

GENDERING TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY IN MEXICO

Adriana Ortiz-Ortega

Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México

Mercedes Barquet

El Colegio de México

Abstract: By analyzing women's and feminist mobilizations from 1968 to 2009, this article offers a periodization of how women have affected institutions during the transition to democracy in Mexico. We argue that such transition remains fragile but visible, as it results from wide social mobilization; at the same time, we show that multilayered connections between democratic change and gender transformation characterize women's mobilization in favor of gender demands.

This article argues that gendering democracy in Mexico requires that we pay attention to women's ability to reconstitute politics in ways that acknowledge how they have constructed demands and moved them forth in the political arena as gender interests. In particular, we pay attention to the ways women have been able to insert connections between the public and the private spheres.

Our main argument is that during the past forty years, Mexican women worked collectively to construct a voice that expanded traditional forms of universal citizenship to encompass, among the key topics in their gender agenda, issues such as bodily integrity, violence against women, the sexual division of labor, and the recognition of diverse expressions of sexualities. To understand the gendering of the (electoral) transition to democracy in Mexico, we look into the ways women worked collectively to construct social movements, collaborated with political parties and institutions to be heard, and recently began to draft and build policies and institutions in which these demands became issues of public concern.

For this purpose, throughout the article, we show that a key result of this process is that a partial and fragmented but tangible deconstruction of the public arena through the establishment of clear connections between the private and public divide has materialized during the incomplete but visible transition to democracy in Mexico. Yet we also prove that this result cannot be taken for granted; rather, it should be thought of as endangered, given the competition between old and new forms of making politics.

Our characterization of the engendering of the Mexican political system follows Jaquette's (1995) observations. According to Jaquette, Latin American experience shows that women seek different political goals and use distinct political strategies from those of traditional male actors. Thus, to make tangible women's experiences, we elaborated new criteria to measure the health of the body politic. For example, analyzing women's mobilizations required that we identify the turning points that women's agitation created in its own right during the years of the transition to democracy.

The turning points in the Mexican transition to democracy that women introduced vary among regions: they depend on women's mobilizations that are only beginning to be documented. Certainly, in some places, like the Federal District, abortion has become legal upon women's demands.¹ This can be explained, at least in part by the fact that feminists are concentrated in Mexico City, where there is greater politicization, defined as women forming groups and participating in political parties and other political associations; in addition, politicization results from the fact that a left-wing party has been in power for ten years (regardless of its strong internal divisions). More important, relations between church and state have given in to the strengthening of laicism. In contrast, in states like Jalisco and Guanajuato, the situation is different; women's rights have yet not gained such salience there.

To better understand the possibilities and limitations of engendering democracy in Mexico, it is necessary to remember that, on the one hand, although women have had the right to vote since 1953, it was not until the beginning of the 1970s that, thanks to feminism, diverse sectors of women began to mobilize in dialogue about or even in opposition to feminism. However, and contrary to common political science wisdom that argues that democracy consolidates during times of economic expansion, in Mexico and throughout Latin America, women's political participation has increased as women have joined the labor market and found themselves unable to fulfill traditional domestic roles. It has been in this context that women began to constitute themselves as subjects of rights. By contrasting women's independent organization with the institutional reactions provoked, we hope to understand how extensive the legal change on behalf of women and gender demands has been.

1. On August 28, 2008, the Supreme Court ratified women's right to abortion on demand in the Federal District, Mexico's capital city. Women's right to abortion became a constitutional right in the district. According to the Constitution's amendment 4, approved in 1974, men and women were made equal before the law, and this measure was the preamble for legalizing contraception, yet abortion remained in the penal code until April 2007. In that year, sectors of the PRI, the Partido Alternativa Socialdemócrata, and the PRD agreed to legalize abortion in Mexico City's Legislative Assembly. The measure received strong support from feminist sectors.

In this article, we analyze feminist mobilizations in Mexico from 1968 to 2008 because of the lack of scholarship on this issue, which suggests the need to combine political science analysis of contemporary factors with political historical reconstruction. From a political science perspective, we unfortunately find ourselves still restating Jaquette's (1995) observations: a persistent blindness to gender in mainstream research on Latin American politics is still the norm. And one could add that this subject remains trivialized and marginalized in the social sciences. Yet women's representation does not only lack salience in Latin American political science: Mexico remains in fifty-first place according to the Gender Development Index (UN Development Programme 2008).² Not surprisingly, feminicide still occurs and domestic violence is prevalent in the country regardless of the transition to democracy.

We have chosen the period 1968–2008 because scholars who study the transition to democracy in Mexico refer to it as the historical moment during which the transit from authoritarianism to democracy took place. The year 2000 is considered a landmark of the transition: in that year, an alternative political party, the conservative National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, or PAN) came to power after seventy years of rule by the Revolutionary Institutional Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI) (Bartra 2007b; González Casanova 1965). Nonetheless, we give special attention to the years following 2000, as these are considered key during the posttransition momentum.

Readers should keep in mind that a study of the processes outlined here requires that we take into account that a salient feature of Mexican transition to democracy has been the initial privileging of the electoral arena, and thus institutional transformation has lagged (Valdés Ugalde 2007). This suggests that, although theorists of transitions to democracy have paid attention to the enhanced role of legality as means to construct a new social order, electoral politics still determine institutional and legal reconstruction. Certainly, the drafting of new constitutions—or at least bringing transformations to existing ones—precedes, in many cases, the edification of a new institutional apparatus (Woldenberg 2007). Indeed, in Mexico, new legal dispositions for the incorporation of gender representation and political diversity have been devised to provide greater freedom of speech. Yet violent confrontation and political corruption still prevail. Similarly, theorists of political transition emphasize the role of the state in bringing and sustaining legality and in consolidating democracy, as well as the fulfillment of four conditions: first, free and authoritative elec-

2. In 2008, Mexico stood in fifty-first place according to the Gender Development Index, whereas Cuba was in forty-ninth place and Chile in fortieth place. But according to the Gender Empowerment Measure, Mexico ranked forty-sixth; Cuba, twenty-sixth; and Chile, sixtieth (UN Development Programme 2007).

tions; second, winners can practice the legitimate exercise of judicial enforcement; third, democratically elected authorities should represent the people; and fourth, citizens need to have their rights protected by a rule of law. Thus, democracy requires stateness: without a state, no modern democracy is possible (Linz and Stepan 1996). Nonetheless, freedom of speech, monopoly of the force, and protection of citizens' rights by the law are features still being built in Mexico.

Although democratization refers mostly to an urban phenomenon, in recent years it has applied to indigenous mobilizations (e.g., the Zapatista uprising and the movement in Oaxaca prove that it is an expanding concept). These latter events have brought new notions of democracy that have put at the forefront debates around women's rights connected to collective and individual rights, as well as to parallel forms of government. In some cases, mobilizations have allowed for greater freedom for women to participate in politics as municipal presidents or have led to greater recognition of female grassroots leaders. Yet even in democratization processes, women fight to gain public recognition, albeit under less difficult circumstances.

