

# Politics in Mexico

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*The Democratic Consolidation*

Fifth Edition

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## Groups and the State: What Is the Relationship?

The growth of electoral competition in Mexico has had uneven and ambiguous consequences on the role and shape of clientelistic interest-intermediation arrangements. As elsewhere in Latin America, democratization has clearly failed to destroy the political centrality of clientelistic structures. Rising electoral competition has not left, however, clientelism unchanged. The combination of more open political contestation, fiscal stringency and market reform has introduced major changes in the nature and scope of clientelistic arrangements.

BLANCA HEREDIA, "*Clientelism in Flux*"

All political systems, regardless of whether the struggle for political power is highly competitive or strongly monopolized by a small leadership group or single party, must cope with political interests and groups. In the United States various interest groups, as they are labeled, express their demands to the executive and legislative branches and contribute significant sums of money to parties and candidates. In Mexico, because the political system's structure is different from that of the United States, both the type of groups and their means for influencing public policy are not the same.

### THE RESIDUE OF CORPORATISM

The importance of corporatism to the Mexican political culture and pre-2000 model was noted earlier.<sup>1</sup> Corporatism describes the more formal relationship between selected groups or institutions and the government or state. Since the revolution—that is, for most of the twentieth century—Mexico used an interesting structure to channel the most influential groups' demands,

enabling the government to monitor the demands and mediate among them. The government has sought to act as the ultimate arbiter and to see to it that no one group becomes predominant.

The corporatist structure was largely devised and put in place under President Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940). Cárdenas wanted to strengthen the state's hand in order to protect the interests of the ordinary worker and peasant, but he ironically created a structure that for the most part benefited the interests of the middle classes and the wealthy, not unlike that of many other political systems.<sup>2</sup> The reason for this outcome is that Cárdenas' commitment to the social welfare of the less well off has not been shared by most of his successors, who have responded to other concerns and groups.

What is important, however, is that although the ideological orientation has changed and various economic strategies have been experimented with since the 1930s, the arrangement remained largely intact until the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> Only under President Salinas was there some interest in restructuring the corporatist relationship,<sup>4</sup> in response to Salinas's promises of political modernization and democracy. Critics argued that the corporatist structures provided the greatest stumbling block to a functioning Mexican democracy.<sup>5</sup> Some changes in the corporatist structure were introduced by recent presidents. Others, however, were the result of larger economic and political changes. Not only did the government have fewer resources to offer various groups, but its electoral competitors achieved huge inroads on PRI's monopoly regionally.<sup>6</sup> Fox's presidential victory clinched the demise of the corporatist system, depriving a PRI-controlled federal government from subsidizing or rewarding various groups.

Historically, the corporatist features of the political system allowed two types of channels for making political demands, and consequently two types of institutional representatives emerged prior to the 1990s. The institutional relationship with the government under this type of system was traditionally a formal one: The state established an organization, requiring those persons meeting the criteria of a special interest to belong to it. For example, the state created several business organizations to which businesses employing a certain number of employees must belong.<sup>7</sup> The state, however, even when PRI enjoyed a political monopoly, was not able to control all institutions representing various groups. Those it controlled were considered to be quasi-governmental interest organizations, part of the traditional corporatist structure.

Some interest groups increased their influence over time, becoming more autonomous. They created their own organizations, as would typically be the case in the United States, which were independent of the government. For example, the business community established the Mexican Association of Employers (Coparmex), an influential private-sector voice, frequently

voicing public opposition to government economic policies. Many of their members played a crucial role in supporting PAN electoral victories at the state and local level, especially in northern Mexico.<sup>8</sup>

The other kind of channel is the informal channel, which is characteristic of all government models. Certain groups in Mexico do not use formal institutions, independent or governmental, to exercise their considerable influence, but instead use informal channels. The informal channels may be incorporated in the governmental structure or remain independent of it. We cannot assert with complete certainty that the informal channels are more significant than the formal channels, but given the lack of relevant studies, most observers of Mexican politics believe that to be the case.

### INSTITUTIONAL VOICES

The range of interest groups in the United States is formidable because of the political system's openness and the ability of multitudes of like-minded citizens and institutions to organize. Such collectivities in Mexico are fewer and weak, and do not figure as significantly in decision making.<sup>9</sup> Remember that decision making remains centered in the executive branch, thus blocking the ability of diverse interests to pressure the legislative branch despite its growing influence. Further, the prohibition against running consecutively for legislative seats limits the potential threat that interests can level against individual members of Congress. Nevertheless, interest groups have gradually increased in number and influence, addressing their concerns to congress as it initiates greater numbers of bills. As members of PAN and PRD have taken over as chairs of the committee structure in congress, they have shown an interest and autonomy in pursuing policy issues related to certain groups, including the armed forces and the Zapatista guerrillas. As a leading student of the congress concluded, "the long period during which congress neither mattered nor paid attention to government actions has come to an end."<sup>10</sup> This will have a significant impact on future group relations with the state.

The most important groups incorporated formally and informally in Mexico's interest group structure are the military, the Catholic Church, business, organized labor, intellectuals and the media, nongovernmental organizations, and guerrillas. Each has a somewhat different institutional relationship to the government.<sup>11</sup> Most have stood out historically in other Latin American countries, suggesting the significance of similar past experiences and the influence of the colonial heritage on contemporary politics in the region.

### *The Military*

No group has played a more significant role in Latin American political life than the military. However, since the 1930s its pattern of influence in Mexico has been quite different from that found elsewhere in Latin America. Most important, the military has found it necessary to intervene politically in every Latin American country except Mexico since that decade, and in most countries the military seized power in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>12</sup>

The military's relationship to the Mexican state or government is different from that of most other groups. The reason is that the military does not function as a separate political actor; rather, it is part of the government apparatus and operates under civilian leadership. This does not mean that the military does not have institutional interests; rather, it publically subsumes its differences from those of the state.

Since the 1930s Mexico's civil-military relationship has been increasingly characterized by subordination of the military and of its interests to those of society as defined by the civilian leadership.<sup>13</sup> Aside from Costa Rica, which has operated without an army since the late 1940s Mexico is an exception. How did its unusual relationship come about?

When Cárdenas became president—and he was part of the generation that had participated in Mexico's civil war—he incorporated the military into the recently established government party, the National Revolutionary Party (PNR). He wanted to balance the military against the agrarian and labor sectors within the party and thus lessen its overall political influence.<sup>14</sup>

Cárdenas's successor in the presidency, General Manuel Avila Camacho, altered this major characteristic of the early corporatist structure by removing the military as a separate party sector.<sup>15</sup> Basically, he did not want to recognize the military as having a public, political voice and did not want to give it equal standing with other notable interest groups. From the 1940s to the present, then, the military's relationship to the government has been determined by its formal structural ties to the executive branch and through informal channels.

The political leadership gradually reduced the military's political influence through a variety of techniques. In the first place, as James Wilkie showed, each successive government reduced the military's allocation as a percentage of the federal budget from 1921 to 1964.<sup>16</sup> The size of the military in relation to population, and the sum budgeted to the military per capita, was among the lowest worldwide, far below the figures for the United States,<sup>17</sup> but has risen significantly in the 1990s. Under Zedillo, military expenditures averaged 5 percent instead of 2 to 3 percent, placing it midway among countries' per capita expenditures. The armed forces were

**Table 6-1** Changes in Mexico's Armed Forces by Administration

Administration	Size Last Year of Administration	Percentage Increase
2000-2003	241,143	1.7
1994-2000	237,025	9.7
1988-1994	214,681	16.4
1982-1988	179,305	35.2
1976-1982	116,050	29.3
1970-1976	82,500	18.3
1964-1970	67,100	37.3

Sources: George W. Grayson, *Mexico's Armed Forces, A Fact Book* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS, 1999), 39; and Ernesto Zedillo, *Sexto Informe, Anexo Estadístico*, Disco 11, 2000.

179,000 in 1988, and reached 215,000 in 1994. They now number approximately 241,000 (see Table 6-1).<sup>18</sup>

As the political leadership gradually reduced the size and potential influence of the military, it strengthened the legitimacy of political institutions, including the official party (PRI). Government politicians had the advantage of operating in a semiauthoritarian fashion within the electoral arena. Military intervention is generally facilitated by competing political groups in a society that are seeking allies in the military. In Mexico, however, the military had to be either for the establishment—that is, the civilian leadership—or against it, and it had no outside civilian allies after 1952. During the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, military officers who pursued political careers helped bridge the gap between civilian and military officials. In other words, these political military officers provided a significant, *informal* channel of communication, allowing the civilian leadership to solidify its control and to establish its legitimacy.

