

# Political Parties And The 2003 Mid-Term Elections Challenges and Proposals

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The collapse of the Soviet Union and the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe threw left parties into ideological crisis. Fully aware of the current inviability of the socialist revolution and the failings of the welfare state, the left is debating the Third Way, as a proposal for renovating social democracy in the framework of a runaway world, to use Anthony Giddens' phrase. Together with the ideological crisis of the left worldwide, hybrid party coalitions have begun to emerge, joining left-wing and right-wing forces in the model of the "catch-all party."

Neoliberal globalization has weakened both the sovereignty of national states and the ability of traditional political actors (parties and parliaments) to represent the complex societies of our time, particularly the new social movements. This crisis of political representation is manifested in the emergence of candidates and movements from civil society, independent of parties, a decrease in party membership and electoral participation, as well as low levels of public confidence in political institutions.

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As can be seen in the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) 2002 Report on Human Development, in recent years there has been a considerable decrease in the size of party membership in European countries and the United States, while in Latin America, public confidence in political parties has dropped very low, beneath that proffered the Church, the armed forces, the president, television, the police, the judicial branch and national congresses. These low levels of confidence contrast with the central role that parties still have in democracy, which is the reason that one of the UNDP report's recommendations is the strengthening of "official democratic institutions."<sup>1</sup>

In Mexico, only 5.36 percent of the adult population expresses a great deal of confidence in parties, while 18.81 percent expresses some confidence.<sup>2</sup> Together with the other factors, these indicators can be attributed to the public's negative perception of politics, which it associates with corruption, deficient performance by public officials and congresspersons and party elitism, seen as proof that they only look after their own interests. Another explanation is the scant direct communication between parties and the citizenry. Parties give more weight in electoral campaigns to the electronic media, which leads to simplified messages, a blurring of ideological proposals and a weakening of political identities.

Despite the public's scant confidence in political parties, 67 percent of Mexicans think they have a great deal of influence in Mexico's political life, surpassed only by the president.<sup>3</sup> The public sees parties' political influence in the phenomenon dubbed the "party-ocracy" since, in its view, it is the parties who run candidates for election, make decisions in the legislature and frequently hold up the country's operation when they delay the approval of the federal budget. In

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Juan Pablo Zamo / Cua

Patricia Mercado (left), president of Possible Mexico, a political organization running for election for the first time.

addition, President Fox has taken it upon himself to strengthen this perception when he has stated, both at home and abroad, that he is the victim of the brakes that opposition parties have put on Congress' activities.

Closing the gap between the parties and society so that people become more actively involved in public life through them is a challenge of the first water for Mexico's democratic development. In the framework of democratic transition, the party system has evolved from a practically single party stage to a multi-party, competitive system in which alternation in office is not only possible but has already occurred on every level of political representation. As Octavio Rodríguez Araujo says, "The party system in Mexico changed....The system of the dominant or hegemonic party no longer exists. But the parties have also changed by abandoning their old principles and their more or less ideological nature and becoming more ideologically ambiguous and seeking the vote by adjusting their political discourse to that

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The country's three main parties have moved toward institutionalization enough to be functional to democratic competition.<sup>5</sup> For its part, the citizenry has advanced from voting to fulfill a civic obligation to voting pro-actively, to give the victory to a specific party or candidate. This advance reflects a consolidation of voters' identities and political positioning in the country. As Alejandro Moreno and Elizabeth Zechmeister have observed, "The location of party voters has evolved in an interesting way....PRD