Adding to the complexity of analyzing the gender dimension of transitional politics, it is important to mention how the incomplete construction of legal order in Mexico affects gender politics: authoritarianism and clientelism remain in place, and institutional fragility remains a salient feature. Similarly, citizen's limited access to democracy as a result of economic hardship is prevalent (González Casanova 1965).³

For these reasons, we argue that, regardless of women's strong commitment to engendering democracy, they have not escaped the intrinsic limitations of the electoral arena or the limited access to the exercise of citizenship, given stark economic conditions and the prevalence of clientelism.⁴ In other words, in the electoral arena, even with quotas in place, women candidates have been found giving up the seats they gain to men to fulfill political-party discipline. Failing to do so would endanger their careers. Similarly, limited funding implies that moving forward on a gender agenda, which women candidates rarely undertake, is a risky activity in a male-dominated arena. Finally, the prevalence of clientelism has im-

3. The combination of illiteracy, poverty, public health problems, marginality, and income inequality and concentration made it necessary to study the gap that separated formal democracy and contemporary forms of internal colonialism in Mexico (González Casanova 1965).

4. Clientelism is a system whereby a group of people (men and/or women) work to consolidate the political standing of a patron; the person who holds the higher political standing provides, in turn, protection and benefits to his or her clients, including helping defeat those who are considered political rivals. In exchange, the "clients" provide loyalty, deference, and useful information while working to mobilize support for the patron (see Ortiz-Ortega 2001).

plied that women in politics—whether or not they participate in feminist organizations—are compelled to privilege their connections to political parties and elites rather than expanding their basis of support among women. That is to say, privileging their connections to party leaders or elites is a way to propel their political careers forward, which in turn remain conditioned to the influence of more prominent figures. In contrast, enhancing accountability, a key feature of feminism as a social movement, would require greater autonomy to build a public presence. Lack of accountability and reliance on party politics places women's issues in a fragile position, and not only because gender issues remain at the margins of the agendas of political parties. Women move between acting as a weak interest group whose demands are overtaken by other more influential actors pushing feminism(s) to the margins and attaining greater visibility and negotiating power by acting as an independent social movement. As the main tool of feminism remains discursive innovation, the constitution of women's groups under the umbrella of parties implies a constant undermining of autonomy and a limitation for future generations of feminists, yet neglecting such connections significantly curtails financial and political support.

WOMEN'S TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY ON THEIR OWN TERMS: 1968–1976

The student movement of 1968 is considered the breakdown of the traditional forms of exercise of power by the Mexican state. The movement's demands were advanced by diverse social coalitions, which included mostly urban workers, students, radicalized Christian sectors, artists, intellectuals, urban and rural guerrillas, and (to some extent) rural workers. These actors emphasized the need for institutions to open up a voice to new generations; to include greater political diversity, including criticisms; and to let go of authoritarian forms of social and political control (for a literary version of these events, see Poniatowska 1969). Certainly, women were present during the 1968 movement, yet their involvement as leaders, agitators, and collaborators did not have an explicit gender dimension; that is, feminist thought began to appear on its own only a few years later. Thus, activists from 1968 focus mainly on embracing students' demands, which resulted mostly in a broader cultural transformation (Bennett 1992). In the short run, the liberalization of the political system was mostly characterized by the opening of the electoral arena (Cornelius and Craig 1991).⁵ By the mid-1970s, the rules for political competition began to change.

5. Liberalization has been characterized as state mechanisms that are devised to include popular demands for democratic change in a controlled way. Democratization differs from liberalization in that political participation is tolerated, but electoral and formal political results are controlled (see Cornelius and Craig 1991).

For example, by 1977, opposition political parties had begun to participate in elections for the Chamber of Deputies. And for the first time, left-wing parties joined the elections.

In the realm of women's activism, it was not until the beginning of the 1970s that women began organizing on their own to discuss the specifics of their social standing as women in Mexican society. Following the publication of Acevedo's (1970) articles on feminism in the United States and Castellanos's (1965) piece on female subordination, women began to meet in public to discuss their situation. By 1971, the first women's group had been constituted: Women in Solidarity Action (*Mujeres en Acción Solidaria*, or MAS), and in 1972, the first feminist workshops were launched in public (Lau Jaiven 1987). More than one hundred women began to address in public issues such as sexuality, sexual division of labor, abortion, and motherhood. *Voluntary motherhood*, a term that encompassed women's demands to have a voice over reproductive issues in order to control their reproductive capacities and to express their sexuality on their own terms, emerged as the critical feminist demand. The first feminist publication, titled "Voluntary Motherhood: A Guide on Contraception,"⁶ informed women about contraception and abortion in a country in which the regulation of fertility was forbidden.

The feminist critique of how the prohibition of abortion implied legal control over women's reproductive capacities was the main antecedent for the state to legalize contraception in 1974. Regardless of the cultural transformation under way in Mexico, feminists fought for their own legitimacy amid the disdain that doing so produced among male-dominated left-wing and progressive forces.

Nonetheless, the impact of feminism—a movement at the time still limited to a few women from privileged educated sectors—was far more important than was recognized at the time. In particular, during those same years, the state sought to promote a decline in fertility by making contraception legal. As an economic decline prevailed since the mid-1960s while educational levels were on the rise (education remains a subsidized sector), it became more evident that a growing number of urban and educated women declared they were having twice the number of children they wished to have (Leñero et al. 1971). That is, demographic studies recorded that women wished to have two children in average, but were having four. Thus, feminist demands provided the needed legitimacy for the Mexican state to promote family planning, and at the same time, the feminist demand to separate sexuality and reproduction became visible in public.

6. Quoted by Coalición de Mujeres Feministas, Colectivo de Mujeres, La Revuelta, Grupo Lucha Feminista, Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer, Movimiento Feminista Mexicano y Movimiento Nacional de Mujeres in their 1979 publication *La maternidad voluntaria y el derecho al aborto libre y gratuito*.

In summary, from the point of view of the transition to democracy, it is relevant to mention that feminist strategic contributions consisted of weaving together women's testimonies to give a sense and purpose to their political action.⁷ Similarly, although feminists had established the left-wing sectors as their point of reference, their ideological itinerary resonated stronger in the state than it did among those sectors: the state became a more adequate forum for the demand to make contraception legal, as left-wing circles were dominated by a pro-natalist ideology. "A parir madres latinas, a parir más guerrilleros" ("Bear more children, Latin American women; bear more freedom fighters!") was a common slogan in progressive circles. In addition, for contraception to be legal, a constitutional amendment had to be approved, thus reinforcing the need to materialize structural changes to provide a new space for women. Certainly, given that the transition to democracy in Mexico started with the implementation of liberalization measures, feminists were not the only force that led to constitutional change. In fact, it was the women who maintained close ties to the PRI, the official political party that had been in power since 1930, who became the critical force that supported the legal transformation.

By 1974, the Constitution's article 4 was amended to promote equality between men and women. As a result, contraception—albeit not abortion, which remained illegal—was made readily available. The extent to which the constitutional modification represented a state maneuver to directly engage women through family-planning campaigns or was part of a broader goal can be evaluated by the additional legal changes that followed. On the one hand, the main agency the Mexican state created to tend to women's demands was the National Population Council (Consejo Nacional de Población). The council depended directly on the Ministry of the Interior, thus reaffirming the state's commitment to make fertility decline a national priority. On the other hand, laws to promote greater access to the labor market were also promulgated.

Thus, when in 1974 President Luis Echeverría amended several laws and the Constitution to establish the principle of equality for men and women (while also becoming host to the UN World Conference on Women) at least three responses were elicited: conservative women expressed outrage as they saw the laws divorced from their immediate reality; the nascent feminist movement accused the government of imposing a women's agenda without women's participation; and liberal women close to government circles expressed approval and satisfaction.

