle would keep it as it was as a viable political option. It had virtually no presence in various states of the republic, which means it is defined more clearly than its two opponents as a regional party with extremely localized coverage. Beyond that structural disadvantage, however, it has a tremendously popular pre-candidate who is gradually gathering political strength, and whom the polls show as the clear favorite, as reflected in Figure 6.

Figure 6. If the Presidential Elections Were Held Today, Who Would Receive Your Vote?

	August 03	October 03
Andrés Manuel López Obrador	15.7	21.0
Roberto Madrazo Pintado	3.2	6.3
Santiago Creel Miranda	4.1	3.7
Marta Sahagún	1.7	3.5
Arturo Montiel Rojas	0.9	1.6
Diego Fernández de Cevallos	2.3	1.6
Miguel Alemán Velasco	1.2	1.5
Others	11.8	11.4
None of the above	0.9	1.6
No response	58.2	47.8
Total (in percent)	100.0	100.0

Source: *Consulta Mitofsky*, October 2003.

There could be some hope for López Obrador in such a scenario, if one considers that in presidential races, the candidate matters more than the party (even though a candidate who is not supported by a major party lacks any real chance of victory). This was the case with Vicente Fox in 2000; in the 1997 mid-term elections his party received barely 25 percent of the vote (a figure not very different from the PRD’s percentage today), also having lost resoundingly Mexico City’s local government, which at the time had been opened up to an electoral contest for the first time since 1928. In 2000, Fox pulled his party to victory, breaking down all historical electoral barriers and bringing in 35 percent of the vote. That vote was the result of the so-called Fox effect, rather than of a solid presence by the PAN among the electorate (as the setback suffered by the PAN in 2003 suggests). López Obrador could generate the same effect, drawing votes to the PRD at the national level, although in a different proportion to what he himself could receive (as was again the case with Fox, who received almost 43 percent of the vote). Another 2000 phenomenon that now could repeat itself with López Obrador is that of the “useful votes” cast by those voters who may not share the ideological positions of the candidate but see him as the lesser of evils and, in the case of Mexico, as the instrument that was able to defeat the PRI in 2000 or can prevent its return to power in 2006.

To the extent that the PAN is debilitated, the Fox administration fails to convince voters of its achievements (the most likely, although not certain, scenario), and the PAN candidate represents “more of the same” to the electorate, it is entirely possible that the broad anti-PRI bloc of voters (whether they are Center Right, Left or purely pragmatic) could come together and give the victory to López Obrador as a way to prevent the return of the PRI to Los Pinos. That

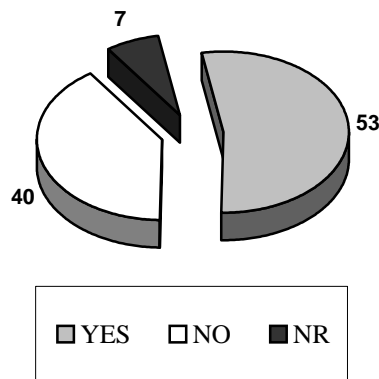
anti-PRI bloc in 2000 represented approximately 60 percent of the voters, of which only 43 percent opted for Fox. But that was enough to defeat the PRI. The current proportion of votes representing the strategic vote that would favor López Obrador is not known, but it is possible to estimate that the anti-PRI bloc (that would not, under any circumstances, vote for the PRI) continues to represent a majority (see Figure 7 and Graph 5).

Figure 7. Opinion of Political Parties (in percent)

Party	Positive	Average	Negative	No Response	Total
PRI	18.6	35.7	41	4.7	100
PAN	25.7	47.5	16.5	10.3	100
PRD	39.8	45.2	9.4	5.6	100

Source: *Consulta Mitofsky*, July 2, 2003.

Graph 5. The Worst Thing that Could Happen Is that the PRI Would Win in 2006



Source: *El Universal*, September 1, 2003.

This is all despite the fact that the 2003 mid-term election favored the PRI and gave it the majority in Congress, a phenomenon partly explained by the high abstention level of 58 percent—the highest official figure since voter registration was established in 1946. The assumption is that a low voter turnout will favor those parties that have an electoral machine capable of mobilizing its members. In Mexico that party is clearly the PRI, whose electoral and corporative machinery continues to operate in some fashion despite the party's defeat in the presidential election, in part due to the fact that over half of the state governments are still in

that party's hands. The fact that the PRI's hard vote is more consistent and broader than that of the other parties is illustrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Strength of the Hard Vote (*voto duro*) (in percent) *

Vote July 6, 2003	
PAN	29
PRI	47
PRD	17
PT	2
PVEM	1
Others	4
Total	100

Source: *Consulta Mitofsky*. August, 2003.

