

# **DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND PARTY SYSTEM IN MEXICO**

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## Democratic Consolidation and the Party System in Mexico.

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Recent studies on third-wave democracies have focused on the issue of consolidation, by looking into the composition and quality of the democratic process. In general, those studies embrace many dimensions of the countries that are studied. For many authors, evaluating the consistency of the democratic process implies taking into consideration factors other than just the elections and the market.<sup>1</sup> This is an interesting perspective when is aimed at understanding the substance and the dynamics of the democratic phenomenon. It is even more interesting when, as one well-known student of the topic once wrote, it allows to identify the different types of polyarchy construction. But it becomes less interesting when, by using ideal polyarchies as parameters that define deficient polyarchies, the intention is to grade the political life of the countries that are being analyzed.<sup>2</sup>

This paper aims at presenting and understanding very confined aspects of democratic consolidation of the Mexican political system, i.e.: continuity and change in the party system. My argument is simple: the inheritance of the hegemonic party system and the dynamic of successive negotiations among political parties, which led to more competitive electoral rules, created the formal conditions for the existence of a competitive and highly institutionalized party system in Mexico. However, the same conditions that favored a high degree of institutionalization could also lead to a growing inefficiency in the party system. In this paper I only examine two dimensions of this paradox. First, by looking at recent processes of presidential candidate selection, I examine the effects of personal ambitions of politicians on party organizations. Second, I address the issue that deals with the linkage function of political parties in the articulation and aggregation of interests.

Recent literature on third-wave democracies shows a growing concern for the role of parties and party systems in the quality of democratic processes.<sup>3</sup> An emphasis is made in the fundamental role that parties have in the good development of democratic life. For some authors, this role is better appreciated in the linkage function between society and the political system that parties perform; for others, what matters is the institutionalization of parties and party systems. These are not contradictory perspectives (at least, not regarding this issue).

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<sup>1</sup> The book of Juan L. Linz and Alfred Stepan, Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation (Baltimore, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996) is an eloquent debate in favor of this argument. The model of analysis developed by the authors takes into account five interrelated areas in which specific conditions for the consolidation of democracy have to be present (5-37).

<sup>2</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, "Illusions about Consolidation," Journal of Democracy, 7,2 (1996) 34-51.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Herbert Kischelt et al., Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation and Inter-Party Cooperation, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999 and Scott Mainwaring, Rethinking Party Systems in the Third Wave of Democratization: the Case of Brazil, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1999.

Those perspectives that emphasize the centrality of parties and their necessary institutionalization in democratic systems are not new. In his very well-known book, Political Order in Changing Societies, Samuel Huntington addresses the issue of which were the conditions that allowed to successfully reconcile social mobilization and political stability. The solution he found lied in the "... existence of political institutions capable of giving content to public interests..."<sup>4</sup> For the famous political scientist, the stability of any system of government depends on the relationship that exists between the level of political participation and the degree of institutionalization of that system. Repeatedly along that book, Huntington insists in the fact that the political party is the institution that characterizes modern systems of government. One or several political parties that are highly institutionalized—that is, adaptable, complex, autonomous and coherent—guarantee the legitimacy, stability and authority of modern systems of government.

In an edited volume on party systems in Latin America, Mainwaring and Scully retake Huntington's argument to adapt it to the contemporary political context of the region. In essence, those authors argue that, when party systems are less institutionalized, "the political democratic life is more erratic, the establishment of legitimacy more difficult and the task of governing more complex."<sup>5</sup> In a more recent work, Mainwaring proposes to take into consideration the level of institutionalization of party systems to explain their dynamic and functioning. Adding this dimension to those that are traditionally used to explain the functioning of party systems could be particularly useful to analyze the party life of third-wave democracies. While a high degree of institutionalization—measured in terms of low electoral volatility, strong social penetration, consistency in the political offer and solid party organizations—constitutes a guarantee for a democratic life, a low level of institutionalization of party systems, at least in some dimensions, frequently occurs in young democracies. This weakness affects the way in which the political interaction is structured: it is then the task of political scientists to identify its particularities and effects.<sup>6</sup>

Kitschelt and his contributors also insist on the centrality of parties and party systems for the health of democracies. Their argument is similar to that of Mainwaring, although it is different in the way it is proved. Kitschelt highlights the distinctiveness of party systems in recently established (or re-established) democracies. He emphasizes the (or lack of) efficiency of the political representation and distinguishes the party systems of third-wave democracies in the way in which their parties are linked to society. In this case, the linkage strategies of political parties are supported by such elements as the charisma and clientelism, rather than just the programmatic offer. The "inheritance from the past", understood in its socioeconomic and institutional dimensions, help to understand the particular combination of linkage strategies in each national case.

Institutionalization and linkage are the parameters through which I base my reflection on the Mexican party system. Before fully addressing this issue, a brief note on the issue of continuity or the inheritance from the past in the study of democratic process is

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<sup>4</sup> Samuel Huntington, Political Order in Changing Societies, New Have and London, Yale University Press, 1968, 24.

<sup>5</sup> Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully, "Introduction", in Building Democratic Institutions: Party Systems in Latin America, Scott Mainwaring and Timothy R. Scully (eds.), Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1995, 22.

<sup>6</sup> The core of this argument is developed in the first two chapters of Scott Mainwaring, op. cit.

necessary. I believe it important to draw some lessons from the first modern and systematic analysis of a real process of political change, that is, The Old Regime and the Revolution of Alexis de Tocqueville. The past, many times, molds the present. This is also frequently called “path-dependency,” to use a contemporary term of political science. Many current studies recognize the weight of the past in the study of democratic regimes. For instance, Linz and Stepan highlight the fact that available roads for transition towards democracy and pending tasks for the new regimes depend upon the type of regime that existed beforehand.<sup>7</sup> Also, in his study of the Brazilian case, Mainwaring insists on the need to develop historical explanations in the formation of party systems.<sup>8</sup> Given the diversity of national democratic processes, Kitschelt et al. opted for operating a “backward-looking causal mode of analysis that examines the conditions under which particular process features of democratic competition, interest representation and policy-making ‘lock-in’...”<sup>9</sup>

These observations invite a reflection on the recent evolution of the Mexican party system. If there is one event that draws attention on what is frequently written about Mexican political change is the fact that many analysts address the phenomenon of change as if continuity could be obviated, as if consolidation of democratic systems did not have a history or as if the tensions that commonly accompany change only affected actors identified with the past. In summary, I will try to develop an argument that runs parallel to that of Rosanvallon in his Le sacre du citoyen, where he highlights the fact that systems of political representation have history and national specificity.<sup>10</sup> Very often that specificity is based on a consensus on certain national issues that reach beyond the dichotomy between authoritarianism and democracy.

