UC Santa Cruz

Reprint Series

Title

Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs and Local Government

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4200c3fc>

Authors

Fox, Jonathan A
Hernández, Luis

Publication Date

1992-03-01

Peer reviewed

Alternatives 17 (1992), 165–208

Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government

Jonathan Fox and Luis Hernández*

Seen from the desert of Latin America's dictatorships, Mexico's democracy once seemed like an oasis. At least that was the impression one got from the thousands of Central and South American exiles who managed to escape military governments and death squad violence. The Mexican government's benign image abroad was reinforced by many of the nation's most distinguished intellectuals and, more recently, cleverly packaged by sophisticated public relations firms.

For many Mexicans, however, this oasis of democracy was a frustrating mirage. For those without privileged protection from the arbitrary exercise of governmental authority, things were not what they seemed from abroad. In spite of Mexico's long electoral history, the image of political opening was deceptive for those citizens whose names were deliberately erased from the voting rolls, or whose charred ballots ended up floating down rivers.

The unexpected explosion of political opposition in 1988 put electoral democracy at the top of the political agenda, but the issue is not a new one. Mexican society has produced a wide range of movements for democracy since the beginning of the twentieth century. The 1910 revolution began with the call for "effective suffrage"—the respect for the rights of the citizenry to choose their rulers. Since that time, movements for political rights have risen and fallen, with the most recent wave traceable at least as far back as the 1960s, a decade marked by failed attempts to democratize the ruling party and by the bloody repression of the 1968 student movement.

*Luis Hernández is a grassroots development consultant and director of research and projects for the National Network of Coffee-Producing Organizations (CNOC) in Mexico City. Jonathan Fox is associate professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

166 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

Since then, civil society has grown much more autonomous from the state. For Mexico's diverse social movements, demands for social and economic rights dominated the 1970s, but the call for political democracy filled many of Mexico's principal plazas in the 1980s. The 1985 earthquakes were a watershed; an impressive citizen response contrasted sharply with the government's initial incapacity. New social actors insisted on becoming legitimate players under new rules of the game. The state's lack of accountability to society had long met largely with apparent resignation, but by the late 1980s broad sectors of Mexican society from across the political spectrum—even including important sectors of the ruling party—agreed that Mexico had to begin a transition to democracy.

Conflicts between national political parties and leaders tell part of the story. The democratization process becomes much more complex, however, as one takes into account a broader range of actors. Many do not fit the frameworks designed for analyzing national political elites. This article will analyze the interaction between three key actors: grassroots social movements, local governments, and nongovernmental development organizations (NGOs). A general overview of state-society relations and the formal structures of municipal authority provides the background for analysis of the key trends in social movements, especially their increasing involvement in efforts to democratize local government. The discussion then turns to the role of NGOs in this process, as one of a variety of linkages between intellectuals and grassroots movements in Mexico.¹

State and Society in Mexico

Political and social life in Mexico has long been shaped by the heavy hand of the state. The country has been governed by the same political party since 1929. The government lacks checks and balances or the separation of powers—the legislative and judicial authorities are under the effective control of the executive branch in general, and the president's initiatives and proposals in particular. In spite of partial electoral reforms, political choices are still limited by strict government controls on opposition political parties, registration, and alliances at both the national and local levels. The electoral process is still controlled by the government without effective channels for independent citizen oversight. Fraud, therefore, remains a serious problem.

Mexico's human rights record is both bloody and, until recently, largely invisible. Official control of the broadcast media limits publicity of the problem to the tiny minority of Mexican society who read newspapers. By the late 1980s, independent human rights monitoring groups began

to systematically monitor and document violations of basic human rights. Perhaps the first human rights organization was the Mothers' Committee, founded in 1978, followed by the National Front Against Repression (FNCR).² The most frequent victims of abuse are those whose voices are weakest in Mexican society—the indigenous peoples, who make up at least 15 percent of the population, and the majority of the rural poorest. As of 1991, reformist currents within the state were still unable to challenge the impunity of human rights violators deeply embedded within the state apparatus.³

