Cuauhtémoc Rey
The PRD in Power: Implications for Democratization

Kathleen Bruhn
Dept. of Political Science, UCSB

On July 6, 1997, the Mexican ruling party lost control of Mexico City to the upstart leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in the first popular election held for the post of mayor since the creation of the Federal District in 1928. That night, thousands of jubilant *perredistas* painted their faces yellow and converged on Mexico City's central plaza to celebrate the biggest victory in their young party's history, waving yellow party flags to the sound of mariachis, firecrackers and car horns. For the victorious mayoral candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the celebration meant a vindication of his persistence on the ninth anniversary of his painful defeat in the disputed and dirty 1988 presidential election, and a big step in the political comeback he clearly hoped would eventually lead him--and the party--back to the presidency. After years of discouraging electoral results, persecution, and political violence, the PRD was, for one night, on top of the world. Democracy had finally come for the PRD.

On July 7, 1997, as the crowd of office-seekers, well-wishers, reporters, and people petitioning for favors that had been building for weeks in the offices of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the Colonia Roma grew more insistent, the optimistic and euphoric mood of the weeks prior to the election began to evaporate. As one of Cárdenas's long-time collaborators remarked, rather nervously, "now we really have to get down to work. It's easier to criticize than to govern."[1] To a party long accustomed to the comfortable task of preaching participation and democracy to other parties, Mexico City gave the biggest public stage yet on which to put its principles into practice. The stakes were high for the PRD and for Cárdenas: public credibility, future electoral success, even the presidency itself might rest on the performance of the new Cárdenas government. Mexico City thus became an important test case for the potential and limits of

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[1] Private conversation with author, July 7, 1997. Loose translation of the Spanish, "ahora hay que chingarle, 'mano.es más fácil criticar que gobernar."

alternation in power at the local level. Could a party with declared democratic goals and strong motives to invest its entire effort succeed in expanding democratic opportunities at the local level? Could it turn democracy at the local level into pressure for more democracy at the national level? What systemic and institutional barriers at either the external or internal party level blocked democratization? Perhaps worst of all, would local democracy and electoral success be compatible goals--or contradictory aims between which the party would ultimately have to choose?

This paper examines these questions through an analysis of the first eight months of the Cárdenas government. It can, of course, offer only preliminary findings. During 1998, Cárdenas had to operate with a budget and government program set essentially by his PRI predecessor; 80% of the approved budget was already committed by the time he took office. Moreover, it takes some time to set up new programs, especially when this involves expanding participation in decision-making to actors outside the central administration. The critical year for the Cárdenas government will be the 1998-99 fiscal year, not only because it will bear full responsibility for the budget and program, but because it is the last year Cárdenas has to prove himself before he must resign if he wants to run for president in the year 2000.[2] It is therefore the year on which most voters will judge him. Nevertheless, some trends appear even at this early date which shed light on the relationship between local alternation in power and democratization.

Measuring democratization in Mexico City

Perhaps the trickiest issue in a project of this sort is measuring progress toward democratization. At a conceptual level, I define democratization as the expansion of

opportunities for citizens to participate in and/or influence collective decisions. This definition is loosely based on the Schmitter/O'Donnell definition of democratization as "processes whereby the rules and procedures of citizenship are either applied to political institutions previously governed by other principles...or expanded to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations...or extended to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen participation." Citizenship "involves both the right to be treated...as equal with respect to the making of collective choices and the *obligation* of those implementing such choices to be equally accountable and accessible to all members of the polity."[3] At a practical level, however, it is not always easy to determine when popular participation and influence have genuinely increased.

It is easiest to demonstrate that the Cárdenas victory in Mexico City represents important <u>evidence</u> of democratization, on at least two grounds. First, the mere holding of a competitive election for mayor of Mexico City reversed a policy by which the president had the right to appoint the mayor, called the Regent. As the seat of national government, Mexico City was considered too sensitive to risk an election. It was also too politically independent for the PRI's comfort; Mexico City voters traditionally voted more heavily for the opposition than rural voters, and even voters in most other cities. In permitting Mexico City voters to choose their own city government, then, the 1997 election applied democratic principles to a "political institution previously governed by other principles,"[4] and extended equal voting rights to the 11% of the country's registered voters who by virtue of living in Mexico City had previously been denied any influence over the selection of their local officials.

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[2] The Mexican Constitution (Article 82) stipulates that presidential candidates cannot have held high office for at least six months prior to the election.

[3] Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, <u>Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies</u>, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1986), pp. 7-8.

[4] O'Donnell and Schmitter, p. 8.

The fact that the PRI accepted a Cárdenas victory also constitutes evidence of significant democratic change since 1988, when the PRI used fraud to deny him any claim to the presidency, and even since 1989 and 1990, when local elections in which the PRD did well, in much less important cities than Mexico City, were routinely subject to fraud and intimidation. In part this may reflect changes in the PRI's assessment of the threat posed by Cárdenas, as well as some mellowing by Cárdenas, but it also reflects important changes in Mexican electoral law which make it much more difficult to cheat successfully. To the extent that the vote is respected, citizen participation on at least that level also becomes more effective. PRI leaders who want to get elected have to pay more attention to citizen preferences if they feel less confident that they can fall back on fraud. Opposition leaders can campaign more effectively if they only have to face the hurdle of convincing voters to trust their leadership—not the higher hurdle of convincing voters that a vote for them will count. Polls suggest that citizens now have much more confidence in the electoral system. In 1997, 70.7% rated the election as clean or very clean—at least eight on a ten point scale—compared to 42% in 1991 who expected the election to be clean. Even more telling, just 2.6% of those polled in 1997 gave the election less than five out of ten points, compared to 32.4% in 1991 who did not expect the vote to be respected. The 1997 election results probably do not account for most of this change, but nevertheless did contribute to greater popular confidence.