My argument is simple. On the one hand, the main characteristics of the Mexican party system that have been inherited from the past (and maintained throughout successive negotiations of electoral reforms) create very favorable conditions for the consolidation of the main existing parties (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, Partido de la Revolución Democrática y Partido Acción Nacional). In themselves, and following the institutionalization perspective, those inherited party characteristics are positive for the consolidation of a representative democracy in Mexico. On the other hand, however, they also stimulate processes that could undermine the bases for such institutionalization. Here, I examine two of these processes. First, higher levels of competition that promote very strong tensions within the main political parties, especially regarding the administration of personal ambitions. An old ghost, that of personalism, threatens again the Mexican party life. Second, the control that is exerted by the main political parties over the selection of candidates for political positions tends to favor an oligopolistic control of the political representation and can eventually create problems in the linkage function of such parties, especially regarding the articulation and aggregation of interests. The ghost of over-

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<sup>7</sup> See Linz and Stepan, op.cit., chaps. 3 y 4.

<sup>8</sup> Mainwaring, op.cit., 5.

<sup>9</sup> Kitschelt et al., op. cit., 10.

<sup>10</sup> Pierre Rosanvallon, Le sacre du citoyen. Histoire du suffrage universel en France, Paris, Gallimard, 1992.

institutionalization<sup>11</sup> or “*partidocracia*” threatens the necessary and healthy process of party consolidation.

Do not misinterpret me. This paper attempts to present a perspective in favor of strong political parties and is quite different from the simple criticisms that since Ostrogorski have been formulated against the democracy of parties. I will try to highlight the favorable conditions for the consolidation of the main parties in contemporary Mexico, at the time that I will demonstrate that those same conditions could paradoxically lead to the sclerosis of those parties for at least two reasons. First, because those parties are consolidating in a moment very different from that when the great mass parties were born. Second, because the very oligopolistic control of representation implies the risk that parties become enclosed in a self-referring interacting logic.

### **The Institutional Inheritance, or how supposedly bad things from the previous system are transformed into advantages for the consolidation of the party system?**

In the contemporary jargon of neo-institutionalism, institutional rules have “autonomous distributive effects.”<sup>12</sup> In more simple words, this means that the rules that were conceived to favor certain actors in specific circumstances could, in others, benefit other actors. Democratic systems are not product of a spontaneous generation. On the contrary, they result from the negotiations between diverse actors that gradually and on a trial and error basis lead to a broader political participation. In the study of post-communist party systems in Eastern Europe, Kitschelt *et al.* argue that the configuration of power in the old regime and the moment of transition influence the political institutions of new democracies. The expectations, the cognitive maps and the resources of the actors involved in the negotiations for change are molded by old power relations.<sup>13</sup> I would add that in the history of each country, there are shared interpretations on what is “good” or “bad” for the country: a higher or a lower degree of centralization, a higher or a lower degree of personalism in politics, etc. The combination of particular characteristics in both perspectives influences the national character of political representation.

The rules of functioning of what has been know as the Mexican hegemonic party system also set a “path-dependency” in the construction of the current party system. Students of the issue have stated, with reason, that the Electoral Law of 1946 was the base of the institutional control that the Executive Power exerted over elections and the party life. They asserted that the continuation of the PRI hegemony, and consequently the lack of a real party competition, was facilitated by the centralization of the organization and the supervision of elections in the hands of the Federal Government, the almost direct control of the Executive Power of those elections and of political party recruitment—by establishing requirements such as the registration of parties based on a nation-wide

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<sup>11</sup> See Andreas Schedler, “Under and overinstitutionalization: some ideal typical positions concerning new and old party systems”, Working Paper no. 213, The Hellen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 1995.

<sup>12</sup> See for instance Jack Knight, *Institutions and Social Conflict*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, 145.

<sup>13</sup> Herbert Kitschelt *et al.* *op.cit.*, 13.

presence or certain organization and ideological characteristics.<sup>14</sup> There are also reasons associated with the history of political representation in Mexico, such as the belief that a centralized control of elections limited the practices of regional *caciques* that were fostered by the Electoral Law of 1918. In 1946 Law, fostering competition through political parties constituted a brake to personalism in public life. Other rules such as those that demanded the existence of recognized and permanent parties that had a national presence granted a greater stability to political competition and avoided the multiplication of small regional parties. These factors converged in a moment where the country was living a process of institutional consolidation by strengthening the penetration capacity of the central government. Naturally, the concept of democracy underlying the Law was far from being pluralistic. At best, the official justification was that the Mexican people was not mature enough to live in a more competitive democracy and that the role of the State was to guide it in that evolving process.<sup>15</sup>

Curiously, the Electoral Law of 1946 set the principles of a Republican (or Jacobin) model for the party system.<sup>16</sup> It refers to a centralized, public, national, State-centered system, that is based on an apparent ideological diversity. Virtuous citizen participation was the only Republican element that was missing in that Law. To this date, many of the constitutive characteristics of that model still persist. Until 1986, the reforms to this Electoral Law were, first, adaptive to guarantee the continuous functioning of the party system, based on the inclusion of secondary actors; later, those reforms were clearly defensive in order to maintain the dominance of the PRI. In all cases, during that period, the Executive Power maintained the initiative to mold elections and party life.

This notwithstanding, from 1989-90 on, the cycle of electoral reforms has intensified in Mexico. In fact, until 1996, there were four important negotiations on the rules of electoral competition that included modifications both to the Constitution and to secondary legislation. In contrast to similar reforms in the past, each of these negotiations ended up including, in a growing proportion, specific demands of each of the major political formations. While the horizon of those negotiations was to produce competition rules that were acceptable to all participants, it is clear that achieving satisfactory agreements implied introducing specific dispositions that some of the participants judged more beneficial according to their own interests. Thus, making the neutrality of electoral rules acceptable implied a redistribution of conditions considered wishful and favorable for

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<sup>14</sup> A preliminary approach was developed in Juan Molinar, *El tiempo de la legitimidad*, México: Cal y Arena, 1991, 29; a more systematic approach is developed in Jean-Francois Prud'homme, "The Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE): Building an impartial federal authority" in *Governing Mexico: Political Parties and Elections*, Mónica Serrano (ed.), London: The Institute of Latin American Studies-University of London, 1998, 141-143.

