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Disentangling the PRI from the Government in Mexico

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Este trabajo pretende analizar el grado en que el Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) y el gobierno de México se entrelazan. Si bien estos dos aparatos a menudo perciben como uno solo, es importante desagregar analíticamente sus papeles, funciones y acceso a recursos, así como diferenciar el personal y las carreras seguidas por quienes pertenecen a una u otra institución. El trabajo demuestra que estos dos aparatos son diferentes en muchos aspectos, y discute hasta qué punto la apertura política y la democratización en México pueden estar llevando a una mayor divergencia o convergencia entre las dos estructuras. De manera un tanto paradójica, dada la ortodoxia técnica y neoliberal de la presente administración, los imperativos políticos tienden a llevar al PRI y a las estructuras gubernamentales hacia una vinculación más estrecha y hacia un traslape mayor. Los autores argumentan que esta convergencia va en contra de un proceso de democratización y apertura política genuinas.

Nettie Lee Benson would have both approved and disapproved of this paper. She probably would have had little scholarly interest in an argument which relates to contemporary Mexican politics, yet we would like to believe that she would have approved of our attempt to disentangle an aspect of Mexican politics in which a popular misconception has become a received wisdom. This is a common enough problem for the historian, but a relatively unusual one in contemporary social science. For example, in one of her less well known papers (Benson 1958) Nettie Lee sought to underscore

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the fact that Mexico's federal system was inherited from Spain rather than from the United States, as is commonly believed.

In this paper we also try to disentangle the layers of popular illusion from the true nature of an aspect of contemporary Mexican political structure. Specifically, we wish to analyze one apparently simple and straightforward question—to what extent do the Partido Revolucionario Institucional and the government in Mexico overlap? Like most apparently simple questions this one spawns many supplementaries, and the actual answer is buried deep beneath various tiers of government practice at different levels; it is obscured by party ideology and its political construction; and it is the subject of often unvoiced tensions and intraparty conflicts. Moreover, the extent of overlap may constantly change as different personalities rise to the fore, and as the modes of political mediation and electoral mobilization demand. And yet asking this particular question often provokes a puzzled response, insofar as many officials, analysts, and, most important of all, many voters unquestioningly perceive the PRI and the government in Mexico as one and the same.

The conflation of these two institutions into one derives, to a large extent, to the fact that in all circles the PRI is commonly referred to as *el partido oficial* (the official party). Put in perspective, this appears to make of what would otherwise be a straightforward political party a government organization, much in the same way as there are other "official" entities. For example, the government's official publication is the *Diario Oficial.* Inevitably, the question that comes to mind when thinking along these terms is whether this distinction bestowed exclusively upon the PRI makes the other political parties, by implication, "unofficial." But the whole issue can easily turn into a rhetorical debate. The point is that academics, journalists, the opposition, and *priístas* themselves refer to the PRI as the official party and even, sometimes, as *el partido del gobierno* (the party of the government) or *el partido del* Estado (the party of the State). Some Mexicanist academics, for instance, refer to these institutions in their writings as the PRI/government. When challenged about this terminology, the priístas tend to react strongly. As one public official unequivocally put it to us, the PRI is "el partido *en* el gobierno, no *del* gobierno" (the party *in* government, not the government party). One can engage in lengthy discussions in an attempt to establish a dichotomy and perhaps even be successful in determining a clear separation, but the overriding fact remains that the conflation is a strong one.

Before we proceed further we ought to make explicit precisely the realms of party political and governmental activity that we are seeking to disentangle. Government involves both executive and

legislative functions, and to the extent that the PRI has a majority in both houses of Congress it clearly forms a *part* of the government. In Mexico, however, one must be careful not to overstate the role of the legislature, which mostly seeks to debate, modify, and ratify initiatives borne within the executive branch, rather than engendering them. This legislative role does not lead to any ambiguity. However, the same cannot be said for the various realms of executive authority—presidential, ministerial, gubernatorial, parastatal. This executive level of authority, whether elected or not, is the one that requires attention, for it is here that the perceptions of PRI/government overlap are constructed. Thus, the bulk of our analysis focuses on the executive branch of government. As Dale Story clearly indicates, "The Party is a very critical institution serving the executive branch of government, in particular the office of the presidency.... the PRI provides the president with the necessary political legitimacy, the symbolic aura of the Revolution, and the machinery for running campaigns, winning elections, and maintaining contact with the masses" (1986, 131-32).

A final cautionary note we must make at this point is that we do not wish to suggest, in any way, that the government is a creation of the PRI and operates at the will and disposition of the party. Quite the contrary. While the PRI may have a disproportionately large political presence within the Mexican political system, it exercises no policy-making authority over the system. The distinction we wish to develop in the analysis that follows is based upon the functions that both institutions perform in an effort to demonstrate that the differentiation between party and government in Mexico is not an artificial one. While in other political systems all political parties can rightfully claim that the government distributes goods and services precisely because members of that party control the government, this scenario does not apply to Mexico with such ease. For example, as will be discussed below, in the states and municipalities where the opposition governs, the benefits distributed through the Solidarity program are not associated with the local governing opposition; the inevitable association is with President Salinas and, by implication, with his government and his party.