In summary, the beginning of the 1970s encompassed two tendencies that would prevail until the twenty-first century, albeit with different

7. Nurses began to furnish testimonies of abortion complications in illegal abortions in public and private clinics. Feminists began to structure this information and present it in public forums (Ortiz-Ortega 2001).

manifestations: on the one hand, an independent feminist movement that struggled to be acknowledged as a public actor; on the other hand, an official feminist movement that sought to recapture and neutralize independent voices, accompanied by conservative women's voices seeking to limit a threatening change. For these reasons, commitment to equality became a leading force for legal change and, equally, a contested measure, even among the different sectors of women fighting in favor of equality, precisely because they came from different political sectors of Mexican society. Yet what needs to be stressed is that, during the first half of the 1970s, women as a social group secured a role for the recognition of matters of personal and bodily integrity, health, and reproduction, which provoked legal and institutional change: a small group of women had succeeded in securing for themselves—and for the rest of women—a contested but critical place in the transition to democracy on their own.

It is important to mention that 1976 was a critical year in women's political history, as state attention turned to the abortion issue. Indeed, a state-led group to promote debates around the legalization of abortion, the Grupo Interdisciplinario del Aborto (GIA, or Interdisciplinary Abortion Group) appeared. This group was responsible for providing, for the first time in Mexican history, legal, ethical, philosophical, economic, and social arguments in favor of decriminalizing abortion. The group was also an advisory one—the core of its mission was to make policy recommendations. Not surprisingly, the GIA proposed legalizing abortion, but this recommendation was not followed either by the Echeverría administration (1970–1976) or that of Miguel López Portillo (1976–1982).

Nonetheless, in the context of Mexico hosting the UN's First International Women's Conference, women's legal status benefited in other ways: for example, federal labor laws were transformed to abolish legal protections for women that were deemed discriminatory and that, in fact, limited women's access to night shifts or prevented them from working overtime (Kurczyn Villalobos 1975). Similarly, women gained greater access to land ownership as agrarian laws were reformed. Yet during the second half of the 1970s, abortion continued to be not only the leading cause of contention but also a symbol of the role of women's issues in the electoral arena as the privileged space of Mexican political transition during the second half of the 1970s. That is, the legality of contraception but the illegality of abortion was a metaphor of women's conditioned access to the public arena; they gained access only through others' representations of their demands.

FEMINIST ISSUES ON THE AGENDA OF POLITICAL PARTIES AND THE STATE: 1976–1982

By 1977, important changes in electoral politics had begun to manifest. Thanks to the changes in electoral laws, opposition parties started

to gain proportional representation in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (Barquet and Cerva 2005). This electoral reform was important for the Mexican political system for two reasons. On the one hand, it allowed the PRI—then the dominant party—not only to remain in power but also to retain its hegemony in conditions of greater legitimacy. On the other hand, the opposition began to grow organizationally and multiply its presence among the public as an electoral option. In this context, and for the first time since its creation, the Mexican Communist Party was allowed to participate in electoral politics.

The entrance of the Communist Party into electoral politics signaled the gradual opening of the Mexican political system. More important, it reflected a change of ideological itinerary among left-wing militants as the armed and revolutionary strategy began to give in to the building of a democratic alternative. It was in this context that militant feminists rebuilt their relationship with electoral politics. In the absence of a direct feminist presence in electoral politics, and given the connections between significant feminist sectors and the left, the feminist demands for voluntary motherhood entered the electoral arena. In brief, as a reformist strategy triumphed among left-wing parties, a feminist front composed of different feminist groups lobbied the Communist Party (Partido Comunista, or PC) and the newly formed Revolutionary Workers' Party (Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores, or PRT) to submit their demand for voluntary motherhood.⁸ The term *voluntary motherhood* became key at that time, as a core demand was the legalization of abortion: feminists estimated that at least 2 million abortions were carried out in Mexico each year, despite the legal restrictions (Coalición de Mujeres Feministas 1977). Placing abortion at the forefront implied, from a political perspective, that voluntary motherhood meant that equality before the law required not only that contraception be made legal but also that access to abortion services was guaranteed. By 1979, the Voluntary Motherhood Bill was presented by the Communist Party during the first elections in which three left-wing parties participated. These were the Popular Socialist Party (Partido Popular Socialista, or PPS), the PC, and the PRT, as well as the loyal opposition represented by the Mexican Socialist Party (Partido Socialista Mexicano, or PSM)—on the right was PAN, which was at the time the main Christian democratic party in Mexico.

An analysis of the relationship between feminists and the left proves that, on the one hand, the Communist Party made use of voluntary

8. Coalición de Mujeres Feministas (Coalition of Feminist Women) and Frente Nacional por la Liberación y los Derechos de la Mujer (National Front for Women's Rights and Liberation) included the following groups: Movimiento de Liberación de la Mujer, Lucha Feminista, Colectivo de Mujeres, LAMBDA, and Grupo Autónomo de Mujeres Universitarias (Autonomous Group of University Women).

motherhood to gain an electoral presence among progressive sectors while excluding feminists from their political maneuvers. On the other hand, it is clear from a feminist perspective that its ideological itinerary was gaining momentum at the same time that the party lacked the ability to capitalize on their demands to consolidate a political standing. In addition, because neither the conservative PAN nor the PRI in the Chamber of Deputies backed the communist initiative that presented the Voluntary Motherhood Bill, it was defeated. The Communist Party's exclusion of feminists created a major crisis in feminism and led to ample discussion about the need to sustain a double militancy: one on the left to articulate social justice concerns and a separate one to address power imbalances between men and women in contemporary Mexican society.

The instrumental use of the feminist demand did not materialize only among left-wing parties: without making any public disclosure of the change of laws, in the context of renewed means to preserve political hegemony, the Mexican state promoted the liberalization of abortion: new extenuating circumstances, most noticeably on behalf of women's health, were introduced in the penal codes of at least nine of the thirty-two Mexican states (e.g., Baja California, Baja California Sur, Jalisco, Michoacán, Nuevo León, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Tlaxcala, Veracruz). However, in 2008–2010, again for electoral reasons, the PAN and PRI promoted severely regressive reforms, penalizing abortion in seventeen states.

Additional women's efforts to constitute a political presence, beyond the feminist campaigns to legalize abortion, can be found in two areas. First, we find the efforts of female PRI militants to back the state efforts to create the first state program to deal with gender demands. Second, we find the enhanced presence of women in the conservative PAN and in efforts to prevent the legalization of abortion. Nonetheless, as a male leadership dominated both the PAN and the pro-life groups, the most explicit way to show the presence of women in conservative groups is not by making reference to the ideological platforms of either PAN or pro-life but by mentioning the increase of women as party militants and representatives.⁹ Indeed, it was during the second half of the 1970s that the pro-life groups appeared in public life in Mexico, seeking to counterbalance feminist influence.

In summary, during the second half of the 1970s, a diversified feminist movement opened the door for the inclusion of an expanded notion of voluntary motherhood, which encompassed the construction of lesbian sexuality. It gave place to a wider view on women's freedom, but mainly

9. In fact, today PAN has the most women legislators in the Lower Chamber, at 32.8 percent of its party representatives; PRD has 31 percent; and PRI, 21.5 percent (relevant to the Sixty-First Legislature, Cámara de Diputados, 2010). None of the parties has updated numbers of its party members.

to the new idea of autonomy of decisions on sexuality and reproduction, and self-identity autonomous of male desires. Lesbian feminism proved central to the feminist notion of women's bodily integrity as the concept of sexuality expanded to surpass heteronormativity.

