

# DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO

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- The Sources of Democratic Responsiveness in Mexico.** By Matthew R. Cleary. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010. Pp. xi + 253. \$28.00 paper. ISBN: 9780268023010.
- Mexico's Economic Dilemma: The Developmental Failure of Neoliberalism—A Contemporary Case Study of the Globalization Process.** By James M. Cypher and Raúl Delgado Wise. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010. Pp. xv + 207. \$70.00 cloth. ISBN: 97807425565607.
- Mexico's Democratic Challenges: Politics, Government, and Society.** Edited by Andrew Selee and Jacqueline Peschard. Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2010. Pp. xvi + 326. \$75.00 cloth. \$27.95 paper. ISBN: 9780804771627.
- Mexico's Unrule of Law: Implementing Human Rights in Police and Judicial Reform under Democratization.** By Niels Uildriks, with Nelia Tello Peón. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2010. Pp. xviii + 313. \$70.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780739128930.
- La regla ausente: Democracia y conflicto constitucional en México.** By Francisco Valdés Ugalde. Barcelona: Gedisa; Mexico City: Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales and Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Instituto de Investigaciones Sociales, 2010. Pp. xi + 249. \$27.00 cloth. ISBN: 9788497845397.

Does democratization matter? If it does, how does it affect the lives of citizens? Are different social groups affected differently by democratization? These questions may seem naive, given the vast amount of literature produced on democratization in Latin America in the past decades, not to mention the seemingly unanimous endorsements of the benefits of democracy.<sup>1</sup> But they may be no more naive than early reactions to the victory of Vicente Fox in Mexico's presidential election of 2000, which was greeted as a watershed event. Mexico has now seen subnational electoral changes, which have increased partisan competition and thus control, as well as two presidential elections lost by the formerly hegemonic

1. See, for example, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transitions for Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); Larry Diamond, Jonathan Hartlyn, Juan Linz, and Seymour Martin Lipset, eds., *Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999); Terry Karl, "Dilemmas of Democratization in Latin America," *Comparative Politics* 23 (1990): 1–21.

Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).<sup>2</sup> It is reasonable to suggest that Mexico has advanced significantly in attaining many of the hallmarks of democratization, including free and uncoerced elections. But how might we assess Mexico's democratic transition beyond electoral competition?

One important and largely unanswered question is the relationship of democratization to economic well-being. Indeed, the question is often not even posed, for many scholars accept that prosperity sustains democracy, and few nations at low levels of socioeconomic development can achieve democratization. Still, fewer scholars are willing to claim a precise and positive, causal relationship between wealth and democratization. Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan state that they "accept the well-documented correlation that there are few democracies at very low levels of socioeconomic development and that most polities at a high level of socioeconomic development are democracies," yet they suggest that "it is often difficult or impossible to make systematic statements about the effect of economics on democratization processes."<sup>3</sup> This lack of attention to the material outcomes of democratization is especially curious, given that the turn away from authoritarianism requires the increased delivery not only of democratic rights but also of other public goods. Among citizen advocates in Mexico, for example, there clearly was a shared and articulated expectation that democratization would result in greater prosperity.<sup>4</sup> Recent changes in Mexico offer us the opportunity to rethink some of these questions and assumptions, as have the authors of the books reviewed here.

All these books share an implicit concern for theories of legitimacy. Studies of legitimacy have ranged widely from examinations of legality, institutions, and bureaucracy to Marxist-influenced explanations of the state's stability despite the uneven distribution of economic benefits. With democratization, the study of legitimacy has brought comparisons to authoritarian predecessors, as well as examinations of what new states can actually deliver to constituents. The link between democracy and development attains great relevance in thinking not just about human rights and the rule of law but also about accountability and the delivery of public services. Mexico exemplifies a nation whose institutional changes are expected to create greater access to power and greater accountability from the government. Legislative, structural, and constitutional reforms have been some of the tools used to make this transition. But can a state truly be legitimate if its citizens are neither economically nor physically secure? And can we understand such a transition in a nation so deeply

2. On subnational elections, see Victoria Rodríguez and Peter Ward, eds., *Opposition Government in Mexico: Past Experiences and Future Opportunities* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997); Wayne Cornelius, Todd Eisenstadt, and Jane Hindley, eds., *Subnational Politics and Democratization in Mexico* (San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1999).

3. Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 77.