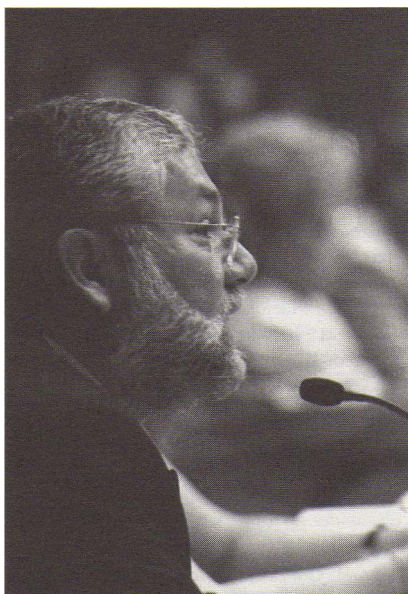
[Party of the Democratic Revolution] followers continue to be to the left of the other main parties, but moving more to the right. National Action Party [PAN] followers, for their part, also moved to the right, so much so that in May 2002 they were to the right of the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party].... This forces us to think about what new content is associated with the left and the right in Mexican politics today."<sup>6</sup> This new content is determined by alternation itself, with the interchange of positions between the PRI and the PAN as administration and opposition, and the proximity of mid-term elections, both of which lead the parties to differentiate their political proposals.

Mexicans' electoral preferences have centered on three forces, spurring the recurring question about the *raison d'être* of the eight remaining parties. While these organizations do have a social base that has allowed them to obtain their registration as national parties, it is also true that they are a reflection of the fragmentation of the country's political elites and tend to scatter the vote without necessarily representing a differentiated ideological option on basic issues. In any case, their scant social and political representativeness could lead them to make strategic alliances that would allow them to survive inside the party system.

In the 2000 elections, two alliances and three parties ran against the governing PRI. The PRI had adopted a neoliberal program in its last few terms in office. In addition, given the specter of a defeat, it reincorporated in its platform some theses from its classical period, like the state as the driving force behind the economy and the promotor of social justice, bringing them up to date with a proposal

of greater participation from the private sector in national development. For its part, the Alliance for Change, made up of the PAN and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM), proposed the continuity of the neoliberal model in the framework of an economy with a human face, plus the added attraction of alternation in the presidency with the candidacy of the charismatic Vicente Fox. Another option was the Alliance for Mexico, made up of five parties, three from the center left (the PRD, the Labor Party [PT], and Democratic Convergence [CD]) and two from the center right (the Social Alliance Party [PAS] and the Party of the Nationalist Society [PSN]). Grouped around the candidacy of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, these parties proposed economic development with social equality. Other contenders in the elections were the Party of the Democratic Center (PCD), the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) and the Social Democracy Party (PDS), with social democratic platforms.

Balloting concentrated on three main forces (the Alliance for Change, the PRI and the Alliance for Mexico), preventing the PCD, the PARM and the PDS from getting enough votes to obtain seats in Congress and maintain their registration as national political parties. Despite the fact that voters' preferences in 2000 pointed to diminishing the number of parties, three organizations managed to obtain registration as new political parties in 2002: Citizens' Force (FC), Possible Mexico (MP) and the Mexican Liberal Party (PLM). With different emphases, these three organizations consider themselves to be on the left of the political spectrum. Thus, the parties that lost their registration were re-



Jorge Alcocer, president of Citizen's Force, another of the new parties on the electoral spectrum.

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placed by others with a similar ideological profile. In fact, some PDS activists became members of MP or FC.

In the current race, the governing party is in fact defending a center-right program, although its discourse is that of the center. Most of the opposition is presenting center-left ideological positions. Party alliances will probably be formed in some specific districts, but at the time of this writing exactly where and among whom is not yet clear (see table of compared positions).

In the current electoral process, the biggest differences between the

PAN and opposition parties are in the areas of energy policy, while the most important agreements are in the aim of moving toward the consolidation of democracy in Mexico. This is why it is possible to again expect the creation of a common agenda among parliamentary caucuses for the political reform of the state.<sup>7</sup> In matters of economic, social and foreign policy, the parties have different, but not necessarily incompatible, proposals, which could lead to considerable parliamentary agreements.