Beyond the feminist demand for legal abortion, which marked the feminist entrance in electoral politics, the feminist movement expanded to include other demands such as preventing violence against women. Given the growing need of the state to renew its forms of legitimacy, not only were abortion laws liberalized but also a state-led program for women emerged.¹⁰ This official program signaled the first steps of the establishment of state responsibility on gender issues, and a few years later, the first agencies to pay attention to violence against women opened up their doors.

By 1982, as a political administration came to an end, it was clear that an era of growing economic expectations had also halted, as the oil boom vanished, leaving Mexico with huge international debt and in the threshold of an economic crisis that would last until the present. In this context, in the electoral arena of 1982, gender issues did not figure prominently, and political parties were not open to considering the inclusion of feminist demands such as legalized abortion or to recognizing feminist lesbian demands. By 1982, internal struggles had consumed parties on the left, even after all parties joined the Partido Socialista Unificado de México (Unified Socialist Party, or PSUM). This party received only 8.23 percent of the vote during the presidential elections.¹¹

It is interesting to note that, even during the 1982 elections, PSUM continued to receive 10 percent of the vote during midterm elections. Nonetheless, as the economic crisis deepened and as the left increased its political maneuvers, by 1988, the situation had changed completely and the newly recomposed left-wing parties began to have significant presence in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.¹² Similarly, the conservative PAN made gains for many years, and it became an uncontested presence in the northern states. Paradoxically, a greater presence of opposition parties in electoral politics did not signal automatically an enhanced presence of gen-

10. The National Women's Program was designed under the Consejo Nacional de Población (National Population Council, or CONAPO) because of the traditional idea that connects women and reproduction. The program lasted for only one year (1981–1982) and was led by Guadalupe Marín, who had been Diego Rivera's wife: more a political figure or icon than a serious bureaucrat.

11. The PC, PPS, and PST formed Partido Socialista Unificado de México (Woldenberg 2007).

12. In 1988, PRI obtained only 52 percent of seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and for the first time, four senators from the left entered the Senate (Woldenberg 2007). For the first time in the twentieth century, the legislature began to be acknowledged as a political arena for the drafting of social change.

der issues in electoral platforms. Instead, during the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, feminism and popular women's movements worked to build strategic networks before reaching a transnational presence, which in the context of the United Nations' promotion of women's organizations became the road through which gender reentered the national scene.

**SYNERGIES BETWEEN FEMINISTS, WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS,
AND THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY**

In the period 1985–1994, feminism expanded to include so many diverse experiences of women that it has been argued that it consisted of an array of feminisms. Although this tendency manifested strongly during the 1990s, it is important to mention that, already during the 1980s, the process had started (Alvarez 1998). In addition, during this time, the explosion of women's popular movements—both in rural and in urban areas—produced important synergies that resulted in giving citizenship gender meanings that have lasted until the present. Such meanings refer, for example, to the fact that women began to realize that the vote in itself would not suffice to achieve parity or representation of their needs and demands. Therefore, they began to craft an agenda that included urban demands.

It was in 1986 that the first of a series of biannual Latin American feminist encounters was celebrated; the first happened in Mexico in Taxco, Guerrero. At the event, a key debate arose about which women's sectors could legitimately claim to be feminists, thus demonstrating that *feminism* was a contested term that appealed differently to women from different walks of life, including peasants, workers, lesbians, university professors, and actresses, among others. To better understand the forces that propelled women in the public arena, it is important to address the difficult socioeconomic conditions in Mexico at the time, as paradoxically, these were central in promoting a gender citizenship, thus contradicting traditional democratic theory according to which economic stability is a precondition for the construction of democracy in a given country. In other words, although throughout history and worldwide women have had to lobby for their rights, Latin American experience shows that it has been during periods of repression and stark economic conditions that women have rallied in the streets to demand their rights, with prompt state responses. In terms of the literature on transition to democracy, it is pertinent to note the state response to women's demands, which has been slow and mediated by the elite, being plagued with unexpected events and following unprecedented routes, rather than the result of institutional policy toward women's demands.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, the deepening of the economic crisis, especially the one experienced in Mexico in 1982 that accompanied the

end of the López Portillo administration (1976–1982) and the beginning of Miguel de la Madrid's administration (1982–1988) was signaled by adjustment policies. In this context, it became evident that a gap between individual women's citizenship and the legal reforms passed in the early 1970s was not allowing women to exercise their newly gained rights. Moreover, it was generally accepted that neither men nor women held the power to transform women's daily interaction with partners in significant ways in the immediate future: culture proved more difficult to change than biology (or, as Albert Einstein said, "It is far more difficult to crack a prejudice than an atom").

In this context, grassroots women's mobilizations began to multiply, thus proving that stark economic conditions propelled grassroots mobilizations (Stevenson 1998). Certainly, from the start, the claims grassroots women raised revolved around social services that the state was not providing, such as housing, transportation, and public health, rather than around bodily integrity or legal reform, which were the main claims university women had raised a decade earlier. However, research conducted in different localities indicates that women began to realize a sense of entitlement through their experience on three levels: family, community, and state policy. Although women did not speak of rights as such, they began to demonstrate greater awareness of the limitations they faced as a result of their social standing as women, and in their potential for community organizing (Ortiz-Ortega, Amuchástegui, and Rivas 2006). As a result of community organization, grassroots women began to participate politically, albeit often without challenging the male leadership of the organizations to which they belonged. As some authors have argued, in Latin America, grassroots women's organizing and women's participation in the public arena contributed to the transition from authoritarian rule to democracy. Nonetheless, women's participation often adjusted itself to previous patterns, thereby proving that it lacked the strength to reverse existing mores (Schild 2002). In short, grassroots women's movements became empowered through participation, but at some point, the organizations turned toward clientelism: the leaders' negotiation tactics included long-standing co-optation strategies, that is, using mechanisms to respond to demands, thereby neutralizing their mobilization potential and depriving movements of their autonomy.

Nonetheless, even if the greatest impact of women's grassroots mobilizations is found at the personal or communal level rather than in the political apparatus, it is undeniable that during the 1980s, urban popular movements began to acquire a woman's face, given the increased number of female participants (Logan 1990). Thus, the 1980s witnessed in Mexico the gradual upsurge of women's popular organizations, which might have existed previously but gained renewed salience in this decade (Bennett 1992). Although Mexico City became a reference point for what has

been called the urban popular movement, community organizations also flourished in other states, such as Puebla, Oaxaca, and Chiapas, as well as in some northern states. After the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, mobilizations increased. The state's slow response to the tragedy and the deaths of many seamstresses in the earthquake propelled a gradual networking of feminists and grassroots women organization.

From a feminist perspective, 1985 is an important year. After more than three years of feminist demobilization in Mexico City, which followed the communist appropriation of the demand for legal abortion in the Chamber of Deputies in 1981, a reciprocal acknowledgment of the different women's sectors followed. The revival of a feminist presence in Mexico City was important because, at the time (and maybe still in the present) such a demand was a national articulating point.

The feminist movement, whose claims had run around three issues—free and voluntary motherhood, free sexual option, and fighting violence against women—opened up and broadened its links with other expressions, including the popular urban movement (Tuñón 1997), union workers, and middle-class women, to form what the *Movimiento Amplio de Mujeres*. The movement's demands encompassed the right to housing and property, better working conditions and wages, and family issues and domestic violence. Claiming their "right to have rights," organized women understood that "the pursuit of rights in themselves, divorced from broader questions of democracy and social justice has little meaning if they are not accompanied by the conditions which make it possible to claim them" (Craske and Molyneux 2002, 25).

