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**“Voto por Voto, Casilla por Casilla?”**

Democratic Consolidation, Political Intermediation,  
and the Mexican Election of 2006



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## **Abstract:**

After he had only tightly lost the election in July 2006, Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his *Coalición* claimed fraud and asserted that unfair conditions during the campaign had diminished his chances to win the presidency. The paper investigates this latter allegation centering on a perceived campaign of hate, unequal access to campaign resources and malicious treatment by the mass media. It further analyzes the mass media's performance during the conflictual post electoral period until the final decision of the Federal Electoral Tribunal on September 5<sup>th</sup>, 2006. While the media's performance during the campaign tells us about their compliance with fair media coverage mechanisms that have been implemented by electoral reforms in the 1990s, the mass media is uncontained by such measures after the election. Thus, their mode of coverage of the postelectoral conflicts allows us to "test" the mass media's transformation to a more unbiased, social responsible "fourth estate". Finally the paper scrutinizes whether the claims of fraud and the protests by the leftist movement resulted in lower levels of institutional trust and democratic support.

The analysis of the media performance is based on data provided by the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). Its Media Monitor encompassed more than 150 TV stations, 240 radio stations and 200 press publications. However, there is no comparable data available for the postelectoral period. Interviews with Mexican media experts, which the author has conducted during the postelectoral period, serve as empirical basis for the second part. Data on the public opinions and attitudes of Mexican citizens are taken from the 2007 Latinobarometro, the 2006 Encuesta Nacional and several polls conducted by Grupo Reforma.

The results do not support López Obrador's notions. Even though a strong party bias is characteristic of the Mexican media system, all findings hint at a continuity of balanced campaign coverage and fair access to mass media publicity. Coverage during the postelectoral period was more polarized, yet both sides remained at least partially open for oppositional views. The claims of fraud, mass protest mobilization and anti-institutional discourse by López Obrador's leftist movement seem not to have caused significant loss in institutional trust, support of and satisfaction with democracy, even though these levels remain quite low.

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## 1. Introduction<sup>1</sup>

„There is no road to democracy, democracy is the road“ pronounced public billboards in Mexico-City’s metro stations in the summer of 2006. They ironically coincided with the „Vote by vote, ballot box by ballot box“ choruses on the streets, which demanded a complete recount, and expressed distrust in the official election results and Mexico’s democratic progress. The general election of July 2 has distributed 628 seats in both parliamentary chambers, created new governments and legislatures in nine states and elected both a new Legislative Assembly and Mayor for the capital’s *Distrito Federal*. Nevertheless almost all public and international attention was absorbed by the presidential election, which had been forecast to be a very tight race. In the end the results of the first *conteo rapido* were too close to call and both candidates, the leftist Andres Manuel López Obrador and the PAN’s Felipe Calderón, proclaimed themselves President-Elect, Mexico’s citizens witnessed the beginning of a conflictual post-electoral period. These weeks saw the denunciation of electoral „fraud“ by the defeated *Coalición por el Bien de Todos (CPBT)*, mass mobilization and the increasing rejection of democratic institutions by the Coalition’s candidate López Obrador.

This paper is based on field research conducted in Mexico during that period, in the context of collecting data and conducting interviews for a larger research project, which comparatively explores the impacts of media concentration on the quality of democracy in Mexico and Italy. Here I will investigate whether partisan claims about fraudulent media performance are supported by an empirical analysis and whether the contestation of the election result has damaged the consolidation of Mexico’s still young democracy.

The Coalition’s claims of electoral fraud, which were proclaimed for the first time on the day after the election and evolved over the subsequent weeks, follow two different lines of argumentation: The first argument revolves around inconsistencies and perceptions of the events in the electoral process. On July 4, López Obrador made the incendiary claim that three million ballots were missing (even though he knew perfectly well that they were in temporary storage in a preliminary archive of inconsistent results as part of the initial count (the so-called PREP)).<sup>2</sup> Later, the Coalition complained about „fraude cibernético“, an algorithm that supposedly had manipulated the PREP count. As layers of explanation were added, some Coalition members added a conspiracy theory of „traditional fraud“ – vote-buying, stuffed ballot boxes etc. Even though international observers noted several disturbing events from polling stations throughout the country, there is no proof of any significant aggregation of manipulations that would indicate a deliberate fraud in favour of the PAN’s Felipe Calderón (Trejo Delarbre 2006b und 2006d, European Union 2006, NDI 2006, IFE 2006c, Salazar Ugarte 2007). In rendering the judgment that ended the electoral dispute (and made Calderón

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<sup>1</sup> The author thanks Dr. Paul Ross for his useful remarks and his correction of the translation.

<sup>2</sup> On February 10, 2006 all parties and the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE), which carries out the elections, had agreed upon this „archive of inconsistencies“ where unclear ballots were „stored“ to be counted later in the district count, which is the basis for the final result. Thus, they were not included in the preliminary count PREP, but accessible through the IFEs website.

President) the Federal Electoral Tribunal TRIFE noted, among other facts, the presence of the Coalition's representatives in more than 96 percent of the polling stations throughout the country (El Universal, 05.09.06, p. A10), considered the recount results of more than 11.000 ballot boxes and rejected the demand for nullification. The construction of a fraud, or a "fraud of frauds" („*el fraude del fraude*") (Murayama 2006) can be understood as the core of the Coalition's strategy and political rhetoric, which they employed in mass mobilizations as they sought official revocation of the election.

The Coalition's second line of argument directed claims of fraud against the media and was focused on campaign events. Besides the illegal campaign interference of President Vicente Fox and the financing of television spots by private enterprises, a sustained smear campaign was the Coalition's central accusation. Assuming a relatively continuous development of media coverage over the last elections, such a manipulative media performance would be surprising. Numerous analyses have found that Mexican media coverage of elections has been increasingly balanced and fair, after the presumed fraud in the 1988 election triggered reforms of the electoral regime in 1993, 1994 and 1997 (Lawson 2002, Moreno 2003). Today, the Federal Code of Election Institutions and Processes (COFIPE) provides a legal frame for the sale of publicity to the parties and the media coverage of the campaigns, which is embedded in fair media coverage mechanisms (Mena 2005).

Despite numerous safeguards, Mexico carries the legacy of more than 70 years of rule of the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution PRI, whose hegemony reached out into all spheres of political, social and economic activity and into the lifeworlds of citizens. Through collusion and co-optation the PRI contained and articulated all relevant social actors and can be described as a distributive mechanism that allocated political and administrative power on the local, state and federal level (Montemayor 2006: 90). Beginning in the 1970s, early electoral reforms made the success of opposition parties in local and regional elections possible, which in the long run challenged the PRI's hegemony. In 1988 the PRI presumably could only win the presidential election by fraud and finally, in 2000 lost the presidency to the Party of National Action, PAN. In the 2006 election, the crisis of the PRI becomes even more obvious: Although it remains in a powerful position as the only possible majority-provider in Congress for either PAN or López Obrador's PRD, the party that had ruled Mexico for more than seven decades did not win in a single state.

Before Mexico's political transformation, which gained momentum during the 1990s, the media and the ruling party were closely interconnected: „In Televisa, we're all soldiers of the PRI."<sup>3</sup> This paradigmatically expressed the tight cooperation between the ruling party and the private broadcast empire, which holds a market share of over 80 percent. Together with its only „rival“, TV Azteca network, which had emerged in 1993 through privatization of formerly state-owned stations, the two major private TV networks together control more than 90 percent of the television market. Additionally, Mexicans first and foremost obtain their politi-

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<sup>3</sup> Infamous quotation of Televisa's founder and owner (until his death in 1997), Emilio Azcárraga. (See Fernández/Paxman 2000).



cal information from TV sources and show relatively high trust in communication media.<sup>4</sup> According to a 2005 survey, 62 percent of respondents inform themselves via television, 17 percent via radio, and only 10 percent read newspapers (ENCUP 2005).

Public (state-owned) media play only a marginal role in this realm. Mexico's deficient media regulation does not even provide a public media law, and neglects many pressing issues, such as independence, clear-cut financing and adjustment to digitalization processes. The scope of party promotion is small and overall, public media play a marginal role (see Ortega Ramírez 2006, La Red 2005). So „the media“ in this context refers to the private broadcast media, i.e. radio and television. The press, most of all the national quality press (Reforma, El Universal, La Jornada) is an important agenda setter and opinion leader and thus influences other types of media, but readership numbers are low, particularly on a daily basis.<sup>5</sup> These features contribute to the fact that beside the „natural“ amount of media power, the Mexican private media dispose of both the overall potential and the historical tradition of interpretive hegemony: „Those who work in the politically relevant sectors of the media system (...) cannot but exert power, because they select and process politically relevant content and thus intervene in both the formation of public opinions and the distribution of influential interest“ (Habermas 2006: 418)

The research interest of this paper is to evaluate not only media performance, but also how claims of fraud and anti-institutional mass mobilization affected the Mexican democracy and its consolidation process. Media performance during campaigns refers to (1) the mass media's mode of allocating contracted publicity space to political actors (parties and candidates), and (2) their mode of coverage of those actors. While the way in which parties buy time or space to publish their propaganda can be fixed legally in great detail, the latter is of more ambivalent nature. A certain degree of partisan bias is deeply inherent in any media system, as Hallin and Mancini (2004) have shown. Furthermore, the way in which a paper or a radio station covers a candidate or a campaign is also protected by the freedom of the press and journalistic independence. Legal provisions should not regulate how journalists cover an issue, even under a regime requiring „objective“ coverage, but ought to appeal to fair coverage norms and monitor the media.

The media's performance during the post-electoral period will serve as a test of their adherence to the rules of the democratic game. Whilst media performance during campaigns is legally regulated (mode of allocating publicity) or contained by fair media coverage mechanisms (mode of coverage), the media are unrestrained by this bridle after Election Day. Thus, their mode and tone of coverage of the conflict-laden political situation after the election reflects their more „savage“ attitudes towards fair and balanced coverage, free from legal rules only valid during campaigns.

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<sup>4</sup> On a scale from 1 (no trust) to 10 (much trust) the media obtains an average value of 7,4 and is ranked four, behind, doctors, the army, and the church. (ENCUP 2005: 10)

<sup>5</sup> According to data provided by IPSOS-BIMSA (Estudio General de Medios), only 21 percent answered to have read the newspaper „yesterday“ (free TV: 73%), but „in the past 30 days“ this number increases to 66 percent (free TV: 97%). N= 26.373 interviews.

Given these considerations, it is possible to shed light on the connection between the media's performance during the campaigns and the post-electoral conflict on the one hand and democratic consolidation on the other. Did the media eschew the legal and democratic rules and cause defects in the functioning of the electoral regime and the legitimation of the democratic system? From this, two central questions can be derived:

- (1) Can media performance exert profound influence on citizen's voting choices, sufficient to determine election outcomes and transport its party bias into broad public opinion?
- (2) Has the Mexican media done so, and thus disobeyed the legal rules with respect to democratic mechanisms?