* These figures indicate how party members who always vote for the same party voted in the July 6, 2003, elections and are thus a representation of the relative strength of the hard vote or *voto duro* among the political parties.

If high abstention levels were to be repeated in 2006, the PRI would be able to reclaim power despite the opposition of a majority of the population who presumably would stay home. But it is likely that the presidential election, because of its importance, will motivate a greater number of voters to cast their ballots than did the 2003 mid-term elections even if the turnout is lower than in the 2000 election, which is not unlikely in light of the voting trends seen in recently democratized countries. This represents both a challenge and an opportunity for López Obrador in the presidential race. Part of his strategy, which Fox also used, involves broadening the electoral spectrum beyond the PRD's boundaries and forming a broad left-wing coalition. This would explain the inclusion of certain non-PRD figures such as Manuel Camacho and academic Julio Boltznivik on the roster of candidates for the 2003 mid-term election. The plan will require a certain movement of the PRD toward the middle of the ideological spectrum, of which López Obrador has already given some signs. One example is López Obrador's devotion of part of his work to satisfying middle- and upper-class sectors in addition to the poorest groups with myriad public works projects. Another example is his closeness to business leader Carlos Slim, one of the wealthiest men in Latin America. Also, support committees are being organized as a basic structure of electoral support for López Obrador, perhaps comparable to what the vast network of "Friends of Fox" represented during the presidential process of 2000 as a resource external to the PAN.

Of course, it is impossible to predict a win for López Obrador with any certainty, because there are many imponderables along the way, and these could have a substantial impact on the trend currently indicated by polls and political events. Besides, it is not certain that Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas will not try to run for

president a fourth time (inspired by the experience of Inacio da Silva in Brazil), even though the polls show him far behind López Obrador. Both López Obrador and the president of the PRD, Leonel Godoy (who is close to Cárdenas) have said that “el Ingeniero” Cárdenas should not be left for dead. Cárdenas and some of the sympathetic currents (such as the one led by Rosario Robles) are creating a counterbalance to López Obrador’s candidacy, insisting that regardless of who is chosen as the candidate, the party’s platform must be introduced first. This current will probably seek to exert pressure on López Obrador and then reach agreements with him on certain positions, in case he wins the presidential election. All other considerations aside, unless Cárdenas insists on being a candidate once again (a possibility many would not rule out), the unity of the PRD seems more secure than that of the other two major parties, which remains a paradox given the PRD’s traditional fragmentation into so-called tribes.

In any case, even if López Obrador were to win the presidency, he would most likely do so with less than 50 percent of the vote and, worse, his party, the PRD, would receive even fewer votes (as in the case of Fox in 2000), which would bring us back to a non-majority, minority, or even a divided government, with the paralyzing and even disruptive effects we have begun to experience these past years.

Afterword

In March 2004, various corruption scandals arose in more than one of Mexico’s political parties, which, due to their magnitude, shocked the public and called into question the credibility of the political parties and the political class at large. The parties that were implicated were the PVEM through its president, and the PRD through high-ranking Mexico City government officials and the party’s leader in the Mexico City legislature (*asamblea legislativa*). A media frenzy was unleashed by the implicated individuals, either in an attempt to explain the acts of corruption or to blame others for having allegedly orchestrated a smear campaign against the political parties involved, with accusations made against the federal government, the Ministry of the Interior, and even the United States Drug Enforcement Administration. These latest developments have undoubtedly altered Mexico’s political climate.

First, the momentum of the presidential candidacy of Mexico City Mayor Andrés Manuel López Obrador was shaken, with various polls showing a significant drop in the population’s intent to vote for him, his popularity, and even regarding his image as an honest politician.

Second, the PRD decided to expel many of the individuals involved in the acts of corruption in an attempt to preserve the party’s image as corruption-free. The party set a precedent by holding accountable those individuals involved in verifiable acts of corruption, in contrast to what typically occurs in other political parties, where the party covers up for its members even when there is clear evidence of illicit acts—as was the case with the PRI in the Pemexgate scandal or the PAN in the Amigos de Fox scandal.