Civilian leadership also cemented its control over the military through the professional socialization process. Civilian politicians established several military schools, most notably the Heroic Military College, the Superior War College, and in 1981 the National Defense College, to train officers. One of the most important themes in the curriculum of the schools is respect for authority, for one's superior officer, and for the commander in chief, the president. All military schools tend to drill in their cadets the concept of subordination to authority, but Mexican military academies are famous for the level of discipline they instill. An American officer, a graduate of a U.S. military academy, wrote that the dominant value would be the individual's willingness to subordinate himself totally to those in authority over him and the expectation that submission would be rewarded and independence would be

severely punished. An officer's primary motivation would be to secure the rewards that the system has to offer.<sup>19</sup>

Colonel Steven Wager, one of the most knowledgeable Mexican military analysts, argued:

Most of the political influence the military has attained since World War II has derived from its crisis management role, which has been fairly limited. However, that role has more often served as a double-edged sword for the army, rather than the distinct advantage some experts have perceived. Since the unfortunate incidents during the student uprisings in 1968, military leaders have been reluctant to participate in crisis situations, preferring to leave police actions to local and state authorities. The irony is that only by defending the state in a major crisis can the army substantially augment its power and prestige within the Mexican system.<sup>20</sup>

For these reasons and many others, the military is clearly subordinate to the civilian political leadership in Mexico. This does not mean that it has little or no influence on the government. The military has served the government in many capacities other than those traditionally subscribed to by the military in the United States.<sup>21</sup> The Mexican military's primary responsibility has not been national defense; rather, it has operated in many realms as an internal police force devoted to national security.<sup>22</sup> Not only does it provide the government with political intelligence, but it also has been used to maintain electoral peace, to settle contentious strikes, and, in the 1980s and 1990s, to carry out antinarcotics raids and repress incipient guerrillas.

The activities that will most affect the military's relationship to the state and increase or decrease its potential influence over the decision-making process are its roles in the anti-drug-trafficking campaign and in maintaining public security, which emerged in the 1990s as national security issues of significant proportions.<sup>23</sup> This led to a public debate on the militarization of society.<sup>24</sup> The United States not only has generated demand for illegal drugs, but by restricting sea and land routes through the Caribbean, the Drug Enforcement Agency increased the number of locations in Mexico used in drug transshipments from Latin America. The alleged connection of drug trafficking and drug monies to the assassinations of the PRI's presidential candidate, the Tijuana police chief, and Cardinal Posadas in Guadalajara during the 1990s, indicates the depth to which drug-related corruption has penetrated the Mexican political establishment.<sup>25</sup> In response to growing levels of crime and drug-related violence, President Zedillo established a National Public Security Council in 1996, giving for the first time "Mexico's military a role in decision making and policy-setting in important domestic public security matters."<sup>26</sup> Fox, responding to the public's concern

for personal security, created a new cabinet-level agency, National Public Security, in 2000 (see Table 6-2).

The decision of the Mexican government to use the Mexican armed forces in drug interdiction missions has exposed the military at all levels to drug-related corruption. Salinas fired his navy secretary midway through his administration when it became apparent that naval officials were using military installations and ports to transport drugs. Zedillo removed his first highly touted drug czar, General Jesús Gutiérrez Rebollo, just weeks after his appointment in 1997, when it became apparent that he too was in the pay of a drug cartel. Finally, officials under President Fox, only four months into his administration, arrested a commander of a mechanized brigade along the Texas border for providing protection from arrest to drug traffickers.<sup>27</sup> The degree to which various units of the military are compromised by drug corruption increases their autonomy from civilian authorities and their own superiors, provokes interagency rivalries, and hastens the decline of military institutional integrity. Given the amounts of money involved and the constant demand from the United States, this is a serious, deeply troubling issue that will not disappear in the foreseeable future. It contributes heavily to political instability and to problems in the military-civilian relationship and the societal-institutional relationship generally.<sup>28</sup> Fox promised to withdraw the armed forces from their drug missions during his presidential campaign, but on taking office found he could not replace them with other agencies.

The expanded military role in national security matters raises international and human rights issues too. In 1997 and 1998, according to the *Washington Post*, some 1,067 Mexican officers were trained at United States bases, and the Central Intelligence Agency instructed 90 officers in intelligence-gathering courses to enhance their participation in counter-narcotics activities. Critics charge that equipment supplied to the armed forces for anti-drug trafficking use can be applied indiscriminately against ordinary citizens or guerrilla sympathizers.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 6-2** Deaths of Mexican Soldiers in the War on Drugs

Administration	Troops and Officers Who Died Combating Drug Traffickers
López Portillo	38
De la Madrid	103
Salinas	135
Zedillo	85
Fox	55 <sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>As of July 2003.

Source: [www.sedena.gob.mx](http://www.sedena.gob.mx), transparency request, folio 0000700031503, July 14, 2003.

Drug corruption and its consequences will be the most intractable problem facing Mexico's leaders for the foreseeable future, but the country's most immediate political issue refocusing attention on civil-military relations was the attack by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) on January 1, 1994, on army encampments in the highlands of Chiapas. The military had provided accurate intelligence on the Zapatistas' activities long before their surprise attack, but civilian intelligence authorities in the Secretariat of Government either chose to ignore that information or convinced themselves that they could delay resolving festering conflicts in the region, despite evidence to the contrary. The response of the Mexican army was swift and repressive and led to numerous allegations of human rights abuses and summary executions. However, because of the extraordinary Mexican and foreign media coverage, President Salinas quickly reined in the military.

The armed forces used extreme force against the Zapatista attacks, but it has not been anxious to suppress large groups of Mexicans in response to mishandled civilian policies since the debacle of the 1968 student massacre. This decision has led military leaders to demand a larger voice in formulating government security policy, rather than merely acting as a tool for resolving civilian mistakes.<sup>30</sup> According to one analyst, a high-ranking army officer publicly declared that the army would not attack the Zapatistas unless the EZLN attacked first and more important, it would do so only if Congress approved.<sup>31</sup> The military lost the public relations war to the Zapatistas in 1994, damaging in the process its institutional and self-image. Thus, because of the price it paid for civilian failures, it asked for and received a larger role in the policy process under the Zedillo administration.

The situation with the Zapatistas remains unsettled, but army troops have had to respond to a smaller and more widespread guerrilla organization, the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP), which emerged in the summer of 1996 and has operated in numerous states, as far north as the border state of Tamaulipas. According to General Clemente Vega García, the Secretary of National Defense, it is the ERP, not the EZLN, which the armed forces considers a national security threat.<sup>32</sup> Accordingly, the military not only demanded a higher price from the government for its continued loyalty, but perhaps more important, because of the increasing political pluralization, supported the legitimacy of Vicente Fox's presidential election. The pluralist environment in Congress, and the strength of PAN and PRD, do offer the military the option for the first time in Mexico's recent history of forming alliances outside the government, thereby placing in jeopardy its traditional relationship with executive branch authorities.