The Illusion of Overlap

Of course, there are many reasons why this perception of overlap between the PRI and the government exists and why some politicians should seek to perpetuate it, both in reality and in the people's minds. Principal among these is the fact that until recently the PRI had always dominated elections at presidential, federal, state,

and municipal levels (Smith 1979; Molinar 1991). In some areas the control of the PRI was monopolistic, and in practically all others it was strongly dominant (Molinar 1989). The PRI's candidate was invariably elected with more than 75 percent of the vote, and until 1988 all senatorial seats and gubernatorial offices were won by the PRI. This hegemony was so pronounced that opposition parties were orchestrated and often sustained by successive governments in order to maintain the illusion of pluralism (González Casanova 1970). The exception was the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), which regularly received around 15 percent of the vote in presidential elections, but seemed incapable of extending its support significantly, at least not among the labor union membership nor among southern rural voters. The PAN has, however, demonstrated its ability to draw support from urban popular sectors, and this has proved crucial in their gubernatorial and municipal successes in Baja California and Chihuahua, respectively (Rodríguez and Ward 1992; Venegas in press).

Only in the federal legislature since the early 1980s did pluralist competition figure to any extent, and even here the whole project of electoral and political reform appears to have been purposively designed to give other parties representation without real access to power. The reform intended to legitimate and revive an ailing political system, rather than to substantively change it. Thus, the first and most important reason why the PRI and the government were perceived to be closely overlapping was the fact that the PRI was rarely challenged at the polls and therefore power and control could not be wrested from it. Moreover, where the PRI did lose absolute control of a municipality to the opposition, for example to the PAN in the cities of Chihuahua and Juárez in 1983, the priístas quickly won them back in the following elections, although whether by fair means or foul remains hotly debated.[1] Until 1988, electoral losses were seen as a temporary aberration and were usually occasioned by splits and disagreement within the party at the local level.[2] Until the late 1980s no opposition party had ever won—or been allowed

1. While the 1982 and 1983 elections appear to have been conducted in a reasonably open and clean fashion, those of 1985 and 1986 appear to have been very conflictive and the results highly disputed, especially in the North (Guadarrama 1987; Aziz 1987). De la Madrid's early electoral openness seems to have been sacrificed midway in his *sexenio* as a concession to the PRI for being allowed to continue with his program of economic stringency.

2. Often in these circumstances it was not so much the disagreement over candidates that was crucial in letting the opposition in—rather, it was the fact that electoral fraud was less likely to be exercised because there was not the usual closing of ranks behind an agreed candidate (see for example the account of priísta divisions in Juchitán in Rubin 1987).

to win—two consecutive terms in municipal office (and even now it is rare). Given the party's longtime hegemony, therefore, it is little wonder that the PRI and the government became conflated in people's minds.

A second reason for this apparent conflation relates to the way in which the PRI is financed. Although there is no work published on the financing of the PRI, its organizational structure, and how it pays the salaries and benefits of its militants and faithful, it is widely recognized that its operating funds come largely from the government. Some works have suggested that Gobernación, specifically, provides the money. As Roderic Camp clearly points out,

> The Party relies on the executive branch for financial support; generally, the Secretariat of Government allocates the funds. The support is difficult to measure because it involves more than money. The government, through its contacts, provides many other resources, such as lodging, transportation, and meals for those doing Party business. Individual candidates receive little direct financing from the Party, but it does pay for Party, as distinct from candidate, advertising, indirectly promoting the fortunes of the individual politician (1993, 142).

There was also, in the literature of the 1960s (Brandenburg; Padgett; Scott), the indication that PRI members contributed a week's pay per year to provide party finances. But nonetheless, the whole issue of party finances remains a sensitive subject; so sensitive, in fact, that when the now infamous "millionaires' dinner" early in 1993 at which President Salinas sought funding for the party became widely publicized, the president felt obliged to respond to the criticism, and did so by removing Genaro Borrego from the top position within the PRI. Evidently, someone had to take the blame for inopportunely bringing out into the open the whole question of the PRI's basis of financing. The point remains, however, that while there might be wide speculation about the mechanisms of the PRI's funding, there is still no academic work that can state, in categorical terms, what these mechanisms are. Thus the impression is that the government sustains the party and its militants in a variety of ways, for example through appropriations siphoned off from various government agencies and/or by putting party workers on these agencies' payroll, without any expectation that they fulfill regular duties associated with that particular department (the so-called *aviadores*).

Thirdly, the PRI has worked hard to cultivate the illusion of overlap. The colors and configuration of the national flag and those of the party logo directly coincide. Nor is it an accident that these

two images—flag and party colors—coincide also in the logo adopted by Solidaridad, which became the basis of President Salinas's social welfare program immediately upon taking office. Indeed, whether through mechanisms of resource delivery such as the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (PRONASOL), through patron-clientelism, or through nonpartisan-based incorporation into regular government programs, the PRI has endeavored to construct the image that these resources come on-line through its influence and intervention. It seeks to portray itself as the government—by association. Ideologically, too, the party has always sought to present itself in nationalist terms—as the party embodying the constitution born of a social revolution. The three sectors of the PRI (Confederación de Trabajadores de México [CTM], Confederación Nacional de Campesinos [CNC], and the former Confederación Nacional de Organizaciones Populares [CNOP—lately reorganized and renamed]) served to embrace the labor and the popular sectors of the population into the bosom of the party. It was seen as the government party rather than the party in government, although today priístas are more willing to make the distinction since President Salinas announced the end of the one-party system (Cornelius and Craig 1991, 1). Nonetheless, the conflation of colors remains as a powerful symbol; so much so, in fact, that other political parties find themselves unavoidably hurt by the association. The blue and white colors of the PAN, or the black and yellow of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), have no instant connection with the green, red, and white PRI and PRONASOL logos. Indeed, an important proposal in the 1993 political reform was the demand by opposition parties that no political party be allowed to use the national colors as the party emblem. Significantly, the PRI did not accede to this demand in subsequent negotiations.