At the state level, the growing presence of women resulted in the modest but dynamic incorporation of women issues in state policies: state agencies were established to deal with the issue of violence against women. For this reason, it is possible to argue that violence against women was the first issue that formally appeared as a gender demand and one that the state addressed fully in the open.

The women's popular mobilizations were coupled by the formation of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).¹³ Women's NGOs began to flourish, thus providing the ground for articulating concrete claims on the absence of state services and working as intermediaries and translators of such demands in a nascent dialogue with the state (Fraser 1997). The NGOs also worked as the platform of action for women whose voice had been denied in established political parties (Tarrés 1995). In summary, the period 1982–1986 saw the diversification of women's demands, beyond

13. To understand their emergence, it is important to remember that, during the second half of the 1980s, the political scenario began to be reconfigured as changes in the stock market accompanied neoliberal and adjustment policies, which resulted in the philanthropic and social sector boom in the so-called first world.

the original ones, and the generation of new points for contesting state action, which included claims for political rights and transparency in public office by women.

Not surprisingly, by 1988, when Carlos Salinas de Gortari became president (1988–2004), social unrest prevailed throughout the country. Salinas's election took place after several years of harsh economic conditions, with devastating inflation and a clear impulse for civil society organizations. Moreover, the PRI was no longer considered the sole political alternative, and its hegemony had been challenged by the PAN, which demanded clear elections, and by the newly formed PRD, which campaigned around social justice issues and the need to overthrow the PRI.

The public scenario was politicized to an extreme, and a definite turn toward citizenship marked women's responses to such conditions: most existing NGOs—previously devoted to health, education, or human rights issues—and new NGOs included or added political activities and demands to the core their concerns (Barquet 1997). After the 1988 elections, opposition parties—both from the left and the right—took state government posts, and at the federal level, they became a majority in the Chamber of Deputies. The main political actors understood that only the democratic format offered the required conditions for pacific cohabitation and that women wanted their share in the new pluralism (Woldenberg 2007). What were once women's expressions and organizations made up of autonomous groups, separate from party structures, took a noticeable party-prone turn with the politicization of the public space. In this context, a woman contended for the first time for presidential elections, and for the first time, women accounted for 18.8 percent of the Chamber of Deputies and 12.2 percent of the Senate.¹⁴

As Mexico entered the last decade of the twentieth century, women began to join democracy in more significant ways, not just grassroots movements or electoral participation. For example, in 1991, the National Women's Convention in Favor of Democracy (Convención Nacional de Mujeres por la Democracia, or CNMD) emerged. The convention brought together women from different sectors, political parties, militants, feminists, and NGO representatives, all of whom joined the convention to push women as candidates and to introduce gender issues in that year's electoral process (Tuñón 1997, 88). Although the initiative was not free from the problems of inside party politics, it was a first experience to seriously promote women's leadership and to bring women's demands to the forefront. The results were contrary to expectations and a failure in the sense that the number of women elected deputies was much lower than it had been in

14. Rosario Ibarra de Piedra, from the PRT, became the first woman candidate to run for the presidential elections in contemporary Mexican history.

the 1991 midterm elections.¹⁵ The possible causes include how power was constructed and exercised in the political realm, which resisted female participation; the privileging of hierarchies and authority; and the fact that women lacked the appropriate experience in practical negotiations, in mobilizing for electoral clout, and in bringing about demands in their own parties (Barquet 2005). Women and their demands, brought together around the convention, were not able to overcome the importance of party priorities from that time on, after the 1988 contested elections.

In the context of the electoral laws promoting female participation, by 1994 and with the 1993 Federal Code of Institutions and Electoral Procedures (Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales, or COFIPE) reforms, women candidates represented 22.4 percent of the total candidates for deputy's positions and 17.15 percent for senators.¹⁶ In the end, women obtained 14.1 percent of seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 12.5 percent of seats in the Senate. In addition, by 1994, two women had contended for president against the official PRI candidate Ernesto Zedillo: Cecilia Soto, from the PT, and Marcela Lombardo, from the PPS. It is important to mention that, in 1996, another reform to the same code recommended "not more than 70 percent of the same sex candidates" in electoral lists. That is, women's political participation has been limited in ways that have allowed women to make gradual changes, in this case, favoring female participation of 30 percent and limiting male presence in institutional politics. Yet full equality would take another ten years to be demanded, let alone attained.¹⁷ In 2002, a quota law was passed that made it compulsory for parties to include at least a 70 percent–30 percent split of male and female representation, and finally in 2008, the law established a 60 percent–40 percent split. The formal political arena became a site of open democratization, and inspired by the Beijing 1995 Platform of Action, increased mobilization turned its energies toward making way in women's participation in decision making, in promoting their "empowerment."

An additional outcome of the growing women's mobilization in a climate of legal change is found in the new strategies of lobbying and negotiations between women legislators and women's groups that took place during the 1990s. Coalitions of legislators from diverse ideological origins, pushed by social organizations, approved three important initiatives on sexual crimes (1991), political rights (1993, 1996, 1998), and the law on violence against women. The latter passed in 1997 through a consensus that

15. The numbers returned to those of 1976: in 1976, women accounted for 8.9 percent of deputies, which increased to 11.8 percent in 1988 and fell to 8.8 percent in 1991.

16. An amendment to COFIPE article 175.3 recommended affirmative action meant to promote women's political participation urging parties to include them in elective positions.

17. Reform to COFIPE Article 5/22 transitory.

Table 1 *Female Governors in Mexico*

Female governor	Political party	Period	State
Griselda Álvarez	PRI	1979–1985	Colima
Beatriz Paredes	PRI	1987–1992	Tlaxcala
Dulce María Sauri	PRI	1991–1993	Yucatán
Rosario Robles (<i>jefa de gobierno</i>)	PRD	1997–2000	Federal District (Mexico City)
Amalia García	PRD	2004–2010	Zacatecas
Ivonne Ortega Pacheco	PRI	2007–2013	Yucatán

resulted from close collaboration (Stevenson 1999; Medina Rosas 2006), brought about by such broad campaigns as Gaining Spaces (*Ganando Espacios*) and Let's Move Forth (*Avancemos un Trecho*), which promoted a minimal consensual agenda that could be widely subscribed to.

In short, women's participation in political parties, coupled with active involvement in popular movements, resulted in greater visibility for gender issues. In this context, sexual violence, violence against women, and political rights became public policy issues as they proved central and much less contested issues than abortion or sexual preference. Among the different parties, PRD proved the key forum for articulating women's demands, given its connections to feminism and to the popular women's movement. At the end of the 1980s, it played the leading role in promoting women's representation in electoral politics (García, Martínez, and Fernández 1991). Ironically, it was not until a decade later that PRD would promote party leaders to governor positions. In contrast, although PRI continued to lose its political influence, or maybe for that reason, it began to promote women to these positions earlier than the others (see table 1).

FRAGMENTED LEGAL CHANGE, GENDER MAINSTREAMING, AND THE ENHANCED ROLE FOR WOMEN IN THE TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY: 1995–2000

During the 1990s, women's presence in different states throughout the country gained additional momentum because of the internationalization of the feminist agenda. The strength of the international discourse wavered at a time of transnational networks pushing and supporting rights and the contrasting effects of globalization. Female representatives from civil society figured for the first time in the official delegation of Mexico to international conferences. The UN international conferences put focus on gender issues worldwide, produced a paradigmatic change, and gave local women's organizations the opportunity to lobby internally for rights and for the means to achieve them (e.g., equality and equal opportunities policy, affirmative action, and political representation) (Chavkin and

Chesler 2005).¹⁸ In addition, given the resources from the international community, feminists were able to construct a transnational movement, gain new conceptual skills to negotiate with governments, and gain the means to construct a diverse national move with strong worldwide influence (Petchesky 2003).

