CONCILIATION AGAINST CONFRONTATION: HOW DOES THE PARTIDO ACCIÓN NACIONAL RULE IN CHIHUAHUA?
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Over the past ten years, Mexico's political landscape experienced dramatic changes as the conservative opposition party, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) started to win important local elections, particularly in the North. By 1993, the PAN controlled the government in three states (Chihuahua, Baja California, and Guanajuato), as well as in 103 cities throughout the country, turning the PAN into the strongest and most consistent opposition to the ruling party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI). These victories, however, have been marred by controversy as the PAN has increasingly adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the federal government. Indeed, the PAN has abandoned its confrontational rhetoric of all or nothing in return for a gradual but growing accession to positions of power, particularly at the local level.

Although the victory of the PAN in Chihuahua was clean and not the product of a post-electoral negotiation like that in Guanajuato, Governor Francisco Barrio's style of government has been subject to numerous criticisms since he took office in 1992. He is accused of adopting an overly conciliatory and suspiciously friendly attitude towards the Federal administration and the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), of excessively praising President Salinas' accomplishments, and of closing ranks with the PRI to attack the left-wing Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). In the most extreme of such accusations, Senator Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, the PRD's national leader, said that "Barrio is nothing but a priísta in disguise... Barrio's attitude invalidates the very nature of the opposition when he proclaims himself as an admirer and follower of the leader of the main contending party" (El Norte, October 28, 1993).

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate these criticisms in the light of Barrio's two years in office. While a final verdict of his administration is premature and beyond the scope of this analysis, it is nonetheless possible to study the peculiar problems and dilemmas the Mexican opposition confronts in a political world still profusely controlled by the PRI. How does an opposition governor negotiate and bargain with an overly centralized federal government? To what extent is an opposition government in a position to change Mexico's deep-rooted political traditions. Is there really any

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1 For an interesting analysis of the political transformation of the northern region during the last decade see Herzog (1991).
2 In the 1991 gubernatorial elections in the state of Guanajuato, the PRI's elected candidate, Ramón Aguirre, was forced to resign, after the PAN complained the electoral process had been tampered and organized a strong mobilization against electoral fraud. Carlos Medina Plascencia, the panista mayor of the city of León, was appointed as interim governor.
3 Muñoz Ledo's criticisms have to be analyzed in the context of the unequal treatment the PRD has received from the government compared to the PAN. While the government has been willing to recognize selected panista victories, it has consistently refrained from tampering electoral processes where the main contending party is the PRD. The most notable case were the elections in the state of Michoacán in 1992, where after allegations of fraud, the PRD was strong enough to bring about the resignation of the elected governor, but not strong enough to impose a PRD interim governor.
important difference between the PRI and the PAN in the way they rule a state? The first part of this article explores the intergovernmental relations between the state government and the federal authorities and attempts to explain why Barrio adopted a conciliatory attitude. The second part analyzes the efforts of the panista administration in Chihuahua to introduce substantive changes and examines the dilemmas it has confronted along the way. The third part concludes with some observations about the role of the PAN in the transition towards democracy in Mexico.

I. From the Opposition to Government: Pragmatism against Idealism?

One of the most conspicuous characteristics of Mexico's political system is its centralist, and above all presidentialist structure of power. While the centralization of power in the hands of the executive was necessary to consolidate the nation-state, before and after the Mexican revolution, this process, as Lorenzo Meyer rightly claims, thwarted democracy, stifled local initiative, and brought about severe inefficiencies and distortions in the economic development of the country (Meyer 1982, 32). A central demand of the opposition, and in particular of the PAN has been precisely to combat this centralist and presidentialist tradition and to fight for more regional autonomy. Once in power, however, opposition governments realize the difficulties and dilemmas that this very task entails.

An important manifestation of the centralization of power lies in the states' lack of fiscal autonomy. States and municipal governments have traditionally been financially subordinated to the federal government; they cannot retain sales or income taxes, and thus have limited control of their spending capacity. More importantly, states'
income, which strongly depends on resource transfers they receive from the federal government, accounts for only 16 percent of total tax revenues (Bailey 1994, 105). The financial weakness of the states and municipal governments limits their capacity to meet the many demands of their populations.

The most important ways in which the federal government allocates resources to the states are federal public investment (mainly through the so-called convenios de desarrollo social), federal transfers (the so-called participaciones), and funds for special projects (inversión federal extraordinaria). While the amount of participaciones is fixed according to a coefficient, the funds for federal public investment and for special projects are allocated on a discretionary basis. Their amount as well as the guidelines and conditions for spending these resources depend to a large extent on the governor’s negotiating capacity and on his relationship with the president (Martínez Almazán 1980, 93). The centralist political structure, and above all the highly discretionary power vested in the executive for the allocation of resources to the states, strongly conditions the states’ relationship towards the federal government. State governments—whether they are opposition governments or not—find it expedient to maintain good relations with the federal authorities in order to secure an adequate flow of resources to the state.

State governors enjoy little autonomy to undertake large and expensive projects.

6 As Bailey argues, in Mexico, the most centralized country in the region, the central government virtually monopolizes taxing and spending (Bailey 1994, 104).

7 According to Provencio, state and municipal incomes represent less than 10 percent of total public income (Provencio 1988, 250). This percentage refers to the federal transfers state receive from the federal government, the so-called participaciones. According to the same author, these transfers fluctuate between 2 and 3 percent of the country’s GDP (Provencio 1988, 252). I shall return to this point below.

8 These Convenios, which are negotiated on a yearly basis between the state and the federal government, are the operating mechanism of the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (Pronasol). States negotiate with the federal authorities the amount of resources they receive as well as the criteria and guidelines for spending these resources in Pronasol’s wide variety of projects. Most projects entail a system of co-participation between the federal government, the state and municipal governments, and the beneficiaries in the provision of resources. However, the percentage of participation between the different entities varies from program to program. Furthermore, each program is bound to particular guidelines and regulations. Interview with Elias Saad Ayub, Director de Coordinación de Planeación y Evaluación (Planning Director), Chihuahua, August 1994. Federal public investment is also allocated through other programs, like the Convenios de Concertación Especial and the Programas Especiales Multianuales, but these are smaller than the Convenios de Desarrollo Social.