<sup>15</sup> This explanation is based on the summary of arguments found in *Diario de Debates* in the moment when the *Iniciativa de Ley Electoral*, that was approved in January of 1946, was being debated. A chronic of those debates could be found in Jean-Francois Prud'homme, "Crónica legislativa: cuatro reformas electorales, 1946-1986", in *El Congreso mexicano en las reformas políticas*, Rogelio Hernández and Francisco Gil Villegas (eds.) (forthcoming)

<sup>16</sup> The use of the term "Republican" corresponds to that of the French model of III Republic. The classic study of Eugene Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976) clearly indicates the avenues for the constitution of this type of national polity.

each of the main parties. In other words, the present law (COPIFE) contains modalities that correspond to specific demands of each of the Mexican political formations, thus making electoral rules neutral.<sup>17</sup>

Something similar happens with electoral rules inherited from the past. These rules conform a specifically Mexican tradition regarding the functioning of the party system. These rules survived the transition towards a situation of electoral competition, and resulted from a combination of two phenomena: the previous existence of an ideal party system that never really worked as such but which deeply marked the imaginary of the Mexican political class (the Republican model just described above which aims at embracing all the ideological spectrum without the existence of real competition) and the path drawn by successive electoral negotiations between opposition parties and the government during the 1989-1996 period (the path-dependency of institutionalists).

This combination made that, in the transition from authoritarianism to democratization, institutional rules that favored the consolidation of strong and highly cohesive political parties were created. How the party elite were (or will be) able to take advantage of those conditions is another issue. However, for different reasons, a democratic party system with strong Republican characteristics started to consolidate: national parties, centralized in its organization structure, constitutionally recognized as “entities of public interest” and obliged to have a programmatic profile.

Let’s examine some of these elements:

- a) The obligation, established by the Law, for office seekers to run in parties with a national registration has granted established parties a virtual monopoly (or to be more precise, an oligopolistic control) over political representation. In the 1946 Law, the objective of prohibiting independent candidacies was to elevate the cost of political dissent and to establish a control over political representation. By forcing political parties to have an official registration, granted by the Secretaría de Gobernación, and by demanding the obligatory linkage between candidacies and party membership, the Executive Power established a solid instrument of control over personal political ambitions.<sup>18</sup> The previous Law, that of 1918, allowed independent candidacies. It is no surprise that the re-introduction of the independent candidacies has not been proposed by any national political party in the different rounds of electoral reform. Today, this rule turns the three main political parties into the privilege way to office, whether by offering direct candidacies or, more recently, by means of a coalition, where the new small political formations seek tying up their luck to that of the largest parties in order to survive the electoral season (and thus obtain the number of votes that are necessary to maintain their registration and to have access to seats in the Congress).<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Jean-Francois Prud’homme, “La negociación de las reglas del juego: tres reformas electorales (1988-1994)” in *Política y Gobierno*, vol. III, núm. 1, 1996, 93-126.

<sup>18</sup> See “Law Electoral Federal”, 7 de enero de 1946, Capítulo VI, art. 60 en Antonio García Orozco, *Legislación electoral mexicana, 1812-1988*, México, s.f., 247. In the 2000 election, one can appreciate the offering of protection of the major parties to the small parties both in the Coalición por el Cambio (between the Partido Acción Nacional and the Partido Verde Econlogista de México) and in the Coalición por México (between Partido de la Revolución Democrática and four smaller political formations).

<sup>19</sup> Instituto Federal Electoral, “Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales”, Noviembre 1996, Título Segundo, Capítulo Primero, Art. 175.

- b) The requisite of having a solid presence at the national level—combining the need of gathering a respectable number of sympathizers in a large number of States or electoral districts—in order to get the party registration has contributed to turn political parties into national organizations with a relatively stable political clientele. That rule was introduced also in the 1946 Law and had the intention of blocking the emergence of opposition parties with a strong local base. It also responded to the will, expressed with the creation of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario at the end of the 1920s, of putting an end to both the fragmentation of the national political life and the regional *cacicazgos*.<sup>20</sup> The party requirements for proving a national presence have changed over time. First, they became more strict in order to avoid further ruptures of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional, once this had selected an official candidate for the Presidency. Then, they became more lax. Today one of the requirements for obtaining a party registration is to have at least 3,000 affiliates in 10 states of the federation or 300 affiliates in at least 100 of the 300 majority districts.<sup>21</sup> This requirement favored a party model that expands from the center to the periphery. Even today, with a more plural party system, local conflicts that in general precede to the existence of an institutionalized party life continued to be channeled through the national party system.
- c) The organizational characteristics of political parties demanded by the Law have had some effects on the internal configuration and institutionalization of those parties. Article 27 of COFIPE specifies some constitutive aspects of parties, and favors the centralization of power in the hands of formal or virtual authorities of the main political formations allowing for inter-party relationships based on party elite.
- d) The cosmetic vision, contained in the electoral Law, of a party system where there are different ideological options—or “tutelage pluralism”—forced political parties to have a programmatic profile. Articles 25 and 27 of COFIPE stipulate that political parties should have a declaration of principles and that they should present political platforms in each electoral campaign. While it is true that the distance between the norm and reality is big and that the Mexican political parties can hardly be pointed out as ideological, party identity is highly valued and this puts a break on the pure pragmatism of political ambition.
- e) Finally, the adoption, through negotiation, of an ever more generous and open system of public financing resulted from the weakness of opposition parties in a system of competition that did not favor them and from the existence of a not well-defined border between government financing and that of the ruling party. The model of party financing grants a minimum role for private financing (10%) and consecrates the formula of the 1977 constitutional reform that states that political parties are “entities of

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<sup>20</sup> See Ley Federal Electoral, January 1946, Capítulo III, Art. 23 and 24 in Antonio García Orozco, *op. cit.*, 244. From its origins this rule had not only excluding effects since it forced existing political parties to have a national organization, at least formally. Soledad Loeza shows how in the mid-1940s Acción Nacional has to expand itself to the national levels in order to respond to the demands of such a law. That party’s national consolidation was slow, but it allowed it to escape from the destiny of being a regional party. Soledad Loeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional: la larga marcha. 1939-1994*, México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1998.

<sup>21</sup> Instituto Federal Electoral, “Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales”, Noviembre 1996, Libro Segundo, Título Segundo, Capítulo Primero, art. 24.

public interest”. The contemporary effect of this rule is that, since the 1996 electoral reform, the Mexican political parties with registration are, in a word, rich parties.<sup>22</sup>

All these elements that are associated with institutional rules constitute the conditions that should lead to the consolidation of a system of strong political parties. In fact, few party systems in the world present similar conditions. If we used the dimensions suggested by Mainwaring to measure the degree of institutionalization of party systems (low electoral volatility, consistency in the political offer and faithful following, a solid party organization and strong social roots), the Mexican party system reaches a high score in several of these dimensions.<sup>23</sup> The three main political parties, taken altogether, concentrate, since 1988, a very high proportion of votes (more than 90 per cent in 1997). Each of them occupies, consistently, a well defined space in the political spectrum. In spite of the lack of strong institutional rules, the PAN, the PRD and the PRI have organizational cultures that allow each of them to maintain a good level of internal cohesion. Also, the existence of generous public funds allow them to maintain a professional party bureaucracy.

