

PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY AND CHANGE IN MEXICO

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- MEXICAN DEMOCRACY: A CRITICAL VIEW.* Third edition. By KENNETH F. JOHNSON. (New York: Praeger, 1984. Pp. 306. \$13.95.)
- THE MAKING OF A GOVERNMENT: POLITICAL LEADERS IN MODERN MEXICO.* By RODERIC A. CAMP. (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1985. Pp. 237. \$23.50.)
- MEXICO: PARADOXES OF STABILITY AND CHANGE.* By DANIEL LEVY and GABRIEL SZEKELY. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1983. Pp. 287. \$27.50 cloth, \$12.95 paper.)
- MEXICAN COMMUNISM, 1968–1983: EUROCOMMUNISM IN THE AMERICAS?* By BARRY CARR. Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies Research Report Series, no. 42. (La Jolla, Calif.: University of California, San Diego, 1985. Pp. 36. \$4.00.)
- THE MODERN MEXICAN MILITARY: A REASSESSMENT.* Edited by DAVID RONFELDT. Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies Monograph Series, no. 15. (La Jolla, Calif.: University of California, San Diego, 1984. Pp. 218. \$12.50.)
- THE MODERN MEXICAN MILITARY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MEXICO'S STABILITY AND SECURITY.* Edited by DAVID RONFELDT. Rand Note Series. (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand Corporation, 1985. Pp. 51.)

By all accounts, the continuity of political life in Mexico in the postrevolutionary period stands as a remarkable testament to the strength of political institutions created by Mexico's leadership. But despite the system's comparative longevity, scholars of Mexico's political system are still grappling with some surprisingly fundamental questions in attempting to define the regime's political project and to explain the operation of the political system. As Mexico prepares to enter the ninth decade of its "revolutionary" history, analysts continue to focus on the sources of the regime's stability, current discussions of crisis notwithstanding. Several recent studies reviewed here take up this issue and offer considerable insight regarding prospects for political change in Mexico.

It is disturbing that scholarship in the area of Mexican politics continues to generate considerable discord over several key issues that have long been the subject of political analysis. For example, analysts routinely offer divergent characterizations of the Mexican regime, some of which are clearly contradictory. The regime has been described as authoritarian, pluralist, populist, progressive, repressive, and sometimes even democratic. Similarly, opinions vary substantially concerning patterns of political change in Mexico, the role of political institutions (such as elections and political parties), and even the interpretation of key historical experiences. An example of the third category is Kenneth Johnson's description of the Cárdenas period as a case of "naïve Marxism," "simplistic populism," and "progressive liberalism" in the third edition of his *Mexican Democracy: A Critical View* (pp. 82–84). Although Johnson's multiple characterizations may comprise a case of somewhat greater analytic imprecision or confusion than is the norm, they are also symptomatic of the theoretical haze that has long enveloped discussion of the regime.

Some of the conceptual distress evident in the field undoubtedly stems from Mexico's revolutionary experience itself, which in many respects has defied easy definition of its revolutionary project. As Theda Skocpol's work on revolution has underscored, what is envisioned by participants in revolutionary upheavals may well bear little or no relation to eventual political outcomes and may indeed be wholly unintended by many of the original participants.¹ In the case of Mexico's revolutionary history, this observation scarcely needs repeating.

It is therefore not surprising that in two recent surveys of Mexican politics, Kenneth Johnson's book and Daniel Levy's and Gabriel Székely's *Mexico: Paradoxes of Stability and Change*, the authors take great pains to acknowledge the subtleties and complexities of Mexico's multifaceted social landscape in order to "understand the logic of Mexican politics" (Levy and Székely, p. 8). Levy and Székely develop their skillful analysis of Mexico's political system by focusing on sources of political stability, elaborating on how such stability has been achieved, and assessing the result. This approach to the analysis of Mexico's political system emerges from their view that the system's stability is its most "striking feature" (p. 1).