A second focus takes up the political debate and polarized rhetoric about the Coalition and López Obrador's performance after the election. It is not so much the mobilization of several million citizens and the installation of protest blockades in Mexico-City that have aroused worries about his commitment to democracy. It has been López Obrador's fierce non-acceptance of the election results culminating in his self-proclamation as „legitimate president“, his neglect and defamation of democratic institutions (and institutions in general) that refueled characterizations of López Obrador as a „tropical messiah“ (Krauze 2006) and as a „danger for Mexico“.<sup>6</sup> Therefore my analysis must include a reflection on this behavior and the spread of institutional distrust regarding the presumed defects of Mexican democracy and the progress of the democratic consolidation process. This leads to another important question:

- (3) Did the post-electoral construction of electoral fraud and López Obrador's neglect of the electoral regime cause further defects in Mexico's democracy?

## **2. Political Intermediation and Democracy**

The critics of the media's performance during the campaigns often assumed that public opinion is directly generated by the „war“ of advertising spots, by the opinions expressed in the news media and by the more or less hidden remarks on party preferences made in entertainment programs. In contrast to what the political debates about Mexico's latest election suggested, the relation between political communication and the public is manifold and deserves to be looked at in a more differentiated way. For this reason I will review the recent literature on political communication and democracy in order to answer the first question whether media performance, after all, *can* have a significant effect on the outcome of elections and the democratic system at large. First it will be necessary to distinguish different types, and secondly different effects of political communication. Third, I will focus on the demands of de-

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<sup>6</sup> In a series of spots by the PAN at the end of the campaigns he had been denounced as „Danger for Mexico“. The Federal Electoral Tribunal ordered later to stop the broadcasting of these spots. (Trejo Delarbre 2006d: 69-74).

mocracy – what criteria can be derived from this research for the media performance during elections?

### 2.1. Varieties of Political Intermediation

Rather than understanding the flow of political communication as a top-down vertical channel that makes information available to the governed citizens – who are perceived as passive viewers who can be easily manipulated – recent research has reinvigorated the perception of potentially active, selective citizens who receive and multiply information about politics to other citizens in a variety of ways. To limit the broad spectrum of communication, which can also be nonverbal or virtual, we instead use the term intermediation, referring to “the varying channels and processes through which voters receive information about partisan politics during the course of election campaigns and are mobilized to support one party or another.” (Gunther/Montero/Puhle 2007: 1). Thus, political information flows primarily through three main channels: *interpersonal* intermediation through (1) social networks such as families, neighbors, friends or colleagues and (2) organizations or secondary associations in which citizens are members and communicate or deliberate over political issues, and (3) *impersonal* intermediation via the mass media.

The results of the Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) have shown (Gunther/Montero/Puhle 2007) that even though partisan ties may be low and the membership in political organizations decreasing, impersonal intermediation through the media has long been overestimated: “Interactive and repeated communication with credible and consistently politicized sources of information — such as that which tends to take place with interpersonal discussants — is potentially more influential as a source of both persuasive messages and trustworthy and usable political cues. In contrast, impersonal communication, lack of perceivable shared interests, and ambiguous or multiple and contradictory messages understandably diminish the potential for influence.” (Magalhães 2007: 242) Thus, an analysis of media performance in the campaigns before Mexico’s elections of 2006 and during the post-electoral conflicts can only result in knowledge about one channel of political information, and even a highly manipulative party -bias would not automatically determine favorable public opinion towards one party, but merely be introduced to interpersonal discussion networks. The problem with basing analysis on media performance during and after the Mexican campaign is that it only focuses on impersonal intermediation.

The second perception that has recently been corrected is that of the passive media consumer, who becomes less interested in politics and more cynical about political issues the more he or she consumes media (principally TV) that scandalize, communicate negativity and reduce reality to short sound bites (e.g. Sartori 1997, 2003). The observation that citizens who receive most of their information from television sources show less political trust than citizens who obtain their information from a wider scope of sources became known as *video malaise* hypothesis in the 1970s. Instead of returning to Paul Lazarsfeld’s *minimal effects*, recent studies challenge the hypothesis of demobilization and instead show a „virtuous circle“ effect of mass mediated information, at least in Western democracies (Norris 2000, Schmitt-

Beck/Voltmer 2007, Demers 2002). According to these studies, exposure to mediated information leads to higher levels of political knowledge resulting in more political participation: „The public is not passively absorbing whatever journalists and politicians tell them, not simply taking everything at face value. Rather, because of increased cognitive skills and greater diversification of media outlets, the public is actively sifting, sorting, and thereby constructing impressions in line with their prior predispositions.“ (Norris 2000: 317f) Thus, people tend to interpret the information they receive rather than just passively adopt mediated interpretations.

These results and the brighter picture of media influence they offer cannot yet be interpreted to say that the media do not matter. As Schmitt-Beck/Voltmer (2007) have shown, even in newly established democracies the media function as „seedsman“ rather than „gravediggers“ of democracy. The authors note that unlike in most established democracies the weak and marginalized public media sector cannot (yet) counterbalance the trivialized and low-quality information often noted in commercial broadcast media, while they found high-quality information to be the „most valuable for the consolidation of political culture in new democracies“ (ibid: 124) Magalhães (2007: 244) emphasizes that impersonal, mediated information has a higher impact, where „media landscapes are dominated by strongly partisan outlets.“ As noted above, the Mexican media landscape is marked by dominant outlets, strong and deeply rooted traditions of party parallelism<sup>7</sup> and intensive viewer identification.

In sum, it seems that media can influence electoral outcome – but it cannot do so in a direct and manipulative way. Sixty percent of Mexicans may obtain most of their political information from television, but they will cognitively process that information, discuss it within their social networks or organizations and reflect on it against the background of their value patterns. Additionally, different media sources tend to be selected according to the primal value configuration and partisan preferences of citizens. Thus *Lópezobradoristas* will tend to prefer the strongly leftist *La Jornada* instead of the centrist *Reforma* for their daily newspaper diet. According to the “home team hypothesis” (Holmberg 1999) citizens could perceive a stronger bias that is critical of „their“ candidate than vice versa.

At the same time, the media’s interpretive power is constrained by laws and fair media coverage mechanisms that, in the Mexican case, have been introduced by the electoral reform of 1994. These mechanisms work with pleas for fair and balanced coverage on the one hand and the publication of monitored results about compliance on the other. Bearing in mind that there is no single-lane influence between mediated information and citizens’ opinions, it is nevertheless crucial that these rules be respected and that the media comply with their normatively defined and institutionalized role during the campaigns. With Mexico’s long traditions of media-party collusion and a history of neglecting and ignoring opposition parties in the media, compliance with the law and fair media mechanisms is a prerequisite for equal and competitive campaigns.

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<sup>7</sup> „Political Parallelism“ (Hallin/Mancini 2004: 27-28) refers to the associational ties between the media and the parties (or broader political tendencies). Among the various components of this concept are (biased) media content, organizational connections between the media and political parties (and other political organizations), political affiliations and career paths of media workers, and journalistic role orientations and practices.

## 2.2. The Rules of the Game

Before turning to the empirical data of Mexico's media performance during the 2006 campaigns and the post-electoral period (which lasted from Election Day to the final decision of the Federal Electoral Tribunal TRIFE on September 5, 2006) it is necessary to review the requirements and criteria offered by democratization theory on the functioning of democratic electoral regimes. The criteria defined by Wolfgang Merkel et al. (2003) for what they call *embedded democracy*<sup>8</sup> serves as a basis for evaluating the electoral regime and its institutions, especially the violations that are held responsible for the development of defective democracies. The indicators employed by Merkel et al., such as the existence of universal, active and passive suffrage, free and fair elections and rule of elected representatives (Merkel et al. 2003: 80, Merkel 2004: 38) encompass an accepted catalogue which is reflected, for instance, in the Bertelsmann Transformation Index (BTI) criteria for evaluating an electoral regime. (BTI Codebook: 11)<sup>9</sup>

In the context of this paper it is most of all the criteria offered for the indicator of free and fair elections that are interesting, because the active/passive suffrage and the mode of allocating political incumbents are uncontested in the Mexican case. According to Merkel et al. (2003: 80) there are two main sub-indicators that refer to free and fair elections: (1) an open, competitive electoral process including equal registration approval of parties and candidates, and equal opportunities (equal access to resources such as media) and (2) a proper electoral operation including the absence of interruptions and malfunctions (as significant aggregation of manipulations) and neutrality of the electoral administration. As mentioned above, irregularities that may have occurred in the process of the Election Day and the counting of the votes shall not be discussed in this paper. Instead, I will focus on whether there have been fair pre-conditions during the campaign and if the outcome of the election was adequately open.

The importance of competitive elections is also underlined by Diamond/Morlino's (2005) assessment of democratic quality: "(D)emocracies vary in their degree of competitiveness – in the openness to the electoral arena by new political forces, in the ease in which incumbents can be defeated, and in the equality of access to the mass media and campaign funding on the part of competing political parties." (ibid: XVII) The introduction of competitiveness to formerly rigged elections through several electoral reforms has been the central accomplishment of Mexico's democratic transition. Adam Przeworski's famous observation, that democracy is a system in which parties lose elections, has become reality for Mexicans over more than a decade. Beginning in the late 1980s, the main opposition parties PAN and PRD (since 1990) won some municipal and state elections, and later obtained seats in Congress. It would not be until 2000, after 61 years in the opposition, that the PAN ended the PRI's presidential monop-

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<sup>8</sup> „An embedded, liberal democracy consists of five partial regimes: a democratic electoral regime, political rights of participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and the guarantee that effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives. (...) The concept of embedded democracy follows the idea that stable constitutional democracies are embedded in two ways. Internally the specific interdependence/independence of the different partial regimes (...) secures its normative and functional existence. Externally, these partial regimes are embedded in spheres of enabling conditions for democracy that protect it from outer as well as inner shocks and destabilizing tendencies.“ (Merkel 2004: 36)

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de>.

oly. Several electoral reforms had taken place in the 1970s to invigorate the regime's slipping legitimacy. But after the presumed fraud of 1988, a new electoral regulation had become vitally important for the PRI "dinosaur" regime. Reforms in 1993, 1994 and 1997 founded an independent electoral institution (the IFE) under civil societal inclusion and made a number of legal adjustments to allow for the opposition's electoral success. Being so important in the democratization process, it comes as no surprise that the reproaches of López Obrador aim precisely at the tender spot of not having had the same opportunities as Felipe Calderón – especially when it comes to media access and treatment by the media.

Thus, the analysis of the media performance during the election has to focus on the following successive aspects:

- Have all candidates or parties had equal access to financial resources and equal access to publicity in the mass media?
- Have candidates or parties been treated significantly negative or received significantly lower attention in the mass media's coverage than their competitors?<sup>10</sup>
- Did the media's performance comply with legal rules and the norms of fair media coverage?

Should any of these questions be answered with "No", this would hint at a regression of the level of competitiveness that has been reached so far – each "no" adding up to a severe defect of the indicator "free and fair elections" and, thus to deficits of the electoral regime.