Although the conflation is understandable and rather evident, we need to ascertain the degree of overlap that actually exists, and whether or not there is a convergence or divergence in the trend towards overlap. In many ways, the answer to our question goes to the heart of any evaluation about the current political process Mexico is experiencing and about its future. How nonpartisan are governments at the federal, state, and municipal levels? How willing is the PRI to give up privileged access to resources and to financing, limiting itself to electoral organization on behalf of its candidates? And how far is the president prepared to give up the timeworn practices of *dedazo*[3] and the privileged control it gives him over

3. The term refers to one of the better known traditions in Mexican politics. It means, literally, being "touched" with the finger (*dedo*) of the president as the designated candidate or appointee to a specific post or office. The same practice is followed at lower levels as well, and thus the governor of a state can exercise the dedazo also when selecting candidates for municipal presidents and/or state deputies.

nominations for elected positions within the party? Indeed, just as the Lord giveth and taketh away, so, too, may Salinas. A preserve over nominations through dedazo is nothing new, but Salinas has also exercised his power to remove governors from office and, most recently in the cases of San Luis Potosí, Guanajuato, and Michoacán, to reverse PRI electoral victories soon after they occurred. This "dedazo in reverse" suggests that centralism and presidentialism are intensifying, rather than declining. In light of these actions, will the party be given an opportunity to develop an ideology that will inform policy, rather than a rhetoric to justify executive defined decisions and lines of action? Stated thus, it may appear to be "Mission Impossible" (Meyer 1989).

The Extent to Which the Overlap Is Illusory

Although there are strong explanations for the illusion of overlap, some of which we have already identified, there is also some compelling research to suggest that the overlap is precisely that: illusory. The party and the government differ in several important respects. First, the actual *functions* of the PRI have little to do explictly with either the structure of government, the formulation of policy, or the disbursement of resources associated with decision making. As Hansen (1974) and others have argued, the primary role of the PRI is to orchestrate and mobilize the vote at election times on behalf of designated candidates. Indeed, this is a role consistent with any political party and it is one that the PRI has generally exercised effectively—with the single major exception of 1988. At times it has carried the vote through fraud; sometimes through lines of patronage to voter-clients; sometimes "press-ganging" votes through its three sectors; and even by making use of the authoritarian power of local caciques, especially in rural areas. The combined use of these mechanisms was usually sufficient to guarantee victory, although they did not always reduce abstentions to an acceptably low level. Abstention, more than the opposition, was the enemy to be confronted.

As well as securing support in elections, the party was expected to secure acquiesence and social peace between elections. In this respect the PRI differs from other political parties, given that for most political parties (in Mexico and elsewhere) the functions performed between elections revolve around organizing campaigns and platforms for the coming election, rather than serving as

institutions responsible for maintaining social peace. All levels of government expected the PRI to assist in keeping the lid on social unrest and to deal with any outpouring of discontent appropriately. In part, too, local party officials were expected to lessen and to divert the demands made upon the system from its supporters—in essence offering promises of goods and favors but not much else (Cornelius 1975; Eckstein 1977). The standard mechanisms of social control used by the PRI have varied from selective clientelism, populism, divide-and-rule, and, if all else fails, repression (Ward 1986; Schers 1972; Rubin 1987).

As a result of being at least partially responsible for keeping social tranquility, the PRI developed its own mechanisms of patronage. Thus a second role of the party was to manage patronage and turnover of positions within government, but not in all areas equally. Although not exclusively, it fell largely to the PRI and to its three sectors to facilitate mobility into the state and federal legislatures. This was the primary arena through which loyalty and performance could be rewarded and sustained.[4] It also offered opportunities for careers to be advanced, especially for up-and-coming politicians who could be lifted from small pools to larger ones (Schers 1972). For example, the usual procedure through which a *presidente municipal* was chosen was that each *diputado federal* personally selected the nominees for the municipal presidencies of his or her district and presented the list to the governor for approval. The list of selected candidates was then submitted to the local PRI committees, which, after extensive bargaining, postulated them as official party candidates. Thus, governorships and municipal presidencies were similarly "given," although here the preserve of the party was often circumscribed by competing pressures of patronage and rewards coming from the president, ministers, and other camarilla heads,[5] whose concerns related primarily to extend their own personal interests rather than those of the party (though these might coincide). But over legislative positions, the party and its constituent corporatist sectors were almost always undisputedly allowed to hold sway.

As far as extending patronage to its base of supporters, the party has only provided the most lightweight of benefits, given that it does

4. However, no one was allowed to develop a spatial constituency which might lead into a personal power base. One of the main reasons why the principle of no-reelection was extended (in 1934?) to legislative positions was *precisely* in order to maintain dependency upon the party for continued advancement.

5. A camarilla is, basically, a patron-client relationship in which the patron, who has high political status, provides benefits and the opportunity for upward mobility to the members of his or her "team." These alliances are assembled over a long period of time and are bound together by personal loyalties. The classic discussion of the camarilla system is the one of Smith (1979).

not have the resources to exercise ongoing or extensive patronage with which to "win friends and influence people." Such influence comes through its ability to *appear* to be an important conduit for securing resources, and occasionally upon its ability to intervene successfully on behalf of its clients. Thus one finds *colonias populares* called "Colonia PRI" where the leaders strongly and openly support the party because this support serves as the channel for securing government monies and services (e.g., Solidaridad). But by and large, the PRI does not directly dispense material goods to its supporters; these come through a myriad of government programs and services.