4. Paul Lawrence Haber, *Power from Experience: Urban Popular Movements in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006); Jon Shefner, *The Illusion of Civil Society: Democratization and Community Mobilization in Low-Income Mexico* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

tied to the global economy without examining its political and economic ties to other nations?

#### LEGITIMATING THE POSTHEGEMONIC STATE

Research on democratization often focuses on structural and institutional changes and on the expansion of political rights. Because of the great emphasis on free and uncoerced elections, institutional changes that facilitate such processes are often highlighted; so, too, are judicial and constitutional reforms, the decentralization of political decision making, and efforts at policing. In addition, research has focused on representation and participation as crucial elements of democratization. Although one facet of representation is the responsiveness and accountability of governmental bodies, few studies look to material changes as an indication of this response.

A tangible manifestation of the democratic transition in Mexico is the large number of state and municipal governments held by the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD). During the early 1980s, subnational victories nibbled at the hegemony of the PRI in Guanajuato, Ensenada, San Luis Potosí, Chihuahua, and Durango. Similar developments followed elsewhere in the 1990s and after. Seeking a new federalism, reformers changed the system for sharing revenue and achieved a real separation among the branches of government. They reduced the power of the executive while strengthening and increasing the autonomy of state and municipal governments, and they broke the popular notion that the PRI was equivalent to the government. In *Mexico's Democratic Challenges*, the volume edited by Andrew Selee and Jacqueline Peschard, Tonatiuh Guillén López argues that federalism is an outcome of the decreased hegemony of the PRI and presidentialism. Local and state governments have asserted their needs as actors whose interests cannot be defined merely by partisan relations. In the same volume, Jean-François Prud'homme also finds reason to celebrate electoral reforms that have made the party system genuinely competitive by creating three separate poles of electoral power. Peschard agrees in her own essay that reforms at state and local levels have enhanced democracy in a decentralized new federalism. Matthew Cleary also acknowledges such changes in *The Sources of Democratic Responsiveness in Mexico*. These findings demonstrate that decades of protest may have increased electoral participation and competition.

Assessments of other institutions crucial to the democratic process are less optimistic. In *Mexico's Unrule of Law*, Niels Uildriks offers a grim evaluation of reforms to policing and their intersection with judicial and prosecutorial changes, especially in the area of human rights. In his account of outcomes for police officers, Uildriks implicitly raises two questions: How democratic can a nation be when so much of its populace feels insecure? Can individual institutions be democratized without deeper systemic changes? The answers to both questions are disturbing.

Uildriks depicts police, prosecutors, and judicial organizations suffering from overwork, undercommitment, and underprofessionalization at best. At worst,

and more common, are the chaos, corruption, and endangerment that citizens suffer at the hands of the very actors sworn to protect them. The state's weakness is demonstrated in the inefficient administration of justice. Police officers who are expected to fund much of their own professional needs are, like their higher-ups, soon involved in graft or the drug economy. Prosecutions and courts epitomize a convoluted, overloaded system, rife with the potential for miscarriages of justice; violations of human rights; and other abuses of authority by ineffective lawyers, overly powerful prosecutors, and absent and incompetent or overworked judges.

Because the broader system of governance has not changed sufficiently, Uildriks gives a failing grade to all the systems of internal and external monitoring, control, and discipline that have been instituted as part of democratic reforms in Mexico. He finds that new institutions that seek to promote human rights not only are inefficient in changing the culture of policing but in fact impose responsibility for better behavior on the police without eliminating the systemic sources of corruption. Rank-and-file officers find that that accountability for human rights limits their space to work without giving them greater effectiveness in exchange, even as the informal networks and patron-client relations that pervade their working relations maintain the pressure to engage in corrupt practices.

Francisco Valdés Ugalde's assessment of the impact that constitutional reforms have had on democratization combines a Weberian view that legality brings legitimacy with a Gramscian recognition of legitimacy's importance in creating and maintaining power. Ideally, constitutions establish norms to ensure the provision of services and to structure state-society relations; they restrict the government's sphere of action and define the construction, interpretation, and application of rules. Yet in the case of Mexico, Valdés Ugalde finds that the constitution has reinforced the rise and long hegemony of the PRI.

These various studies present a segmented analysis of Mexican institutions: electoral reforms largely win approval, yet crucial systems of support are not only lacking but also act to maintain and even legitimate the status quo. Piecemeal changes have proved insufficient, and systemic changes are largely avoided. How have Mexican citizens fared, therefore, under democratization?