### 3. Allocating Contracted Publicity

The following section will analyze the mass media's performance regarding the mode and process of allocating contracted publicity, i.e. the access of parties and candidates to mediated publicity, as spots and other promotion relevant to the campaign. The Mexican campaigns are among the longest and most expensive in Latin America. Presidential elections are held on the first Sunday in July, and the election period starts officially in October of the previous year. In 2006 the campaigns began on January 19<sup>th</sup> and lasted for five and a half months. Adding the pre- and pre-pre- campaigns, the race actually got under way seventeen months before the inauguration of the new President took place. (Woldenberg 2006: 60)

The three relevant actors in the realm of electoral mediated publicity are

- (1) political parties, which alone enjoy the privilege to buy airtime according to the strict rules of the COFIPE's article 48 - candidates depend upon their parties or coalitions to assign them a certain amount of that airtime,<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> A large party such as the PAN will of course obtain much more media attention than a small party, e.g. Nueva Alianza – but in size and scope of representation they are not considered direct „competitors“. The main competitors in the 2006 election were PAN, PRD, and to a lesser degree the PRI.

<sup>11</sup> Which reads (§1): „Es derecho exclusivo de los partidos políticos contratar tiempo en radio o televisión para difundir mensajes orientados a la obtención del voto durante las campañas electorales (...). (§13) En ningún caso, se permitirá la contratación de propaganda en radio y televisión en favor o en contra de algún partido político o candidato por parte de terceros.“ However, the COFIPE does not rule out the mode of buying space

- (2) the mass media, bound by transparency laws and agreements with the
- (3) Federal Electoral Institute IFE, which organizes and monitors both the parties' and the media's activities, allocates financial resources, and to whom the parties are accountable and have to report their publicity investments.

In the process of the campaign the parties then contract airtime (or space in the press, which plays only a marginal role and is not even ruled out in the COFIPE) directly from the broadcast outlets. Then they report to the IFE, which has been provided with a price list by the media outlets before the campaigns started, how much time they have contracted and how much they have spent. As a general rule the prices for campaign airtime must not be higher than airtime for commercial advertisement. The spending and the sources of the money have been liable to accountability measures since the electoral reform of 1993. Additionally, the dominant Televisa network and the IFE agreed in October 2005 that Televisa would communicate detailed information on the contracting of airtime to the IFE.<sup>12</sup> These formal and informal measures of transparency are meant to hinder the favoritism towards one party or another (a long tradition under the PRI's rule). Also, the access to public funding has been balanced and transparent since the 1996 reform. The statement of accounts of the 1994 election revealed how important these reforms have been: in that electoral campaign the PRI had spent four times the amount for publicity that all other parties combined had invested.

Besides a small amount of public airtime in state-owned as well as private media, which the parties can use for their propaganda, it is only private media that are allowed to sell airtime. Thus, state-owned media play a very marginal role in campaign spots because of both their small market share and their non-availability as vehicles for publicity. Another consequence is that large parts of the public funding which parties receive for their campaigns flow into private broadcast outlets, the vast majority of it to Televisa.<sup>13</sup> This is a huge difference compared to other countries, such as Italy, where the media system is similarly characterized by an intense media concentration. The Italian *par condicio* law prohibits any paid publicity in electoral campaigns. Instead, the media outlets have to distribute free airtime or space adequately to all political parties.

As elections have become increasingly competitive in the course of the 1990s, the share of the funding that parties spent for media publicity has risen tremendously. From about 25 percent of their total expenditures in 1994, the amount rose to about 55 percent in 1997 and 2000 and reached more than 70 percent (just for TV!) in the 2006 campaign (Woldenberg 2006: 57, Villamil 2006b). The marginal role of the press is reflected in the IFE's data on campaign spending of the three major parties or coalitions in table 1.

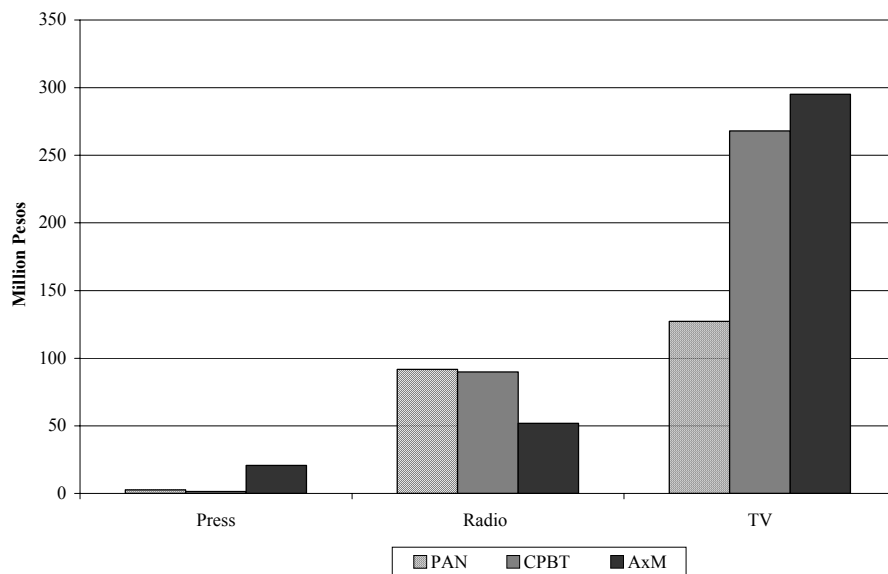
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in the press. This, too, hints at the extraordinary importance of TV and radio in the media as a whole and especially during campaigns in Mexico.

<sup>12</sup> View the contract at <http://www.etcetera.com.mx/pagife-televisa1ne60.asp> <Rev. 10.01.2007>.

<sup>13</sup> Villamil 2006b, Televisa earned a historic 21% increase in its income (9.8 billion Mexican Pesos) in the second trimester of 2006. Milenio, July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2006 (URL: <http://www.milenio.com/mexico/milenio/notaanterior.asp?id=637707>, Rev. 15.05.2007).

Table 1: Campaign Expenditures in Press, Radio and TV, January 19 – June 28, 2006



PAN = Partido Accion Nacional, CPBT = Coalición Por el Bien de Todos (PRD, PT, Convergencia), AxM = Alianza Por México (PRI, PVEM)

1 US-Dollar = 10,8 Mexican Pesos (20.12.2006)

Source: IFE, author's calculation

At the same time we see that the parties had been provided with comparable, balanced amounts of money: the two coalitions spent similar amounts on party propaganda in TV, radio and press – about 360 million Pesos (CPBT) and 368 million Pesos (AxM). The PAN, which ran without smaller partners, spent about 220 million Pesos (in the same media). The parties thus had roughly equal resources, allocated as indicated by the legal institutions and spent them according to their individual media strategies.<sup>14</sup> Unlike the PAN's and the Coalition's preferences, the PRI's *Alianza* relied significantly more on press products and less on radio announcements.

In a second step the analysis will focus on the appearance of the spots, and the real configuration of the airtime the parties bought. It is important to check whether they really enjoyed equivalent conditions or, as has often been the case, one party or another spent more money, but gained much less airtime than others. Most of all, the focus is on the PAN and the Coalition. The data available via the IFE Media Monitor allow a comparison of airtime and the number of spots which the parties contracted for the presidential race as well as for the election to the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate and for general party propaganda. Since the results (and the equal opportunities) of the parliamentary elections are not contested, we will

<sup>14</sup> In October 2007, after the completion of the manuscript, the IFE published an investigation according to which about 281.000 spots both in radio and on TV have not been correctly declared in the parties' settlements of account to the IFE. In a five-month investigation, the *Comisión de Fiscalización* found (among other things) fake invoices and false declarations. All competing parties resp. alliances/coalitions seem to have employed such practices and are to be fined accordingly. If the TRIFE asserts these findings, the parties could face fines in the range of 500 million Mexican Pesos (46 million US\$). See [www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/154949.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/154949.html) (10.10.07) or [www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/29761.html](http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/primera/29761.html) (17.10.07).

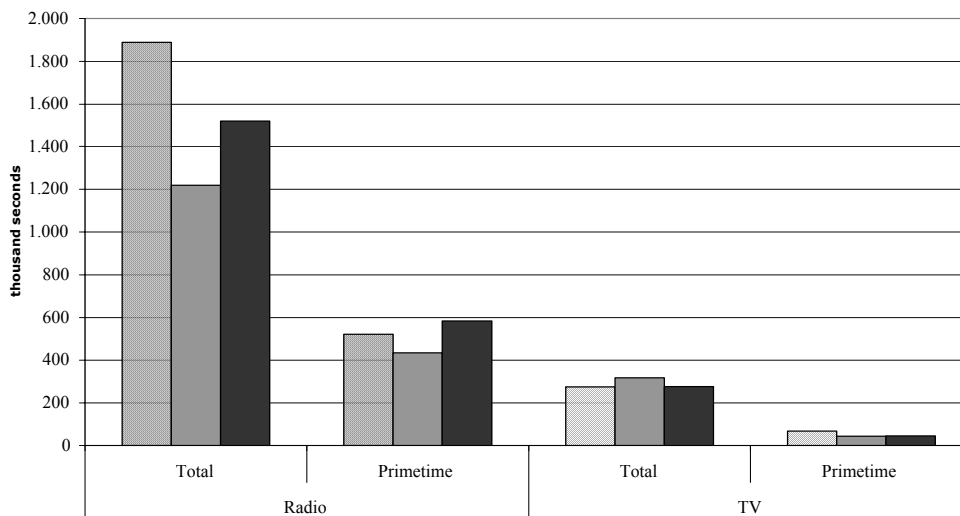


focus only on propaganda aired to obtain support for the presidential candidates Felipe Calderón (PAN), Andrés Manuel López Obrador (CPBT) and Roberto Madrazo (AxM). The two remaining presidential candidates, Roberto Campo (Nueva Alianza) and Patricia Mercado (Alternativa Socialdemócrata y Campesina) both obtained less than five percent and broadcast significantly fewer spots, so that they play in an entirely different league and will be left out of the focus, notwithstanding their relative success in the elections.

It is also important to note that the nature of “airtime” varies widely. There is a huge difference between airtime being broadcast nationwide or locally, between primetime and spots shown at times with lower audience shares. Without digging deep into the media strategies of the competing parties, the data do reveal different preferences, but not a distribution of airtime that would hint at a discrimination of either one party or coalition.

Even though the PAN obviously decided to air more radio ads than the other parties, the amount of airtime seconds during prime time is relatively balanced both in radio and TV. Furthermore, we see that the time of TV propaganda is about equal. The IFE data (not reflected in Table 2) reveal that Felipe Calderon’s share of primetime national TV is some 25.000 seconds larger than López Obrador’s, yet on local TV López Obrador tops Felipe Calderón by more than 60.000 seconds.<sup>15</sup>

Table 2: Airtime in Radio and TV (Total and Primetime)



\* TV here is nationwide TV  
 Primetime: TV: 7pm-midnight, Radio: 6 am-10am  
 Source: IFE

In sum, López Obrador’s claim of inequality seems out of step with a media regime in which all parties dispose of equivalent resources, can contract their publicity freely, and in which he received combined radio and TV airtime roughly equal to Roberto Madrazo – and more than

<sup>15</sup> Visit the IFEs accumulated data on spots of the presidential candidates at: [http://www.ife.org.mx/docs/Internet/Partidos\\_Policos\\_DEPPP/mediospp\\_DEPPP/Monitoreo\\_campanas/estaticos\\_monitoreo/1-28junio06/gTelevisionAcumuladoJunioPresidente.pdf](http://www.ife.org.mx/docs/Internet/Partidos_Policos_DEPPP/mediospp_DEPPP/Monitoreo_campanas/estaticos_monitoreo/1-28junio06/gTelevisionAcumuladoJunioPresidente.pdf) <Rev. 10.01.2007>.