A third characteristic of the PRI which distinguishes it from the government is in the realm of ideology formation. Ordinarily one would expect this to be an important attribute of a political party, but in Mexico, for the PRI at least, this is not the case.[6] The party does not have a clearly defined ideology beyond the broadest of brush strokes representing various elements of the postrevolutionary constitution (e.g., the revolutionary ideal of "social justice"), which allows different thrusts (even reversals) of macroeconomic and social policy to be pursued at different times—sometimes back-to-back from one presidential administration to the next. This further underscores the paramount position that the executive and his government exercise over the party, such that it is denied an ideology formation role that might tie the president's hands. In fact one of the reasons why the Mexican political system has proven so stable is precisely because of the flexibility and pragmatism that each new administration has been accorded. Many analysts have commented how successive governments shift from right to center to left and back again (a swing of the pendulum), which would be difficult, nay impossible, given a firm party ideology.

If the party does not shape thinking directly, neither does it determine policy. Analysts of Mexican politics have long since disposed of the idea that the tripartite corporate structure within the PRI offers an interest aggregating model from the grass roots upwards (as suggested by Scott 1964 and by Huntington 1968). Rather, policy is identified by the president and his closest advisors, often, one assumes, in liaison with key leaders in the public and private sectors. But it is top-down, not bottom-up, and certainly is

6. At a recent conference on electoral reform in Mexico held at Austin, Texas, in November 1991, the senior ranking PRI delegate identified the roles of the PRI (as for any political party) as being those of (a) electoral organization, (b) developing the ideological basis of the party, and (c) participating in the formulation of government policy. With the exception of the first role, our argument is at variance with his interpretation, which we regard as a statement of desire rather than of fact.

not derived from taking soundings at different levels of the party. The party's role is that of disseminating the message, not one of bringing it in.

A fourth important area of difference between the government and the party lies in the area of career tracks (Needler 1982). For many individuals the party-political and the governmental apparatus are separate structures, *within* which mobility is exercised. Up until the last few years, moving *between* these apparatuses was less usual (Grindle 1977; Camp 1980).[7] In part, of course, this relates to the mechanisms whereby jobs are secured in Mexico—through personal networks and loyalty. Thus if one's camarilla leader is a party politician, then one's own career will tend to follow that individual, rather than carving out laterally on one's own. Researchers increasingly point to the fact that many senior government functionaries have no formal party experience or allegiance (Cornelius and Craig 1991; Camp 1984). Certainly it would appear that the higher up one is in government, the less likely that individual will have been dependent upon the party for his or her position. In any event, however, once in office, he/she must at least publicly demonstrate evenhandedness and an ability to manage the responsibilities with which he/she is charged. He/she will often, retroactively, become a party member. The fact that not one of the last four presidents held elective office prior to being designated the party's candidate is often provided in evidence of this divergence between the two bureaucracies. However, it is not quite that simple. Although many of those who held cabinet office in recent years were not party-politicians first and foremost, nonetheless a few of them were (e.g., Luis Donaldo Colosio).

Moreover, drawing the distinction between career tracks in each apparatus is easier at the federal level than at either that of the state or municipality, where moving back and forth is more likely. This is not unexpected since, at this level, the pool is much smaller, and since the importance of personal networks, rather than ability or expertise, are most likely to determine job allocation. Thus in provincial Mexico some of the distinctions which we have drawn between local government and the local PRI are less easily discerned. Most notable are the greater degree of overlap of personnel moving between party and local executive appointments, the higher degree of partisanship observed in public statements that are made, and in

7. Even the fact that positions are often held simultaneously in the legislature (as senators, for example) and in the Comité Ejecutivo Nacional (CEN) or in the top positions of the corporate sectors of the PRI, this is a mechanism of *linking* various sectors and interest groups *into* the party apparatus. It should not be interpreted as movement *between* apparatuses.

the disbursement of resources. We will return to these points later in our analysis.

Processes Tending towards Divergence between Government and Party

Notwithstanding the important caveat that the distinction may be less clear-cut outside of Mexico City and outside of the federal bureaucracy, we are able to identify several processes which we believe have tended to accentuate the division between party and government in Mexico. First among these is the political crisis which developed not only throughout the political system as a whole but, perhaps more importantly for our purposes, within the party itself and which led to various modes of *political opening.* Indeed the whole *rationale*[8] which underpinned this political opening has led to tension between the two apparatuses. The project was one of trying to revitalize a tarnished political structure which had outworn its usefulness. Although the parameters of reform allowed for PRI dominance, the practice meant that several traditional areas of partisanship had to be sacrificed or diluted (at least publicly) if the more competitive pluralist party structure was to be allowed to work and thereby offer legitimacy to the government's policies. *Both* the opposition and the PRI became legitimating structures for government, although the odds remained stacked against the former.[9]

Since the political opening of 1977 there has been a decline in the clientelist and populist styles of government and resource disbursement. The PRI was instructed to no longer make promises that it could not fulfill and that no one believed any longer, but rather to act in concert with local groups and for party officials to intervene on behalf of their constituents. From President Echeverría's term onwards, the number and role of government agencies was expanded, and under Presidents López Portillo and de la Madrid most agencies were expected to act in an evenhanded way, eschewing blatant partisanship, driving wedges between uncooperative leaders and their followers, and contracting directly (and therefore more efficiently) with the people (Gilbert and Ward 1985). This was fine