The armed forces has been undergoing many subtle internal changes in response to problems that have surfaced in the last few years. It has had to cope with dissident officers complaining publicly about due process within

the military justice system, it has raised the issue of concentrated decision-making in the hands of the secretariat of national defense, it has made an effort to increase its professionalization, including its capabilities in electronic warfare and public relations, it has sought to expand the number of civilian employees inside the military, and it has increased its formal contacts with civilian government employees in the recent graduating classes from the prestigious National Defense College.<sup>33</sup>

President Fox has signaled his decision to work closely with the armed forces and to give them a broader role in national security concerns, appointing for the first time in many decades a senior military officer to a nonmilitary cabinet post, that of attorney general. Civil-military relations have changed significantly under President Fox's administration. The secretary of the navy and, to a lesser extent, the secretary of national defense have instituted internal, structural changes affecting the promotion process, human rights training, and, in the case of the navy, drastic reductions in the top naval bureaucracy and a radical reduction in the number of admirals on active duty. The relationship between the attorney general and the armed forces has been stronger under Fox than any recent president and has led to extensive collaboration in the armed forces' anti-drug mission. The application of the new transparency law beginning in June 2003 has opened the military to greater public scrutiny by the media and scholars. The increasing interest of the legislative branch in military affairs resulted, for the first time in history, to testimony by a secretary of national defense in the legislative chambers, during which various deputies, with the media present, questioned the secretary extensively on a wide range of controversial issues. Finally, the military has continued to maintain and improve its public image. In a 2004 poll it shared top ranking (60 percent) with the Catholic Church (64 percent) and the Federal Electoral Institute (61 percent) in favorable opinions among ordinary citizens expressing a good or very good opinion of the institution. Moreover, among all the institutions listed, it had the lowest percentage of negative ratings.<sup>34</sup>

### *The Church*

Mexico legally established and, in practice, enjoys freedom of religion, yet Mexicans, as we noted in Chapter 4, are overwhelmingly Catholic, products of a Catholic, Christian culture.<sup>35</sup> The Catholic Church exercised extraordinary political influence in Mexico and elsewhere in the region during the colonial period and continued to do so in much of the nineteenth century and part of the twentieth.<sup>36</sup>

The government broke this pattern of influence by implementing virulent anticlerical provisions in the 1917 Constitution in an attempt to limit the

church's ideological influence over the socialization of citizen values. Articles 3 and 130 specified these restrictive clauses, which limited religious influence in education, spelled out numerous restrictions on clergy's political involvement, and clearly established state superiority over the church. Clergy's and Catholics's resistance to the implementation of these provisions under President Calles led to the Cristero War from 1926 to 1929, during which time many priests were persecuted, masses were suspended, and seminaries were closed.

The church, unlike the military, operated as an institution fully independent of the government yet severely hampered in theory and practice by the constitution. The state reached an informal understanding with the church after 1930 that in effect allowed it to carry out the spiritual and pastoral functions within the purview of all churches in return for its remaining publicly quiet about political and social issues. The understanding remained in effect until 1992 and in practice was fairly well followed by both parties until the early 1980s.

The church's role as an interest group was limited because of the antichurch rhetoric that was incorporated into the public education of each child in Mexico. The church and clergy were at a disadvantage compared with some other groups in the corporatist arrangement because of the legal limbo they occupied. For example, the church as an institution had no legal standing until 1992, the only institution among the organized groups under discussion. Before 1992, clergy of all faiths did not have a legal right to vote, although many actually did.<sup>37</sup>

As Chapter 4 pointed out, Mexicans nonetheless remain very religious: Many are practicing Catholics, and most have a high regard for clergy and the church as an institution. Half of all Mexicans attend church regularly, about the same percentage as in the United States.<sup>38</sup> Because respect for the church is high and political organizations did not provide adequate channels for people to express their political demands, some Mexicans turned to the church for guidance and, more important, as an institutional vehicle to convey their political frustrations. This trend is reinforced by the fact that Mexican priests support such a posture (Table 6-3). Catholic bishops have begun to speak regularly and critically, illustrating the view expressed by Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera of the Mexico City archdiocese that a "silent Church does not serve God nor humanity."<sup>39</sup>

The church, as is true of other groups, such as businessmen, does not speak with a single voice. Despite its image as a centralized, hierarchical institution, it is decentralized at the level of individual dioceses, of which there are seventy-three in Mexico. Dioceses and archdioceses are territorial subdivisions that serve as organizational units, and each is governed by a

**Table 6-3** Attitudes of Parish Priests Toward Democracy and Political Participation

	Agree	Disagree	No Opinion	Don't Know
Questions Asked	(percentages)			
The Church should support democratiza- tion even though it might produce conflicts with the government	88	5	4	3
The new evangelization requires an open promise from the church for a more just and democratic society in spite of the fact that it might produce conflicts with the government	81	4	3	12

Source: Adapted from Oscar Aguilar Ascencio, "La iglesia católica y la democratización en México," in *La iglesia católica y la política en el México de hoy*, ed. José de Jesús Legoretta Zepeda (Mexico: Ibero-American University, 2000), 171.

bishop or archbishop. Collectively, these men are the extremely autonomous hierarchy of the church.

The leadership of the church in Mexico in terms of policy influence is the episcopate—the body of bishops, archbishops, and cardinals—which in conference recommends policies on issues ranging from the purely theological to foreign debt, the maldistribution of income, and drugs. The episcopal meetings result in the publication of pastoral letters and enunciations of recommended positions.

It is apparent from recent events in Mexico that the geography and the social and economic composition of a diocese often affect the attitude and orientation of its priests and bishops. The most extreme example of this recently was, of course, Bishop Samuel Ruiz in Chiapas, whose clergy represented rural, indigenous interests in San Cristóbal de las Casas. Ruiz's firm stance in defense of the Indians, both before and after the Zapatista uprising, engendered criticism as well as support within episcopal ranks.<sup>40</sup> The Vatican has ordered his diocese to stop ordaining secular Indian deacons in an effort to dismantle Ruiz's ideological influence.<sup>41</sup>

The most important issue in the 1990s that unified bishops nationally, however, was the issue of democratization. Not only did individual bishops issue numerous pastoral letters on this topic, as early as the late 1980s, but the episcopate itself adopted several of these letters as its official position. In particular, bishops addressed several specific issues, especially the obligation to vote, electoral fraud, and the so-called "fear vote." The episcopate declared in 2000, shortly before the election, that it was a sin for any party to use scare tactics as a means of encouraging partisan support.<sup>42</sup> The Mexican Episcopate, recognizing the importance of the 2000 presidential race, produced a pamphlet entitled *Democracy Isn't Possible Without You*, in

which it urged all Mexicans to vote according to their conscience and to select candidates they believed most ideal to serve the nation.<sup>43</sup>

The tone of many bishops' commentaries have also changed in recent years. Numerous bishops now believe it is their responsibility to take stands on significant social, economic, and political issues, a belief that has produced implicit and explicit criticism of government actions. In fact, the episcopate warned the Fox government not to fail to help the citizenry, especially poorer Mexicans.<sup>44</sup> One bishop commented:

One point that is important to make which is independent of the present condition in Mexico is that the Church, both the bishops and priests, consider it necessary to socialize the people about their civic obligations regardless of what the political situation might be. The people are very ignorant of their civic responsibilities. From a moral point of view, we need to create a sense of consciousness. All of this can be badly interpreted by the government, which may see us wanting to reestablish political privileges we have had historically. For us, however, it is obvious that we have no desire to make policy decisions that are handled presently by the government. We only believe we have a responsibility to defend the people. Who else is there?<sup>45</sup>

Bishops have continued this critical posture throughout the Fox administration, raising critical questions about such issues as the government's labor reforms and complete liberty of expression for all Mexicans, including clergy.

Some bishops have strengthened their positions by joining together to explain their views. The most memorable instance in recent years was that of the northern bishops, led by Archbishop Adalberto Almeida of Chihuahua; they condemned election fraud in Chihuahua in 1986 and called on the administration of Miguel de la Madrid to annul the results and hold new elections.<sup>46</sup> The bishops threatened to stop saying mass until the government responded to their demands. The pope intervened to prevent their carrying out the threat, but the bishops' public posture, in direct violation of the constitution, illustrated their potential influence.

President Salinas moved, as part of his modernization plans, to make the Catholic Church a more open actor in the political system. Many politicians resisted any changes in the constitutional restrictions on the church, but Salinas believed the relationship was outdated and needed refashioning. Demonstrating his new posture, he invited leading clergy to attend his inauguration in December 1988 and then appointed a former political figure as his personal representative to the Vatican. He also made Pope John Paul a welcome guest in Mexico in the summer of 1991, creating even closer relations between the government and the church. In 1992, Salinas revised several major constitutional provisions, one of which now permits recognition

of all churches as legal entities. However, the reforms did leave several major constitutional issues unresolved, among them "religious education in public schools, access to electronic means of mass communication, [and] fiscal measures for religious associations."<sup>47</sup>

The church generally does not openly lobby for its political positions; rather, it requests and receives audiences with the state officials. Typically, party presidential candidates meet with bishops during their campaigns.<sup>48</sup> Fox even sent a ten-point proposal to the Catholic and evangelical hierarchy two months before the election.<sup>49</sup> Church personnel also meet with various members of the executive branch on matters of mutual concern. On the state level, bishops frequently exchange views with state governors and collaborate with the government on social welfare projects. Relations are good as a rule and have improved considerably since 1989, but at the local level in certain instances, such as in the southern state of Chiapas, they may be quite conflictual. Chiapas has witnessed the deportation of priests, armed attacks on the bishop, conflicts among various religious groups, and the intervention of various outside national and international actors, including the Vatican envoy. The San Cristóbal de las Casas diocese has become deeply embroiled in the Chiapan conflict, involving indigenous peasants, mestizo ranchers, the government, paramilitary groups, and the army. With bishop Samuel Ruiz's retirement in 2000, and Fox's efforts to reduce potential sources of friction, conflicts there have declined.