Felipe Calderón. Another example further illustrates that López Obrador's relation to the broadcast media has by no means been one of discrimination, least of all in reference to the media's allocation of airtime. Similarly to President Vicente Fox, who has been hosting a weekly radio show for several years, López Obrador broadcast a personal daily TV show called "The Other Version" throughout the electoral campaign. The show was on air from 6 to 6.30 am, reminiscent of the morning press conferences he held during his tenure as mayor of Mexico City, and were repeated at night. The contract his Coalition signed with TV Azteca, which broadcast the show nationwide, tells a story of unfair media performance that is strikingly at odds with his claims. Charging merely 156.000 Pesos per show, the price was 40 times cheaper than the fixed standard price per minute for electoral campaigns (Trejo Delarbre 2006e). If anything, this statistic reflects clear favoritism on behalf of López Obrador that, if not outright illegal, settles in the grey zone between party bias and media freedom.

Even though the access to campaign resources and media access for political propaganda has been equivalent and transparent, López Obrador's complaints also address issues of content: a presumed "campaign of hate", or a "*guerra sucia*" against him. For the purposes of my argument, this issue will play only a minor role, since the content of the spots is determined by the political parties and does not provide information of the media's performance, which serve as transmitters only. However, it can't be left aside when it comes to the campaign coverage and will be reviewed in more detail later on.

Since the election result had been forecast to be a close race, the campaigns have been highly competitive. This resulted in a number of spots with defamatory statements, such as those by the PAN proclaiming López Obrador to be a "danger for Mexico". After various complaints, the IFE as well as TRIFE debated the complex issue of freedom of expression vs. abusive behavior, and finally the TRIFE called for a halt on the broadcast of these spots. The legal regulation of propaganda content is indeed relatively strict. Article 38 of the COFIPE states clearly that parties must abstain from any expression of insults, defamation or libel against citizens, institutions or other parties.<sup>16</sup> Of course, the border between defamation and freedom of expression is difficult to draw. "Despite repeated urges and resolutions from the Federal Electoral Institute as well as from the Federal Electoral Tribunal the principal parties have insisted on disseminating spots of a negative tone", writes Raul Trejo (2006d: 74). Coming from both the Coalition's and the PAN's side, the TRIFE later ruled in its final judgment that the illegal negativity of the party propaganda has had no decisive influence on the electoral outcome. The interesting question that remains (but cannot be answered here) is whether Mexico's culture of campaigning, i.e. its political rhetoric and campaign behavior, is changing as the electoral spectrum is becoming increasingly competitive.

A more serious interference with the legal rules of the electoral process were spots broadcast by commercial enterprises such as Sabritas, Pepsico or Jumex, not explicitly in favor of the

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<sup>16</sup> COFIPE, Art. 38 reads: „(Son obligaciones de los partidos políticos nacionales) (a) abstenerse de cualquier expresión que implique diatriba, calumnia, infamia, injuria, difamación o que denigre a los ciudadanos, a las instituciones públicas o a otros partidos políticos y sus candidatos, particularmente durante las campanas electorales y en la propaganda política que se utilice durante las mismas;“.

PAN, but highlighting the importance of political continuity. President Vicente Fox also behaved in an illegal way by publicly taking sides. Even though the TRIFE acknowledged all these irregularities against which the Coalition had filed charges, it did not regard their influence as decisive for the electoral outcome in its final judgement and thus not sufficient for voiding the election.

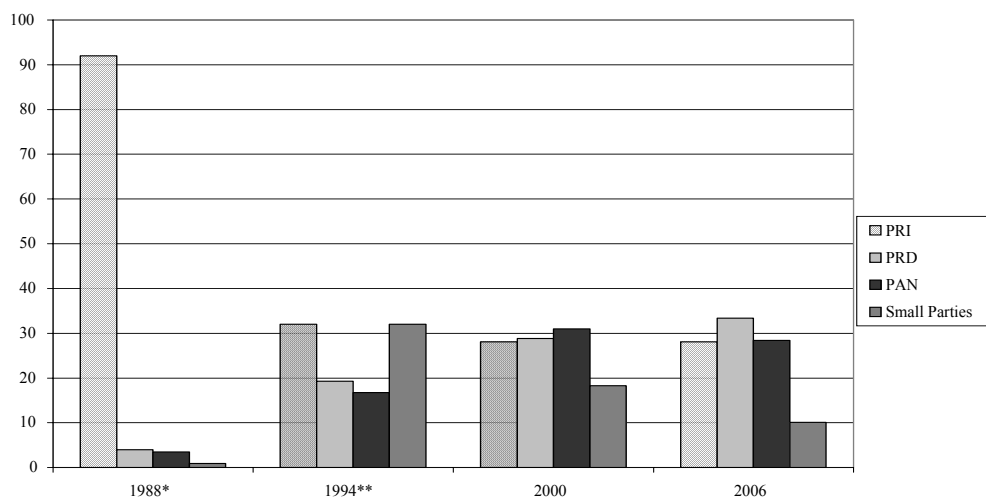
In sum, the legal regulations of allocating contracted publicity all applied, parties had enjoyed equal access to the media and made use of it. The media outlets are, in turn, not responsible for the content of the aired propaganda, so that the claim of a campaign of hate may apply to the behavior of the parties, but not to the media's performance regarding the realm of party advertisement. Also, the IFE and TRIFE fulfilled their function as supervisory institutions.

#### **4. Covering the Campaign**

With respect to elections, the media have a dual function: not only as the transmitter of paid partisan propaganda, but also as the transmitter of coverage that frequently conveys political opinions. The former should be regulated in detail (and is in Mexico). The latter should not be as strongly regulated, since it is protected from state interference by the freedom of the press. According to press freedom rules, the media may freely express critical opinions of one party or candidate, or another. This is their basic right, indispensable in any democratic system. However, in a society such as Mexico, where people rely excessively on the media for political information, and where competitive elections have only recently replaced a one-party hegemony, there is a need for mechanisms fostering balanced media coverage.

The presumed electoral fraud of 1988 demolished the legitimacy of the old electoral regime, and triggered a series of electoral reforms in the 1990s. In the course of these reforms independent and transparent institutions as the IFE and TRIFE were installed, party financing and the electoral process was restructured to form a more inclusive, participatory and transparent electoral regime. One of the central demands in the negotiations of the 1994 electoral reform was a more balanced and fair media presence and media coverage. As a result, a well-functioning system of *fair media coverage* has been created. "Fair media coverage for political parties is a guarantee offered by the state to ensure equitable coverage in, and impartial treatment from, the media during election campaigns" according to David Mena (2005: 30) this mechanism. Media outlets, TV and radio stations, editorial staffs and journalists are called on to reflect and report about the campaigns in as responsible, balanced and prejudice-free a manner as possible. As we can see in table 3, the shares of media coverage, that the participating parties obtained, have almost converged to equilibrium in the following elections starting in 1994.

Table 3: Shares of Media Coverage 1988 – 2006 in Percent



\* In 1988 several opposition groups formed the Frente Democrático, which shortly thereafter transformed into the PRD.

\*\* In 1994 nine candidates ran for presidency, which is why the small parties have such a high share of media coverage.

The numbers refer to the campaign coverage of Mexico’s two major news programs.

Source: Trejo Delarbre 2006c: 23, and more detailed in Trejo Delarbre 2001

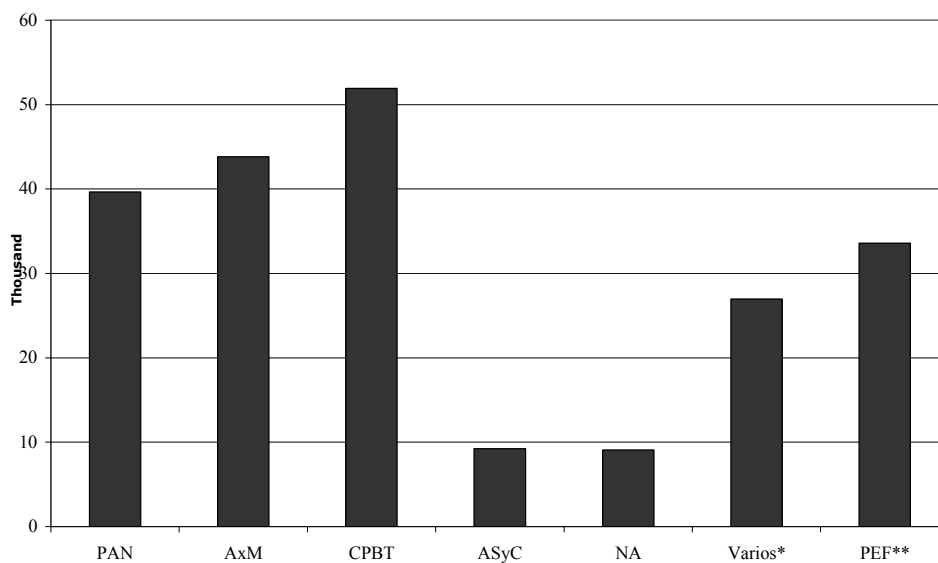
The data show nothing less but a clear break with the hegemonic party bias that Mexicans formerly knew. The reason why the normative appeals worked is that the IFE Media Monitor controls their implementation. This Monitor keeps all relevant media and their compliance with fair media norms under surveillance and regularly publishes its results. In the course of the 2006 campaigns, the IFE monitored the impartiality of media coverage in more than 150 TV Stations, 240 radio stations and 200 press publications (nationwide and local). For although there are no legal sanctions for non-compliance, still the fair media coverage system manages to contain partisan bias and provides a strong argument for the efficiency of informal regulation by commercial interests and a strong desire from the Mexican public to be informed in a balanced way. The possible loss of its audience for certain programs which the IFE monitor reveals to be imbalanced in their coverage, seems to be enough of a threat to Mexico’s highly commercialized media. Another reason could be rooted in the home team hypothesis, i.e. that the audience’s selective exposure corresponds to their individual political attitudes. Thus, it could be possible that media outlets cover campaigns in a more balanced way when monitored, because they do not want to lose viewers/listeners/readers by being too critical of the audience’s favorite party/candidate or too positive toward opponents.

The development towards more balanced coverage of campaigns has continued in 2006. Indeed, the IFE Media Monitor reveals a more equal coverage of the presidential candidates in state-controlled media such as Canal 11 (which is associated with the National Polytechnic Institute) than in commercial broadcast media. But even there the quantitative share of the parties/candidates is rather balanced, as Table 3 shows (referring to the two main news programs, on Televisa and TV Azteca (after its creation in 1993). Adding up all monitored news programs, the IFE data sustain that balanced shares of references have been the general rule

during the 2006 campaigns. Instead of having been neglected by the media, López Obrador’s campaign has received the most attention.

As we can see in table 4, a quantitative perspective does not support the Coalition’s claims of discrimination by the media. However, impartiality means more than just equal time. Important are as well the main focus of campaign reporting and the tone and presentation in form of positive or negative evaluations.

