

# OUR VOICE

Vicente Fox's July 2 victory at the polls has many implications. It leaves no room for doubt, for example, about the consolidation of Mexico's transition to democracy. Regardless of the debate about whether the transition concludes with parties alternating in office or whether other steps must still be made before the definitive arrival of democracy can be declared, what is beyond discussion is that the political actors involved in the elections—including, of course, the losers—demonstrated their solid democratic culture. The immediate recognition of the victory of one of the candidates by everyone, including President Zedillo, with no loud voices raised in protest was a major step forward. The electoral machinery operated almost perfectly, proving that the organization and endorsement of the elections by the Federal Electoral Institute—with its non-partisan citizen representatives as its only voting members—was a success. There are still some doubts, however, about whether a Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) win would have prompted different reactions.

Fox's victory can be explained in different ways. Some consider it mainly a "punishment" vote; others attribute it to Fox's charisma and excellent media strategy. Still others, of course, chalk it up to a significant reduction—and even disappearance—of most patronage-system practices, pressure on voters and other fraudulent activities that have plagued Mexico's electoral history. Most probably, it was a combination of all this, plus the steadfast opposition tradition of the National Action Party (PAN), the discourse of democracy that has permeated the last decade of Mexican politics, the exhaustion of the official party's profile, with its 71 years in office and the very harsh economic adjustment policies that it implemented in the last administration. Naturally, some highly polemical and unpopular political measures like the bank bail-out—better known as Fobaproa—also took their toll.

In any case, it is important to think about the direction that the future consolidation of democracy will take. We must advance in a reform of the state that will include the transformation of many of the country's electoral, political and social institutions. It is already clear that this question will be one of the great tasks the new president will face.

The recent elections will also have an important repercussion on the party system. Two of the three main parties—the PRI and the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)—will have to redesign their strategies, their social base and even their internal structures, programs and principles. Political analyst Alberto Begné looks into this question in his contribution to this issue of *Voices of Mexico*. Begné foresees a significant recomposition of the party system because, he says, the election results and the Fox "phenomenon" outstripped the three traditional parties, forcing them to reposition their forces to survive. On the one hand, the PRI and the PRD must recognize that if they do not act promptly to reorganize, their defeat could even herald their disappearance from the political map or at least their suffering imminent splits that would severely weaken them, which is the alternative Begné considers the most probable. The PAN, on the other hand, must recognize that Fox's victory went beyond party boundaries, making its immediate task that of reforging its relationship with the new chief executive. Otherwise, it runs the risk of "winning office and losing the game." The small parties, for their part, aspire either to maintain their strategic alliances in order to grow or to take advantage of the splits in other parties to swell their own ranks.

In the last analysis, one of the immediate challenges emerging from the July 2 election results is the need to build formal and informal institutional mechanisms to guarantee governability since no political force has a majority by itself in either of the two chambers of Congress.

Political scientist María Amparo Casar dedicates her article to this question, analyzing the new situation of a divided government that the executive will have to face. Vicente Fox is the first president of Mexico who will take office with a plurality—not a majority—of votes. For this reason, Casar says his victory cannot be read as overwhelming, but rather the mandate of the voting population in favor of limited, circumscribed power. Naturally, she says, this new political situation will transform the traditional ways of governing and legislating, opening up a space for the consolidation of alliances and new practices in the relations between the executive and legislative branches of government. More than fearing the possibility of ungovernability and the paral-

ysis of public administration, we should understand that we have been given the opportunity to institute a fully democratic political life, as long as we are aware that when democracy brings pluralism—which, according to the author, is almost always the case—no other road is possible than deliberation, negotiation and compromise. Divided governments do not necessarily equal ungovernability. Quite to the contrary: they represent the possibility that fundamental changes in policy be made only when an extraordinary amount of consensus exists.

Just as the July 2 results were being taken in by the public, a series of events related to the abortion issue, among them the attempt by legislators in the state of Guanajuato to penalize abortion even in the case of women who had been raped, brought to the fore the basic tenet of secularism as a guiding principle in Mexico's political life. Political philosopher Jesús Rodríguez looks at this question, alerting the reader to the dangers posed by the possibility of the fundamentalist and most dogmatic currents of the PAN winning the day and imposing their ideas on the party's democratic, liberal currents. Rodríguez maintains that in modern thought, secularism should not be understood as some kind of a half-way measure that somehow takes the average of different religious moral positions elevating them into a state "consensus," but rather the articulation of legal and institutional practices that will only result from an intense struggle between the defenders of tolerance and the promoters of fundamentalism.

One of the central questions the new administration will face is what policies to implement to maintain economic stability and foster sustained development and growth. In this issue's "Economy" section CISAN scholar Alejandro Mercado presents an in-depth analysis of the decoration industrial district of Tlaquepaque and Tonalá and its potential for economic development. Drawing the parallels between Italy's successful industrial districts and this region of Mexico, he shows how small artisan producers, designers and "consolidators," the link between the first two and export markets avid for both traditional Mexican craft products and new designs, make up a coherent economic whole that works. Far from falling into the trap of thinking that development can only result from economies of scale, Mercado suggests that policy-makers take note of these alternative routes open to us as a nation.

Leonora Carrington is one of Mexico's best-known living painters. Born in England in 1917, she came to Mexico in the mid-1940s, becoming an active member of the surrealist milieu. Angélica Abelleira relates how Carrington has by no means limited herself to painting, but has also worked extensively in narrative, playwriting and costume design. Journalist Merry Mac Masters contributes an article dealing with Carrington's definitive foray into sculpture that began when she participated in the "Freedom in Bronze" project featuring sculptures by artists who did not usually work in that medium. These two articles, illustrated with photographs of Carrington's work, begin our "Science, Art and Culture" section.