Levy and Székely argue that the system's stability derives substantially from the successful institutionalization of an official political party that has skillfully precluded the emergence of a credible opposition and, as the authors note, has proved itself capable of dominating the military. This party has also succeeded in incorporating both regional and functional interests (pp. 38–39). Moreover, the system has fostered the circulation of elites and created substantial opportunities

for their personal enrichment. Consequently, the system has depended heavily on the continuing satisfaction of intellectual and economic elites who have benefited disproportionately from public policy.

Most important, however, has been the regime's ability to control labor organization. Levy and Székely argue that "political stability has resulted in part from the fact that much of the working class has not organized itself to protest the socioeconomic conditions in which it lives" (p. 142). They maintain that the failure of unorganized workers and peasants to take measures to defend their rights has yet to be satisfactorily explained and warrants further investigation. According to these authors, the system now offers only the "illusion of popular sovereignty" via the electoral process (p. 82), but it does permit a considerable degree of "individual freedom" while limiting "organizational freedom." This useful distinction enables the authors to explain how a system that denies legitimacy to its political opposition nonetheless evidences some degree of pluralism in selected spheres of social life.

Levy and Székely concentrate on the recent performance of the stability-growth model pursued by the Mexican regime, highlighting the difficulties faced in the economic arena and in managing political reform. They contend that the possibility for political destabilization exists and may be triggered by the continuing financial crisis in the public sector, by the "potential alienation of organized labor" (p. 257), or by the erosion of political legitimacy due to continued restrictions on freedom and political participation. Still another source of tension in the system described by Levy and Székely is the widening rift between the political and economic elite, which has increased the regime's tendency to rely on "the army and mass-based working class organizations to legitimize their rule" (p. 64).

Surveying the same political landscape in *Mexican Democracy*, Kenneth Johnson takes a notably different approach to Mexico's political development in describing governance in Mexico as the "politics of kleptocracy" (p. 33). Johnson's theme is the bankruptcy and corruption of elites and, by extension, of the entire political system. Progress, he argues, is hobbled in Mexico by the inefficiency and corruption bred by the relentless competition of political *camarillas* over spoils (p. 33). In his view, efforts at reform will be continually undermined by the pernicious effects of political corruption.

While Johnson's observations may accurately reflect the decadence of much of contemporary political life, his arguments concerning the roots of political corruption in Mexico are, to say the least, problematic. For example, he suggests that political corruption along with other social pathologies may have resulted from "psychic frustration over the failed symbiosis of Spanish and Aztec cultures" (p. 58). This particular feature of the nation's cultural development renders the Mexican peo-

ple “psychically unable to defend . . . against corruption and abuse.” Mexico’s problem, Johnson concludes early on, is “cultural schizophrenia” (p. 63).

Although discussions of cultural influences on social development have too often been deemphasized in focusing on the interactive influences of politics and economy, Johnson’s sweeping explanations of Mexico’s political system based on his interpretation of the society’s cultural development remain suspect. Culturally rooted alienation from the system undoubtedly bears on relationships among classes in Mexican society, and Mexican elite behavior manifests an emotional and cultural disengagement from mass society that cannot be explained solely in terms of economic relationships. Nevertheless, while Johnson’s work might suggest a need to restudy the influence of culture on political development, his own assertions strike this reader as rather fantastic speculation.

Johnson claims to be somewhat more optimistic now about Mexico’s future than when he wrote the earlier editions of *Mexican Democracy*, but it is not clear why. For example, he observes, “For most of its people, Mexico is a gigantic prison” (p. 238). He also maintains that the future raises the specter of a people oppressed in a condition of “hunchbacked dwarfish serfdom” (p. 240), referring to the image that he derives from Carlos Fuentes’s *Terra nostra*.

Most of the works reviewed here share the view that while disruptions of the civil order may occur (due to service breakdowns or scattered popular or labor mobilizations, for example), the Mexican regime’s position remains comparatively secure. Although facing an impressive array of increasingly intractable problems, the regime has been little troubled until now by mobilization on the left or by military restiveness.