Most social organizations, such as trade unions, peasant organizations, or business associations, have long been controlled by the government. Membership is often obligatory, and the leadership is chosen from above. Many different social groups have challenged this official monopoly on representation over the last few decades with mixed results. The central state's capacity to control local political and social life has always been uneven, but the Mexican state has retained near-total control over the channels that linked it to civil society at the national level—even in the late 1980s. Among the many diverse groups that make up Mexican society, only the Catholic church succeeded in sustaining a powerful, autonomous national organization.⁴

The secret of the Mexican state's "success" is its skillful combination of "carrots and sticks." Government responses to popular movements for social reform and democracy have typically combined partial concessions with repression, conditioning access to material gains on political subordination. The state does not always wait to be pressured; its remarkable capacity for preemptive measures continues to surprise seasoned observers. One cannot understand Mexico's long-standing relative political stability without looking at both sides of the coin. The state occasionally does give in to some people, some of the time, and usually with strings attached. Some of Mexico's rulers specialize in such bargaining, but they operate in the shadow of their colleagues' capacity for fierce repression in case the negotiations break down. This camouflage is a key component of what noted writer Mario Vargas Llosa called "the perfect dictatorship."⁵

In spite of these constraints, the Mexican state has opened much more political space than existed twenty or thirty years ago. The challenge has not only been to weaken the most authoritarian elements within the state, but also for democratic forces to develop strategies that are politically appropriate to each historical moment. Today's efforts toward local democratization build on a wide range of past experiences in the social as well as the political arena. Perhaps the most important change is the transition from an exclusive emphasis on protest toward efforts to build concrete social and political alternatives.

168 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

Since the 1970s, Mexico's social movements for reform and democracy have been making the transition from confrontational opposition (*contestación*) to the construction of positive policy alternatives (*proposición*). In the process, a new sense of citizenship has emerged, combining community-based self-organization for socioeconomic development with a political push for accountable government. These two streams of social change followed separate paths in the past, but they began to come together in the late 1980s. Social movements that had previously abstained from electoral politics began to get involved in the often frustrating process of gradually widening small openings in the state at both the local and national levels.

Local Government

Mexican history has long been marked by political conflicts between central and local authorities. State governors were once highly autonomous actors—some of national importance—but since the consolidation of the central state in the 1930s, they have tended to represent regional elites to the national state.⁶ In theory, the United States of Mexico is a federation, and state governors have long considered themselves to be the sovereign authority within their domains. In practice, however, ruling party candidates for governor can be named by the president, taking into account the balance of forces within the state. Governors can also be summarily deposed by the president, especially if they directly challenge him or are considered unable to contain political tensions within their domains. When the presidency changes hands, there is sometimes serious friction between the new central authority and his inherited subordinates (because of staggered electoral calendars), but these are conflicts within the ruling “revolutionary family” rather than expressions of democratic initiatives from below.

In Mexico, as elsewhere, for most people, most of the time, most politics is local. The status of the municipality—the smallest territorial politico-administrative unit—has risen and fallen often since independence, with the general tendency toward the creation of more and smaller municipalities through the elevation of formerly subordinate towns to the status of municipal seats. It was not until the founding of the post-revolutionary Mexican political system, however, that the municipality's status was recognized by the national constitution. Even though the Spanish conquerors founded the township of Villa Rica of Veracruz as early as April 22, 1519, the municipality was not fully incorporated into the Mexican political system until the 1917 constitution.⁷ Since becoming the third level of government, in addition to the state and federal

authorities, the municipality has become a key arena of conflict between civil society, which tries to occupy this space, and the central state, which treats it as merely the bottom layer in the regime's vertical hierarchy.⁸