9 The coefficient is calculated according to the number of people living in the state and an estimate of how much the state collects in federal taxes. The coefficient, however, does not take into account the territorial extension of each particular state nor the state’s budget for education, which absorbs most of the state’s current expenditures. States like Chihuahua, with a scattered population and a vast territorial extension, have to spend much more on education than other smaller states with a much denser population. Interview with Alberto Herrera, State Finance Director, Chihuahua, August 1994. The amount of participaciones has also been a subject of controversy because states do not have a way to verify the total amount the state collects in federal taxes, and thus cannot confirm whether the central government transfers the correct amount to the state. This has been one of the major conflicts with Baja California’s Governor Ernesto Ruffo (Guillén López 1993). More on this ahead.
and have a limited decision-making capacity. This is mainly due to two reasons. On one hand, their locally generated revenues are insufficient. On the other hand, the resources states receive from the federal government are bound to numerous restrictions and guidelines. More importantly, state governments remain vulnerable vis-à-vis the federal government because the latter can use its vast discretionary powers to "punish" un-disciplined governors. It can restrain the flow of resources to the state, delay the transfer of resources, abstain from investing in special projects, and limit local officials' access to top members of the executive.

Financial dependence on the central government places opposition governments in a particularly difficult position. They have to demonstrate they are capable of introducing substantive changes without really having much financial autonomy to bring them about. In the process they are caught in a no-win situation: if they challenge the centralization of power and adopt a confrontational attitude vis-à-vis the central authorities they run the risk of not receiving enough resources from the federal government. While they may remain true to their ideals, they may also undermine their capacity to perform, and thus jeopardize their chances to win votes in future elections. On the other hand, if they adopt a more pragmatic stance, a more moderate and conciliatory position vis-à-vis the central authorities, they may get more resources at the expense of alienating their hard-core supporters and disappointing many who expected radical changes as a result of the alternation of power. Striking a balance between pragmatism and idealism has become one of the most difficult tasks of opposition governments in Mexico.

Barrio and Ruffo: Two Styles of Government

The experiences of Governor Ernesto Ruffo in Baja California and of Governor Francisco Barrio in Chihuahua illustrate that clean elections and the alternation of power constitute only the first step towards the strengthening of regional autonomy and the construction of democratic institutions and practices. As Tonatiúh Guillén argues

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10 This is particularly evident with respect to the budget allocated for social development through the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, President Salinas' most important social welfare policy program. According to Bailey, Pronasol has in fact contributed to strengthening the centralist and presidentialist structure of power in Mexico (Bailey 1994).

11 In the case of prístas governors, the power of the executive extends beyond the financial realm. The president has the power to demote elected governors at will, as in the cases of Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Michoacán.

12 While Baja California's governor has adopted a more confrontational attitude, Barrio has adopted a more conciliatory stance. In both cases, the costs have been high. Baja California has been financially punished by the central government. In Chihuahua, many supporters of the PAN resent the governor's attitude. They consider it a betrayal of the principle of regional autonomy, which they have so fiercely defended over the years. This might explain in part why the PAN was not able to increase its vote in the 1994 elections. Interview with Javier Corral, local panista deputy, Chihuahua, August 1994.

13 This section draws mainly from the work of Tonatiúh Guillén (1993) for the case of Baja California. More research is necessary to enrich the comparison.
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for the case of Ruffo, the victory of an opposition party compels the state government to engage in a federalist exercise as it struggles with the federal government to enhance its room for maneuver (Guillén 1993, 42). This is particularly evident in the financial realm, where Barrio and Ruffo have adopted radically different political strategies in their relations with the central authorities.

Ruffo overtly challenged the financial subordination of the state to the federal government. He called for a redefinition of the revenue sharing system (the participaciones) and argued that the state should be able to retain part of the resources collected through federal taxes. His argument was that without fiscal autonomy, states lack a decision-making capacity. In his own words: “Currently in our country, states and municipal governments have legally many faculties, but these cannot be fulfilled because the resources still come from Mexico City”. (Quoted in Tonatiúh Guillén 1993, 111). His rebellious and combative attitude, however, has not been successful either in granting the state more financial autonomy or in securing a greater flow of resources to the state.14

It is against this background that Barrio’s more conciliatory attitude towards the federal government has to be evaluated. In part, Barrio learned from Ruffo’s experience that a more combative strategy does not yield favorable economic and political results. But to a great extent, his conciliatory attitude also stems from a more pragmatic approach which recognizes that centralism and presidentialism cannot be changed overnight and that a state is too weak to fight alone against such a deeply rooted political tradition.15 In contrast to Ruffo, Barrio has abstained from publicly confronting the federal government and instead has been willing to negotiate his differences with the federal authorities behind closed doors.16 As a governor, he recognizes that one of his most important roles is to promote the economic growth and development of the state. For that end, the Governor needs to play by the existing rules of the game, which essentially means accepting the centralist structure of power. He also needs to demonstrate to the federal government and to society at large that opposition governments are not so threatening after all, that they are in fact viable political alternatives.17