Of course, in the recent past, these conditions were not sufficient to guarantee the existence of political parties that were highly institutionalized. Something was missing: competitiveness. The very low degree of competitiveness of the party system and the virtual fusion between the Executive and the Legislative powers reduced to almost zero the functions of interest articulation and aggregation developed by the parties. To quote Huntington, “the political parties had little influence in the creation of the public interest”. True, the corporatist structure of PRI allow this party to penetrate the world of social organizations and to have social roots. In turn, this social base did not allow the party to have an open flux of demands towards the formal institutions of the political system (when this happened, that flux went through informal political channels).

But, today, everything is changing. The 1997 legislative elections clearly showed something that has been emerging for many years in the country: the existence of a diversity of electoral preferences, with the three main parties reaching, each, at least 25 per cent of the vote.<sup>24</sup> As shown by recent studies over party votes in the LVII Legislature, and contrary to a binary vision that presents politics as a dichotomy between opposition and government, diverse patterns of coalitions between political parties have emerged. This reflected the existence of a greater degree of pluralism than that which many were ready to admit.

As I warned at the beginning of this section, the paradox of this situation is that the same conditions that should favor the consolidation of a competitive and highly institutionalized party system in Mexico also encourage tensions that can weaken its

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<sup>22</sup> For the Legislative elections of 1997, if the total amount of party financing is divided by the total number of votes cast (56% of registered voters), each vote cost about US\$8.00. Source: Data Base from the Instituto Federal Electoral y Mony de Swaan, Paola Martorelli y Juan Molinar Horcasitas, “Public financing of political parties and electoral expenditures in Mexico” in Mónica Serrano (ed), *op.cit.* 163.

<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of these institutionalization dimensions, see Mainwaring, *op.cit.*, 27.

<sup>24</sup> The PRI obtained 38 per cent of the vote, with 48 per cent of congressional seats; the PAN, 26 per cent of the vote and 24 per cent of congressional seats; and the PRD, 25 per cent of the vote with the same proportion of congressional seats.

institutionalization. In turn, I examine these tensions in two aspects of the party life: the internal organization of the great political parties and their social mediation.

### **The Control of Political Ambition I, or how two dreams of a grand opposition coalition failed in the face of plural interests, personal ambitions and the oligopolistic control of representation?**

Many North American political scientists place political ambition at the center of their studies of party life. To reach their objective of conquering political positions, political parties support ambitious men who, like any entrepreneurs, ensure that they are able to obtain the largest number of votes.<sup>25</sup> In this perspective, the free run of personal ambition and competition are positive elements that contribute to the health of democracies. In Mexico, the creation of the postrevolutionary party system, since the birth of the Partido Nacional Revolucionario in 1929, reflects the will of limiting the free run of personal ambition.<sup>26</sup> For some students of the Mexican party life, until 1986, different aspects found in electoral laws could be interpreted in such a way.<sup>27</sup> The negative perception of free political ambition found a natural support in the adverse conception of pluralism that prevailed in the political elite. Nonetheless, that negative perception is also nourished by a collective conscience of the negative effects that excessive personalism has had in the Mexican public life. Ambition and personalism seemed to go hand in hand in the national political tradition and their effects were not always appreciated.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the strong attachment to the No-Reelection principle in Mexico after 1932 was seen as the national solution to stop the combination of ambition and personalism.

I will try to evaluate the impact of higher levels of competition and the free run of political ambitions over the degree of institutionalization of the Mexican political parties by studying two recent situations, i.e. attempts to create grand opposition coalitions and the internal processes of presidential candidate selection of the three main political parties. First, I will show how the combination of the oligopolistic control of political representation and the political ambitions of important party figures contributed to frustrate attempts to create an opposition coalition for the 2000 election. Second, I will show how the higher level of competition and personal political ambitions have created strong tensions within party organizations.

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<sup>25</sup> For classic texts on the theory of ambition, see Anthony Downs, An Economic Theory of Democracy (New York: Harper and Row, 1957) and Joseph A. Schlesinger, Political Parties and the Winning of Office (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994). This perspective has lived a renaissance in recent years.

<sup>26</sup> The first formulation of this interpretation can be found in Daniel Cosío Villegas, El sistema político mexicano, México: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1972, 35.

<sup>27</sup> See for instance Benito Nacif Hernández, “The Mexican Chamber of dEpñutiesÑ the Political Significance of Non-Consecutive Re-Election”, Ph. D. dissertation, St. Anthony’s College, Oxford University, 1995.

<sup>28</sup> In many Latin American countries, personalism appears as a constitutive characteristic of public life. In his study of Brazil, Mainwaring repeatedly warns against the continuous existence of personalism in the life of third wave democracies and their negative effects on the quality of the democratic process. See Mainwaring, op.cit., 38.

The 1997 legislative elections produced an unprecedented situation in the Mexican political life: the lack of an absolute majority of a party in the lower chamber of Congress and the existence of a “divided government”. Although in Mexico this situation marks a change in the way the modern political institutions function, because it puts an end to the virtual fusion of the Executive and Legislative powers, it is important to underline the fact that it is a common reality in several political systems that has even spurred an abundant literature. This unusual situation in Mexico invited a reflection on the problem of cooperation between powers and, at the same time, it introduced a relatively new issue in the Mexican public life, i.e. legislative and electoral coalitions.

Since August of 1997, there were attempts, successful in the beginning, to create a coalition of all opposition forces in Congress.<sup>29</sup> The cohesiveness of such coalition, known as G4, was shaken in November of that same year over the negotiation of the 1998 federal budget. In reality, the coalition was maintained only for the internal government of the lower Chamber through the control of the *Comisión de Régimen Interno y Concertación Política*. Meanwhile, depending on the issues in the legislative agenda, a dynamic of episodic convergence amongst political forces, including the governing party, took place.

In spite of this first failure, since February of 1999, the negotiations to create an opposition coalition, known as *Alianza por México*,<sup>30</sup> were gradually formalized. This attempt on the part of almost all opposition parties to create a coalition had as an objective to force the removal of the PRI. The success of partial or total coalitions of opposition parties in recent state elections (Zacatecas, Tlaxcala, Baja California Sur and Nayarit) offered a new horizon to this type of electoral strategy. After five months of negotiations to create the opposition coalition at a national level, a number of disagreements over the adoption of a method of selection of the presidential candidate resulted in the collapse of such negotiations. Obviously, behind apparent procedural problems, there were deeper motives that frustrated the endeavor. The personal ambitions of party candidates, such as Vicente Fox, from PAN, and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, from PRD, as well as the surviving guarantees that are offered to major political formations in the party system contributed to reduce the attractiveness of an opposition coalition.