Barry Carr’s *Mexican Communism, 1968–1983* authoritatively examines developments on the left in Mexico during a transitional period for the Mexican Communist party, the Partido Comunista Mexicano (PCM). He assesses the impact of the Eurocommunist model on the evolution of the party’s theoretical orientation and pattern of political activity. Carr’s work on the left in Mexico has been invaluable to students of politics in Mexico, and this study is no exception.² Although historically the PCM’s record has manifested an ambivalence toward Mexico’s revolutionary project and the resultant political system, Carr concludes that in the aftermath of the events of 1968, the PCM was finally driven to abandon the notion of the Revolution’s “continuing democratic potential” (p. 1), discarding once and for all its “‘rightist’ delusions” (pp. 12–13). He maintains that party renewal after 1968 hinged instead on the thesis that “the Mexican Revolution had finally exhausted its progressive potential” (p. 12).

Carr argues that by the early 1980s, the PCM's reformulated program had come to resemble what might be termed a central core of the Eurocommunist party model. For example, chief among the party's innovations was a strategy of coalition based on the conviction that only the cooperative efforts of a broad range of forces on the left could effect a transition to socialism. The party would no longer subscribe to a Leninist formula for social transformation, and it signaled this shift by rejecting the concepts of the vanguard party and the dictatorship of the proletariat. Long-standing efforts to bridge the ideological chasms dividing the Mexican left partially succeeded by the early 1980s with the creation of the Partido Socialista Unificado de México (PSUM). But just as the political reform launched in 1977 spurred efforts to enhance the electoral position of the left, prospects for the left's progress were substantially compromised, according to some analysts, when efforts at mass organizing appeared to be overwhelmed by the party's commitment to electoral politics, a suspect arena in which to do battle. Efforts after 1981 to broaden the left coalition have yielded some positive results, culminating most recently in the creation of the Partido Mexicano Socialista (PMS) that now includes Heberto Castillo's Partido Mexicano de los Trabajadores (PMT). At the same time, however, "coalition politics" have inevitably muddled the party's ideological profile while compromises continue to be hammered out. As Carr points out, the party's commitment to pursue a "government of democratic coalition" remains ambiguous in intent, a situation that clearly adds to the party's difficulties in enlarging its base of support and thus undercuts its goal of transforming itself into a mass party.

While Carr's work offers important insights as to the reasons for the weakness of the left in the Mexican political system, David Ronfeldt's edited collection, *The Modern Mexican Military: A Reassessment*, illuminates a long-neglected area of study—Mexico's armed forces. The volume originally grew out of a research conference at the Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego. Several factors appear to have prompted renewed interest in Mexico's military. First, the enduring quality of economic crisis in Mexico has triggered new concerns about Mexico's political stability, the role the military might play in guaranteeing such stability, and the impact of political instability on the military's behavior. Second, concern has arisen over the effect on Mexico's military establishment of the militarization of Central America's political crisis. Third, the dearth of research on the Mexican military has underscored the realization that little progress could be made in assessing the regime's strengths and liabilities without detailed new research in this area.³ The Ronfeldt volume draws together new research on this subject and several previously published works that provide excellent perspective on the newer pieces. Ron-

feldt's Rand Note entitled *The Modern Mexican Military: Implications for Mexico's Stability and Security* restates points made in his article in the edited collection.

In his overview article in the collection, Ronfeldt rightly stresses the need for further research on the military and notes the difficulties involved in studying this politically sensitive institution. But it appears that considerable disagreement already exists among Mexicanists over the significance of previous work. Once again, that peculiar theoretical haze surrounding the study of Mexican politics becomes apparent. The conference participants were evidently unable to reach any consensus concerning the definition of professionalism, the level of professionalism of the Mexican military, the issue of how professionalism affects the military's political involvement, or even the issue of "whether the military was marginally or intricately involved in politics and government" (p. 4, note 6).