14 Ruffo threatened to sue the federal government in the National Supreme Court of Justice to gain fiscal autonomy (Tonatiúh Guillén 1993, 118).
15 Chihuahua’s government has decided not to make an issue over the participaciones. However, together with fourteen other states, they are negotiating with the federal authorities to change the criteria used to estimate the amount of these federal transfers. Interview with Alberto Herrera, State Finance Director, Chihuahua, August 1994.
16 Interview with Francisco Barrio, Mexico City, May 1993.
17 After some journalists criticized his conciliatory relationship with President Salinas de Gortari, Barrio responded: “When a governor has good relations with the federal government, he is usually praised and allowed to do his job. Why now when I have such good relations, does this become objectionable and is criticized? I do not understand.” (El Financiero, November 8, 1993). Barrio also learned from his own experience as Mayor of Ciudad Juárez from 1983 to 1986. His combative style of government then led to a severe polarization of society which left families, businesses, and a variety of social organizations deeply divided over political issues. The conciliatory attitude thus responds to an effort to avoid a repetition of such experience.
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Table 1
Federal Public Investment at the National Level and in the State of Chihuahua, 1991-1994
(Real prices 1991)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chihuahua</td>
<td>561,818.2</td>
<td>348,089.6</td>
<td>199,999.1</td>
<td>476,202.4</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>42.5</td>
<td>138.1</td>
<td>15.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>39,462,711.5</td>
<td>39,173,813.2</td>
<td>37,739,997.4</td>
<td>37,037,037.0</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>6.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Refers to authorized public investment.

Although Barrio's conciliatory attitude towards the federal administration has alienated hard-core panista supporters who expected from him a stronger and more assertive defense of regional autonomy, the pragmatic approach of his administration has borne fruit, particularly in the financial realm. According to both the State's Finance Director and Planning Director (Director de Finanzas and Director de Coordinación de Planeación y Evaluación), Chihuahua has not been discriminated against by the federal government in the allocation of resources. To the contrary, the governor's requests have been met expeditiously and the discretionary power of the executive has been used in his favor.

An analysis of federal public investment in the state of Chihuahua from 1990 to 1994 confirms these assertions. While federal public investment decreased 43.1 percent in real terms from 1990 to 1993, between 1993 and 1994 it increased 138.1 percent, reversing its decreasing trend. See Table 1.

If we analyze federal public investment in Chihuahua as a percentage of total federal public investment from 1990 to 1994, we reach the same conclusion. While the participation of Chihuahua in total federal public investment decreased between 1990 and 1993 from 1.8 percent to 1.0 percent, this percentage increased to 1.3 between 1993 and 1994. See Table 2. Furthermore, Barrio has declared that he has successfully

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18 Interview with Javier Corral, a panista deputy, Chihuahua, August 1994.
19 Interview with Alberto Herrera, Finance Director, and Elías Saad Ayub, Planning Director, Chihuahua, August 1994. The latter is in charge of managing and distributing the resources received from the federal government through the Convenios de Desarrollo Social throughout the 67 municipalites of the state.
20 As a result of a more restrictive spending policy, federal public investment has decreased in the country at large. From 1991 to 1994, federal public investment decreased 6.1 percent in real terms at the national level. In Chihuahua it decreased 15.2 percent during the same period. This is a significant advance when compared to the 43.1 decrease of previous years.
Table 2
Federal Public Investment in Chihuahua
(Thousands of pesos) (Current prices)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Federal Public Investment in Chihuahua</th>
<th>Total Federal Public Investment</th>
<th>Federal Public Investment in Chihuahua as a Percentage of Total Public Investment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>568,678.0</td>
<td>33,939,311.6</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>721,106.3</td>
<td>39,462,711.5</td>
<td>1.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>594,033.6</td>
<td>43,835,497.0</td>
<td>1.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>464,854.7</td>
<td>45,627,656.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1994*</td>
<td>604,301.4</td>
<td>47,000,000.0</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


* Refers to authorized public investment.

negotiated with the federal government to reduce the percentage of co-participation of the state and municipal governments in public investment projects.21

As I mentioned above, in addition to federal public investment, state governments may receive extraordinary transfers of resources from the federal government, depending on the governor's negotiating ability. On this regard, the evidence also suggests that Chihuahua has not been "punished" by the federal government for being ruled by the opposition. During 1993, Chihuahua received an additional 50.9 million new pesos (16 million dollars) from the federal government which were mostly used in basic infrastructure, transportation and communication, and urban development and environmental conservation projects.22 According to Salvador Beltrán del Río, Representative of the State of Chihuahua in Mexico City, throughout 1994, Barrio's requests for special funds have been granted.23 A concrete example is the transfer of 40 million new pesos (11 million dollars) Barrio negotiated with the federal government in August 1994 to aid the agricultural sector, and above all, the cattle farmers, who had been severely hurt by the worst drought of the century.24

21 Interview with Francisco Barrio, Mexico City, May 1993. As I mentioned above, the state and municipal governments, as well as the beneficiaries, have to come up with matching funds for a variety of public investment projects. This is negotiated on a yearly basis through the Convenios de Desarrollo Social. By 1993, the federal government contributed with 39.2 percent of total public investment in the state, while the state government contributed with 24.3 percent, the municipalities with 2.8 percent, and the beneficiaries, along with private investment and credit, with 33.7 percent. Primer Informe de Gobierno, Inversión Pública, Inversión total por origen de financiamiento y estructura de aportaciones. More research is needed to analyze how precisely these accords are negotiated at the national level.

22 Primer Informe de Gobierno 1993, Programa de Inversión Extraordinaria Federal, Inversión por estructura de aportaciones y orientación sectorial. These resources were not tagged by the federal government for particular projects. This suggests that the state governor enjoys certain margin of discretion in the allocation of these funds. More research is needed however to confirm this.

23 Personal interview, Mexico City, April 1994.

Seeking Help: Why are There so Many Priístas in Government?

One of the characteristics of public administration in Chihuahua is its pluralist composition. Many lower and mid-level civil servants, who had worked with the previous administration, retained their jobs despite their overt support for the PRI. In part this is explained by the PAN's lack of trained personnel to occupy these positions. But in part, this also reflects a more pragmatic logic that recognizes the advantages of power sharing and the belief that political stability requires gradual and incremental change; that it is too costly to begin a new administration with a clean slate. Furthermore, opposition governments are under increased pressure to demonstrate that they can challenge traditional clientelist practices. That is, in contrast to the PRI, they are independent of their party, and consequently, they do not necessarily privilege party sympathizers with political positions.