The open posture of church leaders in advocating civic participation, and stating their views on broad national policy, has extended to the position of individual politicians too. Leading bishops have called on politicians to profess openly their religious faith, thus setting a spiritual example for other Mexicans.<sup>50</sup> President Fox himself provides the most prominent example of this recent pattern. When the pope visited Mexico in 2002 in celebration of the canonization of a Mexican saint, critics charged that Fox, the first president to attend a public religious act presided over by the pope, should not have attended the mass nor demonstrated publicly his respect for the pope by kissing his hand. The Mexican public, however, overwhelming supported (more than 80 percent) the president attending the mass, publicly demonstrating his religious devotion, and exercising the same religious rights as any ordinary Mexican.<sup>51</sup>

Raising the visibility of religious beliefs among the population at large, and politicians specifically, might well affect public policy. A unique study of Mexican congresspersons demonstrates significant differences in their levels of religiosity, measured by Church attendance. (Table 6-4) PAN members of congress are more religious and more Catholic than the Mexican population. Ninety-seven percent are Catholic and 3 percent Protestant.

**Table 6-4** Religious Attendance Among Members of Congress

Party Affiliation	Frequency of Attendance (percentages)				
	Once a Week	Monthly	Infrequently	Rarely	Never
PRI	13	9	28	34	16
PAN	58	27	8	7	0
PRD	5	0	13	22	60

*Source:* Based on interviews with members of the 1994–1997 Legislature. See Antonia Martínez, "Diputados, clivajes (cleavages) y polarización en México," *Perfiles latinoamericanos*, 11 (December, 1997), 57.

PRD congresspersons, on the other hand, express low levels of religiosity, with two-thirds declaring no religious affiliation; the other third are Catholic. The PRIista deputies are most representative of the population generally, with 87 percent Catholics, 10 percent no religion, and 3 percent Protestants. The attendance patterns reflected in Table 6-4 demonstrate that PAN politicians practice their religious faith more intensely. These religious beliefs, as the author of this research argues, may affect politicians' views on important issues, including such controversial topics as divorce and abortion, on which the deputies from each party take substantially different positions.

The constitutional reforms of 1992 effectively legitimized the church's institutional role.<sup>52</sup> Some observers believe the constitutional reforms decrease the church's autonomy, but in practice the state actually legitimized it, decreasing the negative impact of the liberal heritage and allowing the church a greater part in nonspiritual matters. The church is unlikely to confront antagonistically the state on secular matters, but it has become a more influential actor and will make its voice heard on national issues as societal dissension heats up.<sup>53</sup> The church does not foment dissent; rather, it mirrors its constituency's existing frustrations. The church's openly critical posture on policy issues, when it deems it necessary, has continued under Fox, and has led to petitions to both the Vatican and the government to prevent bishops from interfering in internal political affairs.<sup>54</sup>

### *Business*

The private business sector combines some of the features of a governmental institution, the military, with those of an autonomous institution, the Church. As pointed out earlier, an array of its organizations present its demands to the government. The most important quasi-governmental organizations, established by the government itself, are a group of federations



that include the National Chamber of Industries (Canacindra, or CNIT), the National Chamber of Commerce (Concanaco), and the National Federation of Chamber of Industries (Concamin). These organizations have been considerably weakened since 1996, when the Supreme Court ruled against obligatory chamber membership, leaving them insufficient revenues from membership fees and dependent on secretary of commerce subsidies. The most important autonomous organizations, in addition to Coparmex, are the Mexican Insurance Association (AMIS), the Mexican Council of Businessmen (CMHN), and, the Mexican Bankers Association.

When Cárdenas established some of these quasi-governmental business groups, the private sector was rather weak. As it has grown, it has not only developed other organizations to represent its own interests, but has often taken positions on economic policies different from those advocated by the government.<sup>55</sup> The private sector, however, has labored under conditions similar to the constraints on the church, although not nearly as extreme. The government prior to 2000 allowed labor, professional organizations, and peasants to be formally represented in the PRI, but it purposely excluded the private sector. It did so because private-sector interests did not coincide with the rhetoric of the postrevolutionary leadership, even if in reality their interests have been shared.

The quasi-governmental organizations are not the most important means for expressing private-sector demands. Again, the significance of *informal* channels to express those demands becomes apparent. One prominent businessman described the actuality:

Sometimes it is the business groups which approach the government concerning policy questions, and in other situations it is the government which takes the initiative with the private sector through the individual chambers. It is really what you might call a corporatist situation in which the government and the private sector are tied together as far as interest representation. The difference between our system and that in your country is that here we try to influence directly the minister of the appropriate secretariat rather than going through the legislative branch. Normally, even though we try to directly influence the minister in charge, we first go through the chamber before approaching the individual personally.<sup>56</sup>

Recognizing the advantage of collective representation, at least on certain issues, businessmen created a unitary body to represent the top organizations: the Businessmen's Coordinating Council (CCE). The CCE, however, is not representative of its own members, even though it speaks for them. The most influential business organization in Mexico is the semi-secret CMHN, which is made up of thirty-nine prominent capitalists. The members meet frequently with cabinet members, and occasionally with the

president. Just three weeks after his election, president-elect Fox met with members of the council at the Bankers Club. The meeting was arranged by one of its members, a long-time friend and school companion of Fox from the Ibero-American University.<sup>57</sup> It is clear from the literature that the CMHN rarely makes direct demands on the government or the president; rather, membership in this elite organization is used to gain individual access to the president or the appropriate government official.<sup>58</sup> What is ignored by analysts, however, is the fact that the council serves as an influential vehicle through which capitalists network and advance their own business interests. In short, it functions as an informal interest group between politicians and leading capitalists and a crucial personal link between capitalists. Another informal group, known as the "21 Group," is even more discrete. Founded in 1992, and including some of the same members as the CMHN, it supported President Fox's preference for a new international airport in late 2001.<sup>59</sup> The CMHN shares certain similarities to the Japanese *Keidanren*, a super-business organization.<sup>60</sup>

A structural condition in Mexico that explains the added importance of capitalists, and facilitates informal processes, including business-government networking, is the fact that the majority of Mexico's top corporations remain in the hands of a small number of wealthy families. Whether they are listed on the stock exchange in Mexico or in New York, these families dominate Mexico's manufacturing, industrial, and technological economy. Consequently, individual capitalists influence corporate decision-making to a greater extent than found in most post-industrial societies, including the United States.

Until the 1970s, business and government maintained a relatively stable and symbiotic relationship, although tensions did exist.<sup>61</sup> By the end of Luis Echeverría's administration in 1976, these tensions were increasing as the government began to expand its economic role, buying up privately operated enterprises and initiating policies that ran counter to private-sector interests. This culminated in the 1982 decision by President José López Portillo (1976–1982) to nationalize privately owned banks. There followed a significant break between the private sector and the government and the former's great distrust of the latter.<sup>62</sup>

President Miguel de la Madrid worked assiduously in the 1980s to repair the damaged relationship and partially succeeded. Nevertheless, smaller independent business groups under Coparmex's vociferous leadership advocated a more energetic political activism for businessmen, including open support for opposition parties. These groups began to campaign for candidates of the National Action Party, and members even ran for state and local offices, especially in northern Mexico.<sup>63</sup> Their position was symbol-

ized in the 1988 presidential race when a successful northern businessman, Manuel Clouthier, a former president of both Coparmex and the CCE, opposed Salinas on the PAN ticket. Clouthier's candidacy had even longer-term significance, since one of the businessmen he recruited was none other than Vicente Fox. Bussinessmen's commitment became more intense and had positive results in the 1992 Chihuahua gubernatorial campaign, in which many of their members supported the PAN's victorious candidate, Francisco Barrio. The direct involvement of businessmen in political campaigns has continued and increased, and several prominent businessmen served as advisers to Fox during his presidential race, becoming members of his administration after his election. These radically changing patterns are illustrated by the fact that among the thirty-four newly elected governors from 1997 to 2004, nearly half of the PAN governors were local or national leaders of Coparmex or other business organizations. Among all governors from this period, three out of ten came from business backgrounds (see Table 5-2).