As it often happens in situations of change, many of the aspects of some political formulas that are being tested, such as coalitions, become uncertain. Actors know very little about how to implant such formulas, the obstacles that will emerge, or their effects on the general functioning of the political system. Nonetheless, two dimensions of the coalition formula need to be highlighted here: a) the very dynamic of the process of coalition formation; and, b) its impact over the consolidation of party organizations.

Regarding the frustrated attempts to create an opposition coalition in Congress, one needs to bear in mind that the results of the 1997 legislative elections expressed a diversity of electoral preferences that were much more rich and complex than the logic of opposition-government polarization supposed and which threatened to become a reality in the last semester of that same year. A close attention to the electoral platforms of the three

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<sup>29</sup> This coalition was integrated by Partido Acción Nacional, Partido de la Revolución Democrática, Partido del Trabajo, y Partido Verde Ecológico de México.

<sup>30</sup> Eight parties participated in those negotiations: the four members of G4 and four new small political parties that have just gotten their registration: Convergencia por la Democracia (PCPD), Centro Democrático (PCD), Alianza Social (PAS) and Sociedad Nacionalista (PSN).

main political formations shows that the similarities and differences amongst political parties varied according the issue area of public policies that was being considered.<sup>31</sup> If limited to what was expressed in those political platforms, and if tactical considerations are not considered, an immense field was open for the establishment of a game of fluid and short-term coalitions amongst the political forces represented in Congress. A revision of the legislative work of the LVII Legislature shows a fluctuating pattern of votes in the different party delegations.<sup>32</sup>

The theory of political coalitions considers two factors that could be taken individually or jointly, depending on the different existing models: that of the number of parties, enough to produce arithmetic majorities, and that of programmatic similarity. It is generally admitted that the model that has more predictive power considers both factors. Nonetheless, the evaluation of programmatic similarity implies a strong level of subjectivity: parties that are members of coalitions select programmatic aspects to be used in a coalition in function of their appreciation of the political moment and of their strategic interests. Naturally, there is a clear risk in those strategic decisions. Not all members of a coalition win, especially in cases of rigid coalitions. Such a risk involves the possibility of losing political identity and electoral terrain.

The parties capacity for strategic evaluation explains the distance that was established between the two main partners in the G4: the PAN and the PRD. The former, especially on economic issues, projected an image of responsibility and governance capacity to the business community and the general electorate. For that reason, it negotiated and approved initiatives presented by the government on the budget and financial reform. The PRD opted for a radical opposition position, through which it sought to gain popularity. That position anticipated a rejection from the electorate to the economic policies of the Zedillo administration. Behind these maneuvers, a competition for the leadership of all opposition forces and for the protest vote with a view of the 2000 presidential election persisted in the opposition parties. Since sometime ago, strong presidential candidates were emerging in both parties. Since the creation of the PRD, in May of 1989, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was the virtual owner of the presidential candidacy. In the PAN, contrary to the party tradition, Vicente Fox had, since July of 1997, announced his intention to compete in the 2000 presidential election and had created a *para* party organization, *Los amigos de Fox*, in order to support his plan.

After the failure of constructing a permanent legislative coalition, it was surprising that from February of 1999 there were efforts to unify the political forces of the opposition, this time, in grand electoral alliance. If the orientation of the public policies privileged by each partner of the G4 seemed to have put an end to the opposition block, it was the arithmetic criteria that kept the second unification effort alive: opinion polls showed that a presidential candidate of a wide opposition coalition could defeat the PRI in the 2000 elections.

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<sup>31</sup> See Jean-Francois Prud'homme, "Las plataformas electorales de los partidos en 1997", in Luis Salazar (comp.), 1997. Elecciones y transición a la democracia en México, México: Cal y Arena, 1998, 77-110.

<sup>32</sup> María Amparo Casar, "La LVII legislatura de la Cámara de diputados en México. Coalición y cohesión partidaria en una Cámara sin mayoría" in Política y Gobierno, VII, 1, 1st semestre del 2000, (forthcoming).

However, there were also other less explicit motives that led each party to construct a scenario of a grand electoral alliance. Without entering into a detailed analysis of the interests of the diverse actors involved, there are three important factors that created such a possibility:

First, there are sectors in the PAN and the PRD that, for some time, have defended this coalition strategy to conquer power; they found support in the new and small political formations animated by previous PRI members. For PCD and PCPD, the formation of a grand coalition guaranteed having more influence and eventually a political representation that could give them an electoral presence of their own. The coalition strategy allowed to counter the oligopolistic control of political representation exerted by the three main political parties, to which I made reference in the first section of this paper. It also created a political stage that could cast the “adventurers” of ambition.<sup>33</sup>

Second, the competition and interest struggle within the two main opposition parties, for reasons that are particular to each of them, resulted in the opening of the internal political game of those parties to other political spaces. That is, the existing rivalry between Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo for the presidential candidacy in the PRD and the efforts of the old *panista* guard, led by Diego Fernández de Cevallos, to find a party counterweight to the atypical and extremely independent candidacy of Vicente Fox.

Third, the change in the selection rules for the PRI candidate and the perspective of a long “primary” campaign between four PRI pre-candidates threatened to leave PAN and PRD--where the presidential candidate selection was virtually done--out of the attention focus of the Mexican public opinion for several months.

As already mentioned, after months of negotiation, the opposition alliance failed. While a general agreement over marginal aspects associated with such an alliance seemed to exist (programs, the selection process for congressional candidacies, etc.), the method of selection for the presidential candidate was the issue of greatest contention. Each party opted for a method that favored more its own candidate: while the PRD preferred an open primary election, the PAN privileged a survey. One needs not to forget that the PRD was preparing its candidate since before the party was created, while the PAN candidate announced its will to contend in the 2000 presidential elections since July of 1997. This suggests that in the Mexican party system not only exists a pluralism of political offers, that explained the failure of the consolidation of an opposition block in the Congress, but also a pluralism of interests and ambitions that makes it difficult to create a grand electoral opposition alliance. In fact, the conditions that guarantee the oligopolistic control of political representation of the three main parties do not encourage them to take risks. In these cases, vested political ambitions contributed to maintain the institutionalization of a differentiated party system.