The retention of priístas into the administration has been severely criticized by hard-core members of the PAN as well as by many long time activists who have been left out of the administration. In its most extreme form, a panista deputy complained: “these people [the priístas] are not only disloyal to the government; they actually sabotage it. This is mainly why the PAN lost the 1994 elections in the state.”

Perhaps one of Barrio’s most controversial appointments was that of Eduardo Romero Ramos, a PRI supporter, to the Secretaría de Gobierno, the second most important position after the governor. Many panistas perceived this appointment as a betrayal of Barrio’s partisan loyalties. However, and similar to Barrio’s conciliatory attitude, the appointment of priístas also responds to a pragmatic logic. Although the PAN won the governorship, the PRI still remains an important political force in the state. 54 out of 64 municipalities are controlled by the PRI, and many strong corporatist organizations, like the teaching and the transportation unions, are affiliated to the PRI. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, the governor remains dependent on the federal government for the allocation of funds to the state. In a political world still controlled by the PRI, opposition governments need political brokers with good links to that party ensure a peaceful resolution of conflicts. More than any other office, the Secretaría de Gobierno at the state level performs this role, and this is why Barrio appointed a priista to this office. As Romero Ramos said,

I am Barrio’s diplomat vis-à-vis the PRI. Barrio considered it necessary to demonstrate to the priista-affiliated interest groups that they had a friendly spokesman, rather than an adversary. Barrio navigates in a priista world; that requires constant conciliatory gestures.  

The success of any government —whether it is an opposition government or not—depends in large part on its ability to identify its room for maneuver, its capacity to define

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25 Interview with Deputy Antonio Aguirre, Chihuahua, August 1994. This opinion was repeated in several interviews.
26 Interview with Eduardo Romero Ramos, Chihuahua, August 1994.
areas where positive changes can be introduced, that is, its ability to achieve a well-balanced degree of pragmatism. But for opposition governments, pragmatism also brings a potential cost, for they alienate many hard-core supporters and disenchant many who expected to see the introduction of radical changes in a short time. According to Barrio, opinion polls in Chihuahua showed a great deal of discontent with the government. This was also reflected in the 1994 federal elections, in which the PAN fared badly. Although in a way disillusionment is unavoidable, the gap between expectations and reality constitutes one of the most serious predicaments of an opposition government. If in terms of its relationship with the federal authorities the panista government in Chihuahua is no different from other prísta governments, what distinguishes an opposition government? Although grand scale political changes are still not apparent, it is nonetheless possible to identify some areas where important, albeit less spectacular changes have been introduced by the panista administration in Chihuahua.

II. Changing Styles of Government: The Panista Administration

In 1992, the PAN obtained an unprecedented victory in the state of Chihuahua. It won the governorship, thirteen important cities, and a majority in the local Congress. For the first time in México's history, the PAN gained enough power to amend the state's constitution. While this significantly increases the panista government's room for maneuver and enhances its bargaining power, it is nevertheless constrained by the need to preserve cordial and friendly relations with the federal administration. The panista government can introduce significant changes inside the state as long as it does not jeopardize its relations with the center. This explains in large part why Barrio has been an advocate of gradual and incremental change (Expansión, September 1, 1993). In what follows, I examine four areas where the panista administration has attempted to introduce substantial changes.

a) State-Society Linkages

One of the most important differences between the PRI and the PAN stems from each party's types of ties to their constituencies. These ties strongly condition the parties' room for maneuver once they are in power. While the PRI strongly depends on the political mobilization of its corporatist and sectorial organizations, and appeals to them for support, the PAN depends on the support of individual citizens and appeals to the

27 The PAN won the gubernatorial elections with 52 percent of the vote. The PRI obtained 47 percent. The PAN also won 10 out of 18 congressional seats, giving it a majority in the local Congress. The former prista administration of Fernando Baeza had changed the state constitution to allow a simple majority (rather than two thirds) to pass amendments to the constitution. While this change then was introduced to benefit the PRI, it now benefitted the PAN. As we shall see below, the PAN introduced a constitutional reform which now stipulates that a two-thirds majority is required to amend the constitution.
lectorate at large. A pristá government is bound by its commitments to a variety of powerful political groups (cacicazgos) which support the PRI in exchange for the satisfaction of particular demands. This clientelist operating practice limits its capacity to introduce far-reaching reforms in the government’s relationship to civil society and particularly in the government’s provision of public services. Typically, a pristá government cannot afford to alienate traditional and long-rooted political cliques, often led by powerful and corrupt leaders. The PAN, in contrast, comes to power with less “strings attached” because it does not depend on a clientelistic support base. Although most panista administrators lack former experience in public office and consequently, often have little political sensitivity, they have greater freedom to fight against these powerful political groups, to bypass their leaders and thus fragment their bases of support. Where this is most evident is in the conflict between the government and the teachers’ union, the transportation union, and the leaders of the colonias, the low-income neighborhoods.

In the case of the teachers’ union, the government attempted to regain administrative control over the educational sector, which was virtually in control of the union. That is, it took away from the union the power to appoint the state’s secretary of education, to designate school supervisors, to grant leaves of absence (comisiones), to define work ranks, and to appoint school directors. The conflict with the teachers’ union had many political costs, for the teachers have direct links with parents and can therefore easily mobilize people in opposition to the PAN. Although more research is necessary, it is possible to suggest that the teachers played a critical role in mobilizing support for the PRI in the 1994 elections.

Similarly, in the transportation sector, the government attempted to regain control over the allocation of concessions and licenses, which were controlled by the union.