Table 4: Total Amount of References (*menciones*) in all (347) news Programs evaluated by IFE



PAN= Partido Acción Nacional, AxM= Alianza Por México (PRI, PVEM), CPBT= Coalición Por el Bien de Todos (PRD, PT, Convergencia), ASyC= Partido Alianza Socialdemócrata y Campesina, NA= Partido Nueva Alianza

\* Varios = two or more actors or issues

\*\* PEF = Proceso Electoral Federal, i.e. the electoral process itself

Source: IFE 2006b: 1

The degree of objectivity, party bias or outright political parallelism in media coverage is deeply rooted in media systems. Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini argue that „the strength of advocacy traditions in journalism is connected with the history of institutional ties between the media and the system of parties and organized social groups“ (Hallin/Mancini 2004: 29) and define three ideal types of media systems according to their geographic occurrence. Despite some important differences (like the role of state media), the Mexican media system corresponds most to the Polarized Pluralist Model (endemic primarily in the Mediterranean countries of Europe), especially in regard to its long tradition of commenting bias. Impartiality, in the sense of an ethos of “objectivity” – the normative basis of Anglo-Saxon journalism – has traditionally had a low impact in the Mexican media. Mexican journalism is marked by the typical political parallelism of the Polarized Pluralist Model, namely the association of certain media with a certain party or parties. “We are on the PRI’s side, we’ve always been on the PRI side, we do not believe in any other formula. And as members of our party we will do

everything possible for the victory of our candidate” said Emilio Azcárraga about the relation between his Televisa network and the presidential campaigns in 1988.<sup>17</sup> And indeed, there are many ways of introducing party bias to information. It is not only the mere information item that reaches viewers/listeners, but also the images used and the tone of the presentation. For example, an apparently “objective” piece of news about a candidate and his plans for social reform could be embedded in a presentation showing him or her visiting an orphanage or in a pictorial presentation using archive films of a previous corruption scandal. Thus, a mere quantitative surplus of references does not imply balanced campaign coverage of media contents.

Thus, the IFE Media Monitor first separates references (*menciones*) in the news media into valued and non-valued references. Those that are counted as non-valued are not necessarily solid facts, but may have been expressed in discussion rounds, interviews, polls or satirical programs. Thus, they may contain valuations (*valoraciones*), but no valuations by the corresponding media outlet. In the 2006 campaigns, eight percent of all party references in Mexico’s news programs referred to this group of non-valued information. The remaining 92 percent of news references have been subject of positive, negative or neutral valuation as defined by the IFE. Positive valuation, of course, refers to expressions that promote one candidate or party. Neutral and negative valuations differ in as that the former is rooted in facts, whilst the latter is not, but rather expresses personal opinions of the presenter. The monitor accounts not only for verbal expressions, but also for body language, gestures, tone of voice and subtitles. In 2006, the IFE Monitor counted 96 percent of valued references as neutral valuations, one percent positive and 3 percent negative. This implies a relatively moderate degree of partisan bias. At least it does not suggest an excessive negativism in the media coverage. These value-containing references have been counted in radio and TV news, including different genres of information as informative news, report, analysis or editorial, and do not refer to any other form of broadcast information or bias in other programs, such as entertainment programs. Table 5 shows the course of positive and negative references in relation to the total amount of references (including neutral references) over the entire campaign.

As it turns out, the Coalition’s campaign has been covered in a clearly more negative way than the other parties. From January to April the negative bias rose constantly and reached a level more than twice as high as the PAN, the direct competitor of López Obrador’s Coalition. Beginning in April, the negativism decreased and reached its lowest level of the entire campaign coverage in June. However, the Coalition received the largest amount of positive references, too. In March, almost twice as many positive references on the Coalition’s campaign were broadcast than on the PAN’s campaign. In sum, the data on campaign coverage do not support the claim of extraordinary media favoritism towards the PAN’s and Felipe Calderón’s campaign.

It is notable, too, that the closer Election Day approached, the less negative coverage was broadcast about all three of the parties, and the more equal the number of positive references became. Beginning in March, the shares of positive references of the three largest par-

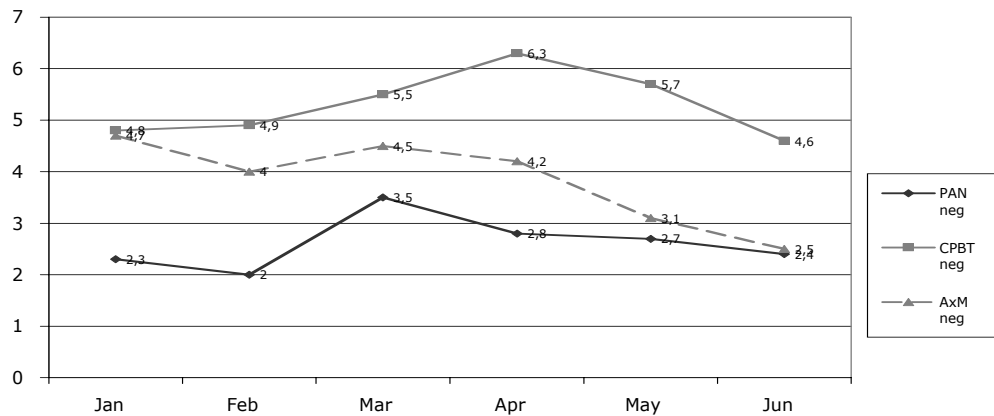
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<sup>17</sup> Fernández/Paxman 2000: 320.

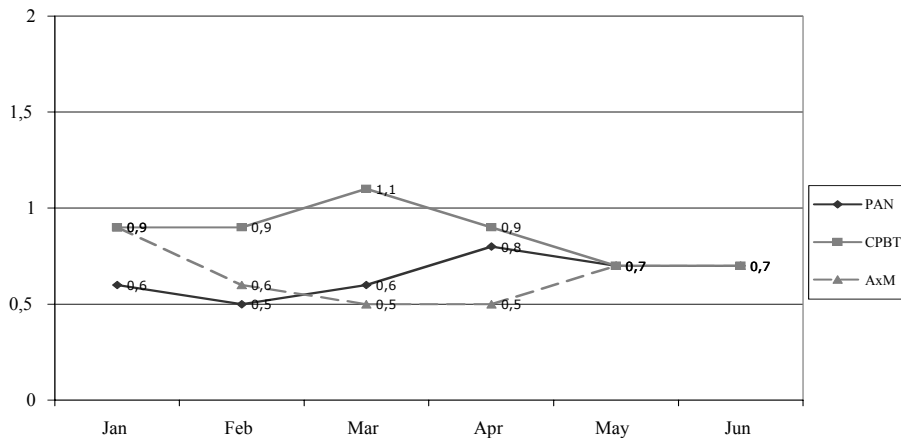
ties/coalitions start to converge. The negative references of all parties reached their lowest level in June – except maybe for the PAN, whose amount only reached the level of January, but had still clearly decreased. This development underlines the diagnosis stated above, that media performance regarding campaign coverage was not at all aimed at manipulating public opinion towards support for the PAN and its candidate Calderón. Rather, the media complied well with the norms of fair media coverage and showed additional moderation during the more decisive second half of the campaigns.

Table 5: Percentage of Positive and Negative Valuations in Radio and TV News Programs

- Negative References:



- Positive References:



PAN= Partido Acción Nacional, AxM= Alianza Por México (PRI, PVEM), CPBT= Coalición Por el Bien de Todos (PRD, PT, Convergencia)

Source: IFE Media Monitor based on 120 TV and 195 Radio news programs; author's calculations

Visit the IFE Media Monitors Database at [http://monitoreo-noticiarios.ife.org.mx/IFElinea/hmain\\_menu.aspx](http://monitoreo-noticiarios.ife.org.mx/IFElinea/hmain_menu.aspx) (Noticiarios/Radio and TV/Resultado en todas las Entidades Monitoreadas) <Rev. 02.01.2007>

However, the rules of fair media coverage mechanisms and thus the IFE Media Monitor only apply to programs dedicated to political information. They do not demand, rule out or control opinions expressed in other types of programs, such as entertainment programs. In fact, these spaces were used in the 2006 campaigns for party propaganda, which aroused fervent debates. The most prominent example of these incidents is that of Mexico's very popular telenovela *La*

*Fea Mas Bella*. In its episode of June 28, the final day of the campaigns, two of the main characters converse in favor of Felipe Calderón. Even though commercial product placement is very common in this type of Mexican TV programs, there have been many protests and complaints about these incidents, which were scattered occurrences rather than a general rule. In fact, they seem to have contributed to a decrease in Televisa's ratings and an increase in public media skepticism, most of all relating to Televisa. The image of the all-dominating media giant had suffered before, in spring 2006, when a media reform was passed which sustained and increased the private media's power and carries the inofficial name "*Ley Televisa*" (Televisa Law). Televisa had exerted considerable pressure on politicians to support the law, which overshadowed the campaign and gained a larger share of public attention than media reforms usually do.

Nevertheless we can conclude that the media have generally complied with the legal rules regarding the allocation of contracted publicity as well as with the norms of fair media coverage providing information on the campaigns, the competing parties and candidates. The degree of partisan bias in the media have been relatively low and was distributed among all participating parties or candidates. The remaining biased references are not likely to be damaging to democratic processes or to the election, they are rather backed up by the liberty of freedom of the press and they are, too, rooted in and typical for the Mexican media system.

## **5. Covering the Post-electoral Conflict**

The post-electoral period lasted from the evening of the Election Day, July 2 until the final verdict of the Federal Electoral Tribunal TRIFE on September 5, 2006. Since the election's result had been too close to call on the Election Day, it took eight weeks until Mexican citizens knew the name of their future president, Felipe Calderón. Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his Coalition put in doubt the slight advantage of the PAN's candidate, proclaimed electoral fraud and mobilized several million Mexicans to protest in the heart of Mexico City and elsewhere. The media's performance, i.e. the mode of coverage of this conflict-laden situation, is of special interest because it was no longer restricted by legal rules or norms of fair media coverage. Given that no formal or informal rules restricted their reporting and that no monitoring of their coverage took place in the post-electoral period, the questions arise: Did the mode of coverage change, and how? Did the polarization of political conflict translate into polarized media coverage?