The progress made in quotas, attention to violence against women, and reproductive health concerns led to the creation of different state programs for women (Medina Rosas 2006), including the Reproductive Health Program (which replaced the traditional Maternal-Mortality Program), and the approval of at least three of thirty-six initiatives presented on behalf of women.

Beyond the state actions initiated in collaboration with civil society to bring about new policies, the national climate on gender saw the emergence of a complex scenario. On the one hand, a democratic climate seemed to be gaining momentum, especially in Mexico City, where the left had established itself as the leading political force since 1997, and in the northern states, where the conservative PAN gained in several elections. Nonetheless, political unrest began to manifest nationwide around the 1994 presidential elections, most notably in the southern states, with the uprising of the National Zapatista Liberation Army (Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional, or EZLN) a few months after President Ernesto Zedillo took office (1994–2000). Social mobilizing in the southern states brought women once again to the public's attention. Tojolabal, Chol, Tsotsil, and Tzeltal women who were EZLN members became advocates of indigenous women's rights through the "women's revolutionary law" (Speed, Hernández Castillo, and Stephen 2006). Parallel to their participation in the struggle for land, these women raised unusual democratic demands, most noticeably the democratization of gender relations (Espinosa 2006). The public presence of Zapatista women marked yet another moment in the transition to democracy in Mexico: it signaled a different type of rural uprising. These women expanded the concept of democracy as they searched to root it in their different and traditional spaces—the home, the family, their community, and society in general. Implicit in this reasoning is that they are interested not only in reconciling different types of struggle but also, more important, in appropriating spaces previously under state control. They thus are reversing a state-led liberal democratic model into a communitarian form of democracy, challenging, at the same time, *usos y costumbres*, which they still have not been able to fully overcome.

Similar to the grassroots organizing of urban or migrating women who move between rural and urban areas, thus having a combined identity

18. Undoubtedly, there were four international conferences with a strong influence on women's mobilizations: human rights (Vienna 1993), against violence (Belem do Pará 1994), population and development (Cairo 1994), and the UN conference on women (Beijing 1995).

as both urban and rural women, the Zapatista uprising found its roots in ejido struggles that had existed since the 1970s. Nonetheless, in line with the previous finding that economic crises propel women's mobilization, the 1980s crisis stimulated women's participation in Zapatismo as rural guerrillas, as they had to move outside their traditional spaces of participation. More important, the voices of Zapatista women began to be heard on the national scene, and they provided a novel democratic discourse and practice. The women's conceptions of citizenship and rights addressed not only the connections between the individual and society. Instead, they struggle for economic development hand in hand with cultural autonomy and diversity by addressing collective identities; rights; and mixed forms of government with varied degrees of autonomy at the local, municipal, and national levels.

In summary, during the second half of the 1990s, a wide array of visible expressions of women's demands—feminists, women from the popular urban movement, indigenous women—were visible. In this context, in 1996, Zedillo finally decided to found the formal and lasting National Program for Women (Programa Nacional de la Mujer, or PRONAM) and start citizen councils in the public administration.¹⁹ This resulted in the now-common practice of incorporating citizens as advisers in decision making, which for women meant a big leap toward autonomy, empowerment, and overcoming their traditional exclusion from politics. In addition, as the legislative power gained renewed salience after the transition to democracy, women were ready to organize, as a critical mass of legislators had been put in place: by 1997, the Equity and Gender Commission was established in the fifty-seventh legislature. The commission has played an important role in approving several laws, starting with those creating the National Institute for Women (Inmujeres), the quota law (2002), and several other secondary laws and amendments (e.g., gender-sensitive budgets). It also served an example for the establishment of equivalent commissions in state legislatures and at the state and local levels.

In 1998, one year after the commission had been established, the Women's Parliament (Parlamento de Mujeres) was established. It was based on a feminist initiative to foster formal dialogue between female legislators and women from civil society organizations. The space brought together activists and representatives, and it was a meeting point from 1998 to 2005 for negotiating agreements on legislation and policy making. Ideological divisions and party opposition has prevented the parliament from meeting after 2005: the harsh electoral campaigns of 2006 confronted civil so-

19. This later became the National Commission for Women Affairs (Comisión Nacional de la Mujer, or CONMUJER), a commission in charge of the earliest initiatives for gender mainstreaming and the antecedent of today's National Institute for Women (Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres).

ciety women's organizations and constrained the possibilities of building a common agenda. At the same time, Inmujeres and several other state agencies had been already working for some time and were focal points for social policy on gender issues. Gender mainstreaming was being established as a state policy, so the executive and legislative governmental spheres directly attracted claims and demands from civil society organizations. Nonetheless, party politics, once again, played a central role in defining the issues to be discussed and their content, leaving little space for building accountability mechanisms that are an integral part of the posttransition to democracy (Isunza Vera 2006).

In addition to the enhanced presence of women in legislative positions, the gains made in the quota system and the increased dialogue between feminists and legislators, women in civil society, particularly feminists, realized that women had not only steadily increased their presence in the upper and lower chambers but also were ready for the challenge of organizing in national political associations (*agrupaciones políticas nacionales*, or APNs), quasi-party formations that assembled women alternative to traditional parties.²⁰ Such associations and the quota law can not guarantee by themselves adequate political representation of women, but APNs proved to allow for women's direct entry onto the political stage. For example, DiVersa (a feminist APN) gained two federal deputy seats (one in Sonora and the other in Oaxaca) and one political representative in Mexico City, out of sixteen. Women-led political associations constituted a notable advance and success for women's organizations, thus promoting individuals to participate and transform the logic of masculine power that prevails in Mexican politics.²¹ Ironically, as women began to gain greater political salience and as democracy was about to consolidate, women returned to the strategy of joining or forming political parties, calculating that this would speed up their political gains. Again, this proved wrong for various reasons. First, organizing parties require consensus and budgets well beyond existing capacities at the time. Second, it was difficult to rely solely on allies: more women had to be brought in. In practice, women legislators were not necessarily committed to work as a homogeneous group or a critical mass devoted to advance gender demands.

In summary, by the end of the 1990s, women's political representation in Mexico, and elsewhere, faced two obstacles: that of defining shared in-

20. Few but significant women-only national political associations were created at the end of the 1990s: *Mujeres en Lucha por la Democracia*, *Mujeres y Punto*, and *DiVersa* (in 1999) and *Junta de Mujeres Políticas* (in 2001).

21. The gains this political association made can be better understood by contrasting them with the gains made after the feminist political party *México Posible* was launched in 2000: it gained only one deputy position (Janette Góngora, intervention during the roundtable "Challenges to Gender Institutionalization," at El Colegio de México, November 9, 2007).

terests among diverse demands and that of establishing the mechanisms to interpret these interests in a way that different and sometimes opposing groups of women can validate and legitimate.

From the point of view of feminism, the century ended with the newly formed Social Democracy Party (Partido Democracia Social, or PDS), which demanded legalization of abortion, thus capitalizing on many years of feminist activism.²² In this context, PDS's contribution was its ability to integrate in the public realm a demand that had been in the shadows since 1981. Given the positive response to this inclusion in public opinion, and that the PRD by then had a much stronger political presence, the PRD lobbied in favor of legalizing abortion in Mexico City.