The demand for local autonomy and decentralization was expressed by the call for "free townships" throughout the Porfirian dictatorship (1876–1910). Embedded in the 1910 revolt for electoral democracy and the return of community lands, it resonated again with Zapata's revolutionary demand for "land and liberty."⁹ One of the first "modern" campaigns for municipal democracy took place in Acapulco, where widely shared grievances against authoritarian local elites combined with anarcho-syndicalist ideas left over from the revolution to launch a mass movement for local democratization. The Acapulco Worker's party actually won the 1920 municipal election, although local merchants soon brought the army in to violently eject them from the town hall.¹⁰ Another key modern political campaign for municipal democracy emerged in 1946, led by the Civic Union of León (an electoral alliance of the National Action party [PAN] and the Popular Force party in the state of Guanajuato). Even though the Civic Union defeated the official candidate by a clear margin, the state government refused to acknowledge the victory and repressed the protests that followed.¹¹ So continued a series of civic campaigns against local and regional political bosses, known as *caciques*. This history is very much alive. For example, at least two powerful contemporary regional movements for democratization can trace their roots directly back to the late 1950s (San Luis Potosí and Guerrero).¹²

There are 2,378 municipalities in Mexico, distributed very unevenly throughout the thirty-one states.¹³ Oaxaca, for example, is made up of 570 mainly small, rural municipalities, whereas North and South Baja California have only 4 each. Each municipality's access to resources also varies greatly, but not in proportion to either its size or population. Most municipalities depend largely on discretionary revenue sharing from state and federal authorities, creating major obstacles for dissenting local governments, whether inside or outside the official party.

The rural municipalities in southern Mexico's majority indigenous regions are far from the world of Western public administration, combining the juridical forms of the nation-state with traditional forms of self-government and community participation. These traditions were not directly inherited from before the Conquest; instead they reflect the imposition of Spanish colonial influence on pre-existing authority structures. The government's National Indigenous Institute (INI) considers 28 percent of the nation's municipalities to be predominantly indigenous.¹⁴ Indigenous forms of governance are based on a mix of civic-religious hierarchies that are based on rotating community responsibilities (*cargos*). This system is especially important in Oaxaca,

and involves a high degree of community political autonomy. After a traditional community chooses its authorities, the official political system often recognizes them as its candidates. Through a delicate bargaining process, the government cedes de facto local autonomy in exchange for a free hand in state and national politics.¹⁵

In those regions where indigenous rights movements have grown, autonomous villages have united at the regional level, as in the cases of the Assembly of Mixe Authorities and the Assembly of Zapotec Authorities. In this context, political party labels are quite superficial. As Mixe leader Floriberto Dfáz put it: "In our experience, political parties end up trying to divide us, to turn us into 'yes men,' or simple paper pushers. If our communities reject political parties it is because we know that only all of us, together can we make the most important decisions that affect us, about land, justice, and government."¹⁶

In indigenous communities where the process of social differentiation has sharpened, and the poorest have developed some degree of autonomous organization, the first phase of conflict for control over local political power often involves a struggle for control over the representation of the official political party. In some municipalities, such as Yalalag in Oaxaca's Sierra de Juárez, communities have managed to defeat the *caciques* and wield local political power from within the ranks of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). In other cases this has not been possible, and communities have taken advantage of the official registries of opposition political parties.¹⁷

Within regional centers—towns called urban by the census but actually quite rural—another arena of conflict is between the municipal center and its satellite "agencies," or village-level branches.¹⁸ In many regional centers, rural community movements may be strong enough to democratize the agencies but not the "urban" center itself. These conflicts rarely appear as political party competition, but they involve key issues such as locally accountable police.

Two factors condition the actual degree of local autonomy. One is the economic importance of the municipality—the richer it is, the more likely the official party will have formalized its permanent presence. The second factor is the organizational consolidation of the community—with more experience of unified mobilization in defense of village and ethnic rights, it is less likely that the official party will be able to penetrate. In these cases, the official party presence is often limited to local elites and their clients.