Some of the disagreement no doubt stems from conceptual problems that have long plagued the study of civil-military relations. But at least some difficulty apparently results from failing to distinguish between the political involvement of the military as the autonomous expression of its own institutional interests versus involvement attributable to civilian political authorities' interest in coopting military personnel by directly including them in nonmilitary bureaucratic and political responsibilities. Notwithstanding these conceptual and empirical liabilities, the contributors to *The Modern Mexican Military* detail important developments within Mexico's military apparatus and offer penetrating observations on the future direction of the armed forces' development and their relations with the civilian leaders.

Frederick Nunn's contribution to the Ronfeldt collection profiles the military's postrevolutionary role. Since the Revolution, the military has been engaged in civic action and internal peacekeeping and has had little opportunity to defend the country against external encroachments (p. 44). Both civilian politicians and the military have traditionally avoided discussing any national security function for the military, preferring instead to describe the military's occupation as that of national defense. As several of the contributors point out, important changes are now underway in this regard.

Ronfeldt observes that the military's de facto role has been to assist the regime in "conflict management," which largely involves political communication (including intelligence gathering) and enforcement (p. 68). The latter activity has encompassed "electoral defense, internal security, [and] enforced subordination of local to presidential interests" (p. 72). Ronfeldt concludes that the partisan role played by the military has become increasingly important for the political elite. In his view, the military has become one of the three pillars of the state,

along with the ruling party and the system of parastatal enterprises. Indeed, he suggests that it is now more appropriate to discuss the military's role in the state rather than simply in "politics" (p. 10).

Mexico's armed forces have been content to remain in the barracks for a variety of reasons. Roderic Camp argues, in his contribution to the Ronfeldt volume, that the degree of practical autonomy enjoyed by the military has greatly enhanced cooperative civil-military relations.⁴ In the view of several of the contributors, civilian politicians' exceptionally skillful management of relations with the military is a key to explaining the behavior of the Mexican military. In addition to granting considerable autonomy to the military, as Camp notes, civilian politicians have adopted certain advantageous institutional practices—such as zone rotation and a nonunified command structure at the national level—that have maintained balance in the relationship. Also advantageous to civilians is the tendency of military personnel in Mexico to espouse conservative values. Stephen Wager, another contributor to the Ronfeldt collection, spent a year in the early 1980s at the Colegio Militar in Mexico City. He cites as prevalent the attitude that "political ambitions are not compatible with a military career" (p. 98).

Ronfeldt observes that the events of 1968, along with the military's growing involvement in internal security operations in the 1970s, contributed to the decision to modernize the military. He suggests further that the availability of new oil revenues may have played a part in the modernization initiative (see Ronfeldt's Rand Note, p. 3). What ultimately evolved was a program for improving training and equipment but one that did not substantially enhance the overall force structure. For example, while absolute levels of spending rose, military spending as a share of GNP actually fell, and while troop strength increased in numbers, these levels barely kept pace with population growth rates. Nonetheless, Ronfeldt argues that this "historic change" in the status of Mexico's armed forces, which conferred new respectability on the institution, has led to a new partnership with the nation's traditional political class.

Modernization of Mexico's armed forces has meant not so much increases in forces or independent reassessments of mission strategy or tactics by the military itself but rather civilian-instigated shifts in orientations within the military in response to new challenges from the political environment. One of the more notable developments has been a shift toward involving the military in formulating a national security policy that would necessarily address critical economic and political issues. These issues are discussed by Alden Cunningham (p. 171) and Caesar Sereseres (p. 211). In addition, Sereseres presents an illuminating discussion of the impact of Central American developments on the military in Mexico that details the growing responsibilities of the mili-

tary in Mexico's southern regions, which have clearly been undertaken at the behest of civilian political interests. Edward Williams's contribution on Mexico's military and foreign policy also assesses the "growing influence" and significance of a military policy role in the southern states (p. 179).