It is much more difficult to assess democratization within the context of an already elected government. In this paper, I will look at three principal types of evidence. First, did the local government make an effort to apply the "rules and procedures of citizenship...to political institutions previously governed by other principles...to include persons not previously enjoying such rights and obligations...or...to cover issues and institutions not previously subject to citizen

participation"? This involves looking for institutional innovation--the creation of new citizen councils, for instance--as well as efforts to gather more information regarding citizen preferences on particular issues. This should be the easiest part of the analysis. The second, more subjective, involves assessing the success and effectiveness of these efforts. Did citizen opinions make a difference? Did new institutions function effectively? Do people feel represented by the new government? And did efforts to expand participation involve marginal issues, where government might not mind relinquishing power, or issues at the core of citizen concerns? Finally, if citizenship "involves both the right to be treated...as equal with respect to the making of collective choices and the *obligation* of those implementing such choices to be equally accountable and accessible to all members of the polity," it seems relevant to assess the extent of accountability and accessibility in the new government. This is perhaps the trickiest measure, and the least transparent.

Although popular opinions of the effectiveness of the Cárdenas government give us information about how well people feel their interests are represented, it is important not to confuse democratization with the personal future of Cárdenas or the potential for alternation in power in the presidential election of 2000.   If the PRI regains control in Mexico City in the year 2000, and retains it in the presidency, any democratization that may have taken place in Mexico City is not automatically cancelled, particularly if institutional innovations occur and are respected. These questions remain for future research.

Participation under the Cárdenas government

There is substantial evidence of efforts to expand participation, access, and accountability under the Cárdenas administration. Some of this is a party effect rather than the will of Cárdenas

personally. The Asamblea Legislativa of Mexico City offers the clearest example. When the PRD won the office of mayor, it also won control of the Asamblea Legislativa, the equivalent of a state congress, or city council. The Asamblea immediately decided to reallocate funds within the existing budget in order to provide money to establish and staff "módulos de atención ciudadana," or offices for attention to citizens. In a questionnaire distributed to Asamblea members in the summer of 1998, 100% reported that they had set up such an office, and that they visited this office an average of just over once a week.[5] During other hours, according to interviews, staff members paid from the Asamblea budget manned the office. Some of these offices provided legal help, as well as hearing complaints and demands. Yet despite opening up a channel of communication, these offices did not give citizens effective influence policy decisions; indeed, they could quite easily become clientelistic forms of linkage, replacing and expanding the PRI's older and more informal ties. Nevertheless, the institutional and non-partisan nature of this network of offices increases the pressure for all parties to do actual constituent service, despite the fact that individual *asambleistas*--who cannot be re-elected--have little personal incentive to such unrewarding and unglamorous work. To the extent that the Módulos become a part of the professional bureaucracy in Mexico City, citizens may come to see them as more of a right than a privilege acquired by loyalty to a particular party, thus undermining the clientelistic potential. The fact that many *asambleistas* are at-large members (that is, without a specific district) may further encourage this tendency, since it raises the possibility of choice among Módulos--if the majority district Módulo does not help you, perhaps an at-large Módulo will. However, tracking down the location of these Módulos remains a task for future research. It is possible that choice is more

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[5] Questionnaire distributed by author, July/August 1998. Response rate was approximately 33%.

available to residents of wealthier districts, where it is more convenient for at-large *asambleistas* to set up an office.

The Cárdenas government has sponsored at least one public initiative, or referendum, to sample public opinion more widely and consistently than the Módulos permit. However, the issue could hardly be called central to policy: whether or not to beautify the Zócalo (Mexico City's central square) by planting shrubs and trees.[6] Nor did the referendum bind the government legally. Critics might well see such a referendum as a cheap publicity stunt, but even supporters must admit that it did not significantly expand participation in the decisions most affecting citizens.

A third innovation, this one more tied to the Cárdenas administration, has been the encouragement of public assemblies in the different *delegaciones*, or administrative subdivisions of Mexico City, around the process of formulating the delegational budget for 1999. I attended one such meeting in Coyoacán in July of 1998. The meeting was well advertised and held in plenty of time to incorporate suggestions by the September deadline for the delegation's budget proposal. Several hundred people attended. About forty spoke, some on behalf of organized neighborhood associations. All the speakers handed in written proposals to delegation officials, and the rest got a questionnaire to fill out, listing their top priorities for the future budget.[7] The head of the delegation administration, Arnoldo Martínez Verdugo, attended along with two local *asambleistas*. The meeting opened with a presentation on the financial limitations of the Mexico City government and a plea that within these financial realities people would try to understand that they had to set priorities. The local *diputado* then expounded for some twenty minutes on

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[6] A second, more vital "referendum" on whether to convert Mexico's bank rescue plan (Fobaproa) to public debt was sponsored by the party, not the Cárdenas government, and was not binding.