It is necessary to address several methodological problems at this point. First and foremost we do not have any data comparable to the IFE Media Monitor, which collected monitoring data during the campaigns only. In fact, there are no available data quantifying airtime, the number of references or valuations of coverage for the post-electoral period. Due to these circumstances it is important to point out that the following observations about the media's performance during the post-electoral period are much less easily quantifiable than the foregoing analysis of their performance during the campaigns. However, it deserves attention and should not be neglected in the context of this paper, not least because of the presumed contri-



bution of the media to the “construction of fraud”. The observations about media performance during the time between the election and the TRIFE’s final decision are based on both the review of the daily press and opinion-leading journals as well as on interviews with Mexican experts, conducted by the author during the post-electoral period.<sup>18</sup>

Allegations of fraud began soon after the election, at a point when the preliminary counting program PREP had not yet finished its work. On July 4, all media, newspapers, radio and TV stations announced the breaking news that three million votes were missing – according to a statement López Obrador made during an interview. The success of the Coalition’s strategy for constructing a strong perception of fraud was made possible in part by the IFE’s deficient communication about certain aspects of the electoral process, and in part by a lack of professional behavior by Mexican journalists. In fact, in February 2006 all major political parties had signed on to an agreement with the IFE to create a so-called “archive of inconsistencies” where unclear ballots would be stored to be counted only in the final and valid district counts. They were not to be included in the first quick count (*conteo rapido*) and the preliminary counting program (PREP), which offer only a preliminary real-time election result, but are not valid as final results. Neither the IFE nor the parties had informed the voters about this new procedure, whether because of a lapse or a lack of the issue’s perceived importance. As a result, the newspaper and radio and TV stations opened with breaking news of possible fraud, apparently without doing much investigation of what was going on at the IFE. Consequently, the IFE’s clarification came as a surprise to many, as expressed in the newspaper *La Jornada* (04.07.2006)<sup>19</sup>: “At night the IFE justified the contradictions of the numbers in a bulletin which announced the existence of a surprising subsystem called ‘archive of inconsistencies’ (...).” Thus, although nothing irregular or untoward had happened with those 3 million ballots, the idea of fraud appeared in the Mexican public arena, and it fell on fertile ground, due to a strong legacy of electoral manipulations.

After this initial deficit of professional coverage, the information about the conflict between López Obrador’s supporters and “the others”, i.e. the state, the institutions, as well as citizens not in favor of López Obrador was marked by a higher degree of professionalism. According to Hallin/Mancini (2004: 34-36) professionalism in the media possesses three dimensions: autonomy, distinct professional norms and public service orientation. In this regard, too, Mexico corresponds to the ideal type of the Polarized Pluralist Model of the media system: “Professionalization of journalism is not as strongly developed as in the other models: journalism is not as strongly differentiated from political activism and the autonomy of journalism is often limited (...).” (Hallin/Mancini 2004: 73). With the tradition of a high degree of partisan

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<sup>18</sup> The in-depth semi-structured interviews have been carried out in August/September 2006 in Mexico City. The interviewees were researchers like Raul Trejo Delarbre (UNAM) and José Woldenberg (who also served as President of the IFE from 1996-2003), journalists as Dolores Beistegui (Director of the Mexican Radio Institute IMER), Julio DiBella (Director of Canal 11) and other Mexican experts.

<sup>19</sup> See <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/04/005n1pol.php> <Rev. 03.01.2006>.

(„Por la noche el IFE salió a justificar las contradicciones en las cifras, mediante un boletín en el que anunció la existencia de un sorpresivo subsistema denominado "archivo de inconsistencias", en el que quedan consignadas las actas de escrutinio y cómputo que hayan presentado inconsistencias.“)

bias this adds up to the assumption that political conflict would directly translate into a continued media battle.

In effect, the media did take sides, and a left/right cleavage framed events in the post-electoral period. Newspapers as opinion-leaders and agenda-setters played an important role during that moment, since they could best distribute and reflect the numerous and multifaceted information and comments, for which the limited space and time of radio and TV provided less opportunity. Nevertheless, framing according to partisan affiliation or sympathy occurred in all media and, as expected, assumed a more polarized shape than during the campaigns. The term “framing” refers to highlight certain aspects of an issue, embedding information of events into a broader spectrum of interpretation (McQuail 2002: 392). This means that in the media coverage *all* political and social events in the period after the election were framed by, i.e. interpreted in the light of the post-electoral conflict.

However, even though the perceived degree of polarization in the media increased after the election, the two different “camps” of *Lopezobradoristas* and *Caderonistas* did not merge into monolithic blocks fighting a surrogate media battle. “Obviously, there was no corporate decision of the (media) companies to present only one version of the events”, noted Mexican media expert Raul Trejo, who nonetheless expressed concerns about the media’s role in the construction of fraud.<sup>20</sup> According to him, their propensity for drama and ignorance had supported the rise of the idea of fraud. Several journalists spoke out positively on López Obrador and his activities, even in media that were critical of him overall. The same applies, to a lesser degree, to decidedly leftist publications such as the daily *La Jornada* and the weekly political magazine *Proceso*. Thus Dolores Beistegui, Director of the Mexican Radio Institute IMER, described a “principle of autoregulation by each individual, rather than on an institutionalized level”. She underlined that “Televisa is not in favor of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, yet some of its presenters, journalists like Carmen Arristegui, are.” The same was true for newspapers like the center-right *Reforma*, in which leftist comments favoring the PRD’s Coalition have been published alongside opinions opposing López Obrador. In the sense that journalists are free to publish their opinions without any party and government control, concludes Beistegui, has Mexico changed “100 percent”.<sup>21</sup>

At the same time the Coalition fervidly expressed allegations of a perceived partisan bias to the extent of an outright war in the media to underline their argument of a necessary revocation of the election. As Jenaro Villamil complained, “Televisa utterly loses its neutral character and becomes part of the post-electoral conflict”. Villamil points out that with respect to the mass protest in Mexico City “the programs with the highest ratings on Televisa opted to make the mobilization of more than two million people invisible. TV Azteca, too, decided to deny voice and image to the hundreds of thousands proclaiming ‘*voto por voto, casilla por casilla*’.” (Villamil 2006b: 20) Despite the interesting (rhetorical) implication of Televisa’s neutrality during the actual campaign, there is something more to this argument. The coverage in newspapers was indeed more intensive and detailed than on TV. One reason for that may

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<sup>20</sup> Interview with Raul Trejo Delarbre, 11.08.2006.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Dolores Beistegui, 22.08.2006.

lie in the nature of the medium: newspapers provide a lot more space for multi-faceted coverage of the events and different comments and opinions. Julio DiBella, General Director of Mexico's largest and most important state-owned TV-Station, Canal 11, offers a different interpretation. He notes that reporters for the private networks Televisa and TV Azteca, whose credibility (especially on the left) had been tarnished by the electoral season and the "Televisa Law", could actually physically not enter the tent city set up by López Obrador's supporters without being insulted, beaten or have their equipment destroyed – supposedly, some reporters were even kidnapped. This did not happen to Canal 11 reporters, which he interprets as a sign of the citizen recognition of the station as a more trustworthy and balanced source of political information, as shown by the protesters' attitude to Canal 11 TV crews.<sup>22</sup>

As a quasi-monopoly that has become the most visible icon of corporate media in Mexico, Televisa has suffered a great loss of trust and a considerable damage to its image. Protest manifestations directed against Televisa and its *perceived* negative coverage of the Coalition's candidate López Obrador have been an integral part of the mass demonstrations. One poster that could be seen during the events read "Do you believe Televisa? – Neither do I!" Moreover, the network has suffered losses in its ratings as well. Even though financially, 2006 has been a very successful year for Televisa's business, due to revenue from the elections and the World Championship of Soccer, the symptoms of a crisis at Televisa are now apparent. For the first time in its history, the ratings of its main news program declined below those of TV Azteca. Other programs offering political information, like *Zona Abierta* and *Tercer Grado*, also lost some of their audience. (Villamil 2006b: 21)

Overall, these observations suggest that the media coverage of the post-electoral period has indeed been less balanced and more polarized, reflecting the political fault lines dividing Mexican society. This indeed reflects both the strong partisan bias inherent in the Mexican media system, and the existing moderating effect of the mechanisms of fair media coverage in place during campaigns. At least among citizens actively involved in the protests, skepticism against commercial media, which they perceived as highly opposed to "their candidate", was prevalent and has been routinely expressed. However, a great deal of detailed and extensive information on the events and political configurations of the post-electoral period has been available to the Mexican citizens, from a variety of sources. The different interpretations of what was happening and what it meant were freely expressed, published and accessible, often within the very same medium. While partisan bias is a traditional feature of Mexican journalism, the large variety and openness to other opinions reflects a more recent achievement of Mexican democratization, especially since the 1990s.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Julio DiBella, 23.08.2006.

## 6. A Danger for Mexico's Democracy?

Even though an independent analysis does not support allegations of fraud in 2006, the question remains whether the events and the rhetoric around this election have been harmful to Mexico's young democracy. The public discourse during and after the post-electoral period, especially when López Obrador "inaugurated" himself as "legitimate President" of Mexico, led to widespread worries about the future development of democratic consolidation. Over the weeks after the election, López Obrador and his supporters expressed distrust and scorn not only vis-a-vis electoral institutions, but democratic institutions in general. According to López Obrador, the institutions were "in crisis, in ruins, absolutely useless", he had "no respect at all for their institutions, because they are not the people's institutions." (Ramos 2006). For observers on the right, López Obrador himself became the "*tropical messiah*" (Krauze 2006), or "*Subcomandante Andrés*", in reference to neo-Zapatista leader Subcomandante Marcos (Sodi de la Tijera 2006). López Obrador's populist ideal of a more direct democracy, in which "the street" dominates institutions, alienated many citizens (including members of his own party) and further distanced him from a constructive dialogue with the other political representatives from the conservative and market-oriented PAN side.

The final issue to be taken up in this paper is whether the allegations of electoral fraud and the scorn displayed by López Obrador and his supporters for the electoral regime have caused additional defects to Mexico's "illiberal" defective democracy (Thiery 2006).<sup>23</sup> Due to the absence of any "real" incidents known as harmful to democracy, as a severe political or economic crisis, the success of an anti-system party or the failure of the electoral regime and its institutions, this leads to the question of how and to what extent political rhetoric followed by mass protest may lead to democratic defects. The concept of "Embedded Democracy" (Puhle 2007, Merkel et al. 2003) provides meaningful criteria for measuring democratic consolidation, or, in its absence, the particular defects of democracy, because it stretches beyond Robert Dahl's minimalist criteria of Polyarchy, but is still not excessively demanding. An *embedded democracy* encompasses five (both independent and interdependent) partial regimes and their criteria.

Civil rights, rule of law and minority rights (9-11) have neither been touched upon nor been put in doubt by the electoral or post-electoral process of 2006, yet they remain generally deficient in Mexico. The access to and the functioning of independent courts are central to electoral conflict resolution in closely fought and contested elections, testing the institutionalization of democracies (see Whitehead 2006). The Mexican system of electoral conflict resolution, in which final decisions fall to the Federal Electoral Tribunal (TRIFE)<sup>24</sup>, has functioned according to legal provisions in 2006. In a tense political situation the Court followed legal rules, reviewed the claims of the parties thoroughly, and came to a reasonable sentence within

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<sup>23</sup> For an in-depth analysis of Mexico's democratic defects see Thiery 2006, and consult the Bertelsmann Transformation Index' Country Report (<http://www.bertelsmann-transformation-index.de/109.0.html?L=1> <Rev. 09.01.2007>).

<sup>24</sup> Or as it is more formally called, the Electoral Court of the Judicial Power of the Federation (TEPJF). See Orozco Henríquez 2006 for details about the Mexican system of electoral conflict resolution.

the period foreseen by electoral law. Unfortunately, not all courts work that well in Mexico. Since the conflictual post-electoral situation has had no discernible effects on the mechanisms of horizontal accountability (D), I will leave this partial regime out of the focus.