Although the contributors to *The Modern Mexican Military* see little prospect for unsolicited military intrusions into the civilian political domain, they recognize that a variety of tensions in the system could erode the harmony characterizing the current civilian-military partnership. Ronfeldt outlines three scenarios in which the military might become "alarmed": first, by a regional-federal conflict triggered by the increasing subordination of local interests to federal dictates; second, by a worsening of tensions between the public and private sectors; and third, by the eruption of open conflict in U.S.–Mexican relations, which could result, for example, from heightened displays of Mexican nationalism and independence (pp. 11–12). Overall, however, the greater likelihood of destabilizing conflict is perceived as growing out of the increasing disaffection of middle-class, professional, and intellectual elements in Mexican society rather than out of labor or peasant discontent. Ronfeldt adds that the potential for generalized civil disorder and the breakdown of public services in the Mexico City area should not be discounted, labeling Mexico City as the "most potentially unstable place in the nation" (p. 15).

Roderic Camp's prolific work on Mexico's elites has enormously enriched understanding of Mexico's postrevolutionary political development. Camp's excellent study, *The Making of a Government: Political Leaders in Modern Mexico*, is a valuable resource in the attempt to comprehend the political elite's ability to revitalize its relationship with disaffected elements of Mexican society, particularly those elements with which the regime has traditionally enjoyed a cooperative, rather than a dominant, relationship. This study focuses on the political socialization of leaders in Mexico between 1935 and 1977 (some nine hundred were listed). Camp identified a pool of two hundred individuals who had held important positions between 1946 and 1970. Roughly half were still alive, and twenty-four were interviewed extensively. Camp supplemented the core interviews with discussions with an "expanded group" of thirty-seven leaders whose political experience fell outside the bureaucracy, including occupying electoral positions. The group he selected for intensive study included those who had the opportunity to influence postwar public policies in Mexico substantially, largely through their bureaucratic positions.⁵

Camp considers a variety of influences on the political development of these leaders and is particularly interested in how they perceive the pattern of their own political maturation. Much of his data

will interest students of general processes of political socialization as well as those interested in Mexico. Among the questions explored are the reasons for entering public life, the impact of family environment on career choice and subsequent political values, the impact of the educational process on the individual's political career and political viewpoints, and the values that came to dominate the leaders' political perspectives.

The majority of the group chose politics as a career quite early, often because their initial interest in politics was sparked during their university studies. Many were recruited into politics by professors at the preparatory and university level, predominantly at the *Escuela Nacional Preparatoria* and the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México* in Mexico City. Despite its image as an incubator of revolutionary enthusiasm, the UNAM environment appears to have served as one of the ruling elite's greatest assets in successful political recruitment.

Most decisions to pursue a political career were predicated on employment opportunities, ambition, personal interests, or a sense of obligation. Camp discovers that political events themselves (such as the Revolution) had little bearing on these decisions while immediate forces—such as the university, a professor, and friends and family—exerted greater influence. Family influence appears to be somewhat less significant than expected, although many leaders came from political families (p. 155). In general, Camp's subjects exhibited a tendency to look to "authoritative figures for developing [their] own political ideas," and in a period of revolutionary disjuncture when new pressures were placed on traditional sources of authority, influential individuals were likelier to be professors (who were often also political leaders) than family members (p. 38).

Camp's research sheds considerable light on the environment in which these leaders' political attitudes were shaped during their politically formative years. He offers a revealing portrait of the university's ideological diversity. For example, he assesses the relative influence of professors like Manuel Gómez Morín and Antonio Caso, the influence of course work in political theory, and the leaders' literary and philosophical preferences. Among the works favored by the study's subjects, Camp notes a tendency to emphasize a preeminent role for the state in social and economic development. In this intellectual milieu, Camp concludes, the nation's future leaders became "neo-liberals and social democrats," rather than Marxists or classic liberals, and most seemed to regard themselves as holding "ideological views which are left of center" (p. 75).