what <u>he</u> thought those priorities had to be--perhaps the least democratic moment of the evening, as it gave the impression that officials had made up their minds prior to listening to citizen views. However, it did not seem to deter those attending. In the relatively comfortable delegation of Coyoacán, the principal demand had to do with crime and public safety, including numerous demands to do something about prostitutes operating in several local neighborhoods, and complaints about traffic and parking violations. The second most frequently mentioned demand had to do with garbage collection and dirty public streets. Other demands covered everything from dental services for the poor and a cultural center to lower water fees and noise reduction. The government's willingness to listen to these demands indicated some effort, but it was less clear that the process would significantly influence the outcome in terms of the priorities in the delegation's budget proposal--or even that such a limited, biased, and self-selected sample <u>should</u> significantly influence the outcome. Furthermore, many of these demands simply could not be resolved at the delegational level, and some--such as the woman who complained about the man upstairs playing his drums too loudly--had little to do with government at all. A future study of budgets produced by delegations may turn up evidence of variation by delegation that can be matched to social priorities within districts, but at the moment, this innovation provides only evidence of some effort to offer opportunities for participation, albeit on an issue of some importance to the population.

   A similar proposal involves establishing neighborhood crime councils. The idea is to give local communities some control over the assignment of local policemen. If implemented, this could increase local accountability and stimulate organization at the neighborhood level, much more so than the type of one-time public assemblies envisioned in the delegation budget process.

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[7] Not every speaker was prepared with a full written proposal; most seemed to use the questionnaire to put their

Environmental councils have also been proposed. Both proposals show good intentions, but are far too vague to be implemented soon, and would require a new law of citizen participation (which, to be fair, is currently being drawn up by Asamblea members, taking into account this goal of stimulating new local organization). Both proposals would involve huge logistical problems, particularly in terms of relations with police.

A fourth area in which the Cárdenas government has tried institute a new policy involves the type of access offered to civil society organizations. To head up the key Office of Citizen Participation and Social Administration [Gestión], which deals directly with mobilization and protest in Mexico City (particularly non-labor mobilization), Cárdenas named veteran student organizer Carlos Imaz Gispert. In June, 1998, this office developed a proposal for reorganization, based on its diagnosis that "for decades, the relationship between the government of the Federal District and the social organizations demanding services was marked by clientelism, corporativism, and discretionality," and that the Office of Citizen Participation in particular had used its "excessive and discretional concentration of functions...[to] support party activities and electoral manipulation."[8] Instead, "the democratic government...conceives of citizen participation as a new form of relationship between governors and the governed, that generates greater activity of the social forces in the political life of the city and that confers faculties on the citizenry to orient public policies...[this makes] necessary the restructuring of [the office of citizen participation]."[9]

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demands in written form.

[8] "Propuesta de reestructuración orgánica," Coordinación General de Participación Ciudadana y Gestión Social, June 10, 1998, p. 2.

[9] "Propuesta de reestructuración orgánica," Coordinación General de Participación Ciudadana y Gestión Social, June 10, 1998, p. 2.

Three key changes were proposed. First, the proposal argues for the necessary

decentralization of the office's functions, creating four regional directors to deal as directly and

rapidly as possible with social organizations. Second, noting that "the existing structure

contemplated exclusively the atention of complaints and demands, not the construction of a new

relationship in which citizens play an active role in the new society, and in the definition of public

policy," the proposal suggests establishing programs to stimulate neighborhood organization,

though it does not clearly specify the nature of those programs.[10] Finally, the proposal

emphasizes the importance of regularizing operations, with the ultimate goal of making the office

more predictable and less discretionary in its actions, and in this way making "the administration

of resources more transparent."[11] Essentially, what is proposed is a bureaucratization of

government functions, reducing political discretionality and reducing the scope of action of any

one official by strictly defining their areas of competency. These goals qualify as democratic,

insofar as they effectively limit the capacity of officials--including PRD officials--to condition

government aid to political support, though it remains to be seen how well the process will work.

However, a similar logic of institutionalization has already been put into operation with

regard to the treatment of civil society organizations, at least according to interviews of

government officials. And this is seen as a specifically "democratic" relationship between state

and society: "rationality, in conformity with the law."[12] The aim is equal treatment under the

law--the same kind of equal access referred to by O'Donnell and Schmitter in their definition of

democratization as the extension of citizenship rights.   In practice this means extending access to

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[10] "Propuesta de reestructuración orgánica," Coordinación General de Participación Ciudadana y Gestión Social, June 10, 1998, pp. 3-4

[11] "Propuesta de reestructuración orgánica," Coordinación General de Participación Ciudadana y Gestión Social, June 10, 1998, pp. 4-5.

[12] confidential interview by author, July 1998.

organizations through formal institutions rather than through connections with political leaders, and irrespective of their ability to mobilize; as one official put it, "we do not apply the mass-ometer," looking at how many people a group can mobilize and how disruptive it can be in order to decide which petitions to receive. Government officials in the Office of Citizen Participation freely admit that this policy has roused considerable resistance, not only on the part of PRI organizations, but on the part of not a few leaders in PRD-connected organizations as well. Many of these leaders see the insistent claim that they no longer have to mobilize to win access as a threat to the internal coherence and unity of the organizations they direct. In essence, such a policy, while apparently democratic in its extension of equal access, may also have the effect of diminishing incentives for popular organization, and even taking away from movement leaders the selective incentives they offered their supporters by virtue of special relationships with particular politicians. A fully rationalized and impartial administration would also undermine the interests of these ambitious politicians, and for this reason, say officials in the Office of Citizen Participation, they have faced opposition from within their own party and from other offices in the Cárdenas government.