#### DEMOCRACY FOR WHOM?

Studies have long found representation and participation to be key elements both in the struggle to achieve democracy and in its consolidation.<sup>5</sup> Recent work has also come to focus on accountability, or what we may think of as outcomes.<sup>6</sup>

5. Many studies in this area still focus on the problematic concept of civil society. See, for example, Alberto J. Olvera, "The Elusive Democracy: Political Parties, Democratic Institutions, and Civil Society in Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 45 (2010): 78–107.

6. Jonathan Fox, *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Leonardo Avritzer, "Living under a Democracy: Participation and Its Impact on the Living Conditions of the Poor," *Latin American Research Review* 45 Special Issue (2010): 166–185; Adam Przeworski, Michael E. Alvarez, José Antonio Cheibub, and Fernando Limongi, *Democracy and Development: Political Institutions and Well-Being in the World, 1950–1990* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

This research goes beyond the assessment of institutional changes to ask how and for whom democratization matters. Cleary asks whether elections really respond to the needs articulated by citizens. He looks to the congruence between government output and public preference as an indication of good governance. He also examines how strategies such as protest influence democratic responsiveness and how electoral and nonelectoral means of political participation interact to influence governance. In this, he shows a willingness to think about legitimacy as a manifestation of governmental action, especially as found in indicators of the delivery of services. Unfortunately, some of the data that Cleary provides to demonstrate outcomes are difficult to assess. This is the case, for example, with the data collected in connection with the welfare programs *Solidaridad* and *Oportunidades*. Both programs operated at the federal, state, and municipal levels, yet Cleary's interest is to assess municipal accountability alone. The use of such multi-level data without clear indications of the sources of state-provided services may confound his findings.

We confront similar difficulties in thinking about participation. Despite Cleary's avowed interest in assessing the impact of political participation, he does not find a suitable instrument to measure it. The closest he comes to an assessment of the influence of behaviors such as protest, petitioning, and visiting municipal authorities to air grievances is to examine electoral turnouts, which, he recognizes, are highly correlated with class, education, and literacy, and thus likely to skew his samples toward upper-class participants. This is especially problematic, given that his measure for government responsiveness is the delivery of public utilities. Unlike middle- and upper-class citizens, squatters and those lower on the social hierarchy often live in areas with few, poor, or no services. Similarly, Cleary uses fiscal income to document the responsiveness of governments. Richer *municipios* are found to be more responsive, an unsurprising finding. What Cleary appears to demonstrate is not the utility of political participation but that rich people are more active politically and live in areas with better public services. Such findings reassert the question: to whom are democratic governments accountable and responsive?

For decades, Latin Americanists have considered civil society one of the primary actors in the struggle for greater governmental accountability. MariClaire Acosta's chapter in *Mexico's Democratic Challenges* repeats several significant errors of civil society analysts by associating operationalization with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), by ignoring differences among social bases, and by failing to acknowledge the ties between governmental resources and the nongovernmental sector. Two assumptions made by Acosta highlight the difficulty inherent in trying to assess the impact that popular struggles have had on democratization. First, she assumes that NGOs generate positive outcomes, without examining the possibility that these outcomes differ among social sectors; second, she fails to show exactly what the positive outcomes of democratization have been.

Other contributors to *Mexico's Democratic Challenges* also raise questions about the outcomes of democratization. Rodolfo Stavenhagen finds a somewhat greater representation of indigenous peoples in the past decades but only on select issues with fewer material implications. Indeed, as natural resources become more impor-

tant, their use is determined by less democratic governance. Similarly, Alejandro Moreno finds great contradictions with regard to the importance of democracy in the arena of public opinion. He documents that support for democratization, interest in politics, and the belief that Mexico is democratic have all grown, as has the belief that human rights are respected. Simultaneously, however, most Mexicans still distrust politics and feel that they are neither represented nor efficacious. Social trust has also declined. Even if citizens are affiliated with political parties, Moreno's data show that Mexicans consider these parties a source of division.