In the rest of Mexico, movements to democratize municipal governments began to spread more quickly in the 1980s, especially after the 1983 political reform permitted some degree of proportional representation in city and town councils.¹⁹ Two different political streams came together. First were

the civic movements against political bosses, often multiclass movements without sectoral demands. They were often led by professionals or businesspeople under the banner of the PAN. Many were relatively nonideological campaigns for “good government,” and they had the greatest success in provincial capitals, often far from Mexico City.²⁰

At the same time, some of the emerging municipal democratic movements came from outside the conventional world of political parties, from the effervescence of grassroots social movements. Neighborhoods and villages had long been organizing against local *caciques*, but largely outside of the electoral arena—targeting them in their multiple capacities as landgrabber, moneylender, hit man, crop hoarder, or unresponsive local bureaucrat. By the mid-1980s, many of these urban and rural social movements began to turn their attention to the possibilities opened up by the government’s partial political reform. The precursor of many of these efforts was the Coalition of Workers, Peasants and Students of the Isthmus of Oaxaca (COCEI), which began contesting elections in Juchitán, Oaxaca, in 1974, and won the municipality in 1981 and then again in 1986 and 1989.

For urban social movements, winning the city or town hall meant the possibility of gaining access to resources, both to deliver public services and to reinforce political legitimacy. For example, selective control over access to drinking water and electricity is a pillar of both urban and rural *cacique* power. Local police power is especially important, particularly when municipal authorities ally with landlords and use the police to push peasants or urban homesteaders off their land.²¹

Until the late 1980s, many civic movements for good government took place within the official party. Although closeted behind closed doors, conflict around the selection of official candidates was often quite real. What sometimes appeared to be merely factional conflict within the ruling party reflected genuine community conflicts, including struggles against local *caciques*. When losing factions were unable to express themselves through compensatory mechanisms, they would seek refuge under the banner of one of the existing “opposition” parties, whichever one had some local reputation or offered access to a line on the ballot (until recently, only nationally registered parties could run candidates, even at the local level). The local expression of most Mexican political parties thus had little to do with a real presence or programmatic competition.

Behind the Opening: Cracks in the System

Many of Mexico’s contemporary social movements trace their roots back to the late 1960s. After the 1968 student movement, many activists went to the neighborhoods, factories, and villages. New grassroots movements

172 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

were born, and older movements were revived. Some survived into the 1990s, and others proved ephemeral. Some won key demands and were pacified, whereas others were dismantled by repression. But aside from their varying fates or political approaches, many shared two key characteristics: they tried to tackle the social problems that directly affected their constituencies, and to do this they tried to establish their autonomy from the state. In the process of trying to “deliver,” some sacrificed their political autonomy in exchange for material benefits. Many of the social movements of the 1970s that defended their autonomy as a matter of principle shared a third characteristic—they attempted to build new forms of participatory democracy.²²

This process was marked by a sharp divergence between socioeconomic movements and political-electoral participation. This gap has long frustrated the construction of citizenship in Mexico.²³ Movements emerged to promote socioeconomic *or* political and civic rights, but rarely did movements manage to sustain efforts on both fronts. Three factors aggravated this tension: first, strong pressure from the state, which threatened social movements with repression and no concessions should they turn to overt political opposition; second, many social movements looked on existing political parties with extreme distrust and were concerned that their needs would be used for purposes beyond their control; and third, most social movement leaders, long accustomed to electoral abstention, were unable to create their own new ways of articulating social and political participation.

Since the founding of Mexico's postrevolutionary social pact during the Cárdenas administration (1934-1940), most social demands were processed through corporatist organizations.²⁴ These organizations, and the bureaucracies that administered them, were both transmission belts between the official party and its social base and the mechanism for channeling much of the national social welfare budget. For three decades, the possibilities for popular groups to sustain their own autonomous leadership and to find solutions to their problems outside of these official channels were extremely limited. Possibilities for autonomous organizing were greater among urban community groups than among industrial workers or smallholding peasants, whose livelihoods depended more directly on political obedience.²⁵ When, by the 1970s, waves of social mobilization overflowed the boundaries of the official groups, certain sectors of the government were willing to bargain with these new social actors, but only if they did not get involved in electoral opposition.