8. We emphasize the word rationale because while the determination to pursue political opening and to restore legitimacy and credibility has led to divergence between the two structures, sometimes the outcomes—i.e., electoral opposition victories (especially on the Left)—have forced the PRI and the government together, a point we discuss further below

9. Some of the recent successes of the PAN (in Baja California and in Chihuahua, for example) also appear to have the support of Salinas and, many would argue, were deliberately contrived by him in order to reinforce the appearance of a pluralist structure and to legitimate his own dubious electoral victory.

for a government that was seeking to promote a more technocratic image and management style, but it left the party somewhat out in the cold, bereft of privileged access to patronage it could use to mobilize the vote. Occasionally the division became so marked that it provoked a political row, as in 1978 when then mayor of Mexico City, Carlos Hank González, sharply admonished the PRI for trying to ingratiate itself in a ceremony at the Aztec Stadium at which land titles were to be given to low-income squatters.[10] Nor were the opportunities for partisanship extended during de la Madrid's administration, given the declining significance of social welfare appropriations and the general backcloth of economic stringency (Ward in press). Largesse, and particularly that which extends through the party, is more likely to occur during times of expansion than at times of budgetary restraint.

Indeed the process of divergence between party and government brought about with the decline in patronage accentuated the crisis within the PRI and fueled the tensions and conflicts between those who saw the need to democratize and to reform the internal workings of the party, and those who intransigently opposed changes which they were sure would debilitate the party still further. During the latter part of de la Madrid's administration the PRI was feeling threatened not only by the advances of the opposition, but also because its hands were being unfairly tied by the presidency. It was expected to conduct itself more openly in elections, yet the government exercised less partisanship towards the PRI in the allocation of resources which it could use to buy off the vote. In addition, certain sectors of the PRI (the CTM in particular) became less than eager to mobilize for candidates that were not of their own choosing. It was amidst this climate of dissatisfaction that several influential members of the PRI formed the *corriente democrática,* which subsequently broke away to field its own presidential candidate in 1988 and ultimately to create its own party. The PRI was unable to cope with this democratic current in its own ranks; had it been able to accommodate the proposed changes, then the major electoral threat posed by Cárdenas's *frente* to Salinas would probably have not emerged.

Another trend leading towards divergence is the increasing technocratization of government and the widely discussed split between *técnicos* and *políticos.*[11] Evidence for this process comes

10. Hank González is a good example of a political "heavyweight" who has not relied nor depended upon the party for his career advancement. Although he was once governor of the State of Mexico (and therefore elected as the PRI's candidate), this did not, thereafter, make him a PRI "man."

11. For a thorough discussion of this split and an excellent analysis of the political importance of *tecnoburócratas,* see Centeno and Maxfield (1992).

from the changing nature of social and educational background of government officials since the late 1960s. Highly educated, often with higher degrees from major U.S. and European universities, the new political elite differ markedly from those of yesteryear, who tended to come from families with strong regional backgrounds and long-established contact and involvement with the party. In some ways, too, these técnicos preferred to make their way without depending upon the PRI, believing that effective government would secure popular (and therefore electoral) support. For example, during his electoral campaign in 1976, López Portillo insisted on filling two important PRI political institutions, the Instituto de Estudios Políticos, Económicos y Sociales (IEPES) and the Centro de Estudios Políticos, Económicos y Sociales (CEPES), with his own people, many of whom were technocrats. Thereafter his government aimed to secure support through extravagant expenditures built upon oil revenues. Faced with recession, both of his successors have also depended heavily upon technocratic styles of management and upon a cadre of highly trained personnel. The aim has been to win support by being more efficient and by delivering the goods through more appropriate policies, better-targeted programs, and by reducing losses through poor management and corruption (Ward 1986, in press).

The point here is not to comment upon the efficacy of these approaches, but to show that for a decade at least (late 1970s to late 1980s) they served to further *separate* government bureaucrats, whose functional rationality was based around technical routines, from party apparatchiks, whose rationality was more politically partisan. But the político-técnico distinction, while a real and important one initially, has become less meaningful in recent years. Today the divergence between the two career tracks is less clear: well-trained technocrats are entering party service and moving quickly up through the ranks of the PRI at the same rate and speed as their counterparts in the executive branch. Also, in retrospect, it appears to us that scholars have exaggerated the extent to which the government is dominated by technocrats and the party by old-party style "dinosaurs." Moreover, as we shall observe later, one of Salinas's masterstrokes has been his ability to turn technical rationality to partisan ends through PRONASOL.

Nonetheless, some evidence suggests that certain areas of government are more prone to partisanship than others. Specifically, those which appear to be best able to resist the PRI's overtures are those departments and agencies closely tied to the needs of production—water and electric agencies, telecommunications, agricultural production, transportation, etc. Conversely, some areas of

social welfare which involve more "lightweight" goods (e.g., land title regularization) that are not crucial to the development process are more likely to be open to partisan rationality in their disbursement (Gilbert and Ward 1985). In these areas, political rationality (e.g., support for local groups in order to win support for one's own party or to draw away support from another) is likely to dominate both the government and the PRI's decision-making procedure.