The free run of personal ambitions that was not solved in the party organizations had to be channeled through the secondary market of marginal coalitions. PAN gave shelter to the Partido Verde Ecologista de México in the *Alianza por el Cambio* and the PRD offered protection to the PT, PCPD, PAS and PSD in the *Alianza por México*. In this way, both parties continued exerting their function of oligopolistic control over political representation and the leaders of the small political formations had almost guaranteed their

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<sup>33</sup> Many of the small political parties, new or old, that survive in Mexican politics are *camarillas* that are defined around the personality of a political leader or candidate.

access to positions of popular election. Also, the alliance with smaller political forces reduced the internal tensions that a coalition could have provoked.<sup>34</sup>

During the negotiations for an opposition coalition, the attempts to create that coalition were equated to a necessary harmony, while the internal competition in the PRI was seen as leading to a rupture. This perception overlooks the fact that coalitions also introduce strong tensions in party organizations. For this reason, it is important to evaluate their impact on party organizations which are already affected by higher levels of electoral competitiveness: upheavals of electoral competition have a strong impact on the internal equilibrium in party organizations, as the recent history of the main political formations in Mexico shows. Frequently, there are no internal norms or procedures that are solid enough as to face those situations of internal disequilibrium. This is the topic addressed in the next section.

### **The Control of Ambitions II, or how, contrary to what some expected, change generates tensions not only for those that were already there but also for those who are coming?**

For many students of transition towards democracy, political change in Mexico was perceived as a process that affects or would mainly affect PRI: this party had to change or, else, loose power. Even if it changed, the PRI was destined to loose power anyway. In the logic of this view, opposition parties appeared as inevitable winners. Very few question marks were posed regarding the disturbing effects of political change over the life of opposition parties. In recent years, it was demonstrated that change presents strong challenges to all political forces, particularly regarding their institutional capacity to adapt themselves. As I suggested at the outset of this paper, although there is a legal framework inherited from the past that creates favorable conditions for the development of strong parties, higher levels of competition in the party system tests the political ability and imagination of party leaders. The management of the internal life of the main Mexican parties has become more complex, among other things because the exit options of frustrated politicians have increased. We are witnessing the disruption of the system of control of personal ambitions that was key in the modern Mexican party system. The three main parties face the challenge of innovating norms and rules that govern their internal life. Paradoxically, a higher level of competition in the party system forces the main political formations to adapt their already institutionalized practices to the new conditions of the democratic milieu.

According to Mainwaring, "...it is a sign of greater system institutionalization if party structures are firmly established, are territorially comprehensive, are well organized, and have resources of their own." In these dimensions, and as I mentioned it above, the main Mexican parties have a very high score. Nonetheless, Mainwaring also asserts that "... in more institutionalized systems, there is a routinisation of intraparty procedures for selecting and changing party leadership."<sup>35</sup>

It is interesting to note the visibility that the close linkage between the internal life and the external performance of parties has recently acquired. All of the sudden, it seems

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<sup>34</sup> Even so, the negotiations of candidacies between the PRD and the PT provoked tensions that even risked the viability of that secondary coalition.

<sup>35</sup> Scott Mainwaring, *op.cit.*, 27.

that the intraparty dynamics is more open, reaching out to the terrain of interparty competition. I mentioned one aspect of this problem in my previous discussion on coalitions. Another aspect is directly related to exit options for frustrated politicians. The fate of some precandidates in the internal competition to get nominations for office has a direct impact over the competition between political parties, as the 1998 and 1999 local elections in Zacatecas, Tlaxcala and Baja California Sur have shown. In those cases the defeated precandidates from the PRI won a governorship by running as candidates of an opposition coalition.<sup>36</sup> But, as the failed attempt of Ignacio Morales Lechuga, previous member of the PRI, to become PRD candidate for the governorship of Veracruz shows, this phenomenon generates tensions not only in the parties affected by defections. Some times, those quick exits create a situation where the apparent beneficiaries have to bear the most perturbing tensions. Also, as the exit of Profitio Muñoz Ledo from the PRD in the Fall of 1999 showed—after his failed attempt to compete for the presidential candidacy of that party—defections not only affect the PRI.

This allows to appreciate in a more general way one of the most important effects of political change over the Mexican party system: the dispersion of power within party organization. In the hegemonic party system, the direction of party life lied on one center of power, which could correspond to the real leadership, the charismatic leadership or the group in charge of the formal party control: probably, it was easier then to reach and maintain the equilibrium within party organizations. The new pluralist context seemed to have modified this situation. This is expressed, for instance, in the tension that episodically marks the relationship of the party organizations with the president of the PRI,<sup>37</sup> the capricious relations with the charismatic PRD leader,<sup>38</sup> and in the adjustments that the executive council of the PAN has tried to implement in order to control what happens within that party. In fact, the three main parties face difficulties to assimilate the effects of a higher level of political competition.

Perhaps we are on the face of a classic problem of party sociology, pointed out a number of years ago by Maurice Duverger: the dispersion of power in party organizations and the difficulty to manage internal equilibrium. The relations between parliamentary wings, regional governments and parties elite are undergoing an adjustment that had never been so evident.

One needs to ask if this adjustment will undermine or not the formal party leadership and will jeopardize one strength of the old Mexican party system, i.e.: the control of personal ambitions. There is one important challenge for the three main Mexican political parties in the next few years: to adapt and consolidate internal procedures that could create an equilibrium within their internal forces and control the free run of personal ambitions.

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<sup>36</sup> The case of Nayarit is only a little different, because the winning candidate in the July elections defected from the PRI only two years before being selected as candidate of an opposition coalition.

<sup>37</sup> See Rogelio Hernández, "Presidencialismo y elite en el control político de México" in *Política y Gobierno*, V,1, 1rst semester 1998, 197-221.

<sup>38</sup> I address this issue in Jean-Francois Prud'homme, "El PRD: su vida interna y sus elecciones estratégicas", Documento de Trabajo no 39, División de Estudios Políticos, CIDE, 1997.

For the moment, there are many indicators that show the difficulties that the three main parties face to adapt themselves to the new political context. The failed internal elections of the PRD to renew its leadership in March of 1999 and the circumstances that surrounded the selection of its presidential candidate exhibit the low capacity that that party has to control the existence of an open internal competition. Those elections, where there was a strong competition and a virtual tie between the two leading candidates, Amalia García and Jesús Ortega, were cancelled because of the large number of irregularities found in the process. New elections took place in July, but this time with a “unity slate” that reunited the followers of García and Ortega.

Regarding the selection of a presidential candidate, the campaign where Porfirio Muñoz Ledo and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas contended did not have a formal outcome. In the face of the unanimity rallied around Cárdenas, many times expressed in practices that corresponded to the old Mexican political tradition, Muñoz Ledo abandoned the party in the Fall of 1999 and sought the presidential candidacy from PARM. This situation confirms that, in the PRD, the practice of searching informal agreements between the members of the party elite and the loyalty expressed by those members towards the charismatic figure of its leader (in the weberian sense) allow to maintain a certain level of internal party cohesion. However, attempts to introduce explicit, efficient and stable norms to regulate internal party life are always facing obstacles. The culture of informality seems to prevail over the party institutionalization.