Camp finds the leaders' inclination to emphasize "peace and order" (an approach stemming from their own experience with revolutionary upheaval) to be critical to understanding the prevailing point of

view of the political elite in the postrevolutionary period (p. 134). He observes that the postrevolutionary tendency to emphasize stability over “political liberties and increased participation” is not peculiar to Mexico but typical of postrevolutionary environments in many other societies (p. 156). Although the leaders predictably profess personal commitment to creating a just society, defending individual freedoms, serving others, working hard, and being knowledgeable and honest (p. 128), their statist orientation, coupled with keen interest in insuring peace and order, are political organizing principles most consistent with the pattern of development seen in Mexico under their stewardship (pp. 130–31).

When queried about the shortcomings of the system, Camp’s respondents cited disappointing results from agrarian reform efforts, the overcentralization of power in the system, and bureaucratization and corruption (p. 142). The most commonly cited problem, however, was the lack of democratic participation, a feature of the system they attributed to the failure to educate the Mexican population.

Camp’s research suggests that there is little prospect for substantial elite-inspired initiatives for change on the horizon despite the leaders’ willingness to acknowledge problems of considerable severity in the system. Beliefs and behavior patterns have been sustained and insulated from pressures for change—and for that matter, even from new ways of thinking about old problems—by the “common socialization experience, the relationship between the recruiters and the socializers, and the closed nature of the Mexican political system” (p. 154). Camp suspects that neither public policy nor political structure will change significantly unless the profile of the political elite is changed to alter the pattern of beliefs and the sources of political recruitment. Although Daniel Levy has argued in a recent article that some changes have been taking place in the pattern of political recruitment to now include individuals who have been educated in the private sector, it remains to be seen what impact this trend will have on the political values that have traditionally served as the basis for politics in Mexico.⁶ To the extent that clientelistic relations continue to shape political careers within the dominant party system, the system will arguably continue to manifest a substantially closed character. For the moment, then, the processes of decision-making and policy formulation in Mexico appear to be on a treadmill, growing more and more stale with each succeeding year.

As a result, the Mexican regime now confronts numerous structurally rooted difficulties—such as the widespread disaffection of the middle class, economic elites, and much of labor (to say nothing of the plight of the long-suffering peasantry)—along with the chronic financial crisis of the public sector. Moreover, the regime now faces these problems with an increasingly inefficient authoritarian governing appa-

ratus that is managed by a comparatively monolithic political ruling elite substantially at odds with an ever more sophisticated, pluralistic urban society. The rigidity of approach inherent in a virtually self-contained political elite does not bode well for the future. Although the Mexican regime may continue for the moment to count on the many political assets that have made the system so stable in the past (such as dominion over the military and organized labor), there are reasons to believe that inherent characteristics of the political elite may jeopardize the political stability it has so long enjoyed.

NOTES

1. Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).
2. See for example, *The Mexican Left, the Popular Movements, and the Politics of Austerity*, edited by Barry Carr and Ricardo Anzaldúa, Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies Monograph Series, no. 18 (La Jolla, Calif.: University of California, San Diego, 1986); and Barry Carr, "The PSUM: The Unification Process on the Mexican Left, 1981–1985," in *Mexican Politics in Transition*, edited by Judith Gentleman (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987).
3. Prior to publication of the Ronfeldt volume, little was available for those interested in Mexico's military establishment, and what was available was largely based on research conducted in the early 1970s and earlier. See, for example, Edwin Lieuwen, *Mexican Militarism: The Political Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Army, 1910–1940* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1968); Franklin D. Margiotta, "Civilian Control and the Mexican Military: Changing Patterns of Political Influence," in *Civilian Control of the Military: Theories and Cases from Developing Countries*, edited by Claude E. Welch, Jr. (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1976); and David Ronfeldt, "The Mexican Army and Political Order since 1940," in *Armies and Politics in Latin America*, edited by Abraham F. Lowenthal (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976).
4. Camp provides a complete discussion of his survey universe and sample in the book's appendix.
5. Among Camp's other works on Mexican elites are *Mexico's Leaders: Their Education and Recruitment* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1980) and *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).
6. Daniel Levy, "The Political Consequences of Changing Socialization Patterns," in *Mexico's Political Stability: The Next Five Years*, edited by Roderic A. Camp (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1986), 19–46.