PAN was not the only party which made inroads in the traditional government-business alliance. Dissident members of Canacintra, opposed to the entire formal, corporatist arrangement between business organizations and the state prior to 1996, found a strong ally in the PRD. As one observer argues, "PRD officials saw an opportunity to broaden the party's base of support to include one faction of business. Thus, the PRD integrated the private sector dissidents' anti-corporatist campaign with their own on-going criticisms of the state's liberal economic policies and authoritarian practices."<sup>64</sup>

Businessmen, more than any other group in Mexico with the exception of the political leaders themselves, have the capability of influencing government decisions, especially in the economic realm. They have not been able to do so consistently or to a meaningful degree. This can be seen most vividly in the private sector's open criticism of Zedillo's austerity policy, thereby jeopardizing its success. Government economic policy, which has favored business's interests more frequently than those of organized labor, has emerged as much from the self-interest or preferences of government leaders as from private-sector pressures. Given Fox's macro-economic preferences, and his business background, this is not likely to change in the foreseeable future. On the other hand, numerous conflicts have occurred between the Fox administration and the private sector over major policy issues, indicative of divisions within the business community.<sup>65</sup>

The overt participation of entrepreneurs in the electoral arena has changed the traditional relationship between business and government.<sup>66</sup> Entrepreneurs' support was crucial to the PAN's successes and strengthened the opposition generally before 2000. As individual businesses or business

groups become directly tied to the electoral process and to the fortunes of political candidates, they acquire powerful political capital that they can use to negotiate with the state. In turn, governments must pay closer attention to business's demands, especially given the increasing electoral competitiveness and business's greater ability to determine the outcome of elections. Organized business groups that collectively support candidacies and parties are likely to expand their influence too.<sup>67</sup> Because the former quasi-governmental organizations have formed alliances with the autonomous groups to criticize government economic policies, business organizations no longer can even be considered remotely corporatist.<sup>68</sup> This greater activity marks a significant change in entrepreneurial political behavior and, if adapted elsewhere in Mexico, will cause major alterations in state-group relations.

### *Organized Labor*

Of all the groups with political influence in Mexico, organized labor best met the criteria of an ideal, traditional corporatist group. One of the contributing causes of the Mexican Revolution was the suppression of the working class under the Porfiriato. General Obregón recognized the political importance of labor and relied on labor's support in his struggles against President Venustiano Carranza. The labor movement started to grow in the 1920s, and in the next decade membership in labor organizations reached 15.4 percent of the economically active workforce. It has not grown in percentage terms since 1940 and by 1970 began to decline.<sup>69</sup>

Organized labor in Mexico is quite different from that in the United States. The first distinguishing characteristic is the preponderance of government employees, most of them federal, who account for more than a third of all organized workers. The second characteristic is that organized labor is made up of unions called confederations, similar to the chambers of the business organizations. Nearly half of organized laborers are members of these broad confederations. The third differentiating characteristic of labor is the lesser presence of purely industrial-based unions such as those of miners, electricians, and petroleum workers. These characteristics are undergoing significant change since PRI's defeat in 2000.

The most important labor organization, the Mexican Federation of Labor (CTM), was established under President Cárdenas. He and his successors maintained a close relationship with union leaders that amounted to government control.<sup>70</sup> The control was cemented by incorporating the CTM as the foundation of one of the three sectorial pillars of the National Revolutionary Party—a role that continues to this day. The CTM was led from

the 1940s to 1997 by Fidel Velázquez, giving him considerable stature and influence in the labor movement.<sup>71</sup> More than any other characteristic, organized labor's status within the party placed it in the semi-corporatist fold. Unlike business, the church, or even the military, which is incorporated into the state itself, organized labor has had a prominent role in the PRI. Between 1979 and 1988, for example, 21 to 25 percent of the PRI's congressional candidates were labor leaders, most commonly from the CTM.<sup>72</sup> Since President Fox's election, the percentage of labor deputies as a proportion of PRI members of congress has declined dramatically, accounting for a mere 9 percent in 2003.<sup>73</sup> This does not mean that it influenced the decision-making process but, rather, that its relationship with the government, through the party, was formalized, legitimized, and visible.

A small but growing percentage of unions in Mexico are independent of PRI control. One of the most interesting consequences of the North American Free Trade Agreement's (NAFTA) labor provisions is the impact on labor-government relations generally, and specifically on legitimizing independent organizations. In 1997, for the first time in history, a PRI-affiliated union was decertified in favor of an independent union among the 2,700 assembly (*maquiladora*) plants. In some cases their leadership has been able to obtain better benefits for members than have government-controlled unions. On the other hand, previous studies of independent unions in Mexico reveal that democratically elected leaders typically do not better represent the demands of the rank and file than do the designated leaders in government-controlled unions. This pattern has changed under Fox. It is apparent that even international protests against conditions in multinational corporations in Mexico has led to newly independent union representation among some firms, and that their leadership, at least initially, is responsive to worker demands.<sup>74</sup> It became clear that independent unions would make significant inroads after 2001, when the Supreme Court, following a series of other court decisions, ruled against provisions in the Federal Labor Law giving preference to the established, corporatist unions.<sup>75</sup>

The government prior to 2000 used unions to prevent the mobilization of large-scale opposition. "The government treats labor as a firm parent would a teenager. When it needs support in family crises and labor quickly provides it, it rewards the action. But when labor strays away from the family fold, it is scolded in a variety of ways. The government, not organized labor, controls the relationship."<sup>76</sup>

In the past, the government often promoted new unions and leaders to keep established unions in line. The removal of PRI-affiliated politicians from the national government in 2000, however, has effectively eliminated the ability of the government to continue such policies. The corporatist system of integrating most of organized labor within the PRI required that

it control the government bureaucracy, providing resources for patronage and the establishment of new unions. The government also subsidized favored unions, creating a dependent relationship, because most unions were unable to charge dues.<sup>77</sup> Since 1997, within months of Fidel Velázquez's death, other labor leaders formed the National Workers Union (UNT), an umbrella organization composed of 110 unions and two million workers, to oppose the CTM. The UNT has a different agenda from the traditional trade unions. In 2002, the long-time leader of the telephone workers' union and secretary general of the UNT resigned from the PRI and established a new organization.

Even the more cohesive National Teachers Union (SNTE) has been faced with numerous dissident movements in response to President Fox negotiating a salary increase with the former union head without involving its national leadership. Perhaps the most influential sources of change within the labor movement are recent decisions by the Supreme Court. In April 2001, for example, the court ruled against the existing federal labor law, which allowed employees to be fired if they left the union that held a collective contract with the employer. This and other decisions are significantly changing Mexican labor culture. In response to these decisions, the Federal Workers Union (FSTSE) recently told members they could affiliate with any party of their choice.<sup>78</sup>

The National Teachers Union is the largest single organization among government workers' unions, and one of the most important groups in Mexico. A study of it provides interesting data on its techniques for conveying demands to the private sector and the government (see Table 6-5). Mexican unions must convince the government that their demands are legitimate; otherwise, they cannot legally strike. Determinations of legality are made by conciliation and arbitration boards, on which the government representative holds the deciding vote. The strike is only one means of conveying demands; marches and demonstrations have become increasingly common. But strike threats bring pressure to bear on both government and private-sector management.

Because teachers were federal employees when the data were compiled, it is revealing to examine how the government itself responded to labor demands (see Table 6-6). Rarely did it actually raise salaries; rather, it provided low-cost benefits—such as discounts for married teachers at government stores—or relied on dialogue or promises to resolve complaints. If it decided not to negotiate, the government then took a hard line, either refusing to discuss the issues or threatening to fire striking teachers.