Nevertheless, they claim proudly that even their limited efforts in this direction have contributed to changing patterns of social mobilization in the first months of the Cárdenas government. Four changes are particularly worth noting. First, overall rates of mobilization and participation are down compared to the previous PRI administration. Records from the Office of Citizen Participation indicate that in the first six months of 1998, the total number of public mobilizations of all types aimed at the local (Federal District) government declined by 65.5% in the first six months of 1998, compared to the first six months of 1997.[13] Mobilizations of all types

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[13] "Informe Mensual," Coordinación General de Participación Ciudadana y Gestión Social, June 1998.

aimed at the federal government declined even more dramatically, by 76.9%. However, while

attendance at local mobilizations fell 63.3%, attendance at federal mobilizations fell by only 2.9%.

Government data published in 1996 show an even more dramatic decline, from an average of 6.9

mobilizations per day in 1995 to just 2.2 mobilizations per day in the first six months of 1998.[14]

In order to provide a countercheck on this data, I also carried out an event-counting of

mobilizations in Mexico City based on a survey of La Jornada during 1996, and the first seven

months of the Cárdenas government. While many mobilizations never make it to the newspapers,

this procedure does offer an independent check, certainly of the more important mobilizations,

and provides much more detailed data on exactly who is mobilizing, how, and why. This analysis

confirms a decline in the number of mobilizations (comparing the first seven months of 1996 with

1998), but by a more modest 21%.[15]

Second, the type of demands made most frequently in mobilizations has changed.

According to government data, the biggest change occurred in the category of labor demands,

with a decline from 346 events in the first six months of 1997 to 54 events in the first six months

of 1998. The next largest decline falls into the government category of claims for justice, which

includes a number of human rights demands. In percentage terms, agrarian demands declined

most, by 96%. On the other hand, demands for government services and public transportation

actually increased, 160% and 142% respectively.[16]

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[14] Victor Ballinas, "Dos mil 522 manifestaciones de protesta en el DF en 1995," La Jornada, 9 January 1996, p. 38.
The comparative data from 1998 come directly from the "Informe Mensual," Coordinación General de
Participación Ciudadana y Gestión Social, June 1998.
[15] This count leaves out the month of December for the Cárdenas government. If it were included, the count for
Cárdenas would rise to 135, but one would have to also include the non-continuous month of December 1996 for
the previous PRI administration, which raises its count to 164. The difference between them falls by two events
when both months are included.
[16] All data reflect demands made at the local level rather than against the federal government. "Informe Mensual,"
Coordinación General de Participación Ciudadana y Gestión Social, June 1998.

A more disaggregated analysis, based on events recorded in La Jornada, turns up relatively fewer differences [see Table 1, below]. For both administrations, labor conflicts spark the biggest share of mobilizations and protests, a finding consistent with the 1997-1998 government data. However, issues involving informal street vendors come very close to these figures, and if one adds together protests in favor of and against street vendor rights, the total share of informal commerce surpasses the share of labor conflicts in the Cárdenas administration. The share of housing demands among total protests remains fairly constant, although according to government data, the actual number of protests fell from 1997-1998. Instead, the biggest changes include increases in the categories of protest against corruption and against particular government officials, and a significant decline in protests over human rights. Interestingly, while public security remains a very salient issue, according to polls (with which this paper deals later), it does not seem to spark many demonstrations or marches. Crime may be a good example of a public good where citizens face significant free rider problems in organizing a coalition.

Third, the type of tactics most commonly used has changed [see Table 2, below]. While the number of "assembly" mobilizations (including marches, demonstrations, and *plantónes*, or outdoor sit-ins) in the first seven months of 1998 fell 54% compared to the first seven months of 1996, the number of strikes doubled, and the number of aggressive "occupation" tactics-- including street blockages and takeovers of buildings--more than doubled. Civil society actions in 1998 were less likely to involve strictly verbal methods. The share of assembly mobilizations within each administration fell relatively less; in 1996 38.5% of all mobilizing acts involved assembly, compared to 31.6% in 1998. This probably reflects the relatively low risk and cost of such methods. However, the share of strikes rose from 2.7% to 6.8%, and the share of occupation tactics rose from 10.1% to 26.5%. These are interesting and suggestive data, raising

the possibility that while overall mobilization has fallen, mobilizers may feel it necessary to use more aggressive tactics once they decide to take that step.

Finally, the identity of the organizations that are most active has changed. The type of active organization does not seem to have changed very dramatically [see Table 3]. Moreover, three of the top five most active organizations remained the same from 1996 to 1998--specifically, the Asamblea de Barrios (associated with the PRD), the remnants of the SUTAUR-Ruta 100 bus drivers union dissolved by the PRI administration in 1996, and the union of government workers of the Federal District (SUTDGF) [see Table 4]. However, while just one labor union section accounts for 10 of 11 actions in 1996, unionized workers from six separate work areas mobilized in 1998 against the Cárdenas administration.

In addition, the political associations of the most active organizations shifted. In 1996, six of the top eleven organizations had formed at least a temporary electoral alliance with the PRD. In 1998, eight of the top eleven most active organizations were affiliated with the PRI. The tactics of the most active groups in 1998 were also more aggressive than those of the general 1998 sample. Just under 30% of the mobilizational activity of the most active groups in 1998 involved assembly type activities, compared to 31.6% overall. Over 31% of their activity involved seizures of streets and buildings, compared to 26.5% overall. In contrast, the activity of the most active groups in 1996 was somewhat less aggressive than that of the general 1996 sample. 43% of the activity of the most active groups involved assembly, compared to 38.5% overall, and 5% of their activity involved seizures of buildings or roads, compared to 10.1% overall. It is not clear why these differences occurred, except that they may reflect the different organizational traditions of the groups involved. When the same group was involved, the tactical menu did not seem to change dramatically across administrations.

