



Dilemas de la democracia en México

(Dilemmas of Democracy in Mexico)

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The dispute about democracy in Mexico has become endless. Before the historic July 2002 elections, people discussed how to achieve transparent elections that could be accepted by all contenders. They also systematically criticized the over-long stay of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in office and bet on alternation in the presidency for democratizing the country.

Once public belief in electoral authorities was established, and with the arrival of the National Action Party (PAN) in the Los Pinos presidential residence, it was believed that democratic transition in Mexico had concluded. However,

the scenario of a divided government in which Vicente Fox has tried to govern the country and the lack of a civic culture rooted in Mexican society are factors that have reactivated national debate about measures yet to be taken regarding the political reform of the state.

Today, discussion turns on the construction of a new relationship among the branches of government that would make it possible to overcome the conflicts between the executive and the legislature. In that framework, measures have been proposed that go from allowing the reelection of legislators to consecutive terms to the adoption of a semi-presidential regimen. The creation of mechanisms of direct democracy on a federal level and a legal framework that would favor the development of organizations of civil society to broaden out and strengthen public participation have also been proposed.

Rubén García Clarck's book is part of the debate about these and other issues on the national political agenda; his is a historic perspective with a moderate political stance. García Clarck looks at these matters through the critical review of the dilemmas that have been posited, offering a balanced solution to each one.

The dilemmas he examines are, thus, nation or democracy; parliamentary or presidential regimen; civic or party organizations; liberal or social democracy; and evolution or break. These are also the titles of his five chapters, which lead the reader through several episodes of the history of political ideas in Mexico.

When Mexico's independence from the Spanish empire was consolidated, nineteenth-century Mexicans tried to build a nation called the United States of Mexico from the ashes of 50 years of internal strife. At that time, in the context of the modern era's first wave of democratization, the debate centered on the establishment of a system of government based on democracy, monarchy or a necessary dictatorship.

This debate continued into contemporary Mexico, not about the choice between democracy and monarchy or democracy and dictatorship, but about building an authentic democratic regimen in the country. With the victory of the 1910 Revolution, a nominal democracy was established in Mexico, headed by a state party that governed the country for more than 70 years. Mexico's twentieth century was characterized by relative social peace guaranteed by a corporatist self-renewing political class and a de facto authoritarian political system. This led to the growing demand for democracy among opposition parties and Mexican society as a whole.

Based on a selective review of these positions, García Clarck takes us by the hand from that far-off nineteenth century to our day. Through a clearly defined structure, each of the chapters begins with a reference to some of the theoreticians of democracy that have discussed each of the dilemmas dealt with. Then he brings onto the scene fundamental individuals of Mexico's history, whose opinions he counterposes and analyzes. Thus, José María Luis Mora, Ignacio Ramírez, Gabino Barreda, Porfirio Díaz, Benito Juárez, Francisco I. Madero, Venustiano Carranza, Lázaro Cárdenas, Manuel Gómez Morín, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, José Woldenberg, Soledad Loaeza, Federico Reyes Heróles and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN), among many others, discuss and take positions regarding a myriad of issues: democratic universalism, the nationalization of democracy, parliamentarianism, presidentialism, the rivalry between political parties and civic organizations, the problematic relationship between economy and democracy and the dual nature (combining evolution and breaks) of the democratic transition.

It should be said that *Dilemas de la democracia en México* presents political positions outside their specific context, particularly in the case of the EZLN, which the author anachronistically presents as equivalent to nineteenth-century liberalism. This lack of contextualization is insufficiently resolved by the author's constantly flagging the ideas with dates.

The book's fluidity of style and the author's efforts to corroborate his initial thesis (that democracy must be debated democratically, eliminating false dilemmas that arise out of a reductionist and exclusionary logic) make it attractive. In that sense, García Clarck maintains that one of the greatest challenges in consolidating democracy in Mexico is achieving the theoretical and practical inclusion of the plurality of histories, institutional bodies, actors and ideological positions in a single order.

The passages of the text, which seem to be snapshots of a real drama, single out defining moments in Mexico's political history. This book, with its novel presentation of dissenting positions, is recommended for those interested in Mexican political debate and in the torturous advance of democracy in Latin America.

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