Little by little, these “social left” organizations became increasingly consolidated in several cities.²⁶ Even though they were often built outside of the official system of legal recognition, their capacity to mobilize their mass bases and their ability to channel social energy toward the

solution of concrete problems combined to permit them to negotiate with the state. Conservative elements within the state combined cooptation with repression, whereas reformists saw these community-based groups as safety valves for urban discontent, effectively regulating extra-legal access to land for self-built housing.

The community groups that had the most staying power were the ones whose leaders learned how to gain bargaining power and legitimacy by taking advantage of elite conflicts within the system. Just as important was knowing not to push too hard when the ranks of the powerful were closed. By the 1980s, the veteran social organizations of the urban poor, largely made up of those displaced by rural poverty and now rooted in the informal economy, had become key protagonists of a new "informal politics."²⁷

In spite of sustaining their autonomy and experimenting with new, participatory decisionmaking processes—often gaining the government's de facto recognition in the process—these groups ended up limited to small urban and rural enclaves. The combination of their own classist ideology and mass media campaigns against them isolated them from other social sectors. These small islands of "plebian democracy" were seen by others as lands of savages, protectors of criminals, and sources of disorder. Ironically, what really happened within these communities was exactly the opposite: order reigned, including the establishment of neighborhood guards, grassroots judicial systems, campaigns against alcoholism, and protection for women against domestic violence—the whole idea was to create a new sense of security. Two images grew apart. For those outside, aside from curiosity and mystery, they saw these communities as the new barbarians. For those within, outsiders were hostile, politically "damned," and beyond salvation.

In the eyes of many grassroots organizers of the time, the practice of Mexican electoral politics showed that political parties were a dead end to social change. They reacted against the dominant political culture, which combined the official conditioning of social demands on electoral clientelism with the tendency of opposition parties of the time to sacrifice social movements in their secret bargaining with the state (with the exception of the PAN).²⁸ Convinced that electoral politics were inherently corrupt and useless as a path to change, these leaders of the social left preferred to build independent poor people's organizations based on radical ideas of direct democracy, in which members made decisions collectively in assemblies, held their representatives accountable, and combined negotiations with mass direct action as a means to get the government to address their problems. For the increasingly politicized segment of the urban poor, they began to create a social counterpart to the informal economy.

174 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

Many of these movements had been born in the course of broad civic mobilization for accountable government.²⁹ After these issue-oriented movements crested, often winning what could be won at the time, the core activists became more class oriented, emphasizing the consolidation of poor people's organizations. Reproducing past tensions between movements for socioeconomic versus civic rights, more general democratic demands were not sufficient to sustain poor people's participation, and the focus shifted to immediate survival issues. In the process, the organizations lost their capacity to lead multiclass civic movements for democracy.

The political reality of isolation stubbornly challenged these social left groups to find new styles and forms of organization in order to grow beyond their enclaves. Until they did, the best they could do was to extract partial material victories from the state, and thereby administer some of the demands of their members. In some cases, key activists withdrew to private life or joined the long march within the institutions of government. Key individuals took important lessons from their grassroots experience with them, designing innovative new public policies for confronting Mexico's perennial problems of entrenched poverty.³⁰

In some regions, political isolation began to lead to internal decomposition. The new forms of assembly-style democracy began to show weaknesses. Although mass meetings may have been quite effective forms of popular representation during a movement's ascent, assemblies came to represent only the most active as mobilization ebbed. Leadership factions learned how to prevent assemblies from leading to unexpected outcomes. In some cases, however, organizations responded by developing creative new combinations of representative and direct democracy. The Popular Defense Committee of Durango, for example, began a process of neighborhood referenda on key issues, as well as the direct and secret vote for city-wide leaders.³¹

At the same time, society as a whole was changing—not only the independently organized sectors. Urbanization increased and access to education broadened in the 1960s and 1970s. More and more citizens rejected traditional state “tutelage,” especially after the post-1982 economic crisis limited the state's capacity to “divide and rule” with clientelism and subsidies. Broad sectors of the middle class, especially in the north, began to channel their discontent through the PAN's mass electoral campaigns.