The PRI is also experiencing a difficult transformation process, as revealed by the fact that in five years that party has had five party presidents.<sup>39</sup> The way in which the first four presidents had to leave office showed the devaluation that such position is undergoing. The circumstances that surrounded the last change in March of 1999 demonstrated the difficulty to open the competition within the party.<sup>40</sup> The real problem lies in the redefinition of the role of the Mexican President in the internal life of his party. This has been shown by the discussion, that has taken place throughout the present *sexenio*, over the “healthy” distance that should exist between them. The establishment of an open primary for the selection of the presidential candidate for the 2000 election was a giant step in the redefinition of that relationship. The traditional *dedazo* was replaced by an open competition, with explicit rules and the participation of all the Mexican electorate. To the surprise of many observers, given the negative tone of the campaign, the victory of Francisco Labastida Ochoa did not lead to internal party divisions. The rules established for the presidential candidate selection were capable of processing the internal conflict. However, one could suspect that the internal cohesion of the party organization was maintained more because of the old methods of the priista culture than because of a wide acceptance of the new formal rules.

Finally, the PAN also had to face the challenges of institutionalization. Of the three main parties, the PAN is the most prepared to process an open internal competition. However, its organization model is constructed to arbitrate fights between a reduced elite

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<sup>39</sup> María de los Angeles Moreno, Santiago Oñate, Humberto Roque Villanueva, Mariano Palacios y José Antonio Fernández.

<sup>40</sup> In March of 1999, after a surprising resignation of Mariano Palacios, there were attempts to open up the selection process. For two days, Rodolfo Echeverría attempted to contend against the favorite candidate, José Antonio González, but then it withdraw its candidacy by arguing that there were no favorable conditions for a real competition.

that shares values over the existing rules of the party game.<sup>41</sup> For this very reason and paradoxically, Acción Nacional had problems to manage its electoral success in the last years. Suddenly, the party organization model, similar to an elite party, did not allow it to ensure internal cohesion and to coordinate the actions of its prominent members. That is why party leaders talked about a crisis of growth: the very regular performance of this party in the 1997 legislative elections is a reflection of this problem. Then, the particularities of the unanimous, single-candidacy of Vicente Fox for the 2000 elections (a candidacy that was built largely outside of PAN) constituted another challenge for the party organization: How to establish an equilibrium between party and candidate? And especially, what was the effect of such candidacy in the opening of the *panista* organization model? Some measures have been taken to open more the party to the direct participation of its members and affiliates as well as the general public. For instance, the process of presidential candidate selection was changed from a model of delegate convention to one of a closed primary. However, it is very difficult to evaluate the effects of this change, given that this time the PAN had only one presidential precandidate...

This brief panorama shows that although the main Mexican political parties are making efforts to find new procedures to regulate internal competition, those procedures are far from being stable. The PRD continues to recur to *ad hoc* agreements within its own elite to resolve power conflicts, even if it repeatedly tries to enforce open selection procedures. The PRI was successful in using open primaries, but this procedure is not used for all internal elections and it is therefore an exceptional recourse. Finally, the PAN has not proven the real effectiveness of opening its mechanisms for selection of candidates. It is still looking for ways to open its organization model that is restricted to the participation of a highly cohesive elite. In summary, these three parties face the challenge of creating and stabilizing internal procedures to control personal ambitions. Until now, the weakness of formal rules has been compensated by the surprising vigor of party cultures. However, it remains to be seen the extent to which party organizations could resist the ups and downs of electoral competition.

### **The Linkage Function or how parties experiment problems fulfilling a function that has been denied to them during many years?**

One of the major challenges for the institutionalization of Mexican parties has to do with what in the past was the major deficiency of the party system: articulation and aggregation of interests. In analysis of the new situation of divided government and greater relevance of legislative activities in Mexico, almost no political scientist emphasizes the importance of the linkage function that is traditionally ascribed to political parties. The opening of the legislative process gives parties a great opportunity to strengthen their links with large sectors of society and to exert more influence in the decision-making process. However, more than once in the past years, it appeared that parties took advantage of this opening more to bolster their short-term interests than to reach out for stronger social roots.

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<sup>41</sup> For the study of the evolution of the PAN organization model, see Jean-Francois Prud'homme, "The National Action Party's (PAN) Organizational Life and Strategic Decisions", Documento de Trabajo no 59, División de Estudios Políticos, CIDE, 1997.

The theory of political parties have long stressed their central role in interest's articulation and aggregation in democratic political systems.<sup>42</sup> Parties fail when they cannot assume their linkage function between society and the political system.<sup>43</sup> More recent literature on third-wave democratic party systems emphasizes the importance of parties taking roots into society.<sup>44</sup> In their study of post-communist party systems, Kitschelt and his collaborators insist on the importance of linkages between party elites and citizens to guarantee the quality of democratic interactions. According to them, in post-communist party systems, political entrepreneurs compensate the lack of programmatic appeal to the electors resorting to alternative linkage techniques such as charismatic leadership or clientelistic exchanges. The peculiar blend of those techniques has a direct effect on the nature and quality of political representation, and thereof of democracy.<sup>45</sup>

Dealing with the issue of party-society linkage in present Mexico suppose taking into consideration two circumstances. First, Mexican parties are consolidating in a very different setting than the one that prevailed when traditional parliamentary or mass parties developed more than a century ago. Second, the features of the Republican model described in the first part of this paper affects the way in which linkages are built.

First, against the commonly heard argument that modern political parties are in crisis, some political scientists argue that what has changed is their role in democratic political systems. As a matter of fact, that has been persistently subject to an evolution. Referring to European political parties, Peter Mair coined the concept of "cartel parties" to describe the new partisan reality. Among the characteristics of those parties, there would be a contained pattern of competition, a quasi permanent situation of being party in government, a reliance on state subventions, an access to state-regulated channels of communication and a position closer to the state than to society. In that context, many other political groups mobilise interests.<sup>46</sup> Even though it does apply fully to the Mexican situation, it represents a universal trend from which Mexican parties do not totally escape. It is also important to stress that political socialisation and communication relies increasingly on electronic mass communication and image building. In the year 2000 presidential election, between 70 and 80% of parties' electoral spending are going to be used for electoral mass marketing. This overall context paints a different image from that of the classic Westminster model of parties as vehicles of different social interests.

Second, the Mexican Republican model of party system favours, as stated above, an oligopolistic control of political representation. In a positive way, electoral rules encourage the consolidation of the main political parties. However, they also bear a risk of closing in and colluding among those same political formations. If it were to happen, political interaction would be mainly a party affair that could lead to what has been labelled *partidocracia*.