28 At the national level, the federal government has sought to introduce radical reforms in public administration, like the reduction in the number of administrative offices, a greater rationalization of resources, budget slashes, and a reduction of personnel employed. But at the state level, pristá governors have typically refrained from adopting such reforms because they threaten to erode important sources of local power. This is most evident in the case of the teachers’ union, the transportation union, and the public officials’ union. It is precisely for this reason that panista governors, who depend less on the support of corporatist groups, have a higher margin of autonomy to introduce reforms that are more compatible with the administrative reform supported by the federal government. For an interesting analysis of the discrepancy between the national and the local governments on this respect see Espinoza Valle (1992).

29 It should be noted, however, that the PAN depends considerably on the support of the middle class and entrepreneurs. While it does not have a clientelistic form of organization or operation, the PAN is under pressure to introduce policies that benefit these groups.

30 The teachers’ union has been traditionally linked to the PRI. In Chihuahua — as in other parts of the country — many of the so-called comisionados conduct political work for the PRI but receive their pay check from the educational sector. One of the goals of the government of Chihuahua was precisely to eradicate this practice, which is illegal. Many of these comisionados are also leaders of low-income neighborhoods. Interview with Eduardo Romero Ramos, Chihuahua, August 30, 1994.

31 In Baja California, Governor Ruffo introduced similar reforms which included the public servants’ union. For an interesting analysis see Espinoza Valle (1992).
However, following a more conciliatory attitude, the government decided not to eradicate the union's prerogatives through one sweep. They negotiated with the union the manner in which their privileges would be gradually reduced. As the Secretario de Gobierno said with respect to this union, "it is necessary to recognize the power that these groups wield, even if they are corrupt. To guarantee political stability one needs to negotiate with them."

Finally, in the low-income colonias, the panista government, and particularly the municipal governments controlled by the PAN, have attempted to fragment the power of the local leaders or caciques, by attending the demands of the population directly, without the mediation of these leaders. This is considered critical by the government in assuring a more efficient provision of public services based on more technical, rather than political criteria.

Behind these conflicts with organized power groups linked to the PRI, is an effort by the panista administration to weaken the deep-rooted corporatist structure of power and to fragment the power of traditional local leaders. The panistas believe they must redefine the links between the government and civil society along non-corporatist lines. Although this perspective has an ideological root, it also has a pragmatic angle. In order to distinguish themselves from the PRI, panistas believe they must show the electorate that a different style of administration is indeed possible and desirable. Furthermore, they also want to alter the rules of the political game so that in the event of an electoral defeat in future elections, the PAN — or any other opposition party for that matter — is able to maintain a strong presence in politics and to exert a powerful influence in the process of decision-making. Finally, many panistas believe that combating corporatism and clientelism is critical in eradicating one of the many sources of corruption. The latter is perceived as one of the most serious and threatening problems of México's political system.

While the panista administration has been relatively successful at destroying the bases of power of some corporatist groups, it has failed to construct new links with

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32 Interview with Francisco Barrio, Mexico City, April 1994.
33 Interview with Eduardo Romero Ramos, Chihuahua, August 1994. Romero Ramos recognized that in contrast to the negotiations with the transportation union, the government committed mistakes in the way it handled the conflict with the teachers' union.
34 The efforts to destroy these power groups started in the early 1980s, when the PAN won the Ayuntamientos (city governments) in various cities. Francisco Barrio in Ciudad Juárez and Luis H. Alvarez in Chihuahua bypassed traditional leaders in low-income neighborhoods (colonias populares) and created new non-partisan organizations with democratically elected leaders (Rodríguez and Ward 1992, 53). However, many of these new organizations disintegrated after the PAN left office.
35 A style of administration characterized by a non-partisan distribution of public services, an effective separation between the party and the government structures, and the introduction of technical criteria in the administration of resources.
36 It is important to recognize, however, that in the states controlled by the PAN, the corporatist structure of power is relatively weaker than in other states, particularly with respect to organized labor. In fact, it is possible to argue that the PAN was more able to mobilize electoral support in those states where the rates of unionization have been traditionally lower. For the case of Chihuahua see Mizrahi (1994).
civil society. The experiences of the PAN in Baja California and in Chihuahua are similar on this respect. In both states, the government has remained isolated from the masses. This is in great part due to the PAN’s “hands-off” attitude which derives from its anti-corporatist and anti-clientelistic ideology as well as to the party’s lack of an alternative strategy to maintain ties to its constituencies on a more permanent basis. As a former member of the administration said:

The PAN knows how to mobilize people during electoral campaigns, but they do not know what to do once they are in government. Moreover, Barrio behaves as if we were living in a democratic country, where both the party and congress know what to do. This is a fiction. Democratic practices have to be created.

In its rejection of clientelism —that characterizes the PRI— the PAN has failed to recognize that distributing divisible goods to the electorate is not necessarily illegal or reprehensible, and that some form of clientelism might in fact be politically expedient. Furthermore, members of the administration are beginning to recognize that they need to cultivate stronger ties to society. That is, that they need to “go out” more often, organize more public meetings, and socialize more with the “popular” sectors of society.

b) A New Style of Government: Administrative Efficiency

One of the first and most advertised reforms introduced by the panista administration was administrative efficiency. This implies greater fiscal responsibility, avoiding unnecessary expenses, removing excessive personnel, and combating corruption. PRIista governments have in general tolerated inefficiencies, waste, and the illegal diversion of funds. Their commitments to a large variety of groups who place concrete demands (regardless of their financial viability) on the authorities on one hand, and their lack of accountability, on the other, makes PRIista governments less interested in an efficient administration of public finances.