The right wing's political success took the autonomous social movements by surprise.³² When the PAN swept the state of Chihuahua's 1983 municipal elections, it became clear that an impetuous wave of popular civic discontent was on the rise.³³ It is true that the PAN had become a key channel for business dissent, which exploded after the

government's abrupt 1982 nationalization of private banking, but it also gained broad popular support because of its long-standing civic tradition of electoral opposition to single-party rule.³⁴ The autonomous social organizations, still captive to their strong proabstention position and their contempt for electoral and party politics, were late in understanding the breadth and depth of popular sentiment in favor of real electoral democracy.

New Directions for Grassroots Movements and Local Politics

The principal form of alliance building in the popular movements of the late 1970s and 1980s was the sectoral network, the *coordinadoras* that became umbrella groups for urban-popular organizations (CONAMUP), agrarian groups (CNPA), and dissident trade unionist teachers (CNTE). By the end of the 1980s, however, it became clear that the national coordination of local sectoral struggles was far from sufficient to affect the balance of forces at the national level. New autonomous social organizations began to grow and bypass the veteran groups of the 1970s. For example, after the 1985 Mexico City earthquake, the National Network of the Urban Popular Movement (CONAMUP) went from being the leading force to one among three, as the Union of Earthquake Victims (CUD) and the Neighborhood Assembly developed creative new organizing strategies and outreach styles.³⁵

Similarly, in the peasant movement, as the most promising area of organizing shifted from land rights to production and marketing issues in the early 1980s, the National "Plan de Ayala" Network (CNPA) was unable to change with the times. Riven with internal political conflicts, it lost its leading role to more pragmatic groups that carved out a new, relatively autonomous "political gray area" that broke the past dichotomy between "independent" and official. A new national network, the National Union of Autonomous Regional Peasant Organizations (UNORCA), began to open and fill this political space, managing the difficult transition from contestation to proposition.³⁶

Challenged also by the rise of the PAN, many in the *coordinadoras* began to rethink their approach to electoral politics. As the 1988 wave of Cardenista sympathy swept their rank and file, even those leaders who came late to this process had to rethink their antielectoral positions. Official political reforms had changed the rules of the game, both permitting and imposing the institutionalization of the informal politics inherited from the 1970s.

Those regional social organizations that managed to consolidate themselves were faced with the challenge of municipal power. Where

the leadership chose to abstain for ideological reasons, the rank and file sometimes chose to vote for political parties whose success led to a "short circuit" of the movement. One of the clearest examples was in the northern industrial city of Monclova, where for many years workers at the largest steel mill in the country had been organizing for union democracy. Together with left-wing allies, they managed to defeat the corrupt bureaucracy and won control of their local union, but the same bureaucracy still controlled the city hall. The workers wanted to exercise their citizenship rights and voted against their enemies, but by voting in favor of the right-wing PAN for mayor.³⁷

Few popular organizations proposed electoral participation early on. The attempt to bring together social demands with political democratization was pioneered by the COCEI, which was the first independent left group to win an important city hall.³⁸ Based in and around Juchitán, Oaxaca's second largest city, the COCEI was built through a resonant combination of class demands and a public emphasis on its ethnic Zapotec identity, articulated through a combination of electoral struggle for municipal autonomy with mass protest. From there they went on to participate in federal congressional elections. Between the municipal electoral victory of 1981 and the state government's violent takeover of the town hall in 1983, the COCEI pursued its class and cultural project, building an influential series of national alliances. The COCEI's persistence and strong grassroots legitimacy permitted it to regain the city hall, first through a partial power-sharing arrangement in 1986 and then fully in 1989. In the process, the COCEI showed other grassroots organizations what could be accomplished through flexible tactics and alliances. The COCEI was an example for other Mexican social movements of what many smaller communities in Oaxaca had long been pursuing by other means—that grassroots movements can win municipal democratization, even though the election laws require them to ally with national political parties that remain fundamentally foreign to local politics.³⁹

