



Private Sector: orphaned



**The IP in Mexico:
orphaned from the PRI,
relatively autonomous from the PAN,
defining its own political strategy**

With even greater media diffusion than the news of civil disobedience calling for a vote-by-vote recount, campaign-like advertising spots confirming the July 2nd electoral count are promoted by the IFE, the PAN, the “Government of Vicente Fox,” and various private sector groups. Led by Coparmex (Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana) and the CCE (Consejo Coordinador Empresarial) through their “Society in Movement” programs, the private sector (“IP” in Mexico) is the most aggressive political advertiser in the country.

While the IFE, the PAN, and the Federal Government spots tend to promote their sponsors and indirectly attack the opposition, the private sector spots are “completely non-party and profoundly political”, in the words of the Society en Movement web site. Eight minute ads on prime time explain how the July 2nd election was “practically” immune from fraud by virtue of citizen participation, and that in fact the vote-by-vote, casilla-by-casilla count has already been completed.

Speaking in the name and with the “voices” of the casilla citizen participants and the people themselves, the ad shamelessly appropriates the inked thumb logo character of the IFE to explain the current situation. In fact, the use of the IFE character represents a challenge that bespeaks the group’s lack of institutional respect and the IFE’s possible connivance. Coparmex local Presidents are being quoted as saying this campaign is to “pressure” Andrés Manuel López Obrador so that he understands that the “elections were clean.” (The ad in streaming video can be seen on www.sociedadennovimiento.org.mx.)

The ads from the private business sector appear not to be regulated in any way by electoral or influence laws. They have been advertising vigorously since 2003. Before this simply becomes accepted as part of the landscape, it would be useful to look at how this supra-party activism of some business people came to be.

Orphaned from the PRI.

The IP was a powerful and comfortable part of the traditional coporativist PRI structure, alongside the unions, the campesinos and the middle class organizations. With the fragmentation of the PRI, particularly beginning in the North during the 1980s, a number of businessmen and





groups separated from the PRI. Some went into the PAN, but in general they did not seek to recreate the organic PRI-like relation they had left behind.

As the transition to democracy became more formalized in the course of the 1990s, the IP took up a role in supporting local candidates, rarely leading on specific issues but increasingly flexible around the fundamental dynamic of alternation in power as a touchstone for the process.

(This discussion does not pretend to be a definitive summary of the IP history in politics; the private sector in Mexico is as diverse and as textured as the country itself. The broad strokes used here have value to give a feel for the emerging role of the key centers for developing IP strategies.)

Relatively autonomous from the PAN.

The 1994 election saw the IP divided, especially since a strong PAN candidate had emerged after the Presidential debate on television. Nonetheless, by the time of the election, most business people appeared to be in the PRI camp.

The 1997 election results showed attentive IP leaders how fragmented the PRI had become, having lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies. From that time forward it was easier for those who wished to think flexibly with regard to the PAN, and even to the PRD, to forge working ties.

Beginning his campaign for the Presidency in 1998, Fox actively courted the IP, particularly the strong groupings in Monterrey, Mexico City and Guadalajara. How important these groups were for the Fox victory is still a matter of historical research and judgment. The key point here is that Fox later disappointed them with his lack of success on a structural "reform agenda" as President.

Many of them accepted the thesis that Fox was being held back by a divided and uncooperative Congress. This provided the opportunity for a critical experiment by the CCE and its allies in the Congressional elections of 2003.

The general strategy was to secure a Congress more open to recover the market reform initiatives of Salinas, especially those targeted but not yet realized by either Zedillo or Fox. Under the slogan of "that the Congress function", the IP groups tried to help the good guys and oppose the bad guys, from their perspective. The result was not a success, as the PAN was weakened, the PRI (using the slogan of "no IVA on foods or medicines") was strengthened and the PRD increased its representation marginally.

Defining its own strategy

After reviewing the results of the elections and the persistent popularity of López Obrador in the DF, the twin foci of the more independent strategy became a promotion of free market values





and stopping AMLO, even promoting anyone but AMLO, including a list of “acceptable” leftists. Several versions of this strategy were utilized in ad campaigns around the video scandals of 2004 and the impeachment efforts of 2005. By March of 2005, the various threads of the strategy were brought together in the Society in Movement ensemble, which includes Lupa Ciudadana and other “independent” academic and “civic expert” groupings.

In some periods the discourse of the groups have been anti-AMLO, in others more anti-party (directed against all parties). At times, they seem to operate with the idea that political parties are very devalued in Mexican public opinion (reasonable conclusion) and that the moment is ripe for some kind of citizen revolt (a chimera chased by the Right, Center and Left at different times all over the developed world).

The goal of Society in Movement is to limit the power of the parties and to search for other forms by way of which the “best men and women” can come forward as “ideal candidates.” One way this has been discussed is to lower the profile of the parties by having more “direct democracy”, in the form of plebiscites, referendums, recalls. Such forms of direct democracy are being discussed, proposed and even implemented by other sectors – including, ironically, many of those most sympathetic to AMLO.

Another way to lower the profile of the parties, with the implicit participation of the Consejo de la Comunicación, is the extension of “media democracy”, that is the greatly increased use of media to inform, measure and register not just public opinion but actual political decisions. Given their access to the commanding heights of the media, these IP sectors seem to wish to extend and formalize the opinion/decision process under media aegis and with seemingly spontaneous, or at least non-party, organizations coming to the fore on key issues.

A counter-expression of this, perhaps only a coincidence in institutional development, is the increased formal use by the IFE and the State level electoral institutes of contracted pre-electoral polls, exit polls, quick counts and political culture studies. In fact, the complex of federal and state electoral institutes is the biggest collective purchaser of opinion research in the country. That may or may not be seen as a good thing, when the achievements and shortcomings of these institutes are reviewed in the coming period.

In the campaign of 2006 and now in the post-electoral period, the CCE and other groups in the IP have been active, sometimes on the side of the PAN, sometimes on the side of the PRI, sometimes to protect Mexican democracy from “Venezuela type influences,” always in an anti-AMLO mode. The details of their participation, including the volume and impact of the advertising, will be part of the evaluation – political, historically and juridical – of these elections.

Dan Lund
President
MUND Américas