In contrast to the focus on institutions found in most chapters of *Mexico's Democratic Challenges*, John M. Ackerman reminds us of the roles that protest and movement actors have played, not only in the process of democratization but also in its protection. Indeed, for Ackerman, protests against the election of President Felipe Calderón in 2006 should be understood to police a system defined as much by vestiges of the past as by current reforms. Democracy does not require people to leave the streets. Instead, protest is a quintessential part of democratization, one that should not be given up quickly. Ackerman explains: "one of the most dangerous situations for a democracy, and especially for a nation undergoing democratization, may actually be when citizens blindly trust institutions that are in fact not trustworthy" (109).

These generally positive perceptions of democratization must be balanced against the significance of mass migration. David R. Ayón asks in *Mexico's Democratic Challenges* why fewer migrants participated in the 2006 elections despite greater institutional access and indeed representation, especially via bodies such as hometown associations. Ayón furthermore helps us understand that institutional changes are not the end-all of democratic reforms. The latter opened the agenda of migrants to new concerns, thus increasing the importance of remittances from abroad while diminishing that of the vote as a source of representation. Yet, curiously in a chapter about Mexican migration, Ayón ignores the influence exerted by the United States, with the exception of some discussion of the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. He also ignores that what he presents as greater accountability—the increase in hometown associations active in Mexican development—can best be understood as a response to the failure of the Mexican government under neoliberalism.

Like many researchers, Ayón avoids assessing the results of democratization in Mexico. Institutional access has grown; so, too, has the crucial economic role of immigrants. But how can we reconcile mass migration with the generally positive evaluations of democratization found in the other books under review? Put simply, if democratization has been so positive for Mexicans, why have so many Mexicans left the country?

#### BRINGING ECONOMICS BACK IN

The empirical answer to this question is, of course, that wages, employment, and welfare programs have plummeted in Mexico since the beginning of the neoliberal era in the early 1980s. This lengthy economic downturn presents a dilemma that most scholars of democratization ignore; few find economic outcomes

pertinent to their assessments. Nevertheless, even if they choose to set aside normative issues of social justice, studies of changes to formerly authoritarian states must in some fashion take stability into account. And stability and economic inequality are at odds.

Despite José Woldenberg's warnings about the dire effects of economic inequality in the foreword, none of the other contributors to *Mexico's Democratic Challenges* appears willing to take economic problems of this sort into account. Similarly, Cleary correlates collective action only with such typical measures of increased electoral competition as urbanization, education, and so on. Yet he ignores economic hardships, a key spur to protests about the delivery of services, his measure of governmental accountability. This lack of attention to neoliberalism is problematic, insofar as it ignores the resources that governments have available to address social needs, that is, to be accountable to their various constituencies. How are we to measure accountability if we do not take into account the diminution of governmental prerogatives under neoliberalism? If decentralization moves the resolution of problems to more local levels, neoliberal policies reduce the ability of all levels of government to be responsive. Cleary simply ignores the neoliberal shift.

In stark contrast, *Mexico's Economic Dilemma* makes the economy central to its research on the same period of democratization in Mexico. This focus leaves the analysis of the authors, James M. Cypher and Raúl Delgado Wise, a good deal less optimistic. Faithful in large part to dependency theory, Cypher and Delgado Wise find that neoliberal policies on trade, production, and migration have together made Mexico more dependent and vulnerable. Their major contribution is to show in painstaking detail that Mexico has followed not just an export model but one based on the comparative advantage of cheap labor both within and without the nation, tying Mexico ever more closely to U.S. consumers and labor markets. The focus on cheap labor, including millions of immigrants, reveals similar practices in both the maquiladora industry and what they call the "disguised *maquila* sector," which enjoys the same policy advantages but is not considered part of the maquiladora industry according to government accounting (107). The result is production that follows the needs of U.S. markets rather than the internal needs of Mexico.

Cypher and Delgado Wise consider that neither economic nor political challenges can be understood apart from the context of globalization. Uildriks offers a brief but similar analysis in his discussion of the great cost of drug violence and how it disrupts any genuine hope of police, prosecutorial, and judicial reforms. He recognizes that the systemic violence of drug trafficking cannot be properly resolved by the long-standing war on drugs. Only when the United States addresses its importance as a consumer market—which is akin to its importance as a labor market—can the traffic in drugs be disrupted and truly reformed.