What do these changes, taken together, imply about democratization in the Cárdenas administration? Some members of the administration interpret the overall decline in mobilizations as a positive indication that their policy of direct access is working. Partisan alliances may also account for some of this change, although PRD-associated organizations have not stopped mobilizing, and the small organizations which account for most mobilizations rarely claim a formal affiliation to any party. A partisan explanation would thus have to rely on deliberate under-mobilization by PRI organizations, which is not especially credible given the dominance of PRI groups in the most active set of organizations under Cárdenas. Yet even if the administration is correct, might not the leaders of popular organizations also be correct, that regularization of access to citizens and small groups weakens the basis for solidarity within popular organization? It would indeed be ironic if more equal and democratic access tended to undermine the very civil society which supported democratization in the first place.

Partisan differences may account for some of the other observed changes, however, and in a less democratic way. The decline in claims for justice, for instance, is probably associated to fewer PRD-related mobilizations on human rights violations. The decline in labor and agrarian claims is much more surprising given the incentives of the PRI to use its affiliated union and peasant organizations to put pressure on the PRD government. The increase in conflict within so many different sections of the SUTGDF and from PRI-affiliated street vendor movements may be the only indication of such a policy. This suggests, however, that much more detailed investigation is needed into the types of labor conflicts that have occurred, or that have been classified as labor conflicts by previous PRI administrations. It might be, for instance, that dissident sections of unions have caused much more trouble than popular perceptions would indicate. It might also be that researchers have overestimated the ability of PRI unions to

mobilize. Or it might be that PRI unions have simply put the interests of economic and labor peace ahead of the goal of undermining Cárdenas. From the information in La Jornada (which shows a much smaller decline in labor mobilizations than government data), all of these hypotheses have some support. Dissident teachers, for example, account for a number of 1996 mobilizations. PRI unions often threaten to mobilize--then back down. And union mobilizations have been largely confined to the SUTGDF, which affects Cárdenas most directly, rather than spreading to manufacturing or other types of unions.

The reversal of the partisan affiliations of the most active groups is a rational response to electoral incentives, and may have no further implications. However, it may also indicate that the state policy of impartial, regularized access has not been fully functional; that in fact, PRD-associated organizations enjoy non-rational, privileged access compared to PRI organizations, with or without the connivance of the Office of Citizen Participation. As one official in the Office of Citizen Participation admitted, privately, the PRI organizations claim that we don't like them, and "the truth is, we don't." [17]

Finally, the withdrawal of privileged access to some of the PRI organizations has coincided with an increase in aggressive tactics. Organizations like AMOP, a powerful street vendors association affiliated with the PRI, progressed to street blocking, which it had not done in 1996. The SUTDGF engaged in five building seizures and six strikes, compared to one building seizure, three strikes, and five incidents of public bloodletting in 1996. [18] It is not clear whether a lack of democratic access caused this trend toward more aggressive tactics (or, alternatively, whether partisan calculations or different organizational capacities caused this change), but the implications for democracy are troubling because it pushes state-civil society relations toward a

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[17] confidential interview by author, July 1998

confrontational and to some extent extra-legal pattern. Democratic institutions must be able to process demands without risking violence, as street and building seizures in particular often do. Such tactics harm the population as well as embarrassing the government.

Effectiveness in government and the question of competence

Diving even deeper into the murky waters of measuring democratization, one comes to the question of governmental effectiveness in responding to citizen demands. On the one hand, "effectiveness" and "democratization" are conceptually separable. Regardless of how one measures effectiveness, it is clearly possible to envision a democratic government that responds to citizen demands ineffectively or that responds to some demands in ways that undermine other, more salient ones. No government can give citizens everything they want. Human error may also interfere with efforts to respond. Goals may not be compatible. Likewise, it is quite possible to envision a non-democratic government that responds to citizens effectively, although we usually assume that their incentives to do so are low. In fact, for years the non-democratic PRI responded to many citizen demands despite being under no electoral compulsion to do so. On the other hand, citizens in a democracy must evaluate governments on the basis of whether they keep the promises they make, and this involves judgments about effectiveness. The key distinction of a democracy should be accountability rather than inerrancy: assuming that no government is completely effective, can governments that make mistakes or that are especially incompetent be held accountable by the citizens they serve?

In this light, then, how well has Cárdenas done? The most damaging mistakes made by the Cárdenas administration involve personnel choices. In staffing the new government, Cárdenas

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[18] All the incidents of bloodletting and strikes were associated with one medical workers' union.

fell back primarily on his long-time collaborators in the PRD, mostly because of the emphasis he places on personal loyalty as a shield against sabotage, but also in part (according to interviews) because many of the non-PRD people he asked turned him down. Yet in two key areas, his choices have been quite unfortunate. First, and most damaging, six of his nominees to top commands within the police forces had to resign for various crimes in the first seven months of his administration; two, in fact, had to resign in the very first week. These officers included the head of Recovery of Vehicles (for accusations of previous involvement in extorsion, murder, and violation of human rights), the head of the Judicial Police (for similar accusations of torture, murder, and drug trafficking), the subsecretary of Public Security (for involvement in the 1968 student massacre, as a soldier in one of the batallions involved in the shooting), the subdirector of the Judicial Police (who served part of a 14 year prison term for kidnapping), and two regional commanders in Iztapalapa (for current involvement in criminal activity, including directing a band of car thieves, and protecting robbers who assaulted public transport). The failure of Cárdenas and his collaborators to uncover and/or respect the seriousness of the charges and crimes involved was at the least a serious lapse of judgment, especially given his campaign promises to clean up city government.