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<sup>42</sup> See for example Sigmund Neumann (ed.), Modern Political Parties, Chicago" The University of Chicago Press, 1956.

<sup>43</sup> Kay Lawson and Peter Merkl (eds.), When Parties Fail: Emerging Alternative Organizations, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988.

<sup>44</sup> It is one of Mainwaring's four dimensions to wage party system's degree of institutionalisation. Scott Mainwaring, op. cit., 28-35.

<sup>45</sup> Herbert Kitschelt et al., op. cit., 6.

<sup>46</sup> Peter Mair, Party System Change: Approaches and Interpretations, Oxford:Clarendon Press, 1997, 107-116.

Aside from the direct electoral linkage between party leaders and their constituencies, the relation between parties and society operates through three main channels in Mexico: political recruitment, legislative work and direct relations with social organisations.

The three main parties have taken advantage of their virtual total control of access to political office. As mentioned above, electoral rules make them almost indispensable if an individual wants to get elected. Political recruitment has been used as an instrument of linkage to society. Three party strategies can be identified. A first one, quite common in Mexico and elsewhere, consists of lending parties' political franchise to individuals with political ambitions. It has been practised by the three main political parties, even though it meant sometimes making membership requirements more flexible. In the past years it has caused problems within parties with more rigid membership requirements such as the PAN.<sup>47</sup> A second type of strategy represents an interesting fiction that has been practised extensively by the PRD and in a lesser fashion by the PAN. It consisted of reserving a certain amount (up to 50% in the case of the PRD) of parties' candidacies to non-party affiliated candidates.<sup>48</sup> Parties lent their right to present candidates to well-known public figures or leaders of social organisations. The interesting aspect of this procedure is that it was meant to maintain an idea of autonomy and purity of those external candidacies (as if they were non political) and of openness to society. Actually, it would be interesting to study the effects of these procedures on the cooptation of social leaders, on party discipline and on the type of power relations it encouraged within party organisations. Finally, the third type of linkage through political recruitment operates through what I would call secondary political coalitions. Basically, it consists of small (and sometimes new) political parties with few chances to gather enough votes to maintain their registration tying their electoral fate to one of the three main political parties by way of entering into a coalition. I already explained the working of these secondary coalitions. It would be interesting to measure the real effects of linkage through political recruitment techniques on parties social rooting. A first assessment of those techniques is that it recruits more than it links and it does not contribute much to parties' institutionalisation.

In an ideal Westminster model, the parliament should be the place *par excellence* for the interplay of interests. It is doubtful that it ever worked that way. It is common place to read that modern democracies are drifting away from that model. Despite of it, in Mexico effective separation of power is something new. There are great expectations that the Legislative is promised to acquire an increasing importance in the country's institutional life. The 57<sup>th</sup> Legislature (1997-2000) projected at first an image of paralysis in its working. However, as shown by existing studies on that issue, behind the apparent paralysis associated to a shortsighted conception of checks-and-balances, there is an acceptable degree of collaboration between party delegations in Congress.<sup>49</sup>

In spite of that satisfying performance, parties strategies in Congress showed that they still have a lot to learn. Their actions are very often guided by a very short-term vision

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<sup>47</sup> Actually that situation ended up forcing a revision of the membership status within that political party.

<sup>48</sup> In 1994, the PRD referred to these candidacies as to citizens' candidacies. That terminology strangely carries the notion that there is a difference between professional politicians and citizens.

<sup>49</sup> See María Amparo Casar, *op. cit.*

of their own interests. Their legislative behaviour showed limited openness towards interest groups. Frequently, they designed their strategies according to a preconceived appreciation of the issues at stake without connecting with social actors concerned by those same issues. Moreover, accepting more abstract forms of linkage between parties and society (mediated by public opinion, for example), Mexican parties could hardly adjust their legislative strategies to the expectations of their constituency (real or to be). All those shortcomings can add to a general impression of parties inefficiency and isolation. This being stated, strategic improvements should derive from learning of the divided government situation. Mexican parties would also benefit from a greater opening of the legislative process to the consultation of citizens and interest groups. That opening would allow for a more visible interaction between parties and organised interests.

Finally, Mexican parties also penetrate society through direct relations with social organisations. This is not a new phenomenon. The lasting PRI hegemony over political life was partly built upon corporatist control of unions and peasants organisations. In the urban areas, there were extensive networks of clientelistic exchange between urban dwellers associations and the party in government. In that sense, the party system was strongly rooted into society. However, this peculiar type of linkage did not translate into democratic articulation and aggregation of interests. Most of the mediation undertaken by the PRI took place outside of the formal democratic institutions.

Direct relations between parties and social organisation is still an important linkage technique in Mexico, especially when it comes to establish bounds with the popular sector. Among the three main political parties, PRI and PRD have stronger links with social organisations. PRI still maintains its declining corporatist sector and has gone to a great deal of efforts in the past years to modernise its relation with the popular sector. PRD, in its intent to define itself as a party-movement during the first half of the nineties, has also established a wide network of relations with social grassroots organisations. Its peculiar view of how that relation should be built on tried to reconcile political support and social autonomy. In reality, the interaction that developed between that party and social organisations still presents a lot of clientelistic features.<sup>50</sup> In fact, Mexican parties linkage with the popular sector still resorts mainly to clientelistic linkage techniques. This type of relationship is here to stay in Mexico, confirming O'Donnell insights about informality and democratic consolidation.<sup>51</sup> The questions to be answered are: How it will affect democratic party system consolidation? What type of exchange takes place between parties and social organization? Who benefits? What type of division of political labour does it encourage? How can it combine with other party-social organisation relations that are based on non particularistic and clientelistic linkages?

In sum, assessing Mexican parties penetration of society suppose taking into account the universal changing role of parties in democratic systems and the very specific features of the Mexican republican model. Both dimensions present characteristics that can contribute to isolate parties from society and lead to a *partidocracia*. However, the increasing competitiveness of Mexican electoral life forces parties to go through an accelerated learning process in the selection and application of their linkage techniques to

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<sup>50</sup> For example, see Helène Combes, "Des leaders sociaux devenus députés: Quel impact sur la représentation politique?" in *Trace*, no 36, Décembre 1999, 26-36.

<sup>51</sup> Guillermo O'Donnell, "Illusions about Consolidation" in *Journal of Democracy*, 7, 2, 1996, 40-43.

society. That learning process implies combining very abstract and modern methods of political communication with traditional and direct ways of dealing with social demands. It also supposes being able to combine informal and formal relations in a way that does not to hamper the level of institutionalisation of parties and the party system.