The current relationship between labor and the state is the result of two important trends since the 1980s, economic crisis and political liberalization. The economic liberalization policies introduced by Miguel de la Madrid in

**Table 6-5** Means Used by Organized Labor in Mexico to Convey Demands: National Teachers Union

Union Means of Action	Percentage of Total
Partial strike	21
Meetings, marches, demonstrations	21
Strike	17
Indefinite strike	7
Parade in front of public buildings	6
Call for a demonstration	6
Rejection of salary increases	6
Denunciations in press conferences	5
Block streets and highways	4
Occupy educational institutions	4
Block access to offices	3
List of demands to authorities	2
Hunger strikes	1

Source: *Este País*, June 1991, 32–34; based on an analysis of 237 newspaper articles, January–April 1991.

the mid-1980s, expanded by Salinas and Zedillo, have had “profound implications for the state-labor alliance which has been so central to the Mexican regime” since the original formation of the corporatist strategy.<sup>79</sup> As Ruth Berins Collier observed, the established relationship, based on the state’s protection of labor, has now lost its logic. From an economic perspective, it is clear that over the last two decades labor never benefited in real terms from rising wages, although the government did provide some subsidies for consumer goods and housing. In real terms, the minimum wage is less today than it was in 1970. Politically, the government under PRI rewarded labor leadership with positions in the legislative branch and, to a lesser degree, in the

**Table 6-6** Government Responses to Organized Labor Demands: National Teachers Union

Government Response to Union Demands	Percentage of Total
Married teachers will receive discounts	42
Dialogue	15
Shut off dialogue	13
Promise to resolve issues	9
No funds available	9
Will fire teachers who miss three days	7
Offer a small salary increase	3
Reject violent actions	1
Reject actions	1

Source: *Este País*, June 1991, 32.

party itself. Given the fact that PRI is just one of three major parties, it cannot rely on government subsidies. Its economic philosophy more closely approximates that of PAN, therefore labor has more in common with the PRD. Some unions may remain closely affiliated with the PRI because it can still offer certain rewards at the state and local level, and others, with stronger ideological concerns, may ally with the PRD. The competitive political process, and the need for all parties to capture large groups of voters, now gives unions viable political alternatives and a noncorporatist path.

### *Intellectuals and the Media*

The intellectual community has an amorphous relationship with the government. Some of its formal organizations are patronized by the state; others are independent. None speaks for the intellectual community, but they do provide some public prestige. The most salient quasi-governmental organization is the National College, a publicly supported institution founded in 1946, whose purpose is to disseminate its members’ work. Members are prominent figures in all fields, including law, sciences, humanities, social sciences, and fine arts.

The relationship of the intellectual community to the state is much more a product of the relationship between the government and intellectual employment than between the government and intellectuals’ organizations. Three sectors of the economy employ the vast majority of intellectuals: government, academia, and publishing. Unlike intellectuals in the United States, Latin American intellectuals—Mexican intellectuals among them—have a long history of employment in public life, either in a federal bureaucracy, especially the Secretariats of Foreign Affairs and Education, or in various political posts as governors, party leaders, and cabinet members.<sup>80</sup>

The lack of employment opportunities in Mexico has encouraged intellectuals to work for the government. This means that the government does not have to incorporate intellectuals formally into institutional relationships with the state because the majority have been state employees since the 1920s. Many intellectuals, desirous of maintaining greater autonomy, have sought employment in the most prestigious universities, especially those in Mexico City. They hold teaching and administrative positions at the National Autonomous University, the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico, the Ibero-American University, and at the Colegio de México. Intellectuals have advantageous ties to the government because many were classmates of future politicians and others have been their teachers. Politicians often identify prominent intellectuals as having been their most influential professors.

If intellectuals influence societal ideas, they do so through the written word. Intellectuals in Mexico, as in the United States and other countries, establish magazines to circulate their views. Magazines dedicated to particular schools of thought are typically the product of a group of people who share certain ideological principles. One Mexican described the phenomenon:

There are some good papers and excellent magazines here, but each one tends to be controlled by some group or interest. All of these, such as *Excelsior*, or the publications of the Colegio de México and the Fondo de Cultura Económica, are publications of elite groups. It is very difficult for a person who writes to publish in them if [he or she does] not belong to the group in control of that publication. . . . These groups exist because most intellectuals are receptive to ideas paralleling their own preferences. . . . Actually there are very few independent intellectuals in Mexico, or intellectuals who have not formed groups.<sup>81</sup>

Some of the more prominent contemporary intellectual groups in Mexico include those of the late Octavio Paz, who contributed to his journal *Vuelta* and its successor, *Letras Libres*, headed by Enrique Krause; Héctor Aguilar Camín, who from 1983 to 1995 directed the popular monthly *Nexos*; Julio Scherer García, president of the board of *Proceso*; and Federico Reyes Heróles, who is an editorial board member of *Este País*, Mexico's first magazine devoted to survey research, but with a strong intellectual bent. Other groups are associated with newspapers, and many intellectuals earn a portion of their income contributing essays to editorial pages.

The intellectual community has increasingly sought new channels in the electronic media, mainly in television. Some prominent Mexican figures, including Enrique Krause, Octavio Paz, and Rolando Cordera, have used this medium to reach a larger audience and to discuss controversial political and social topics. The proliferation of public opinion polls, the association of some leading figures with these survey research efforts, and most important, their analysis of the findings in both the print and electronic media extend the intellectuals' influence to the electoral arena, as polling results become identified with the party and the candidate.<sup>82</sup> In a recent survey among Mexico City residents of the impact of opinion polls, over half reported hearing about or reading the results of such polls, two-fifths indicated they believed in the result somewhat or a lot, half thought it would influence how people voted, but only a tiny minority, 10 percent said the results would determine the party they would vote for or if they would vote.<sup>83</sup>

The government's relationship to the intellectual community is also reflected in its attitude toward the media.<sup>84</sup> Mexico has freedom of speech. Freedom of the press, however, does not have a strong tradition and is affected somewhat by the medium. Government controls over radio and

television programming are quite strict. Since the 1990s, radio call-in shows have become quite popular, and the spontaneity of the process has made it possible to voice political and social criticism, thus circumventing traditional restrictions. Television is the most important medium politically, and selected intellectuals and commentators have developed national recognition. Television is significant because it is second only to family as a basic source of political attitudes.<sup>85</sup> The print media, which has operated under far fewer restrictions, has existed within a professional culture that has not advocated investigative journalism. On the other hand, the government rarely provided adequate information about its budget or policies, a pattern which has changed dramatically since 2003, when the Fox administration implemented the new Transparency Law, giving ordinary citizens and reporters access to a wide range of governmental information and statistics. These practices, combined with government payments, subsidies, and favors, led to a press that was largely pro-PRI during elections. Most of the censorship in Mexico today is self-censorship from publishers who are afraid to antagonize their sources, governmental and nongovernmental, or advertisers.<sup>86</sup>

The influence of censorship and self-censorship on politics can be better understood by exploring the media's coverage of various parties in the electoral process. A number of studies examined both television and print media coverage of the candidates in the 1994 elections. These studies found qualitative biases in the media's presentation of the various parties or candidates, and in addition, the quantitative biases in the coverage were extreme. For example, in a study of two leading television news programs, *24 Horas* and *Hechos*, from January to April 1994, the authors discovered that on *24 Horas* the amount of time given to the PRI candidate compared with that given to his major rivals was in a ratio of 46 to 1. The parties did better, but on both programs, the PRI received far more attention than did the PAN or the PRD.<sup>87</sup> The same was true of the print media, which gave the PRI candidate 44 percent of their coverage, compared with 24 percent and 20 percent for the PRD and the PAN, respectively.