Yet was there accountability? On the positive side, Cárdenas can point out that he has vigorously prosecuted the officials involved in current criminal activity, and that all six resigned and left the administration. Most of the officials who resigned had served with the police in previous PRI administrations, during which their written criminal records were just as available, but did not lead either to public revelation of their past or the termination of their careers. This seems to indicate increased accountability. On the negative side, Cárdenas cannot claim much credit for this outcome, and mechanisms of accountability remain informal, running through the

press and public opinion rather than institutional channels. The real difference here was the public exposure of the records of these officials rather than the procedures used to select and monitor them. While perhaps evidence of democratization, in the sense that political competition has encouraged trends toward a freer and more vigorous press and given political competitors stronger incentives to leak information, the Cárdenas administration bears only the limited merit of having responded to public pressure by firing its own nominees.

A second area which has generated intense conflicts within the administration is the selection of *delegados*, or heads of delegation administration. In eight of Mexico City's sixteen delegations, serious conflicts arose between the *delegado* and political *subdelegados*, resulting in the resignation of two officials, despite repeated calls by Cárdenas for cooperation. Many of the seizures of delegation offices in 1998 involved conflicts among delegation officials and between delegation officials and disgruntled party activists (from various parties) who objected to the nomination of a particular delegate. These conflicts also account in part for the increase in the number of mobilizations directed at government officials. Part of the problem appears to be the delegate nomination process. Delegates were not elected, but rather nominated by Cárdenas for confirmation by the Asamblea. [19] Rejection by the Asamblea seems to be a precursor of future conflicts: of the eight delegations most affected by conflict, three had the first delegate nominee rejected, and one received the bare minimum number of votes for approval.

Cárdenas has done even less well at resolving the principal demands of Mexico City citizens. When Cárdenas took office, in December of 1997, polls indicate that crime was by far the biggest concern of Mexico City citizens, identified as the 'principal problem' by 36% of

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[19] Confirmation requires a two-thirds vote. Of the five delegates rejected, all received the vote of a majority of the Assembly (basically, the vote of the PRD bench) but failed to win two-thirds.

respondents.[20] Unemployment, the economic crisis, and corruption came in close together--but far behind crime--at 10.9%, 9.2%, and 9.2% respectively. As the mayor of Mexico City Cárdenas could do least about economic crisis and unemployment. On such issues as crime, Cárdenas faces in some ways a more difficult task than municipal administrations in other cities that made substantial progress, such as New York Mayor Rudy Giulani. Cárdenas started with a police force that is relatively less well trained, paid, and armed, and riddled with corruption at all levels for many years.

The limited budget and authority of the Mexico City government makes its problems much more difficult to deal with. Voters may forgive him for failing to fix big problems as long as they recognize his inability to resolve them. But do they recognize this? To some extent, this is reflected in opinions about whether it was the government's responsibility to solve the principal problem each respondent mentioned, and whether Cárdenas himself could resolve it. In the case of crime, for example, only 36% of those who listed it as the principal problem thought it was the government's responsibility alone (though an additional 29% thought the responsibility was shared by the government and the citizens). Yet over 80% expected Cárdenas to resolve the situation at least in part, and 30% declared that they thought he could "resolve it all." Fewer expected him to be able to do anything at all about pollution, traffic, or overpopulation, but these were also less vital concerns. Lack of democracy, on the other hand, generated virtually no concern (less than 1% thought this was the principal problem in Mexico City), and few respondents expected Cárdenas to put much effort into improving citizen participation. [21]

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[20] This and all other polling data come from a series of polls conducted by CEOP, in Mexico City, and generously provided to the author.

[21] Most people answered that he would not make increasing citizen participation a priority in his government; with 'yes' coded 1 and 'no' coded 2, the mean response is 1.75.

Six months later, the natural consequences of these expectations had begun to emerge. Crime, unemployment, the economic crisis, and corruption remained top concerns. The number of those who thought of environmental pollution as Mexico City's principal problem had risen substantially, to 22.9%, probably because of several serious forest fires in May which left the city choking and caused health alerts as far north as Texas. However, the number of those who thought Cárdenas could resolve these problems even in part had declined significantly [see Table 5]. Cárdenas himself claimed to have reduced crime in Mexico City by "10-12%" in the first six months of 1998,[22] although disaggregated figures from the April-June period show a more mixed picture. Rates of murder and car theft did decline slightly, and car recovery rates rose from 59.6% in April to 63.5% in June. However, robberies of homes and businesses increased, and robberies of pedestrians rose by 15%.[23] Citizens did not appear to share his confidence that the crime situation had improved: 62% thought the number of crimes had increased, and close to half of those polled thought the police had actually gotten worse (which is saying something, given general opinions of the Mexico City police). Cárdenas's approval rating had fallen from 2.2 (on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being 'approve a lot') in December to 2.8 in early June, a close to neutral rating. Where people had felt pretty good about Cárdenas in December--an average of 1.1 on a feeling thermometer scale from -3 to +3--they felt less enthusiastic by June, at just barely over the midpoint of zero on the scale (.3). While 46.6% still approved of Cárdenas some or a lot in June, the percentage of those who disapproved some or a lot had risen from 11.5% in December to 33.5% in June. These judgments seem to be connected to expectations and evaluations of success in major areas. Those who thought in December that crime would fall