Although a consensus exists that former PRIista Governor Fernando Baeza (1986-1992) did a good job in promoting the construction of public works throughout Chihuahua, with regards to administrative efficiency, his government was no different

37 For an interesting analysis of the experience of the PAN in Baja California see Guillén López (1993).
38 Interview with Héctor Chávez Barrón, former Director de Comunicación Social, Chihuahua, August 1994. The PAN traditionally becomes active during electoral periods, but after the elections, it loses its drive and falls into inactivity. See Mizrahi (1994).
39 Some panista deputies are beginning to recognize this, but they remain a minority. Of the 10 panista deputies, only two are actively engaged in community work (pork-barrel politics). In contrast, all PRIista deputies do community work. Interview with Leandro Luján Peña, panista deputy, Chihuahua, August 1994. For an interesting discussion of the distinction between clientelism and citizenship see Fox (1994).
40 Interview with Francisco Barrio, Chihuahua, August 1994.
from other priísta administrations. When he left office, the government had a deficit of 30 million dollars and a public debt of 300 million dollars (Proceso, December 7, 1992). In order to forestall a liquidity crisis, upon coming to power the panista administration requested from the federal administration an extraordinary transfer of resources to both reduce the deficit and aid some of the poorest municipios. President Salinas attended to respond to the request and authorized a transfer of 10 million dollars (Proceso, December 7, 1992).

The panista administration also slashed the budgets of many government offices which used to spend resources lavishly, discharged excessive personnel, and rationalized the use of resources in order to increase government’s efficiency in the provision of public services. For example, in the Junta Municipal de Agua (Municipal Water Board), the government reduced the work force from 625 to 400 workers, increased the working hours from 27 hours to 40 hours per week, and reduced the workers’ benefits. According to Barrio, the government could withstand the union’s pressure because the PAN “does not owe political favors to anyone” (Expansión, September 1, 1993).

Another visible reform was the introduction of an anti-corruption campaign designed to prevent the illegal diversion of funds, encourage greater savings in the administration and, more importantly, clean up the police. The latter had become one of the most serious problems of public safety. The government allocated more resources to the police, introduced a training program, designed a program to reward outstanding police officers with economic benefits, and created a new office of internal affairs which receives complaints against police violations. According to the administration, as a result of these efforts public safety has ceased to be the most important problem in the state.41

As part of this anti-corruption campaign the local congress, which is dominated by the PAN, accused several former mayors and the previous governor of illegal diversion of funds. Upon revising the accounts of the former administration, panista deputies found irregularities in several municipios and in the state government as well. While it is the responsibility of congress to do such a revision at the end of each year, it traditionally used to accept and approve all public accounts, even when similar deviations of funds existed. For the first time in Chihuahua’s history, the local congress performed its functions more independently. The mayors were charged. However they appealed and were released on bail. On the other hand, the case against Governor Baeza was dismissed.42


42 Interview with Salvador Beltrán del Río, México City, April 1994. More research is needed to evaluate these cases. On a first impression, it seems that the panista administration did not want to risk a serious confrontation with the PRI and the federal government on this regard and accepted to release the mayors on bail. This suggests first that a negotiation between the PRI and the panista government took place and second that the PAN—or any other political party—has a limited capacity to end a long rooted legacy of corruption.
The attention given to administrative efficiency derives in great part from the entrepreneurial origins of many of the officials in the administration. While priísta governments typically recruit their officials from within the party ranks, the PAN recruits most of its officials from the private sector. The implication of this different type of recruitment for their performance in government cannot be overemphasized. Most of the panista officials are affluent entrepreneurs who actively participated in the campaign, but who lack experience either in the party or in public office. They come to office with their business experience, trying to run their government offices with the same efficiency-oriented criteria they use in their private businesses. However, while most of these people have a reputation of being honest, they lack political sensitivity. More importantly, they also lack connections with other groups in civil society. As an entrepreneur, critical of the government, said:

The private sector has become the most important source of recruitment for public office. However, the skills required to run a government office and a private business are not identical. Business’ goals are to make profits. Government’s goals are to provide public services. Moreover, firms are by nature authoritarian organizations. Entrepreneurs do not like others to tell them what to do. While this might be good for efficiency, it makes entrepreneurs politically insensitive once they are in office.

Due in large part to their lack of political experience, panista officials tend to adhere to the law in the strictest possible way. As a result, they often lack the necessary flexibility to smooth over conflicts with different sectors of society and to win the support of the general voter. When asked about the political inexperience of government officials, Barrio recognized that this is a serious problem of his administration, that his officials have tended to act in an authoritarian way, and that they have not succeeded in fostering a greater participation of civil society. Another and related problem of the administration’s recruitment practices is that it generates resentment within the ranks of the PAN, as many of its most active militants are not promoted to public office.

43 For a more in-depth analysis of the role of entrepreneurs in the PAN see Mizrahi (1994).
44 Interview with Eugenio Villarreal, an entrepreneur who has maintained a critical position vis-à-vis both the current panista and the former priísta government. Mexico City, April 1994. This criticism of the panista administration is generalized. A panista deputy summarized this position: “panista officials are closed-minded. They are concentrated on administrative tasks but have rejected to do political work (politiquerta).” Interview with Leandro Luján, Chihuahua, August 1994.
45 In the financial sector, for example, government officials started to audit private businesses and to threaten those with fiscal problems with imposing severe penalties. The unyielding attitude of these officials alienated many entrepreneurs. A former government official also complained that the social origins of many public officials blinds them to the severe problems of poverty that still exist in the state. Interview with Manuel Carrasco, former Director of Fomento Municipal, Ciudad Juárez, September 1994.
46 Interview with Francisco Barrio, Mexico City, April 1994.
c) A New Institutional Practice: Separation of Powers

Besides winning the governorship in 1992, the PAN also won a majority in the local congress. Notwithstanding this majority, an actual separation of power between the executive, legislative, and judicial system has begun to come into effect. This is indeed an innovation, considering the traditional subordination of both the legislative and judicial powers to the executive. The congress has introduced many reforms on its own initiative. More importantly, it has confronted the executive on several policy initiatives. One of the first reforms introduced by the congress was to grant both the legislative and judicial branches financial autonomy. Whereas before they received their budget from the state's treasury and did not have control over how they spent the resources, now they manage their own budgets.