Third, the mayor of Mexico City alluded to evidence, yet to be presented, of an orchestrated campaign against his government involving individuals from the Office of the Attorney General, the Center for Investigation and National Security (the Ministry of the Interior's intelligence agency), and PAN senator Diego Fernández de Cevallos. Such allegations raise questions over the use of government agencies against the political opposition, an antidemocratic practice that was condemned when the PRI was in office.

Fourth, legislators from all of the political parties demonstrated concern over the discrediting of the political party system, and pledged to introduce reforms that would reduce future party-related corruption and enhance oversight.

In sum, these political scandals could be healthy for Mexico's democratization. Assuming the various acts of corruption are accompanied with political and legal actions against those involved, the resolution of the scandals will strengthen the credibility of Mexico's democratic institutions. In the event of no such consequences, however, as was the case with the PVEM whose president was re-ratified by a 99 percent vote in that party's recent convention, the reputation of Mexico's democratic process will be tarnished.

Notes

- ¹ See José Antonio Crespo, "PRI: de la hegemonía revolucionaria a la dominación democrática," *Política y Gobierno*, no. 1, Centro de Investigación y Docencia Económicas (January–June, 1994).
- ² See Carlos Castillo Peraza, "De la fuerza a la maña; la lenta apertura del poder Legislativo mexicano a la oposición política entre los años 1943 y 1958," *Diálogo y Debate*, no. 1 (April–June, 1997).
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- ⁸ See José Antonio Crespo, *Raising the Bar: The Next Generation of Electoral Reforms in Mexico*, Policy Papers on the Americas (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, March 2000).
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- ¹⁰ Juan Linz, "The Perils of Presidentialism," *Journal of Democracy* 1 (Winter 1990).
- ¹¹ See Scott Mainwaring, "Presidentialism in Latin America," *Latin American Research Review* XXV, no. 1 (1990).
- ¹² Jaime Cárdenas, *Una constitución para la democracia; propuestas para un nuevo orden constitucional* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1996), p. 51.
- ¹³ For more details on the difference between divided government and government without a majority, see María Amparo Casar, "Perspectivas políticas de un gobierno dividido en México," in María Amparo Casar and Ignacio Marván (eds.), *Gobernar sin mayoría; México, 1867–1997* (Mexico City: Taurus, 2002).
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- ¹⁵ In the case of Mexico and thus in the context of this paper, qualified majority refers to the two-thirds majority needed to pass constitutional reforms.
- ¹⁶ When Fox says “parliamentarism,” he is evidently referring to a divided government, in which the opposition controls a relative or absolute majority of Congress. See Vicente Fox, *A Los Pinos* (Mexico City: Océano, 1999), p. 126.
- ¹⁷ *Reforma*, July 8, 2003.
- ¹⁸ William Heller and Jeffrey Weldon, “Reglas de votación y la estabilidad en la Cámara de Diputados,” in Luisa Béjar and Rosa María Mirón (eds.), *El Congreso mexicano después de la alternancia* (Mexico City: Asociación Mexicana de Estudios Parlamentarios, 2003), p. 86.
- ¹⁹ Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales.
- ²⁰ See Javier Hurtado, *El sistema presidencial mexicano; Evolución y perspectivas* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2001), ch. I.
- ²¹ Gabriel Zaid, “Escenarios para Julio,” *Reforma*, March 30, 1997.
- ²² See José Antonio Crespo, *¿Tiene futuro el PRI?*
- ²³ See John T. Ishiyama (ed.), *Communist Successor Parties in Post-Communist Politics* (New York: Nova Science Publishers, 1999).
- ²⁴ Press conference, December 11, 2003, covered in *Reforma*, December 12, 2003.
- ²⁵ Message broadcast on December 11, 2003, covered in *Reforma*, December 12, 2003.
- ²⁶ *La Jornada*, December 13, 2003.
- ²⁷ Message issued December 21, 2003, covered in *Reforma*, December 23, 2003.
- ²⁸ Press release, December 23, 2003, covered in *Reforma*, December 24, 2003.
- ²⁹ *El Universal*, December 4, 2003.
- ³⁰ *El Independiente*, December 23, 2003.
- ³¹ *Reforma*, December 18, 2003.
- ³² See Luis Javier Garrido, *La Ruptura; la Corriente Democrática del PRI* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 1993).
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- ³⁴ *El Universal*, December 23, 2003.
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- ³⁸ Vicente Fox, *A Los Pinos*, p. 94.
- ³⁹ Vicente Fox, *A Los Pinos*, pp. 61 and 96.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 183.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 184.
- ⁴² Interview in *La Jornada*, July 6, 2000.
- ⁴³ See Luis Javier Garrido, *La Ruptura*.
- ⁴⁴ See José Antonio Crespo, *Urnas de Pandora; partidos políticos y elecciones en el gobierno de Salinas* (Mexico City: Espasa-Calpe, 1995), ch. II.
- ⁴⁵ *La Jornada*, January 2, 1994.
- ⁴⁶ *Reforma*, January 29, 1997.
- ⁴⁷ See Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, *¡Vamos a ganar!; La pugna de Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas por el poder* (Mexico City: Océano, 1995).
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- ⁴⁹ Interview in *Excelsior*, December 10, 1997.
- ⁵⁰ Cfr. José Antonio Crespo, “Mexique 2000; L’anne de dérouté du parti hégémonique,” *Politique Etrangère*, no. 1 (Spring 2001).
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Appendix