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[22] Ricardo Olayo, "Ha disminuido la delincuencia entre 10 y 12 por ciento en el DF, asegura Cárdenas." La Jornada. 22 July 1998, p. 50.

under Cárdenas, for instance, were significantly more likely to approve of him than those who thought crime would stay the same or increase ($r = .29$, significant at .01). And those who perceived in June that crime had risen were less likely to approve of him than those (few) who thought crime had fallen ($r = .13$, significant at .01). In various models of multivariate analysis, evaluation variables attain larger coefficients and higher levels of significance than age, sex, religion, family income, or occupation.

Ironically, some areas in which Cárdenas had more success, mostly because he had more direct control over implementation and outcomes, may not improve his popularity. One example is the collection of traffic fines. In the first five months of 1998, the Cárdenas government collected 80% of the total collected from traffic fines in all of 1997. Cárdenas may point to these figures as evidence of lower corruption, but people still rarely jump for joy because they get to pay their traffic tickets. Yet people getting traffic tickets belong to a relatively small group compared to those who pay taxes and other fees. If Cárdenas is as successful in improving collection rates in these areas, he may face some resentment.

These findings suggest that Cárdenas has failed to respond to the areas of greatest citizen concern. He has failed in part because of the difficulty of the problems, in part because of the limitations of his office (particularly the limited resources and authority of the mayor), and also in part because of his personal limitations. It is difficult to avoid the speculation that opinions of the police have been affected by the frequent scandals involving high police officials in the Cárdenas administration. These problems will certainly affect his presidential prospects in 2000. Yet democracy can coexist with incompetence. In the short term, incompetence may encourage alternation in power, which can bring about a more rapid acceptance of electoral credibility in a

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[23] Juan Antonio Zuñiga y Raúl Llanos. "Ascendente la tendencia delictiva en la ciudad," La Jornada, 23 July

long-distrusted system like that of Mexico. Nevertheless, incompetence--even if it is only perceived incompetence--may be less helpful in the long term. If all democratic leaders seem incapable of resolving major problems, voters may lose interest and confidence in elections as a method of choosing leaders. This could pose risks for democratic consolidation.

Conclusions: effects of alternation in power on democracy in Mexico

From this rough and preliminary evidence, what can we discover about the connection between alternation in power at the local level and democracy in Mexico?

First, this paper argues that Mexico City represents a special case of clear democratization because it involved the extension of voting rights to filling an important office not previously subject to democratic election. Whether or not an opposition party won, this advanced democracy in Mexico.

Second, the acceptance of an opposition victory--and by Cárdenas--significantly enhanced the credibility of Mexico's new electoral system. This should tend to stabilize electoral rules, particularly among the supporters of the party that until 1997 most frequently challenged the legitimacy and credibility of the electoral system: the PRD. Indeed, one of the indirect effects of Cárdenas's victory has been to strengthen the hand of moderates in the party, and to moderate those who had advocated more radical resistance, Cárdenas's own faction. Cárdenas himself is apparently convinced that his best path to power now lies through good administration rather than firebreathing defiance or inflammatory declarations. [24] The prospects for stable consolidation of

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1998, p. 26.

[24] In 1994, even prior to the election, Cárdenas repeatedly accused the government of fraud, which he failed to prove legally, and threatened that if deprived fraudulently of the presidency a second time, the country would be ungovernable. However, he did not attempt to incite any aggressive actions after the election, limiting himself to rhetoric and peaceful demonstrations.

democracy are enhanced by the stabilization and institutionalization of a moderate three-party system in which the left accepts the legal rules of the game.

Third, the consequences of alternation in power for changes in participation depend more on the will of the government to spend resources to open up participation than on the fact of alternation itself. One can imagine a PAN, PT, or PVEM government having different consequences for democratization at this level than a PRD government. Yet the case of an actual PRD government demonstrates some of the limits and contradictory effects of such efforts. While substantial evidence exists that the government has put some thought to the problem of participation, most initiatives remain conjunctural or even conjectural in nature: one-time assemblies or referendums rather than institutionalized channels of participation, and fine-sounding but vague and un-implemented proposals. One must grant the PRD some time to realize its proposals. Less than a year has passed since the PRD took office. However, there is no real indication that expanding participation is a top priority for the new government. Rather, it is one among many, and by no means the most important. It may thus get lost in the short three years of a local administration (or two years, counting only the time available to Cárdenas if he wants to run for president).

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the problem of participation has been the government's efforts to regularize contacts with social movements. Here, the democratic consequences are contradictory and not yet clear: does equal access under the law, to the extent it can be realized, contribute to democracy--or undermine social organizations that give people more leverage against the state?

Fourth, in terms of levels of accountability, some evidence suggests that the PRD has responded when caught in a mistake, primarily when other party competitors leak information to

the press and a public outcry ensues. This is, perhaps, a democratic mechanism in the end, and maybe even a more reliable one than institutional solutions to monitoring government officials. However, it does seem a little haphazard and dependent on the continued willingness of government to pressure officials to resign rather than ride out publicity problems.