Overall, despite these conditions, media professionalism is on the upswing. *Reforma*, a major Mexican daily owned by a Monterrey-based publisher, accepts no government advertising and has strict journalistic guidelines. Televisa, a private television monopoly with an openly declared government bias in the past, not only has faced intense competition from the Azteca chain, but its leadership changed significantly in 1997.<sup>88</sup> Journalists, according to a study by Sallie Hughes, have begun to emulate journalistic practices in the United States. Many of them were impelled to make these changes by specific political events in the 1990s, such as the Zapatista uprising and because of influences from the United States.<sup>89</sup>

The impact of this changing pattern in television coverage is starkly illustrated by Chappell Lawson's examination of 402 voters in Mexico City during the contentious 1997 race for head of the Federal District. Lawson interviewed the respondents when the candidates were announced, after a debate on television, and immediately following the elections. He discovered a marked change among Televisa viewers who initially favored PRI. More than half of those voters abandoned the PRI for another party's candidate (see Table 6-7). Televisa coverage, balanced quantitatively among the leading candidates, significantly altered the outcome of the election.<sup>90</sup>

Television appears to have played a significant role in the 2000 presidential election. During the campaign, 84 percent of the voters watched television news, and two-thirds of those viewed news programs at least four or more times weekly. Several NGOs, and the Federal Electoral Institute examined media bias. The parties and candidates can obtain television and other media coverage in two primary ways: advertising and news commentaries. Because of significant changes in the electoral laws, the major parties in 2000 were roughly equal in their ability to advertise, especially on the dominant television networks. Even when coverage is equitably distributed, it may well be biased. In a comprehensive examination of television news coverage in the 2000 election, Hughes and Lawson discovered that privately owned stations offered more balanced political news than state-run stations, that both were subject to bias, and that the inclinations and values of owners and journalists influenced electoral coverage.<sup>91</sup> Most Mexicans believed that Francisco Labastida received more coverage on television. However, when they were asked if they saw advertisements for the leading candidates, an equal number, half, saw announcements for both Fox and Labastida. By the end of the campaign, three-quarters of the voters could identify Fox's slogan "now is the time for change," a slightly higher percentage than those voters who recognized Labastida's motto.

The dependence of intellectuals and journalists and the institutions that employ them on the largesse of the state affected their relationship to the government. But the coming to power of a different political party elimi-

**Table 6-7** The Impact of Media on Voter Preferences in Mexico, 1997

Viewer Preference	Percent Favoring PRI	Percent Voting for PRI
Televisa Viewers	28	13
Televisión Azteca Viewers	14	14
All Viewers	21	14

Source: Adapted from Chappell Lawson, "Building the Fourth Estate, Democratization and Media Opening in Mexico," Ph.D. dissertation, Stanford University, 1999, p 268.

nates the monopoly of a single party-state relationship over time. Furthermore, the increasing professionalization in television and the media increasingly restricts governmental influence from any one source. Finally, the rise of independent educational institutions, as alternative sources of employment for future intellectuals, also provides greater potential autonomy in intellectual employment. Nevertheless, some sectors of the intellectual community continue to rely heavily on the government to support their activities, thus continuing a pattern of dependence.

## VOICES OF DISSENT

Even when Mexico's political model was a more or less orthodox example of a corporatist structure, the government never successfully incorporated all potentially influential groups into its fold, nor all members of the groups just discussed. Indeed, many of those who opposed the government politically were formerly its supporters. These included both intellectuals and political opposition leaders.

Mexico allowed dissent, but successfully controlled its level and tone prior to 2000. The government had a structural advantage in terms of continuity of leadership and the dominance of its party, the PRI, over the voting process. In an underdeveloped economy, the state's economic resources are overwhelming, and in Mexico those resources were used to disarm and co-opt dissidents, be they peasant leaders, lawyers, labor organizers, or intellectuals. Yet the state, including the presidency and the federal bureaucratic leadership—contrary to its impression as a monolithic and all powerful institution—demonstrated in practice that it was "a heterogeneous concoction of social classes and political factions holding little consensus over critical issues."<sup>92</sup> In the past, the government often coopted dissidents. Cooptation is the process by which the government incorporates an individual person or

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Cooptation: the process by which the government successfully incorporates an individual person or group into its ranks.

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group into its ranks. Groups find it difficult to counter government influence over their leaders. Few people can resist the attraction of political power or money, and the government often rewards cooperation with prestigious posts. Some persons accept posts for financial reasons; others because of the possibility of working within rather than outside the system.

On the whole, the government dealt well with contending groups until the 1990s, maneuvering them against one another when it believed that was necessary or creating intragroup competition to diminish the strength of a single recalcitrant leader or organization. The attitudes of each administration toward various groups and individual leaders varied. Since 1989, the state gave greater attention and consequently prestige to business, the military, and the church, and less attention to labor. It remains to be seen if Fox will continue that pattern. It is definitely the case, however, that he will pay more attention to the voices of dissent, since his own election in 2000 legitimized their existence.

### *Nongovernmental Organizations*

Mexico has witnessed a flowering of popular movements since 1989. This is not a new phenomenon. Many groups with political, economic, and social interests grew out of the general malaise of the 1968 student movement and the subsequent government repression, and such organizations were given an additional boost in Mexico City after the 1985 earthquake. Also, after 1968, women were given more influential roles in these organizations, particularly in urban areas. In the 1988 presidential elections, many of these movements began linking themselves more closely to political parties.<sup>93</sup>

Critical voices have been a presence among most of these groups for decades. But a set of organizations over which the government has been unable to exercise much control has been nongovernmental organizations. Nongovernmental organizations range in scope from civic action groups, similar to the League of Women Voters in the United States, to religiously affiliated human rights advocacy organizations. By the mid-1990s, more than 5,000 such groups existed in Mexico, half of them in Mexico City, and an additional 25 percent in four cities: Guadalajara, Tijuana, Oaxaca, and Saltillo (Table 6-8). They are largely "urban phenomena, a result of the action of elite economic and cultural groups."<sup>94</sup>

As the 1994 presidential elections approached, many civic organizations were formed specifically to observe and evaluate the electoral process. Among the most notable of these organizations was an umbrella group, the *Alianza Cívica*, or Civic Alliance, which coordinated dozens of other organizations. Directed by Sergio Aguayo, a leading Mexican intellectual and human rights activist, Civic Alliance represented Mexicans seeking democratic change, in particular clean and fair elections. It recruited election observers from four hundred nongovernmental and civic groups to watch five thousand polling places. In 2000, it concentrated its electoral observation program on 200 districts in 27 states, using more than 7,000 volunteers.

**Table 6-8** Nongovernmental Organizations in Mexico

Type of Organization	Number of Organizations
Welfare & assistance	1,883
Environmental	1,027
Human rights	952
Women	437
Indigenous services	270
Art, culture & science	248
Rural development	200
Total	5,017

Source: Adapted from Alberto Olvera, "Civil Society in Mexico at Century's End," in *Dilemmas of Political Change in Mexico*, ed. Kevin Middlebrook (La Jolla: U.S.-Mexico Studies Center, 2004), 428.

Even intellectuals became involved in the electoral outcome, when a loosely organized elite, calling itself the San Angel group, acted as a watchdog.

The San Angel group, small in numbers, but bringing together an extraordinary collection of intellectuals, politicians, and professionals favoring democracy, illustrates the potential influence of even the smallest organization. Vicente Fox was a member when he met Jorge Castañeda, Adolfo Aguilar Zinser, and Carlos Fuentes, all leading intellectuals, and Santiago Creel and Alejandro Gertz. Three of these individuals, Castañeda, Creel, and Gertz, became his secretaries of foreign relations, government, and public security, respectively, and Aguilar Zinser became ambassador to the United Nations. Fox himself admitted that meetings with the San Angel group help sustain his battle for democracy in Mexico.<sup>95</sup>

Another notable example, made up of individuals and groups who were part of the old corporatist structure, is the El Barzón movement, composed of small businessmen, agriculturalists, and middle-class people opposed to government financial policies. Specifically, many people were caught in a credit crunch and became part of a broad, debtors' protest. Analysts claimed that they may have reached as many as two million members by the late 1990s. What is significant about this group is that it transformed itself into a typical interest organization, making demands on state and federal governments, and using a range of techniques to express its views. More importantly, it created a multiplier effect, because it weaved "together, more or less simultaneously, events ongoing in the farthest corners of Mexico."<sup>96</sup>

The political changes introduced since the 1988 presidential elections, as well as President Salinas's dismantling of certain features and structures of established state-group relations, contributed to the increasing growth and strength of nongovernmental organizations and to links with peer groups in other countries, ranging from environmental to human rights



allies. Human rights organizations in Mexico, both independent and affiliated with the Catholic Church, were especially effective in obtaining media attention and support for their agendas, thereby becoming important actors in the political and social arenas.