In contrast to Baja California and Guanajuato, where the local congress remained in control of the PRI in Chihuahua the PAN has a greater and unprecedented room for maneuver to amend the constitution. Perhaps one of the most significant reforms introduced by the congress is a constitutional reform, which includes a new electoral law. This law seeks to create a more egalitarian and impartial electoral process. It includes ceilings on financial contributions and campaign expenditures, punishment of electoral crimes, and provisions to guarantee the neutrality of the electoral authorities. Moreover, it introduces the referendum and the plebiscite as constitutional mechanisms of direct consultation with the voters.

While these changes undoubtedly represent a great step towards democracy, for the average citizen they still have little meaning in daily life. People are more concerned about the solution of their concrete and practical problems than with the separation of powers. In this respect, the inactivity of the PAN has not helped in "educating" its constituents about the benefits of having a more democratic political system in which an actual separation of powers exists.

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47 An example is the governor's initiative to revoke the constitutional privileges (fuero) granted to a deputy in order to prosecute him on charges of corruption. The congress decided not to revoke the privileges. Another case was the passage of the Ley de Alcoholes which the executive did not endorse. A revealing example of the separation of powers is the passage of a new penal law, which was approved unanimously by the congress and was introduced by the judicial system. This law increases the penalties for corrupt practices. Lawyers opposed to the law pressed the governor to veto this law. The governor, however refused. El Heraldo, Chihuahua, August 30, 1994.

48 Interview with Javier Corral Jurado, panista deputy, Chihuahua, August 1994.

49 In these two states, a separation between the executive and the legislative powers has also come into effect but more as a result of the PRI's control of congress than the PAN's explicit will to respect the separation of powers.

d) The Intergovernmental Relation between the State and the Municipalities

Finally, another innovation introduced by the panista administration is the way the state government distributes resources for public investment throughout the different municipalities, the majority of which are controlled by the PRI.

During the early 1980s, when the PAN won important municipalities in the state, a conflictual relationship developed between the municipal governments controlled by the opposition and the state government. In particular, Francisco Barrio (then mayor of Ciudad Juárez) and Luis H. Alvarez (mayor of Chihuahua) complained that the government discriminated against them in the allocation of resources for public investment. While they received their share of federal transfers, they had difficulties in receiving funds for special projects, which are allocated on a more discretionary basis. Furthermore, they also faced problems in receiving the resources allocated to them on time (Rodríguez and Ward 1992, 72). It is against this background that Governor Barrio’s financial relationship with the 64 municipalities in the state has to be analyzed. According to the Director de Coordinación de Planeación y Evaluación, who is responsible for distributing federal and state resources throughout the different municipalities, the panista government has not followed a partisan logic in its allocation of resources. To the contrary, it has sought to balance the distribution of resources both across municipalities and across economic sectors. Furthermore, it has been particularly careful to allocate funds to the poorest municipalities, which have been traditionally neglected.

The relationship between the state government and the priísta municipalities, however, has not been all that peaceful. In particular, the municipal governments of Chihuahua and Delicias, the two most important cities controlled by the PRI, have had important conflicts with the state government. The municipal president of Chihuahua complained, for example, that the state government discriminates against priísta

51 These are the resources allocated to the state by the federal government through the Convenios de Desarrollo Social. As I said before, these Convenios are the mechanisms through which the federal government distributes the funds of the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad to the states.

52 Interview with Lic. Elías Saad Ayub, Planning Director, Chihuahua, September 1994. In comparing these two experiences, however, it is important to take into consideration two factors. First, since the mid-1980s, municipal governments’ income increasingly depends on locally generated revenues, rather than on state and federal transfers. Second, and more importantly, in the early 1980s the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad did not exist and thus fewer formal mechanisms existed to allocate funds for public investment to the municipalities. Although further research is needed, it is possible to suggest that one of the outcomes of this controversial social welfare program is the reduction of governors’ discretionary powers in the allocation of resources to the municipalities (Cornelius, Craig and Fox 1994). Analyzing how governors, and particularly opposition governors, distribute these resources is one of the areas of most promising future research.

53 One of the most advertized conflicts was that between the municipal president of Delicias and the state government over the jurisdiction of the Civil Registry. The municipal president sued the state government because the latter had refused to grant him control over the administration of this public office. The case went to the National Supreme Court of Justice, which ruled against the state government and in favor of the municipal president. Diario de Juárez, September 2, 1994.
municipalities in the allocation of funds. More specifically, he claimed that in contrast to the panista municipalities, Chihuahua has a heavier burden in its contribution of resources for public investment. However, if one compares Chihuahua to Ciudad Juárez, the second most important city in the state and controlled by the PAN, these assertions cannot be substantiated. While in Chihuahua the municipal government contributed with 55 percent of total public investment, in Ciudad Juárez the municipal government contributed with 54.7 percent. In both cities, the shares of participation of the municipal government, the federal government, and the state government in public investment projects are similar.

Although the government in Chihuahua has sought to allocate resources to all the municipios, as compared to the previous administration that benefited the politically most important ones, this did not translate into greater electoral support for the PAN. In part, this is due to the lack of adequate publicity on the issue on the part of the government. According to Barrio, many municipal presidents do not give credit to the state for the allocation of funds. They rather tell their constituents that the funds were granted by President Salinas himself. But the efforts to distribute resources more equitably among the different municipalities has also curtailed the government’s capacity to invest in big, expensive, and noticeable projects. The latter, as the experience of the PRI corroborates, has been politically important in maintaining its electoral support.