Based on their different electoral campaigns and the design of renewed strategies for winning the vote, some parties have stated that their aim is to achieve a congressional majority; others only seek to increase or maintain their current positions; and the new ones want to make themselves known in order to get enough votes to keep their registration as officially recognized parties. To the three main parties' national leaders, the challenges they face in these mid-term elections are: obtaining a majority in the Chamber of Deputies to push forward "the structural reforms that will ensure the viability of the nation in coming years" (Luis Felipe Bravo of the PAN); win 300 of the 500 seats in the Chamber of Deputies as a step toward recovering the presidency in 2006 based on their previously demonstrated ability to govern and the necessary renovation of the party (Roberto Madrazo of the PRI); win 130 seats in the Chamber of Deputies to move toward being "the only alternative for real change in the country" vis-à-vis the neoliberal project (Rosario Robles of the PRD).<sup>8</sup>

Regardless of each party's legitimate electoral expectations, the greatest challenge for all the parties, given the

probability that no party will achieve a majority in the Chamber of Deputies, will be to devise the agreements that the country's development urgently requires among the congressional caucuses and between the legislative and executive branches of government. Once the inevitable polarization of the elections is overcome, the actors on the national political scene will have the responsibility of creating a dialogue and negotiation capable of dealing with the enormous legislative agenda that cannot wait a minute longer at the same time that they respect their principles and specific commitments to society. That is the only way that the public's trust in the parties, as well as the confidence of international public opinion in Mexico's economic and political viability, can expand. ■■■

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Programa de las Naciones Unidas para el Desarrollo, *Informe sobre Desarrollo Humano 2002. Profundizar la democracia en un mundo fragmentado* (Madrid: Mundi-Prensa, 2002), p. 69.

<sup>2</sup> Secretaría de Gobernación (Segob) and Fundación Este País, "Conociendo a los ciudadanos mexicanos. Principales resultados de la Encuesta Nacional sobre Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas 2001 de la Segob," supplement *Este País* 137 (Mexico City), August 2002, p. 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Octavio Rodríguez Araujo, "Los partidos políticos en México, origen y desarrollo," Carlos Sirvent, comp., *Partidos políticos y procesos electorales en México* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa/UNAM, 2002), p. 59.

<sup>5</sup> Miguel González Compeán and Leonardo Lomelí, comps., *El partido de la Revolución. Institución y conflicto (1928-1999)*, (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2000), p. 670; Soledad Loaeza, *El Partido Acción Nacional: La larga marcha (1939-1994)*, (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1999); Francisco Reveles Márquez, comp., *Partido Acción Nacional: Los signos de la institucionalización*

(Mexico City: UNAM/Gernika, 2002), p. 568; Marco Aurelio Sánchez, *PRD: La élite en crisis* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés, 1999); Marco Aurelio Sánchez, *PRD: El rostro y la máscara. Reporte de la crisis terminal de una élite política* (Mexico City: Centro de Estudios de Política Comparada/Centro de Estudios para la Transición Democrática, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> Alejandro Romero and Elizabeth J. Zechmeister, "Hacia una definición de la izquierda y de la derecha en México," *Este País* 141 (Mexico City), December 2002, pp. 73-74.

<sup>7</sup> The political reform of the state includes all the legislative changes needed to bring the country's political and governmental institutions (created on the whole during the period of the authoritarianism of the practically single party system) into line with the new political and economic situation: the consolidation of democracy and globalization. Efforts to achieve a political reform of the state have failed in recent years. Despite apparent agreement of political platforms about the need to carry it out, the parties seem to have opted for short-term, merely electoral strategies and not for long-term politics of consensus. [Editor's Note.]

<sup>8</sup> "Desafíos y perspectivas. PAN, PRI, PRD," *El Cotidiano* 115 (Mexico City), September-October 2002, pp. 7-31.