The section is completed by two articles about international exhibits: the first, the Mexican pavilion at Expo Hanover and, the second, the latest exhibition at San Diego's Museum of Contemporary Art. Raúl Cid, deputy general director of Mexico City's Papalote Children's Museum, reviews for our readers the museography of Mexico's six-room, three-patio pavilion at Expo Hanover 2000, designed to present visitors with a new way of looking at Mexico.

The San Diego Museum of Contemporary Art opened its exhibition, "UltraBaroque: Aspects of Post Latin American Art," in September. A celebration of the hybrid born of the mix of European baroque—in its heyday at the time Latin America was colonized—and the baroque indigenous forms the conquistadors encountered, the exhibit flies in the face of the adjective often used to deride Latin American art, dubbing it "ultra-baroque." The exhibit, which features the work of 16 contemporary young artists, will be open until January 2001.

This issue's "Society" section presents our readers with an article on free trade and inequality in Mexico by UNAM researcher Gerardo Torres. After a brief overview of the definition of inequality and its history in Mexico, Torres concentrates on the question of whether free trade and the economic opening have increased or decreased poverty and inequality in Mexico in the last decade. With an eye toward the new century, and particularly the incoming Fox administration, Torres suggests that the increasing concentration of wealth—and therefore inequality—should be reversed by concerted policy efforts beyond simple liberalization and international market mechanisms.

To inaugurate a new section, "Mexico-U.S. Affairs," *Voices of Mexico* has asked two of CISAN's outstanding researchers, Silvia Núñez and Mónica Vereá, to contribute. Núñez takes up the question of poverty and how civil society in both Mexico and the United States is responding to the problems it causes. After a brief overview of poverty levels and profiles in both countries, she highlights the efforts of a nongovernmental orga-

nization in Mexico —DECA, Equipo Pueblo— and a nationwide community organization in the United States —ACORN, the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now— and their focus on different strategies to achieve people’s empowerment to ultimately influence public policy making. The author considers both organizations examples of how civil society contributes to the forging of a modern democracy.

Former CISAN director Mónica Vereá again brings *Voices of Mexico* readers up to date on the prickly problem of Mexico-U.S. migration, this time with extensive suggestions for policy changes in the matter. Given recent shifts toward a more open immigration policy by different sectors of U.S. political actors as well as increased bilateralism between our two countries, Vereá presents a series of proposals for liberalizing U.S. immigration policy, putting Mexican immigration and emigration policies in sync and establishing joint programs to meet the common challenge together. The latter include setting up a bilateral fund and a savings fund to encourage repatriation of Mexican nationals to their places of origin.

The North American region not only has these matters in common, but another age-old problem: the relations of its indigenous peoples to the rest of the population and to government itself. In our “Canadian Issues” section, political scientist Isabel Altamirano examines the different kinds of land claims and other rights recognized by Canada’s federal government. She zeroes in on the weaknesses of the First Nations’ strategy caused by their division into groups recognized and those not recognized by the Constitution, and the resulting need for many of them to negotiate separate treaties. In addition, native women have insisted that values that discriminate on the basis of gender should not be upheld in the name of tradition, thus demanding that the new citizenship the indigenous communities are fighting for combine customary and universal rights to create a new, better life.

Xochimilco, known the world over for its “floating gardens” is the center of this issue’s “Splendor of Mexico” section. Joaquín Praxedis Quesada, director of a local community cultural organization, has contributed an article on the more than 400 fiestas celebrated in this corner of the Valley of Mexico. His description covers everything from the yearly “Most Beautiful Flower of the Ejido” beauty contest and the trade fair observing the many uses of amaranth seed, to the myriad of saints days celebrated by every neighborhood and town in the area. Enrique Martínez, president of the same local association, takes a look at the many examples of colonial religious architecture in the Xochimilco area. And Daniel Munguía, a free-lance photographer and writer, presents our readers with a review of the special ways in which Xochimilco residents commemorate the Day of the Dead on November 1 and 2, as well as a historical review of the pre-Hispanic origins of this kind of ancestor worship.

Mexico’s wealth of museums is represented in this issue with a review of the Xochimilco Archaeological Museum, written by its director, Hortensia Galindo. The approach to the building itself is typical Xochimilco: visitors can take a launch there that moors on the northern edge of its garden before they go in to view its more than 3,000 pieces.

Iván Trujillo rounds out our coverage of Xochimilco with an article for our “Ecology” section on the many species living in the area’s 187 kilometers of canals. From protozoans to the *acocil*, a local variety of fresh-water shrimp, to its main predator, the axolotl, a kind of larval salamander, the different water-based species form a food chain that reflects the underwater universe of Xochimilco and its silent battle for survival. This endangered ecosystem is rounded out by thousands of plant, insect and bird species more visible to the casual observer.

Literary critic and researcher Lauro Zavala introduces our “Literature” section with his review of Mexican mini-fiction, a genre which is now coming into its own. Tracing the publication of this kind of mini-story through anthologies, schoolbooks, research by academics and international symposia, he concludes that recent years have brought the canonization of this genre. *Voices of Mexico* is also pleased to be able to present our readers with four mini-stories by writers José de la Colina, Mónica Lavín, Felipe Garrido and Guillermo Samperio.

Our “In Memoriam” section pays homage to two figures: Carlos Castillo Peraza, former leading member of the National Action Party, the party which has for the first time won the presidency away from what was considered Mexico’s “official” party, the PRI; and Gunther Gerzso, painter, sculptor and set designer, the founder of Mexico’s abstractionist school.

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