#### PRESCRIBING DEMOCRATIC MEDICINES

The answer to the challenges of democratization appears to be more democratization, institution by institution. Despite Uildriks's recognition that corrup-

tion cannot be addressed by a single nation, he continues to focus on national policies to reform and professionalize Mexico's police forces. While advocating further reforms, he makes it clear that such efforts are likely to fail if they do not also resolve the underlying problems of personalism and clientelism, which force police to resort to corruption to survive. So, too, will respect for human rights be incomplete so long as these systemic problems persist. In short, Uildriks asserts, informal systems endure because the economic rewards of such systems remain unchanged.

Valdés Ugalde is similarly prescriptive; indeed, his final chapter is an unabashed call for a new constitution, not just piecemeal change. Without a new constitution, Mexican democracy runs the risk of involution in that the current constitution provides a legal basis for the traditional power structure of hegemony and presidentialism rather than protecting democratic rights. From this perspective, political liberalization is not equal to true democratic reform. For Valdés Ugalde, the result is the combination of new and old in ways inadequate to a pluralist system. An example is the electoral reforms documented in *Mexico's Democratic Challenges*, which create what Valdés Ugalde calls an incompletely pluralist and competitive democracy. This makes it impossible for the president and legislature to come to an accord, not because of an absence of will but because there are more incentives to act in the interest of political parties than in that of the public. Valdés Ugalde therefore recommends that Mexico's constitution be changed to strengthen the sovereignty of municipalities and states, to allow reelection, to reduce the terms of elected officials, and to strengthen the judiciary so as to make it more independent. All of these reforms share the goal of increasing representativeness.

Such advocacy returns us to the question of the relationship of prosperity to democracy. Does democratization matter if new governments do not serve their constituents any better than their predecessors? Of the authors under review, only Cypher and Delgado Wise address this question. For them, Mexico's import-substitution industrialization was not exhausted, as many believe, but was instead always shallow and insufficient compared to the more successful Asian practitioners. Cypher and Delgado Wise urge Mexican policy makers to adopt an industrial policy focused on alternative measures of production to capture more of the wealth that escapes Mexico as a result of the exploitation of workers and the flight of talent through migration. As comprehensive as their research is, befitting a case study of globalization, one must ask whether renationalizing the economy is truly a viable strategy. They propose a truly independent industrialization, with backward and forward linkages, and expenditures in research and development. But will this bring an alternative to current economic inequalities? Here again, studies of economic democratization need to engage more fully with those advocating political democratization.

#### DEMOCRATIZATION WITHOUT REDISTRIBUTION

The respect of human rights and the transformation from authoritarian rule to transparent and accessible government are laudable goals, and Mexico appears to



be on the road to achieving them both. But the works reviewed here offer important reminders that political democratization cannot provide stability and development without industrial, tax, trade, wage, employment, or other welfare policies that seek to redistribute income and wealth. Memories of the bad old days may not suffice for long to convince citizens of the superiority of democratization. The ongoing presence of personalism and informal networks, and of dependency and corruption, weakens the effort to democratize nations like Mexico. Both empirically and theoretically, there is in most analyses an unfortunate divorce between political and economic democratization.

Mexico is a contradictory democracy. Measures of public opinion, the delivery of goods, industrial investment, political efficacy, and representation are all rife with contradictions. It is difficult, for example, to reconcile a feeling that democracy has advanced with indications of limited efficacy. Similarly, it is difficult to reconcile increased access and fairness in electoral politics with economic policies that not only have kept a large segment of Mexico in poverty for thirty years but also have forced emigration by millions.

One of our academic errors may be a downsized theory of democratization that refuses to take material outcomes into account. Among the great successes of democratization literature was the move away from a static endpoint in which democracy was opposed to authoritarianism. Once theorists recognized that democratization was a process and could advance to different degrees, research became more nuanced and sophisticated. If we were to add material outcomes to this schema, we might similarly find better ways to understand how democracy matters to people.

At some point, greater electoral access amid policies that leave citizens impoverished will offer little reason for the latter to invest in democratic change. As all the authors under review note, public trust requires legitimate institutions. Legitimate institutions, in turn, require equitable action by institutional actors. Equitable action requires less polarization of power, benefits, and social goods. And neoliberalism, in Mexico and elsewhere, has demonstrated that a different economic schema is required to diminish polarization. Without economic democracy, political democratization can change only so much. Indeed, material outcomes are crucial, given that authoritarian governance denied so much to so many, both politically and materially. If the new social order resolves popular needs no better than its predecessor, why should it be accorded the legitimacy a noncoercive government needs?

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