Diagram 1. Types of Government and Distribution

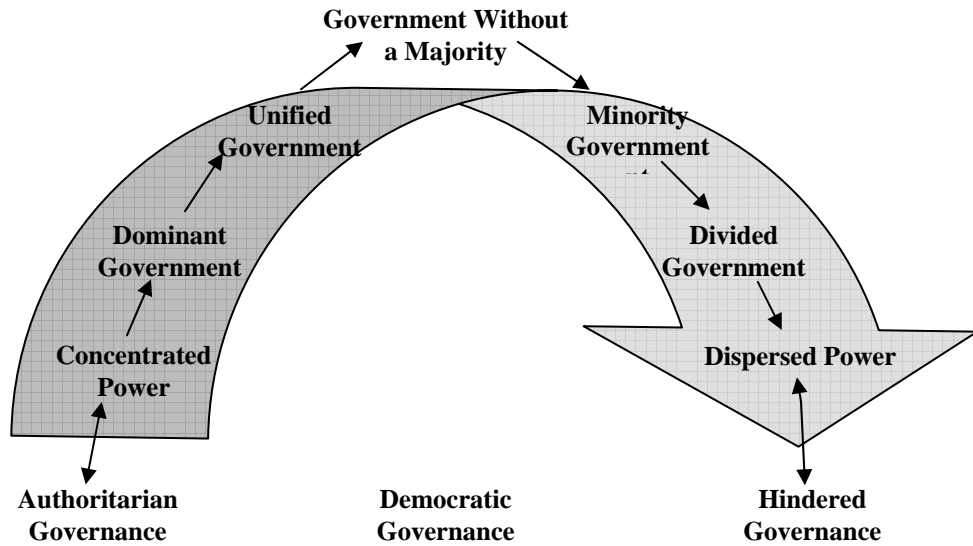


Diagram 2. Evolution of Government In Modern Mexico (1940-2003)