Processes Tending towards Convergence between Government and Party

Paradoxically, both de la Madrid and Salinas, despite their technocratic backgrounds and predilections, have been obliged to take steps to revive the fortunes of the party, extending to it enhanced opportunities to benefit directly from the government. Although, as we have seen, political opening did hurt the party, since 1985 the results derived from reform and the opposition victories have begun to strengthen both the PRI itself and its ties to the government. A process of clear convergence may be discerned as the austerity program of de la Madrid took its toll and resulted in the loss of PRI support throughout the country at the ballot box in 1983. The losses of 1983 (largely to the PAN) were reversed in 1986, apparently due to de la Madrid's decision to sustain his macroeconomic program—even if it required reversing political opening by giving the PRI carte blanche to engage in the electoral fraud necessary to win back the lost ground. The fraud in 1985-86 was systematic and widespread (Guadarrama 1987; Guillén López 1987). Considerable electoral alchemy was required to contrive an absolute majority for Salinas in the 1988 elections,[12] such that upon taking office he was faced with problems of how to restore his own undermined legitimacy as president and the problem of a party whose internal organization and morale was in tatters. Many of the actions that President Salinas has taken subsequently in the arena of political and electoral reform have been directed to restore the credibility of the PRI. Inevitably, they have contributed to a convergence between the party (or substantial parts of it) and the government.

Convergence through Electoral Reform

The program of electoral reform upon which the Salinas government is engaged appears to be designed, on the one hand, to make the electoral process more equitable and more efficiently organized. Yet on the other, it appears that the PRI-dominated Congress and

12. See Barberán et al. for a discussion of these election results.

the executive have taken steps to safeguard the PRI's continuance in power. In the first round of reforms (1989-92) a "governability clause" was negotiated through Congress ensuring that most areas of legislation could be passed by a simple majority rather than by one of two-thirds (as had been the case before). The newly instituted Federal Electoral Commission, upon which statewide counterparts are also modeled, is government controlled under the aegis of the Secretario de Gobernación (the president of the commission). Therefore, with the exceptions of the internal elections within the states of Baja California and Chihuahua, where the PAN governs, the entire electoral apparatus remains under PRI governmental control. Furthermore, under the first electoral law, funding and media air time accorded to individual parties is closely tied to their performance in the previous elections—i.e., directly proportionate to votes—thereby reinforcing and sustaining the advantage that the PRI already enjoys. The principal parties do not receive equal levels of funding nor equal opportunity to present their agendas on national television simply because the total number of votes they receive is considerably smaller. However, in 1993 a new series of electoral provisions were pushed through Congress at the last minute in order to pave the way for the 1994 presidential and congressional elections. While on the face of it this suggests a major government concession and climb-down for the PRI, providing as it did for a more level playing field between parties (in terms of access to the media, some proportional representation for senators, removal of the "governability clause," inter alia), these have not really threatened the PRI. The party is confident that it no longer needs the "governability clause," since it can cut deals with minority parapriísta parties. Moreover, the reforms do not embrace two key elements central to our discussion here, namely, (1) making illegal use of the national colors by any one political party, and (2) preventing government officials from participating in party campaigns. If it is to win well in 1994, the PRI needs to preserve the conflation government-party. Perhaps in the future it will be able to wean itself from this association, but for the time being it knows the power of the red, white, and green in the electorate's mind, especially in the rural regions of the country. Thus, while electoral opening has in some ways threatened the absolute dominance of the PRI, it has also brought the PRI and the government together, counteracting many of the tensions alluded to earlier.

Convergence through Internal Party Reforms

The convergence between the party and *salinistas* within the government has not been achieved easily. In part it has come about

precisely *because* of the successes that Salinas has had in purging both the party and the government and renewing them more in his own image. Very soon after assuming power he acted decisively to remove two powerful opponents who dominated the petroleum and education unions respectively. This attack on the old style union bosses weakened the traditional corporative forces within the CTM and CNOP and laid open a path for more democratic leadership structures, which are more amenable to his project of reform.[13]

In a similar fashion, reformists within the party are struggling to be rid of those political hacks or "dinosaurs" who have traditionally dominated the party apparatus, and who have everything to lose from internal reforms that seek to democratize the party and make it more credible, faced as it is with strong electoral competition. Indeed, as we pointed out earlier, many of the new leading figures in the party are younger and come from backgrounds more akin to their technocratic counterparts in government.[14] Their behavior and style of management mirrors more closely that of Salinas and his principal collaborators. However, the purging process has neither been total nor complete. In many municipalities and states the old guard remains entrenched and resistance to change is intense. Partly in order to combat these power groups, Salinas has acted to remove governors who are intransigent (as in Tabasco in 1992, for example) or those who appear to be incapable or unwilling to win back the vote on the PRI's behalf (as in the State of Mexico in 1989).