#### Embedded Democracy: Partial Regimes (A-E) and Criteria (1-11)

- |  |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>0. Stateness</li><li>A. Electoral Regime<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. elected officials</li><li>2. inclusive suffrage</li><li>3. right to run for office/full contestation</li><li>4. free and fair elections</li></ul></li><li>B. Political Liberties/ Public Arena<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>5. freedom of speech, of the press and of information</li><li>6. freedom of association</li></ul></li><li>C. Effective Power to Govern<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>7. government by elective officials/ no reserved domains</li></ul></li><li>D. Horizontal Accountability<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>8. checks and balances</li></ul></li><li>E. Rechtsstaat<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>9. civil rights</li><li>10. rule of law and judicial review/independent courts/<br/>equal access to and equality in court</li><li>11. rights/protection of minorities</li></ul></li></ul> |
|--|

Source: Puhle 2007: 131, Merkel et al. 2003: 57

This leaves us with the criteria of the remaining three partial regimes: electoral regime (A), political liberties/public arena (B) and the effective power to govern (C). As the first part of the paper has shown, some actors' allegations of fraud (understood as deliberate and aggregate manipulations of election results in favor of one candidate) are not supported by empirical data. The elections were indeed extremely close, but López Obrador lost because he lacked the votes. Despite some minor incidents, all of which were addressed by election monitoring institutions, the 2006 elections in Mexico were free and fair. Basic political rights were respected, which unfortunately is not the general rule in Mexico and a major reason for democratic deficits. In the post-electoral period, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of association were all put into practice. Several thousand protesters gathered peacefully, showed their rejection of the election results and blocked the center of Mexico City for more than two months without any interference from state institutions. Despite strong demands from some sectors of the public to end the protests, these demonstrations were permitted by the government. This might be considered especially striking, since in Mexico assaults against civil and human rights are repeatedly reported by international NGOs such as Amnesty International. Reporters Without Borders lists Mexico as one of the most dangerous countries for journalists.

The analysis suggests, that the two aspects which may have been the most negatively influenced by the construction of fraud and anti-institutional expressions of mass protest, is the

partial regime of the effective power to govern and the levels of support for democracy. Do elected representatives have the power to govern when they face such a strong opposition in and outside the parliament, and when a President leads the executive branch with a strongly contested legitimacy? When representatives of the opposition express their distrust in the nation's institutions with protests in parliament itself, one should ask whether the support for democracy and trust in democratic institutions has suffered among Mexican citizens.

### **6.1. Democratic Support**

The operationalization of “democratic support” has received further nuance since David Easton's distinction between interest-oriented *specific support* and value-oriented *diffuse support* (Easton 1965, 1975). In Easton's concept as well as in earlier works, as in Almond/Verba's (1963) famous study on Civic Culture, political attitudes are deeply rooted in citizens' socialization. We also find approaches focusing on the performance of political systems (outputs) and how citizens perceive their responsiveness. Such studies are based on the idea that citizens' attitudes and their behavior towards a political system stem from their assessment of the political outputs and the responsiveness of the political system to their needs: “Thus, the perceived efficacy of a regime is among those attitudes which are fundamentally related to democratic legitimacy and the perception of its political institutions as the most appropriate means of government. [...] In this vein, opinions about the legitimacy of a regime are linked to judgments of the merits of incumbent authorities, perceptions of governmental performance, and/or the gap between respondent's ideals and political reality.” (Morlino/Montero 1995: 234)

Gunther/Montero/Torcal (2007) distinguish between democratic support, discontent and disaffection. *Disaffection* describes the „subjective feeling of powerlessness, cynicism and lack of confidence in the political process, politicians and democratic institutions“ (Gunther/Montero/Torcal 2007: 33). The roots of disaffection reach deep into the socialization of citizens and are hardly affected by short-term influences or temporary dissatisfaction. *Discontent*, on the other hand, refers to the dissatisfaction with the particular functioning of democracy in a given country at a given time – when citizens are not satisfied with the policies or the behavior of their incumbents. Discontent stems from the discrepancy between positive expectations and negative evaluations of political efficacy and usually results in voting-out the incumbents or governing parties. If discontent continues over a longer period and the democratic actors and institutions do not deliver or adjust their responsiveness to the citizens' needs, discontent might feed a shift to more disaffection. A significantly higher degree of discontent after the elections than Mexicans had expressed before could hint at an erosion of democratic support, but as a singular event it is not very likely (according to this concept) to be a danger for the Mexican democracy at large. Additionally, I will test whether the anti-institutional rhetoric by López Obrador has translated into widespread distrust in democratic institutions. Do citizens still have faith in Mexico's electoral institutions?

The data monitoring long-term developments of trust in institutions and democratic support

are taken from the *Latinobarometro*<sup>25</sup> and the annual *Encuesta Nacional Sobre Cultura Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas* (ENCUP 2005)<sup>26</sup> (the latter is carried out by the Mexican government). However, the data in these sources are published only once a year, so the use of additional sources that might reveal short-term shifts is also necessary. With all the usual caveats about the limited reliability of surveys with smaller N and data gained from telephone interviews, data gathered by Grupo Reforma and El Universal can help us to begin to answer these questions. Their surveys used samples in the range of 450-600 respondents and were collected by a professional staff experienced with empirical methods.<sup>27</sup>

Support for López Obrador and sympathy for his protest declined dramatically in the weeks after the election. Thus, by the end of July, 59 percent considered his behavior to be “irresponsible”, and by the end of August, he would have gained only 30 percent of respondents’ votes (Felipe Calderón 54 percent).<sup>28</sup> López Obrador nonetheless succeeded in anchoring the idea that at least some kind of fraud had occurred in the 2006 presidential election. More than one third of the respondents agreed in mid- and late July that the result was “not trustworthy”, 41 percent believed in “severe irregularities” (Reforma, 30.07.2006, p.4), and 59 percent expressed belief in electoral fraud (El Universal, 14.08.2006, p. A17). Although a significant part of the citizens did not support López Obrador’s radical means of protest, such as proclaiming himself “legitimate president”, blocking President Fox from giving his annual *Informe del Gobierno* in Congress and causing a traffic nightmare that snarled Mexico City’s vehicles for several weeks, there was a widespread belief in some kind of electoral manipulations. When it is seen in a broader Latin American perspective, Mexicans’ skepticism regarding clean elections was, according to the Latinobarometro data, close to the regional average.<sup>29</sup> The belief in clean elections in Mexico even increased, from 22 percent in 2005 to 40 percent in 2006,<sup>30</sup> which follows the regional trend, according to which more Latin Americans see their elections as clean.<sup>31</sup>

At the same time, trust in institutions remains rather low. About one third of citizens have little or no trust in the institutions of the electoral regime, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and the Federal Electoral Tribunal (TRIFE).

But as the data in table 6 show, no significant withdrawal of trust from the institutions involved in and responsible for the electoral process has occurred. The open scorn for these institutions displayed by López Obrador and his supporters is not representative of the citi-

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<sup>25</sup> <http://www.latinobarometro.org> <Rev. 09.01.2007>.

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.gobernacion.gob.mx/encup/> <Rev. 09.01.2007> N= 4700, face-to-face interviews.

<sup>27</sup> El Universal is a centrist daily newspaper, Reforma instead is more center-right. The leftist La Jornada newspaper did not present figures that would be comparable in respect to number and quality of the data.

<sup>28</sup> Reforma, 30.07.2006, p.1/ Reforma, 27.08.2006, p. 4/ also El Universal 04.09.2006, p. A11.

<sup>29</sup> In Mexico, according to these data, 40 percent believe that clean elections have been held in 2006, the Latin American average is 41 percent. (Latinobarometro 2006: 18)..

The Latinobarometro’s data in 2006 has been collected in 20.234 interviews in Latin America between October 3 and November 5, 2006. Thus, it does reflect opinions after the election and the post-electoral period.

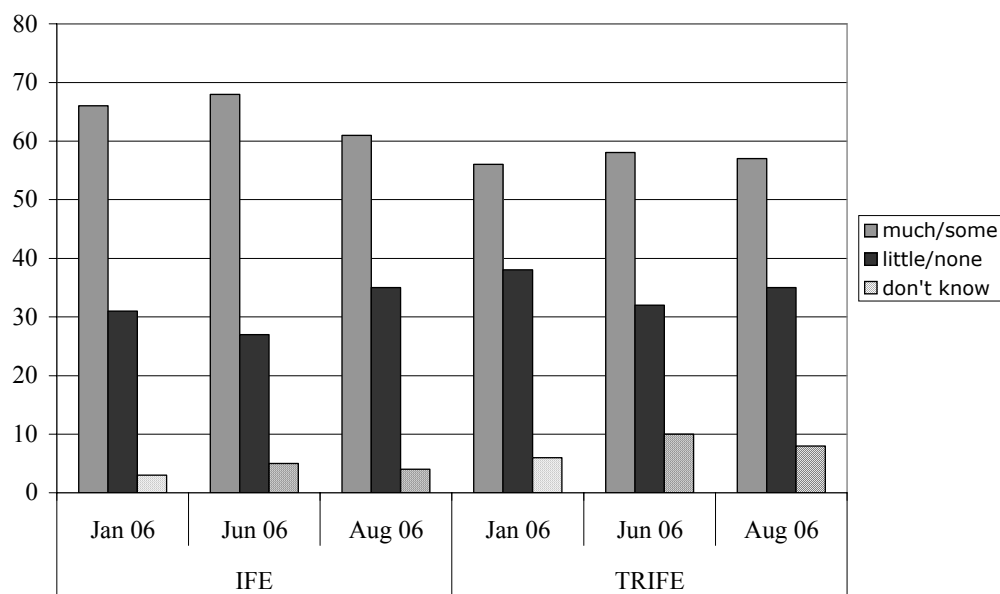
<sup>30</sup> Latinobarometro 2006: 19.

<sup>31</sup> From 54 (fraudulent): 37 (clean) in 2005 to 49 (fraudulent): 41 (clean) in 2006 in Latin America; Latinobarometro 2006: 17.

zenry at large, and it seems that the obituaries for the IFE (Flores 2006) were premature, partisan, and arbitrary. Data on satisfaction with the functioning of the political system confirm this picture.

The mid-term parliamentary elections in 1997 and the general elections in 2000 and 2006 seem to have had an invigorating influence on the perceptions of the performance of democracy. This underlines the importance of the electoral regime's transformation and the experience of elections that have been the most competitive and least manipulated in Mexican history. The data for 2006 were collected between October 3 and November 5, so the 41 percent of citizens reporting satisfaction with the functioning of their democracy in that year already take the election and the subsequent events into account.