III. Conclusions

As the administration of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari draws to a close, Mexico’s political landscape experiences radical transformations. While the outburst of violence in the southern state of Chiapas and the assassinations of the PRI’s presidential candidate

54 Interview with Patricio Martínez, Municipal President of Chihuahua, Chihuahua, August 1994.
55 These figures refer to the municipality’s percentage of coparticipation with the state and federal governments in public investment. The data for Chihuahua comes from Anexo del Informe de Labores, Ayuntamiento de Chihuahua, October 1993-August 1994. The data for Ciudad Juárez was given to the author by the secretary of the treasury in Ciudad Juárez and derives from the Primer Informe de Gobierno 1993-1994.
56 It is important to mention that the municipal government in Chihuahua has adopted many of the efficiency oriented criteria of the panista administration. In great part this is due to the need of the PRI, which is an opposition party in Chihuahua, to demonstrate that it can become efficient and run an honest administration. But in great part, this is also due to the entrepreneurial origins of the municipal president himself. Patricio Martínez is a commercial entrepreneur and was president of the local Chamber of Commerce in the city of Chihuahua. He has a similar educational and social background to the panista entrepreneurs who are now in public office. Although with respect to efficiency and honesty in the administration the differences between the PAN and the PRI are virtually imperceptible, the municipal government in Chihuahua has invested in more visible and spectacular projects, like statues and lining avenues with trees. More research is needed to analyze and compare the performance of municipal governments, both pristas and panistas.
57 Interview with Francisco Barrio, Chihuahua, August 1994.
and its general secretary have shocked the country, less shocking yet important events have been underway. One of these is the coming to power of opposition state governments.

The most conspicuous characteristic of these opposition governments is that they have not brought about a deep polarization of society. Although some governments are more confrontational towards the federal government than others, none of them is perceived as a threat to political stability. Opposition governments adhere to formal institutions, that is, they rule as governments, not as opposition parties. This is one of the most relevant changes in Mexico's political traditions, namely, that to the extent that opposition governments agree to some degree to play by the "old" rules of the game, they are becoming viable political alternatives.

Yet if opposition governments are no different than priísta governments with respect to their institutional role, they are nevertheless under increased pressure to distinguish themselves from the PRI in the way they rule their respective states. This is why they place greater emphasis on the efficient and transparent administration of public finances, the non-partisan distribution of public services, the fight against corruption and the enforcement of formal procedures in their administrations. In contrast to the PRI, which traditionally has relied on its control of electoral procedures and on its corporatist political structure to win votes, opposition parties depend more on a successful performance in government to win votes and legitimize their rule.

What is the implication of these changes for democracy in Mexico? Can we conclude that the existence of opposition governments in three states is a sign that Mexico is advancing towards democracy? Although Mexico's political landscape has changed in fundamental ways, I believe it is problematical to conclude that a democratic transition is at work. First, opposition victories still depend on whether the federal government, and the president in particular have the "political will" to respect the electoral results. The PRI still holds a firm grip on power and the president retains discretion to decide when and where opposition governments are "allowed" to win. This can hardly be a path towards democracy. The 1993 elections in the state of Yucatán are the most recent proof of how electoral processes remain fraudulent and in most cases, results are still decided at the negotiating table, not the ballot box.

Second, and as consequence of the above, the tolerance for opposition victories has been selective and greatly conceived in terms of its viability for the PRI. The party of the left, Partido de la Revolución Democrática, the PRD, has faced enormous problems in pushing the government to recognize their alleged victories. Moreover, several of its more active members and supporters have been killed in suspicious circumstances. The PAN's supporters, in contrast, have not been intimidated or repressed.

Third, the experience in Chihuahua shows that the introduction of some more democratic practices clashes with old-time practices and customs which are difficult to eradicate at one fell swoop. Furthermore, following more democratic procedures is not always popular. Although people complain about corruption, for example, they are not always ready to refrain from bribing officials to solve conflicts. Similarly, those who benefit from clientelism feel unprotected and ignored when the government
attempts to design other more formal and procedural ways to meet their demands for public services. Democracy requires a new political culture, but this requires time. It is difficult to eradicate a legacy of political attitudes based on informal and authoritarian rules of behavior.

Finally, and most importantly, the willingness of the federal government to respect opposition victories in some states has not been accompanied by fundamental political changes at the national level. Mexico’s political system has remained virtually unchanged. The president still exercises vast discretionary powers, the legislative and judicial powers are subordinated to the executive, no formal mechanisms have been established to make the government accountable for its actions, the states are subordinated to the federal government, and the PRI and the government are still fundamentally merged. While the opposition has won at the local level, it is highly unlikely, at least in the short run, that the PRI and the government will tolerate opposition victories at the national level. Furthermore, the main opposition parties, and especially the PAN, are not strong enough to win elections at the national level. This in great part explains why the PAN has not been pressured to define its standpoint on broader national issues like economic policy or questions of social justice. The PAN has estimated that it is more expedient to direct its resources and efforts at the local level, where it has a greater opportunity to win. Can opposition state governments promote a greater democratization of Mexico’s political institutions if they only have a local, not a national power base?

While opposition governments might not be able to introduce changes that have national political implications, they can effectively promote significant political changes within each state. They can administer the state’s finances honestly and efficiently, fight against corruption, secure clean electoral processes, guarantee freedom of expression, and foster democratization of society within the state. More importantly, to the extent these changes are effectively introduced, people might become accustomed to living with more democratic rules and with greater accountability. This can engender a more democratic political culture. States ruled by the opposition may then become critical “testing grounds” of democratic experiences which can eventually reach the national level. But for that end, it is important not only that opposition governments perform well, but that opposition parties remain strong. That is, it is important that they assert their independence from the government, that they maintain a political presence between elections, penetrate civil society on a more permanent basis, keep a permanent check on the performance of government, and continually press the national political regime into opening the political system. This however, has been precisely one of the most important problems for the PAN.

In all these respects, Chihuahua remains the most important “political laboratory” in the country; a state where the PAN has enough room for maneuver to introduce important political reforms, where the patterns of recruitment to office have dramatically changed, and where new styles of administration can transform government’s traditional operating practices, albeit at the expense of some degree of accommoda-
tion with the authoritarian characteristics of Mexico’s political system. More importantly, Chihuahua is a state where the PRI has been forced to adopt a new role as an opposition party.

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