Salinas's direct support of the PRI has been especially clear in his attack on left-wing political parties, most notably Cárdenas's PRD. The latter, in particular, is perceived as the principal enemy partly because Cárdenas himself has intransigently refused to recognize the president's victory, and partly because the Left's social appeal

13. For a review of the most current literature on political reform in Mexico, see Morris (1993).

14. For example, prior to Genaro Borrego becoming president of the PRI in April 1992, Salinas had worked with two principal party leaders—both of his choosing and both relatively young men with broadly technocratic backgrounds. The first was Manuel Camacho Solís, who was brought in as party secretary (in effect, the head) immediately after the election debacle of 1988 and whose principal task was to pacify international opinion about the elections and restore the legitimacy to Salinas's victory. The second, Luis Donaldo Colosio, a senator, is also a longtime and close collaborator of the president, and well attuned to the needs to modernize the party and to win back the ground lost in 1988. It is also worth noting that both Camacho and Colosio were latterly pulled out of the party and appointed heads of important agencies (Camacho as mayor of Mexico City and Colosio as secretary of the newly created Secretaría de Desarrollo Social)—perhaps in order to enhance the probabilities of them being in the running for the next presidential term. In all circles, both were considered highly *presidenciables*. Ultimately it was Colosio who was selected as the PRI's presidential candidate for the 1994 elections.

coincides with the rhetoric of priísta ideology. Thus it appears that the government has systematically supported the PRI's drive to win back the vote from leftist opposition strongholds, often relying heavily on the benefits provided by government programs (such as PRONASOL, as will be discussed below). But it has also acted against the PRI by recognizing *panista* victories where they occur and even by overturning the PRI's victories in the states of Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí in the fall of 1991. The latter actions, in particular, demonstrate not only that the government is ultimately in control, but also emphasize the centralist nature of Salinas's political project. The events in Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí so badly undermined the PRI's morale in the two locations that several key city hall administrations were won or retained by the PAN in December that year. Whether Salinas acted as he did in order to discipline local "dinosaurs," to show his intolerance of election irregularities, or to reinforce a PRI-PAN pluralist structure, remains unclear. What is clear is that these actions provide glaring examples of the degree and direction to which the government and the executive are prepared to intervene in electoral issues.[15]

Convergence through Decentralization

Mexico is highly centralized politically, economically, and demographically. Yet in theory it is a federal system with ostensible power and authority vested in the autonomy of the municipality. States, too, on paper at least, enjoy widespread autonomy over their internal affairs. During de la Madrid's presidency a serious attempt at decentralizing power and public administration was made, which focused principally upon (a) transferring some federal functions to the states (in health care for example), as well as moving the offices and personnel of certain departments out of Mexico City; and (b) strengthening the financial provision and autonomy of municipalities (Rodríguez 1992, 1993). But the effects of these initiatives, which have continued under Salinas, appear to have been marginal—at least for the municipalities—and the greatest benefits fell to the state governments who proved adept at hijacking many of the advantages for themselves (Rodríguez forthcoming).

But to the extent that these moves towards decentralization

15. One might argue that both actions are to the PRI's advantage. The first sustains the PRI by undermining the leftist opposition whose broad ideological construction is closest to its own; the second, by sustaining the "acceptable" face of opposition, without ultimately threatening the party's hegemony—albeit at a sacrifice of power in certain regions. In effect, therefore, Salinas is exercising the government's autonomy from the party in order to preserve and to sustain its long-term interests.

occurred, they, too, have led to some convergence between PRI and government. This is because the pool of personnel at state and municipal levels is smaller—as we described before—so that greater overlap of social and political networks is likely, as are career moves back and forth between governmental and party-political positions. Furthermore, the influence of informal authoritarian bosses (caciques) and union leaders is also more pronounced in remoter regions and especially in rural areas. Here, in return for being allowed to maintain their informal basis of control, they have been able to continue working closely with the PRI, thereby reinforcing the PRI's presence and dominance over electoral and governmental power.

The push towards electoral reform and internal reorganization of the PRI, however, threatens to undermine this symbiotic relationship and is one of the reasons for the intense resistance that the process has encountered. However, there are strong demands within the PRI for greater local autonomy, particularly over the choice of candidates for legislative and government office. Local party officials have always resented sharing the spoils with individuals nominated through dedazo by higher-ups within the corporate sectors of the party, or by state or federal government officials. Since 1988, party officials have been able to claim with some veracity that local candidates and activists deserve to be recognized and are likely to be better received by the electorate than an unknown outsider. To the extent that these demands are met in the future, there is likely to be a greater convergence and overlap between local PRI militants becoming local government officers.[16]

Convergence through PRONASOL

We have seen how the PRI, as a political party, does not have large scale resources of its own and that, at least until intense electoral competition began to emerge in certain areas in the 1980s, government officers (whether priísta militants or not) had focused more upon maintaining social peace than upon partisan demonstrations of government largesse. But by the late 1980s widespread alienation had set in, arising from the enforced austerity programs adopted by President de la Madrid, and which seemed likely to be sustained by his successor. Salinas's macroeconomic policies and the rolling back of state involvement in many sectoral activities, reduction or removal of subsidies on foodstuffs and transportation, and so on, have threatened to leave the poor even worse off and more vulnerable than they were after almost a decade of austerity and recession. Urban low-income settlements, largely the preserve of CNOP mobilization for the PRI, voted in droves for Cárdenas (Ward 1990, 82–85). Therefore, Salinas needed urgently to win back the electoral high ground of the working-class districts of urban areas, but without engaging in large scale indiscriminatory subsidies.