Fifth, in terms of responsiveness and effectiveness, the Cárdenas government does not win especially high marks. I make no judgments here about whether he <u>could</u> have responded more effectively, or whether he <u>tried</u> hard enough to respond effectively. However, it is worth noting that he certainly had as powerful an incentive to try as any politician in a system that bans re-election can ever have: his desire to run for and win the presidency. The reality may simply boil down to the inability of any government, democratic or not, to give the citizens all of what they want. The more interesting questions will lie in the judgments citizens make about who to blame, and how to react to failures.

Finally, it is important to remember that alternation   in Mexico City will not necessarily precipitate alternation in power in the presidency. It may even have the reverse effect, souring Mexico City voters on the potential of non-PRI administrations to do any better than the PRI did. Moreover, alternation at the national level does not solve all problems of democratization. Although it would probably consolidate a competitive electoral system and ensure maximum credibility, many islands of non-democracy would remain within the Mexican political system, including continuing imbalances between executives and legislatures (something to which Mexico City itself bears witness), limitations on the powers of local and state governments, political violence and human rights violations that undermine free and fair competition in many states, and pressure on the freedom of the press. Nevertheless, the case of Mexico City raises interesting

questions about the problems of democratic deepening. It is perhaps an optimistic sign that one

can even begin to raise such questions in the Mexican context.

TABLE 1: TYPE OF DEMAND, 1996 AND 1998

TYPE OF DEMAND	1996	1998
space for street vendors; other concessions	10.6%	13.6%
get rid of street vendors	5.1	5.0
labor conflict	17.9	14.3
for/against a political figure, esp. govt. official	3.8	13.6
Corruption	6.8	13.6
public security	5.5	2.9
Housing	6.0	6.4
public services	4.7	6.4
traffic/parking related	.4	.7
aid to business	2.1	1.4
electoral (includes internal union elections)	1.7	.7
Educational	3.4	1.4
anti-growth--opposed to new construction	6.0	4.3
land invasions/regularization—conflict over land	3.0	7.1
Ecology	4.7	0
human rights	7.2	1.4
debt resolutions	3.0	0
other:	8.1	7.1

TABLE 2: TYPE OF ACTION, 1996 AND 1998

Year	assembly	strikes	Occupation	verbal	other	TOTAL
1996	57	4	15	55	17	148
1998	37	8	31	34	7	117
% change	-54.1%	+100%	+107.7%	-38.2%	-58.8%	-20.9%

 "Assembly" includes marches, manifestations, and *plantónes* (outdoor sit-ins).
"Strikes" includes work stoppages and slowdowns as well as strikes.
"Occupation" includes any takeover and blockage of a street or building.
"Verbal" includes verbal forms of expression, such as letters, petitions,
        legal claims, press conferences, and threats to take some future action.

TABLE 3: TYPE OF ORGANIZATION, 1996 AND 1998

TYPE OF ORGANIZATION	1996	1998
vecinal	30.0%	35.8%
vendedores ambulantes	12.0	14.7
comerciantes establecidos	7.3	6.4
business organizations	2.0	2.8
unions of government employees	5.3	2.8
police	4.0	5.5
transportation unions	7.3	7.3
other unions/job related protests	8.0	5.5
campesinos/ejidatarios	4.0	4.6
students/parents	3.3	1.8
other	16.7	12.8

These data include organizations not named in the article, as well as named
organizations. For 1996, the figures reflect the share of each type for the January-
December period, and for 1998, they reflect the entire Cárdenas administration, December-July.

TABLE 4: MOST ACTIVE ORGANIZATIONS, 1996 AND 1998

1996	1998
1. SUTAUR--Ruta 100	1. SUTGDF (from six different areas)
2. SUTGDF (all but 1 from same union section)	2. Alianza Metropolitana de Organizaciones Populares (AMOP)
3. El Barzón	3. Asamblea de Barrios
4. Asamblea de Barrios	4. SUTAUR—Ruta 100
5. Comerciantes Establecidos Procentrhico	5. Confederación Nacional de Comerciantes y Prestadores de Servicios (street vendors)
6. Frente Popular Francisco Villa	6. CNOP—taxistas
7. Unión Popular Revolucionario Emiliano Zapata	7. CNOP—street vendors
8. Movimiento Pro Dignificación de la Colonia Roma	8. Unión Cívica de Comerciantes de la Antigua Merced
9. Movimiento Urbano Popular	9. Coordinadora de Comerciantes en Pequeño, Artesanos, y Trabajadores no Asalariados
10. Asamblea Ciudadana de Deudores de la Banca	10. Frente Político 6 de Julio
11. Unión de Marchantes en Movimiento	11. Movimiento Territorial del PRI (neighbors)

TABLE 5: PRINCIPAL PROBLEMS AND CÁRDENAS CAPACITY

	CAN RESOLVE		RESOLVE IN PART		CANNOT RESOLVE	
	Dec. 1997	June 1998	Dec. 1997	June 1998	Dec. 1997	June 1998
Crime	29.8%	17.2%	50.3%	37.7%	16.8%	40.1%
Unemployment	31.4%	21.3%	53.5%	39.7%	9.3%	31.6%
Economic crisis	21.4%	12.8%	51.0%	42.5%	24.1%	40.8%
Corruption	22.6%	17.8%	61.0%	51.1%	15.8%	29.6%
pollution	21.1%	18.9%	49.5%	41.5%	27.4%	36.9%