## 2003 ELECTORAL PLATFORMS. THE PARTIES AND THEIR PROPOSALS

PARTY*	DOMESTIC POLICY	ECONOMY	SOCIETY	FOREIGN POLICY
National Action Party (PAN)	Consolidate democratic change through the institutional design of political co-responsibility in a pluralist framework. Legalize consecutive reelection of legislators and decrease the number of deputies and campaign spending.	Constitutional reform to allow private sector participation in the generation of electricity, safeguarding state sovereignty over energy resources.	Sustainable human development based on employment, social solidarity of the state and society's participation in food supply, health and education.	Diversify federal government's international actions and promote the reforms needed so the Senate can participate in international negotiations.
Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI)	Strengthen the division of labor and collaboration among legislators. Promote a reform to review federal executive prerogatives, particularly those linked to the veto and the nomination of public servants subject to ratification.	Design a long-term state energy policy. Maintain electricity supply as a public service, operated exclusively by the state.	Legislate the participation of the media, the government, the private sector and society as a whole in the dissemination of women's and children's rights.	Defend and preserve national identity, dignity, beliefs and culture worldwide. Foster a bilateral, integral migratory agreement that would take into consideration Mexicans' human rights abroad.
Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)	Seek a national accord with other political and social forces to find ways to develop democracy and solve the country's broad social and economic problems, leaving behind political paralysis and the lack of reforms.	Foster the approval of a Program of Economic Reactivation. Maintain the electricity sector as a public service under state management.	Ensure appropriate pensions and retirement. Grant food stamps for people over 70, create full-time schools, guarantee health services to the entire population and promote low-income housing.	Review the North American Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada. Establish an international migratory agreement with the United States.
Labor Party (PT)	Continue and deepen the democratic reform of the state. Reject consecutive reelection of legislators.	Reform labor legislation to include a new labor and business culture, agreements by consensus, modernization of federal public administration, efficient administration of justice in labor matters, union democracy and labor relations with other countries.	Reform the Constitution and legislation to include the legitimate rights of indigenous peoples and communities along the lines of the San Andrés Accords.	Legislate to establish the defense and safeguarding of labor, human and social rights of Mexican migrant workers.
Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM)	Promote public participation in designing state and municipal government programs and projects as a condition for receiving federal funding.	Create a new economic model based on sustainable development.	Design programs to raise consciousness and educate civil society to prevent, control and reduce pollution levels and protect natural resources.	Continue to actively participate in international environmental fora.
Democratic Convergence (CD)	Consolidation of democracy given the challenges of governability.	Support for the domestic market and solidarity between businessmen and workers.	Solve the problems of inequality and poverty through quality education.	Democratize foreign policy, adapting it to the new world situation.
Social Alliance Party (PAS)	Amend the Constitution to include direct democracy. Make community administration a fourth level of government in addition to municipal, state and federal.	Establish co-ownership and joint management in private, social and public companies.	Right of parents to require that their children receive religious education in public schools. Church access to the media.	Seek the total cancellation or notable reduction of the foreign debt. Seek equal vote of all countries in international bodies.
Party of the Nationalist Society (PSN)	Promote electoral reform to allow for fair, equitable participation of emerging political currents.	Prevent the privatization of Mexican state companies and foreign investment in strategic sectors of the national economy.	Integral reform of national education, safeguarding patriotic values as a fundamental principle.	Review the North American Free Trade Agreement agricultural chapters.
Mexican Liberal Party (PLM)	Raise the revocation of elected officials' mandate to a constitutional level. Legalize consecutive reelection of legislators. Create a civic body to monitor transparency in governmental information.	Promote equitable fiscal reform to tax the richest individuals, companies and institutions.	Promote a National Program against Poverty to halve the number of individuals and families in extreme poverty in three years.	Attenuate the negative effects of globalization through compensatory policies that protect agriculture and industry.
Possible Mexico (MP)	Defense of political pluralism and reform of the state (decentralization, professionalization of public service and the fight against corruption).	Redistributive policy for an economic reform that would promote growth, with a broad social pact.	Promote action against discrimination, particularly against homosexuals, and compensation for vulnerable groups. Decriminalization of marihuana use.	Seek favorable positioning in the globalized world; fight against abuses and asymmetries.
Citizens' Force (FC)	Review existing mechanisms of public participation.	Market economy that promotes domestic savings and the export sector.	Policy of sustainable development, including the fight against poverty, rural employment and environmental protection.	Respect the Constitution by involving the legislature in foreign policy design.

\* Parties are listed in the order they appear on the ballot.

Source: The national political parties' 2003 electoral platforms.