PRONASOL offers a tranche of sharply targeted support to marginal urban and rural populations. The resources for the program have been stripped away from the regional development programs, from other ministries, and from some of the proceeds realized from the privatization of former government provided utilities and services. The budget is substantial, having grown from $680 million in 1989, to $950 million in 1990, to $1.79 billion in 1991, and to just over $2.1 billion in 1992 (Ward in press). PRONASOL comprises a wide array of actions such as basic food supports and subsidies, health care, school equipment, land regularization, provision of potable water supplies, and other basic elements of infrastructure. Often this is undertaken in conjunction with local populations and groups embracing community action. In order to obtain maximum efficiencies, the program is highly targeted, is run out of the president's office (at least indirectly; since 1992 it has been subsumed under the newly created Secretaría de Desarrollo Social) with local and state programs into which any group with proven need may tap—jumping over the state bureaucracy. The main argument for creating and latterly for supporting Solidarity was that this was a nonpartisan technocratic program aimed at the very poor. But many have argued and sought to demonstrate that, in fact, PRONASOL is highly selective of those locations and groups where the PRI is weak electorally.

Researchers continue to explore whether PRONASOL is or is not highly partisan in its political and spatial targeting. But what is already clear is that the PRI has benefited greatly. To the extent that PRONASOL activities have enhanced Salinas's personal image, this has reflected well upon the party which he heads. The PRI has also developed its own parallel structure to PRONASOL designed to advise and guide local communities about how to tap into the program's resources. And, as we identified at the beginning of this

16. It should be noted that the reforms have only partially resulted in a decline of dedazo. Many candidates continue to be imposed from outside and there has been no serious move towards instituting the equivalent of "primaries." Indeed, if anything, the degree of centralized interference in both the selection of candidates and in the electoral process itself has intensified under Salinas (Meyer 1989). Certainly major tensions remain between the government and party on this and on related issues. One clear example where the dissatisfaction of party members with the actions undertaken by the executive became publicly evident was the "resignation" of Ramón Aguirre from the governorship of Guanajuato in 1991. When Salinas attended the inauguration of the interim panista governor, Carlos Medina Plascencia, a priísta of Guanajuato, referring to the president, stated: "Encima, viene a legitimar la ilegitimidad" (*Proceso*, September 30, 1991).

paper, Solidarity's logo conflates in people's minds the program with the party and with nationalism. There seems little doubt that the sharp renewal in the PRI's electoral fortunes since 1989, especially in peripheral urban areas, is due both to Salinas's own personal popularity and to PRONASOL. Solidarity is acting as the PRI's Trojan horse, offering them inroads into the opposition strongholds. Thus, PRONASOL's success leads to an intensified convergence between Salinas's government and the PRI.

Conclusion: How Real and How Important Is the PRI/Government Distinction?

In this paper we have argued that the overlap between the PRI and the government in Mexico has often been overstated. In many respects the government (especially at the federal level) traditionally exercised a relative autonomy from the party, in part, of course, in order to sustain the overall hegemony of the PRI. In the exercise of that autonomy, inevitable tensions arose leading to an apparent divergence between the two apparatuses and, some would argue, to an intensification of the internal crisis that the PRI underwent in the mid 1980s. But electoral reform, the rising fortunes of the opposition parties (particularly those on the Left), and decentralization accompanied by demands for greater internal democracy have thrown the party and the past two governments back together again, so much so, that the legitimacy of the democratization process—both within the party and in the system as a whole—is in question.

But there are two broad interpretations about this process: first, that the process of political reform is designed to ensure the continued dominance of the PRI and that for democratization to succeed it must be built up from the bottom, not introduced by presidential fiat. The belief in democracy is hardly likely to be sustainable if there is widespread suspicion that the PRI and the government are one and the same and that the latter is acting systematically to sustain the fortunes of the former. This interpretation is one in which the government seeks to project itself as nonpartisan while systematically working towards reviving the fortunes and sustaining the hegemony of the PRI—through dominating the structures of the electoral process; through large scale unaccounted transfers of resources to sustain the party apparatus; through setting the level of financial support and media time to parties at election time in such a way as to reproduce the existing structure; and through partisan and populist policies under the banner of PRONASOL. And, if all else fails, the government may still

resort to repression and/or fraud in order to sustain the PRI's hegemony.

The second view is a rather more positive interpretation of the democratic intent of the Salinas government and is more optimistic of the eventual outcome. It sees, for example, the top-down orchestration of pluralism, the PRI-PAN negotiations, the gubernatorial overturns, and major electoral reform concessions (which stop short of a potential loss of overall control) as indicative of a regime transition. According to this view, an elite pact has emerged since 1988, which, while being imposed from the top down and appearing to generate paradoxes and anomalies for democratization, may, in fact, be paving the way for subsequent consolidation. Only during this latter period will one begin to observe the institutionalization of democracy as manifest in a genuine separation of powers and bolstering of the legislative branch, a decline in presidentialism and centralism, a devolution of power away from the center towards the state and municipalities, and other developments indicative of a regime where democracy has been consolidated. In short, as the ancien régime progressively "lets go," the elite pact that is achieved during the period of transition becomes critically important for shaping the nature of the eventual period of consolidation.

The problem with this second view, however, is that it requires a leap of faith to believe that the PRI and the executive are committed to a democracy, in Krauze's terminology, "without adjectives." If anything, the processes of recent convergence between the PRI and the government which we have described in this paper might be viewed as essential steps for building up the PRI so that it can contend on its own in a genuinely open electoral environment. We believe that it is too early to be definitive and to come down on one side or the other, although many analysts will have already formed a clear personal view. It is certain that the 1994 election results will be crucial for the future of Mexico's democratization process. Equally important will be the disposition of the new president towards taking the process further. But in our view, as long as the overlap remains close and no effort is made to genuinely disentangle the PRI and the governmental apparatus, then the fate of the process of democratization and electoral reform would appear to be in doubt.

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