Table 6: Trust in IFE and TRIFE in percent, Jan-Aug 2006



Source: Reforma, 27.08.2006, p. 4

Even though the post-electoral conflict has not diminished the satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, the level of discontent is still high. Paradoxically, the belief in democracy itself as a desirable political system decreased in 2006, at the same time as satisfaction with this system has grown. Sixty-eight percent of respondents (seven percent less than in 2005) agreed that democracy, despite its problems, is the best political system. In this regard Mexico has fallen below the Latin American average of 74 percent (which has risen by four percent since 2005).<sup>32</sup> This is also reflected in the decline of electoral participation: only 58,6 percent voted in 2006, compared to 64 percent in 2000. Among the eleven Latin American countries that held presidential elections in 2005/2006, only Honduras had a lower turnout (55 percent).<sup>33</sup> At the same time Mexicans are optimistic about the future of their democracy: 47 per-

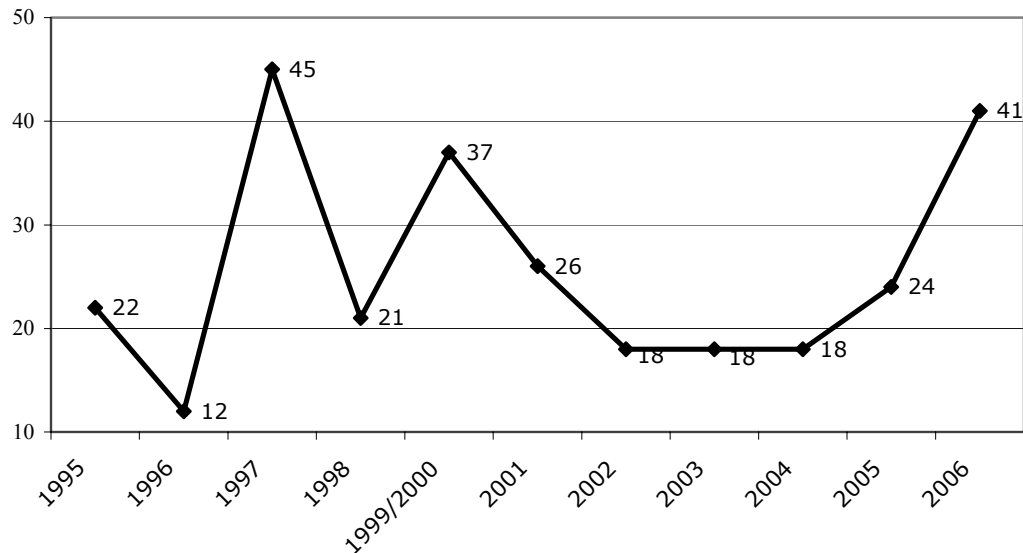
<sup>32</sup> Latinobarometro 2006: 65.

<sup>33</sup> Latinobarometro 2006: 13.



cent think that their democracy will be better, or at least partially better in the future, while only 22 percent believe it will be worse.<sup>34</sup>

Table 7: Satisfaction with the Functioning of Democracy 1995 – 2006, in percent



Source: Latinobarometro, Press Release 2006: 74

Here: Percentage of respondents stating that they were very satisfied and those stating that they were more than less satisfied.

“In general: Would you say that you are very satisfied, more than less satisfied (más bien satisfecho), not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the functioning of democracy in Mexico?”

A close analysis of the available data thus do not support the impression that there has been a loss of support for democracy in Mexico, or increased distrust in the electoral regime’s institutions that could be related to the post-electoral claims of fraud. Whether the broader decrease in the general approval of democracy as a desirable political system is just a deviation or a deeper trend will require further analysis.

## 6.2. Effective Power to Govern

In addition to the level of support for democracy prevailing in Mexican society, it is important for the consolidation of democracy that the elected representatives have the effective power to govern.<sup>35</sup> The proclamation of an alternative government presided by López Obrador, who had himself elected in “alternative” elections on Mexico City’s Zocalo on September 16, 2006, and the effective blockade of political institutions by his supporters had put the new government under pressure. Beyond the non-parliamentary opposition manifested by hundreds of thousands of protesters on the streets, the Coalition had been very successful in the

<sup>34</sup> ENCUP 2006: 21.

<sup>35</sup> On the role of effective power to govern in embedded democracies, and the possible defects caused by lack thereof, see Merkel et al. (2003).

parliamentary election and could therefore carry the protest into formal institutions of the state.

Table 8: Allocation of Seats in both Parliamentary Chambers 2000-2010<sup>36</sup>

	Chamber of Deputies (500 seats)		Senate (128 seats)	
	2003-2006 (LIX Legislatura)	2006-2009 (LX Legislatura)	2000-2006	2006-2010
<b>PRI</b>	201	104 (- 48.3%)	58	33 (- 43.1%)
<b>PAN</b>	148	206 (+ 39.2%)	47	52 (+ 10.6%)
<b>PRD</b>	97	124 (+ 27.8%)	15	29 (+ 93.3%)
<b>Convergencia</b>	5	18	-	5
<b>PT</b>	6	16	-	2
<b>PVEM</b>	17	19	5	6
<b>Nueva Alianza</b>	-	9	-	1
<b>Alternativa</b>	-	4	-	-
<b>Independent</b>	26	-	3	-

Source: Reforma, 23.08.2006, S. 7, author's calculations

The 2006 elections were very successful for the PRD: Besides a 30 percent increase in seats in the Chamber of Deputies, the party almost doubled its presence in the Senate and again won the government of the *Distrito Federal* (Mexico City). Next to the PAN, which also increased its share of power, the PRD is now the second most influential party in Mexico.

During the post-electoral period and after, López Obrador's protest and denunciation of institutions were introduced into parliament by congressmen associated with the Coalition. When President Vicente Fox tried to give his annual *Informe del Gobierno*, these representatives seized the tribune and blocked the building's entries. Fox was finally forced to deliver his speech from the presidential residence *Los Pinos*. Three days before Felipe Calderón's inauguration on December 1, representatives of the Coalition and the PAN on the other side staged a bizarre sleep-over blockade of the Congress tribune to hinder/ensure the ceremony. Despite being parliamentary representatives, they supported a self-proclaimed President, who had closely yet definitely lost the elections. All this has aroused doubts about the new government's ability to govern. However, with majorities in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, effective government is perfectly possible for the PAN – meaning that elected representatives execute real power to decide on and implement policies. With the support of

<sup>36</sup> Although PRD, PT and Convergencia ran in the elections as *Coalición por el Bien de Todos* on the one side, as well as PRI and the green party PVEM as *Alianza por México* on the other side, they are not coalition partners in parliament. As the senior partners in their electoral coalitions, both PRD and PRI had signed contracts with the smaller parties, fixing a percentage that the small parties would gain from the joint electoral result. The PRD passed 6% of their seats on to PT, 5,5% to Convergencia. The PVEM obtained 6,6% from the Alianza's seats. As we can see, the small parties benefit considerably from this agreement (which is not so obvious in the case of the PVEM, because it had already joined an alliance with PAN in 2000 and had already benefited from this coalition in that year).

the PRI, Nueva Alianza and/or the green PVEM, all of whom fully accept the legitimacy of Felipe Calderón as president, the PAN could (at least theoretically) obtain absolute and two-thirds majorities, which would be necessary for constitutional reforms.

Only a few months after the elections, the support for López Obrador began to diminish. Even though more than half of Mexicans evidently believe in some kind of fraudulent activities in the elections, large parts of the population do not agree with López Obrador's means of protest. In October/November 2006, 60 percent approved of their government, and 50 percent expressed confidence in the president – both numbers are above the Latin American average (54 percent and 47 percent respectively).<sup>37</sup> López Obrador remains an important non-parliamentary opposition leader with tight connections to parliamentary incumbents, but he is not powerful enough to hold the government in check. His movement cannot be considered to be a tutelary power, in the sense of “democratically non-legitimized elites and power groups, which elude government authority and thus safeguard extra-constitutional privileges no longer controlled by the state.”<sup>38</sup> The strong opposition the government is facing inside and outside parliament may moderate its policies, yet the government disposes of all the necessary resources and effective power to govern. Whether the Calderón government will employ this power or submit to potential veto actors, such as influential economic enterprises or drug cartels, is another story.

## 7. Conclusion

There is a long way left to go on Mexico's road towards a consolidated democracy, most of all in the realm of the rule of law. The electoral regime, whose reforms constituted the core of the country's transformation, is basically functioning well, despite “irregularities” noted by domestic and international election observers. These irregularities, which include vote buying and inappropriate conditions in the polling stations, are rooted in long traditions of corruption, the prevalence of informal over formal rules and the dominance of local *caciques* (bosses). However, election observers do not support the notion of a deliberate manipulation of the election in favor of the PAN's candidate Felipe Calderón. Besides claiming fraudulent activities in the electoral process, the defeated *Coalición Por el Bien de Todos* and most prominently its candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador has also complained about a “campaign of hate” by which his competitor and the media allegedly conspired to diminish his chances to win.

This paper has analyzed the media's performance during the 2006 presidential campaign, regarding both the mode of allocating publicity and the mode of coverage of the campaign. In both cases the data do not support either the thesis of an increased negativism in general, nor one directed against one of the competing parties. In fact, the media's allocation of publicity

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<sup>37</sup> Latinobarometro 2006: 76.

<sup>38</sup> Merkel et al. (2003): 92 „Dies sind demokratisch nicht legitimierte Eliten und Machtgruppen, die sich der Regierungsautorität entziehen und dadurch extrakonstitutionelle und nicht mehr kontrollierbare Vorrechte sichern.“

complied with the legal rules - despite minor exceptions, which actually sometimes suggest favoritism *towards* López Obrador, as in the case of TV Azteca's heavily discounting the airtime for his daily TV show. The mode of coverage featured a moderate degree of partisan bias, which is deeply rooted in Mexican journalism and the media system. However, the number of negative references decreased during the second half of the campaign, as the positive references converged for the three most important parties. The fair media mechanisms implemented in the 1994 electoral reform continued to show a significant effect of moderation, as they had in the previous elections. That the degree of partisan bias in the media coverage was actually affected by these mechanisms is strongly suggested by the increased bias that prevailed in coverage during the post-electoral period. Even without data comparable to the Federal Electoral Institute's Media Monitor, a common perception of a stronger party parallelism during the highly conflictual weeks after the Election Day could be observed.

Although the perception of some fraudulent manipulation has been successfully disseminated by López Obrador and his followers in a broad swathe of Mexican society – rendered believable by a long historical experience of electoral fraud – Mexicans do not seem to be too impressed by the Coalition's persistent rhetoric when it comes to support for the electoral regime's institutions. The level of trust in the Federal Electoral Institute and the Electoral Tribunal has not diminished overall. Also, Mexicans were significantly more satisfied with the functioning of their democracy in 2006 than in the eight previous years. Its new president may have been elected with the small margin of only 0.56 percentage points of the votes, yet the government has the effective power to govern: it is accepted by all other parties except the parties that made up López Obrador's Coalition. Felipe Calderón's PAN will be able to form coalitions and obtain parliamentary majorities, even if it may lack the ability to put forward a bold legislative program under these conditions.

There are a few worrisome trends in this picture: voter participation has dropped steadily since 1994, and the belief in democracy as the best available political system in the Churchillian sense is weakening. Now that the new government has finally been installed, its first priority should not only be to consolidate its legitimacy to govern, but to restore and stimulate the citizens' faith in democracy, and the faith that the road to democracy is worth its troubles.

[Postscript: After the completion of the manuscript, in September 2007, under intense protests by the private media outlets, Mexican legislators passed an electoral reform, which in a way was a reaction to the controversies over the electoral and postelectoral process of 2006. This reform has, among other points, reduced the duration of presidential campaigns to 90 days and banned the acquisition of airtime in radio and TV by the parties. Spots shall only be broadcast by public media outlets and within the limited airtime reserved for public announcements in the private media (free of charge). The intention was to reduce campaign costs.]

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