Human rights groups, during the first two years of the Fox administration, have been among the most influential organizations in effecting changes in domestic policies. Among the most important of these changes has been increased access to government files, similar to the U.S. freedom of information legislation. This new access has led to numerous revelations about past abuses, including the massacre of student demonstrators in Mexico City in 1968, and the disappearance of leftist and alleged leftist activists in the 1970s and 1980s, during Mexico's own version of the region's "dirty wars." The President appointed a special prosecutor and promised to prosecute and punish officials responsible for the murders. Many human rights activists remain critical of the Fox administration for the slow pace of reforms, and the inadequacy of protection for activists and judges citing the murder of a leading human rights figure, Digna Ochoa, in October 2001 in the capital, and two federal judges in Mazatlan.

Nongovernmental groups, without a doubt, played a crucial role in the increasing competitiveness of Mexico's electoral process and in Vicente Fox's electoral victory. Their growth is one of the most significant political changes in Mexico since 1988, and they are likely to play a critical role in contributing to the give and take of democratic politics, especially in their relationship to the legislative branch. In recognition of this role, the Chamber of Deputies passed a law in 2004 "to Encourage Citizen Activities Performed by Civil Organizations, which sets forth certain benefits such organizations may obtain from the government, as well as establishing opportunities for collaboration between civil associations and the government. In short, such groups are now formally registered."<sup>97</sup> At present, however, most nongovernmental groups are characterized by their lack of partisan political attachments. They also have created a network of channels from which to work outside the party system altogether. Finally, they have contributed significantly to an expansion of international influences in Mexico.<sup>98</sup> For example, Global Exchange, a U.S. NGO that established a relationship with the Civic Alliance, made a long-term, sustained political investment in working with Mexican partners and became one of the pro-democratic movements' most consistent civil society allies.<sup>99</sup>

### *Guerrillas*

The failure of Mexican administrations—local, state, and national—to resolve many long-standing problems, particularly in rural communities,

came to a head on January 1, 1994, with far-reaching national and international consequences. A different kind of popular movement, willing to use force to obtain redress for decades of abuse and exploitation of indigenous peasants in the highlands of Chiapas, emerged in the form of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), which launched guerrilla attacks and seized villages near San Cristóbal de las Casas.<sup>100</sup>

The Zapatistas' beliefs are laid out very clearly in their official paper, *El Despertador Mexicano* and their website, and cover many issues, including women's rights. Their principal focus is on agrarian and economic reform, and some of their requests echo the voice of their inspiration, Emiliano Zapata, such as limits on land ownership and the redistribution of excessive land holdings.<sup>101</sup> The rebellion had at least three underlying causes: disappointment with the government for changing the provisions for agrarian reform in Article 27 and ignoring peasants as a client group, the peasants' declining economic status in the rural community, and their exclusion from the political process.<sup>102</sup>

The enigmatic spokesperson for the EZLN, Subcomandante Marcos, later identified as Rafael Sebastián Guillén, a former university professor and non-Indian, captured the national and international media's attention.<sup>103</sup> It immediately became clear that although most Mexicans opposed the guerrillas' use of force, they sympathized strongly with their goals. The EZLN uprising influenced the pace of electoral change for the remainder of 1994, leading to more electoral reforms favorable to the opposition parties, and it also set the tone for this period as one of increasing political instability and violence, especially after the PRI presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, was assassinated. The Zapatistas showed other popular movements that even small, well-organized groups can have tremendous political influence. The guerrillas demonstrated the importance of electronic media, illustrating their ability to defeat the military and the government in the media war, affiliating themselves with national and international NGOs through e-mail. They continue to maintain an updated web site.<sup>104</sup>

The government and the Zapatistas signed an agreement in February 1996, the San Andrés accords, but President Zedillo never implemented these provisions. The division between executive branch and legislative branch control from 1997 to 2000 further complicated compromise on the accords. Among the provisions, the government agreed to permit the Indian communities to establish local governments, to educate themselves using indigenous languages, and to mandate indigenous representation in legislative bodies. President Fox made settling the Zapatista impasse a primary campaign issue, stating publicly in a nonchalant fashion that he would settle this issue "in 15 minutes." In spite of many concessions, including withdrawing the military in 2001, the guerrillas remain intractable. Further



debate of constitutional reforms linked to a National Indigenous Law (2001) suggest the consequences of democratic pluralism in addressing these and other long-neglected issues.

The continued lack of resolution of the Zapatista issue, and the activities of paramilitary groups, often in the employ of local economic interests and political officials, contributed to increased violence in Chiapas. Most notably, a paramilitary group in the employ of a local PRI leader attacked the village of Acteal in December 1997, murdering forty-five indigenous people, including children.<sup>105</sup>

The emergence of the Zapatistas produced an environment more favorable to other groups willing to use violence to achieve their goals. In the summer of 1996, an organization calling itself the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) initiated attacks on isolated police outposts and military patrols in the southern state of Oaxaca and elsewhere in central Mexico. They have been traced back to dissident leftist groups founded in the 1960s, and to an organization associated with Lucio Cabañas, a guerrilla leader killed in Guerrero in the 1970s. Unlike the Zapatistas, the ERP has been unwilling to negotiate with the government. Small affiliated groups have continued their attacks in seventeen different states. Other armed groups are also operating in many rural regions. None of these groups achieved the Zapatista's level of success politically, nor has any established international linkages.<sup>106</sup> Increased participation and democratic competition since 2000 have not necessarily provided adequate channels for the demands of all Mexicans.

## CONCLUSION

From the leadership's viewpoint prior to the 1990s, Mexico developed a successful corporatist structure for engaging and controlling society's most important interest groups. The corporatist system was never comprehensive or complete, but channeled many political demands through quasi-governmental institutions. It was an essential ingredient in Mexico's one-party state.

Various groups in Mexico, including the military, the Church, business, labor, intellectuals, and the media, have maintained somewhat different relations with the government, depending on the legal and institutional role given to them by society. Interestingly, whether their relationship is established and visible or more autonomous and independent, the informal channels that their leaders use carry more weight in the decision-making process than do the formal channels. The political system used and abused interest-group institutions to mobilize the rank and file for their own purposes rather

than, for the most part, to hear group demands. The removal of a single-party elite from controlling the state, and electoral competition, destroys this well-established pattern of interest-group relations.

The groups having the most institutionalized relationship with the government through their incorporation in the PRI party structure had the least influence, on the whole, on the decision-making process. Groups excluded from the party, such as business, the Church, and the military, have influenced the decision-making process more heavily. Of the major interest groups in most Western polities, business has had the most influence on Mexican government policies, primarily in the area of economic policy. Electoral competition, and the increasing strength of the legislative branch, will continue to enhance the importance of these three institutional actors, but especially the Catholic Church and business.

The state itself has often pursued its own policies, not in response to demands or pressures from any particular group, but because of self-interest or its interpretation of societal interests.<sup>107</sup> In this sense, the state too has been an actor in the decision-making process. It has had the greatest potential for influencing the outcome of policy making because it operated in a semiauthoritarian environment prior to 2000, and it mediated among the more traditional, competing interests.

Electoral democracy, multi-party control, and different executive branch leadership have dealt a death blow to the traditional, semi-corporatist structure in Mexican politics. The most influential structural change that alters this relationship is that the state and the party are no longer interchangeable. The ability of a small, circulating elite, affiliated with the same political organization, to retain control for decades over the federal bureaucracy, was the source of this pattern in state-groups relations. The PRI itself was a hollow skeleton, funded by the largesse of the state. Breaking that link destroyed the ability of government officials to keep groups loyal to their party or to the state. It is possible that on the state and local level, certain groups, especially labor, may retain ties to specific political parties, including the PRI, but the competition for interest group loyalties has intensified, making such linkages difficult.

The pattern that is least likely to be affected in state-interest group relations in the short run, at least until the legislative branch unequivocally demonstrates its decision-making influence on the national level, is the informal process through which elites use their networking ties to raise issues, seek out crucial information, and obtain access to critical policy-makers. Certain institutions, however, are well placed to continue using the elite networking patterns to convey their demands, especially capitalists in the private sector, while at the same time participating in a partisan manner

as individuals or groups in the electoral process. The Catholic Church also has demonstrated before and after Fox's election that it is an influential actor. More than any other interest group, it has a reservoir of support among average Mexicans, and it often articulates the interests of less influential Mexicans, rather than just its own institutional self-interest. Consequently it will remain the most critical voice of government economic policies that do not address the issue of poverty and redistribution of wealth. Finally, NGOs, if they decide to pursue partisan political issues as part of their mission, and develop the skills to do so, will increase their role in a more open, competitive setting at the state, national, and international levels.

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