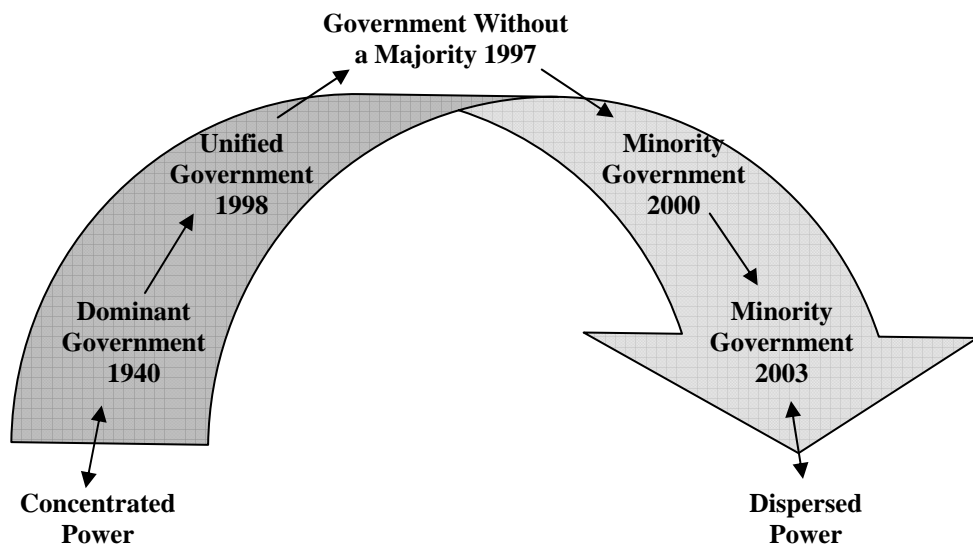


Diagram 3. Party Alliances, 1988–2000

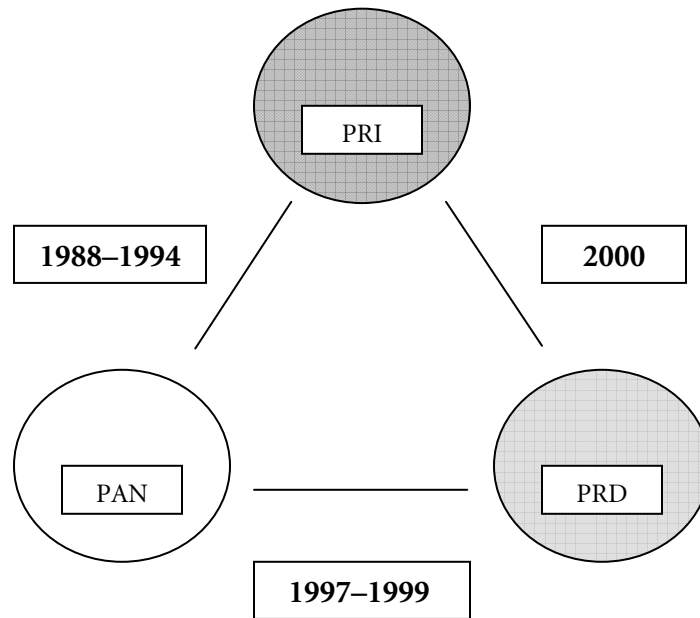
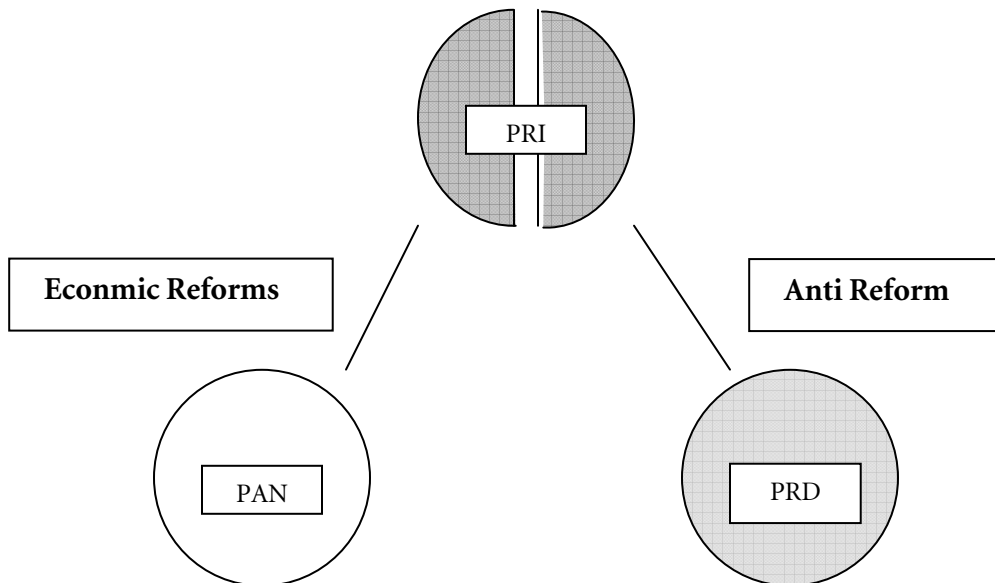


Diagram 4. Party Alliances, 2001–2003



About the Author

JOSÉ ANTONIO CRESPO is a professor at the Center for Research and Economic Education [CIDE]. He has published extensively on issues of democracy and electoral systems, and conducted intensive studies on Mexican politics. The author of numerous articles and books, he most recently published *The Risks of Presidential Succession: Players and Institutions Towards the Year 2000*, [Centro de Estudios de Política Comparada, 1999]; *Does the PRI Have a Future? Between Democratic Survival and Total Disintegration* [Grijalbo, 1998]; and “Political Coalitions” in *Conciencia Mexicana* [1997].