From a feminist perspective, it is important to note that the century ended by transforming Mexico City's penal code, which had remained without change since 1931. Following the PRD's electoral victory in Mexico City in 1997 and during the administration of Mayor Rosario Robles, the Asamblea Legislativa approved both failure of family-planning methods and genetic reasons as extenuating circumstances permitting a woman to choose abortion. The Robles measure contested the attempt by PAN leaders in Guanajuato to make abortion illegal nationwide. Overall, the transformation of abortion politics signaled connections between democracy and reproductive policies, proving that it would be hard for the PAN to sustain its ideological platform (Bartra 2007a). Instead, PAN had to adopt a more pragmatic political route to satisfy the public polls that showed that most voters were in favor of women deciding when to have an abortion, thus departing, at least during 2000, from a national anti-abortion strategy based on reforming all penal codes. This, however, did not prevent PAN, at the state level, from forbidding women's access to abortion, even in cases where abortion was made legal—the *Paulina* case in Baja California clearly illustrates this (Ortiz-Ortega 2007).²³

WOMEN'S DEMANDS AND GENDER LEGAL CHANGE AMID FRAGILE DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURES: 2000–2008

In 2000, Mexico entered a new political era in which more than seventy years of PRI rule came to an end. Although Vicente Fox became the first president from outside the PRI since 1929, different social sectors inter-

22. The PDS was officially established in 1999, founded by Gilberto Rincón Gallardo, an earlier communist leader who had broken with the Communist Party. The party attracted different progressive sectors, including feminists, and from the start included the legalization of abortion in its platform.

23. *Paulina*, an underage girl pregnant from rape, was denied proper information and abortion services, according to the law. Several government agencies turned their back on her, thus forcing her to continue with her pregnancy. Officials involved in the case referred to their moral values protecting life.

preted the victory of the PAN not only as a victory for the party but also as the result of a combined effort of different social forces. In this context, Fox's campaign pledges had to address an array of social demands that toppled the PAN's own platform. For example, in addition to political reform, administrative efficiency, and anticorruption measures, other demands such as indigenous rights, prosperity, and "change" were to be achieved during his term, from 2000 to 2006.

Opposition from the left remained ever present, and the PRD considered the end of PRI rule an achievement it brought about. In addition, the change of government implied the possibility to rearticulate different electoral and nonelectoral coalitions around a demand for social justice, as in the case of the Zapatistas' *La Otra Campaña*.

The end of PRI rule brought new possibilities to women's organizing. The political presence of women was felt: more than 120 women's organizations and 319 female candidates signed in 2000 the Agreement among Women for a Legislative Agenda and Government Rule in Favor of Equity (*Pacto entre Mujeres hacia una Agenda Legislativa y de Gobierno por la Equidad*). In accordance with the spirit of the times, a few days after the elections, the leading feminist activist Patricia Mercado launched a political party with feminist demands at its core: *México Posible* (Mexico Possible, or MP).

During the 2003 elections, MP obtained only one position in the Chamber of Deputies and one municipal presidency; it proved short lived.²⁴ Possibly this outcome was the first of many that demonstrated to feminists that, even after the transition to democracy, bringing gender and women's political representation to the electoral arena would be a rocky road.²⁵ They learned that their formal participation in politics was to be mediated by parties whose interests were quite different from the gender issues they were pushing.

In contrast with MP's results, at the national level, and regardless of what could be assumed for a conservative party, the PAN's electoral victory provided an opportunity to respond and capitalize on the international importance of gender issues. The federal administration created the National Institute for Women, followed by state institutes whose mission was to mainstream gender. Legal changes included incorporation into article 1 of the Constitution certain measures to acknowledge and prevent discrimination; ratification of international instruments; and Mexico's becoming a member of the multinational UN expert group that

24. This party was officially registered on July 3, but as it did not obtain 2 percent of the vote, it lost its license soon afterward.

25. By 2005, Patricia Mercado and Alberto Bagné had registered a new political party, *Alternativa Social Demócrata y Campesina*, after obtaining 2 percent of the vote. In 2006, Mercado was the only female candidate during the presidential elections.

oversees application of the nondiscrimination convention in national contexts. President Fox also responded to the demands of autonomy and multiculturalism of Zapatista women by issuing legislative reforms and *indigenista* programs, which nonetheless were soon contested and described as combining old developmentalism with a liberal multiculturalist discourse, having little to do with the real demands of indigenous people (Hernández Castillo, Paz, and Sierra 2004). As was mentioned earlier, COFIPE made it mandatory that political parties could not register more than 70 percent of either male or female candidates. Similarly, programs to attend to women's issues were divided in the areas of health, human rights, education, political participation, and economic and rural development, and the Fox administration inaugurated, for example, a program to address femicide in 2003.

Regardless of the positive changes, a closer look shows that issues that bore a close connection to sexuality and reproduction received less support both at the federal and at the local levels. Nevertheless, the Fox administration devoted strong efforts to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS, and reproductive health programs had a new impetus, mainly given the presence of progressive actors such as Julio Frenk as public health minister, whose appointment allowed women to achieve a level of certainty that the Beijing platform would be implemented.

In this context, by 2003, the PRD, which still was center left, was asserting its leadership among vastly diverse groups (Villoro 2007). Andrés Manuel López Obrador, as Mexico City mayor, skillfully maneuvered to increase women's position in decision-making bodies by appointing several women to Mexico City's high-level administration. At the same time, feminists were invited to become part of the advisory councils that had become an integral part of all women's institutes. Nonetheless, as in many other states in Mexico, feminist demands moved to the background and priority was given in Mexico City to building a populist form of feminism. The Institute for Women in Mexico City (Instituto de las Mujeres del D.F., or Inmujeres-DF) launched much-needed actions in a country divided by economic disparity, and it repeated the usual practice of attending to special needs of social groups (e.g., programs for single mothers, educational programs to prevent violence against women). Yet as *jefe de gobierno* of Mexico City, López Obrador explicitly excluded from his administration feminist demands such as legalized abortion or recognition of same-sex unions, thus showing that women's issues were secondary to the Catholic Church support López Obrador sought to obtain in his term.

In 2006, Fox's administration came to an end, leaving many social problems unattended. Paradoxically, much-needed institutions, key elements for building democracy in Mexico, were founded, such as the Federal Institute for Access to Information (Instituto Federal de Acceso a la Información, or IFAI), the National Council to Prevent Discrimination

(Consejo Nacional para Prevenir la Discriminación, or CONAPRED), and the Ministry for the Public Service (Secretaría de la Función Pública, or SFP). Given that the 2006 election has proved the most contested election in Mexico, institutions that were built during the last years of the transition to democracy, such as the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, or IFE) and the Federal Electoral Court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, or TE) were severely challenged. Thus, in the context of limited consensus among actors regarding the construction of democracy in Mexico, greater attention was still paid to procedures regarding how to obtain electoral victory, a consideration that has had an overriding stand over institutional consolidation. That is, the transition to democracy in Mexico has followed a shifting route according to the different weight of political parties during elections. This has significantly increased the importance of elections while undermining institutional strength, which is severely dependent on electoral outcomes.

From a gender perspective, it is important to note in the last election an inverse relationship between the importance given to gender in the electoral platforms of the political parties and their political chances of winning elections. For example, both PAN and PRD—but particularly the latter—assigned a marginal role to gender, and the former addressed only specific demands, such as the needs of working mothers, a social group on the rise.²⁶ In contrast, only parties that found themselves in a disadvantaged position, such as the PRI or parties on the rise (e.g., the nascent *Alternativa Social Demócrata*) gave much greater attention to gender issues, but neither received substantive popular support.

