

OUR VOICE

Democracy is undoubtedly the best of all known political systems. Throughout its history, however, it has been multi-faceted. Opposing causes have been defended in its name and the struggles of interest groups have determined the different concepts of democracy.

The classic paradigms of democracy seem to be insufficient to explain the current political situation in the United States. Before last November's elections two stances could be clearly distinguished in the political arena. The conservative Republicans headed by Newt Gingrich, were pushing for the impeachment of President William Clinton. The Democrats, on the other hand, were in an uncomfortable position because they disapproved of Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinski but could do nothing but support their party leader.

Public opinion polls play a central role in the political arena today as a fundamental tool for legitimizing democratic processes. Before the November elections, the polls showed that the public disapproved the Clinton-Lewinski relationship, but it condemned even more strongly the political harassment of the president. Nevertheless, these voices were disregarded by conservative politicians, which prompted a drop in the Republican vote count.

Another consequence of the election results was the resignation of Republican spokesperson and House speaker Newt Gingrich. All indicators pointed to the impression that the public mandate had finally been heard. But the impeachment procedure continues its course, even despite the fact that a November 11 CNN poll indicated that 63 percent of the public disapproves, while only 34 percent favors its continuing.

The democratic rules of the game are not rigid —nor should they be. Nevertheless, to what point is it valid to use a democratic political system's legal and administrative procedures, set up to control probable abuses of power by those in office, to judge the private life of a high government official? The response to this question implies a conception of democracy, which should be strictly confined to public matters.

The article by U.S. specialist Patricia de los Ríos, "Paradoxes of the 1998 U.S. Elections," in our "United States Affairs" section, goes into the electoral consequences of the political and media handling of the Clinton-Lewinski case and probes the political trends and phenomena that have had a decisive impact on the voting results. Important among them is the increasing influence the U.S. population of Hispanic

origin has on political representation. Appealing to the Latino vote is no longer resorted to only by the Democratic Party, but also by the Republicans, as Ríos points out in her article.

Our “Politics” section includes two articles on a topic of major importance in Mexico today: the right of Mexicans to vote while abroad. Jesús Silva-Herzog Márquez supports the proposal arguing that this right cannot be denied to Mexican migrants, particularly those who—as in the case of people of Mexican origin in the United States—are closely linked to policies and problems in Mexico, both for emotional and trade and financial reasons. Jurist Diego Valadés alerts the reader to the legal problem involved when giving the vote to a great many Mexicans abroad who have dual citizenship.

In the same section, political scientist Rubén García Clarck examines presidentialism in Mexico in the context of the ongoing international debate on presidentialism versus parliamentarianism. García Clarck contends that both for historical and political reasons, the Mexican political system should remain presidential or, in any case, semipresidential. He does state, however, that the “reform of the state” process must be concluded to put checks on presidentialism in order to achieve a fully democratic system.

Mexican migration to the United States is a topic which will always need exploring. In this issue’s “Society” section, we present a contribution by Luis Herrera-Lasso, Mexican consul general in San Diego, who deals with the contradictions that migration has produced in bilateral Mexico-U.S. relations. While economic links in the context of the North American Free Trade Agreement are on the rise, on the other hand, restrictive U.S. immigration policies are intensifying, as is shown by the increasing militarization of the border.

Gabriel Rovira also deals with our northern border, but from another angle, in his article “Reflections on Transculturation,” assessing the sometimes negative effects of the penetration of certain U.S. cultural values, like consumerism, into Mexican border areas.

Our “Canadian Issues” section includes an article by researcher Julián Castro Rea, “Mexico and Canada. The Internationalization of Domestic Policies.” Castro points to the intensification of relations between both governments parallel to the increasing interest of the civil societies of both countries in broadening their mutual familiarity, partly due to an increased information flow between the two. One example of this is the concern in Canada today about the situation in Chiapas. As part of an effort to create bridges between Canada and Mexico, *Voices of Mexico* presents Dianne Pearce’s review “Anatomical Permutations. Ten Canadian Artists in Mexico” about the works presented at the 26th International Cervantes Festival last October in Guanajuato.

Francisco Sevilla offers our readers a detailed analysis of the complex question of Mexico's Savings Protection Bank Fund (Fobaproa), its origins and possible repercussions for society as a whole. This is a topic which will determine Mexico's economic future for the next three decades. Clearly, the Congress will have to take a course which will avert a collapse of the banking system, which would have terrible consequences for the country, but at the same time, it must make sure the legality and transparency of loans already given be investigated, since many of them are questioned by the opposition. That is, those guilty of white collar financial crimes must also be punished.

The "Ecology" section in this issue deals with concern for a beautiful bird that human "progress" has endangered: the flamingo. Strategies for sustainable development must be found that include the ecological factors which will conserve their habitat.

Voices of Mexico dedicates its "History," "The Splendor of Mexico", "Literature" and part of its "Science, Art and Culture" sections to the state of Jalisco, known for the wealth of its folk culture as well as its well known artists and writers. Historian Javier Moreno explains how the capital city of Jalisco, beautiful Guadalajara, was founded four times. Researcher Ana María de la O Castellanos offers our readers a sketch of the municipality of Zapopan and its religious traditions, particularly the faithful followers of the popular figure, Our Lady of Expectation or Our Lady of Zapopan. Folk art specialist Silvia González Anguiano reviews the different kinds of ceramics to be found in Jalisco, particularly in Tlaquepaque and Tonalá, its main craft corridors. Patricia Ríos opens up the world of complexity and mysticism of the art of the Huichols, one of the indigenous ethnic groups which has managed to conserve its ancestral traditions.

In "Science, Art and Culture," Berta Taracena and Beatriz Vidal, both art critics, delve into the work of Jalisco artist Raúl Anguiano, whose importance and influence in Mexican visual arts is unquestioned, as one of the founders of the Popular Graphics Workshop, where some of Mexico's most important painters were trained. María Tarriba narrates the preparations and development of the traditional "dance of the *tastuones*" in the town of San Juan Ocotán, Jalisco. Arturo Cosme tells us both the real and mythical story of the birth of tequila, perhaps the world's best known local drink.

Rafael Alvarez's boxes, an outstanding example of object-art, are not only important as an aesthetic proposal, but also because they recover folk legends and pieces of Mexican life and customs.

The "Literature" section pays homage to Jalisco-born Juan José Arreola, writer and conversationalist, at the age of 80. A brief sketch of his life accompanies two short stories representative of his ties to Jalisco.

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