This can be interpreted as the result of contradictory forces. On the one hand are the costs to women and other social sectors of constructing democracy amid economic deterioration. In this sense, costs include diminishing support for women seeking leadership positions in parties or less financial support for their NGOs to continue their work. In addition, women's mobilizing has had a significant impact in positioning gender as a contestatory demand, thus opening the door for parties to raise their profile by including women's concerns. Not surprisingly, this has led these women to compromise their voice at the same time that funding is decreasing. A side effect is the revival of clientelism among civil society organizations, which also decreases the strength and number of independent activists involved in social mobilizations. On the other hand, given the incomplete and fragmented mainstreaming of gender through political parties, it is much harder to advance the agenda now than it was to insert gender in the agenda for the first time. Moreover, internal competition

26. The PRD included such issues as abortion and women's working conditions, but the candidate himself did not include any gender issues in his "Fifty Agreements for the Nation."

for party seats has created tensions on when and how to include women as popular representatives.²⁷ The issue of representation has become a deeply contested feature of the democratization process: against the previous identity politics of feminism, a multiplicity of women's voices, opposing and diverse, came to the forefront, thus reflecting the wide array of today's women's interests.

Last but not least, the male leadership's fight among themselves has required that women play the role of personal support for these candidates. A clear example is the backing by several feminist groups of López Obrador's electoral victory over gender concerns. In this context, a paradox is that the branch of PRD most committed to bringing about changes on women's behalf, Nueva Izquierda (New Left), has become both a platform for launching reforms and a reformist "inside enemy" whose victory over López Obrador during the 2008 party elections all party members did not endorse.²⁸ Not surprisingly, the efforts of Nueva Izquierda to transform the internal procedures of PRD to give women a 50 percent representation quota are often overlooked, as was the historical reversal of abortion laws or of same-sex marriages during López Obrador's administration.

Nevertheless, as elsewhere in Latin America, women's certitude that their mobilization toward inclusive democracy required their participation in the formal political spheres and has permitted the implementation of a rather successful quota system (Htun and Jones 2002), but the results and consequences of that system have yet to be fully assessed for the long term. In addition, feminist efforts, in combination with the emergence of important "femocrat" groups—many of them coming from professional or party origins but not necessarily associated with feminism—have promoted the institutional design of agencies, institutes, and ministries that have an uneven but tangible impact on attending the needs and demands of the female population.²⁹

27. Some examples of today's women's political participation are the following: in the Sixty First Legislature (2009–2012) women amount to 24.8 percent in the Lower Chamber and to 22 percent in the Senate; their participation in local congresses is no greater than 20.3 percent; and the presence of women drops to only 3.4 percent for the 2,439 *presidentes municipales*.

28. Nueva Izquierda is the political group within the PRD that dominates the Federal District Legislative Assembly and whose votes permitted the legalization of abortion and same-sex unions. Paradoxically, this reform has been mostly capitalized on by Marcelo Ebrard, a close ally of López Obrador during the 2006 mobilizations that challenged national electoral results that gave the victory to PAN's Felipe Calderón and in contesting the internal PRD elections that gave the victory to Jesús Ortega, leader of Nueva Izquierda.

29. *Femocrat* is a term that addresses the contradictory position that women occupy in state positions, as they have to attend to both feminist demands and institutional structures of power (Donoso and Valdés 2007).

In summary, there are different elements at work against building democracy in Mexico: unresolved political tensions among the actors involved in constructing the transition to democracy and a weak economy that has become a bigger social problem and has permeated the 2006 electoral process and its aftermath. In this context, new reforms continue to be issued that reflect great mobility among political parties when explicit sexual content is absent from them, thus permitting contextual alliances according to electoral times and interests (Stevenson 2005). For example, laws promoted through a consensus agenda such as the *Ley General de Acceso de las Mujeres a una Vida Libre de Violencia* and the *Ley General para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres* are now federal laws. Similarly, from a gender perspective, it is clear that the mainstreaming of gender in Mexico faces, as elsewhere, the challenge of becoming a bureaucratic tool instead of an instrument for social change. This feature of being neutralized once established is a paradox that any institution in the governmental structure is prone to, but it is an element of frustration for some feminists whose expectations of radical change often overlook the positive balance of progress.

CONCLUSIONS: RETHINKING THE GENDERED TRANSITION TO DEMOCRACY

At the start of a new millennium, it is certain that some things have changed: women can identify their needs and project their demands from a more visible site. Undoubtedly, women's capacity to knit connections between the public and the private spheres is a key factor for changing conventional political terms and move forward to positions from which they can transform the established order. These strategic dynamics still need to be analyzed and theorized to grasp the meaning of women's role in such historical processes. Women's incorporation into formal politics opens up numerous options for adequate political analysis, in particular because formal politics has privileged a subordinate institutionalization under party and state hierarchies with a social movement that would exert pressure only on specific topics—violence, abortion, same-sex marriage, working mother's rights—but lacks the resources to create its own institutions.

Women's mobilization in Mexico has consolidated during the past thirty years, in discourse and practice, and has evolved cyclically. Its emergence and consolidation has confirmed that women's movements flourish at critical historical times (Jaquette 1994). Similarly, this article testifies that women's ability to affect the political body works more on their behalf when they use different political goals and use distinct political strategies from those of traditional male actors, and doing so has put them on the road toward making gradual gains, notwithstanding a few

steps backward as well. The examples provided in this article have shown that women's participation implies the expanding horizon of concerns and possibilities traditionally excluded from liberal democratic definitions of citizenship. In addition, we need to assess the extent to which women's practices reformulate the notion of citizenship (Kabeer 2005).

This article has illustrated how women's practices have reformulated the notion of citizenship, particularly by addressing early feminist practices and indigenous women's mobilizations. At the same time, the article confirmed that a salient feature of Mexico's transition to democracy is the privileging of the electoral arena, and thus institutional transformation has lagged—particularly for the 2006 presidential elections. Insofar as electoral politics have been privileged over institutional transparency and consolidation, feminist and women's groups remain prone to authoritarianism and clientelism, as those are an integral part of Mexican society. In addition, institutional fragility remains salient, and not only because of economic considerations or state cuts: from a political perspective, it is necessary to acknowledge the unresolved tensions among political actors that are hindering the Mexican transition to democracy. Finally, this article makes clear that not only the transition to democracy has been engendered in Mexico during a specific historical period; women have constructed their own history as they engaged in this process. A full account of this process should look into women's efforts to constitute themselves as subjects of rights and the discursive impact their losses and gains have had on the political system, as well as the limitations of their strategies. In this context, the divisions among women due to partisan interests are seemingly the most salient limitation, as they risk giving priority to an elite form of politics that privileges connections at the top rather than grassroots mobilization. Privileging connections with parties based on coalitions to support male or female leaders means that short-term goals are given priority over consolidation of the movement. If this strategy were to be judged simply by immediate results in the incorporation of gender into the public agenda, the design of programs to prevent violence against women, or the recent legislation in favor of abortion and same-sex marriages, these conclusions might prove insufficient, given that in seventeen states party coalitions have promoted the criminalization of abortion. That is, it is important to realize that previous gains will be sustained over time only if a strong citizenship base is built around them and with strong democratic institutionalization and improved living standards. In other words, moving beyond party politics to democratic consolidation is inseparable from engendering democracy in Mexico. Yet analysis of success needs to take into account the gradual movement toward equality; the limited but visible institutionalization of gender; and the ability of social movements, feminists, femocrats, and their allies to insert gender issues in the agenda of electoral politics, institutional design, and state making.

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