The narrow social base and limited outreach of most left-wing opposition political parties limited the options of community-based movements interested in making the transition from sectoral and economic demands to direct participation in local elections. This left a vacuum, which eventually obliged some social movements to begin to act as electoral parties. In some cases, as in Juchitán, the regional organization was sufficiently powerful to gain access to the electoral registry of a national party in an unusually balanced political alliance. The 1977 national political reform had made that possible by broadening the officially recognized party spectrum, but it also limited options because it allowed the registry of national political parties only.⁴⁰

Like Zapata's guerrillas during the 1910–1917 revolution, who were part-time soldiers and went home to their fields during planting season, some of these regional organizations have had to act at some points as leaders of antiauthoritarian resistance, at other times as development agencies, and at still other moments as political parties. In the process, alliances with intellectuals were often crucial.

Paths of Linkage Between Social Movements and Intellectuals

The encounter between critical sectors of the intelligentsia and popular sectors followed five main paths: (1) through the universities, (2) government rural development agencies, (3) “organic intellectuals” who bridged different movements, (4) political parties and proto-parties, and (5) nongovernmental development organizations (NGOs).

Since the 1960s, Mexican universities have experienced many waves of reform efforts by students, workers, and teachers. Time and again, these movements emphasized deepening the linkages between universities and the poor. Thousands of students went out to fulfill their social service requirement and ended up becoming advisors, organizers, and even leaders of grassroots movements. The university offered both political and logistical shelter, as the classrooms opened up to social movements.⁴¹

Since the early 1970s, several government rural development programs also played key roles in shaping what eventually became autonomous smallholder movements.⁴² The outreach programs of a wide range of agricultural, credit, and marketing agencies penetrated deep into the countryside. Especially during the 1973–1976 agrarian reform revival and the 1980–1982 food policy reform period, thousands of social service-oriented, university-trained “promoters” worked in projects to increase productivity, broaden access to credit and inputs, and organize subsidized food distribution outlets for the poorest of the poor, leading to the creation of a wide range of new organizational forms. By no means did all of these outreach workers see their tasks as linked to the broader goal of democratization, but many did—in sharp contrast to their bureaucratic superiors. Their main obstacles were not only local *caciques*, but the inertia and corruption of their own agencies as well. By the late 1980s, these various organizing efforts had had an important “feedback effect,” not only on the character of the peasant movement, but on national rural development policies as well.⁴³

The third main path involved “organic,” community-based intellectuals who built horizontal links between movements. The most important case was the relationship between rural teachers and peasant movements.

In Mexico, rural teachers usually come from humble backgrounds and are often highly politicized. Since the 1920s, they have played a strategic role in both supporting and leading local peasant movements, linking them to one another and helping them to “scale up” while advising them in dealings with the state. Throughout the 1980s, teachers in Mexico’s poorest rural states combined their own efforts for trade union democracy and high wages with support for peasant rights and municipal democratization.⁴⁴ In addition, other examples of organic intellectuals’ bridging roles include urban community organizers who went into trade union organizing, especially in the early and mid-1970s.

The linkages between intellectuals and popular movements through political parties have been much more limited than the first three paths.⁴⁵ This fourth path has usually been indirect, as party-linked support agencies offered needed services to existing movements in an effort to gain political clientele. This indirect relationship was due to the parties’ political isolation and big city, middle-class character, as well as the movements’ persistent wariness about being “used” by the parties.

The fifth genre of linkage between intellectuals and grassroots movements is through nongovernmental development organizations. The first Mexican NGOs were closely linked to the Catholic church, which directly or indirectly managed many welfare and educational institutions. By the 1950s and 1960s, the church’s social secretariat played a crucial role in founding NGOs that worked in the areas of revolving credit funds, popular education, food distribution, health, and urban problems.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, it was not until the spread of liberation theology and the emergence of Christian base communities that these institutions mushroomed. By the 1970s, many foundations and centers were set up to accompany and finance efforts at the “*concientización*,” developed as part of the progressive church doctrine of the preferential option for the poor. NGOs appeared along with base communities in Morelos, Veracruz, Jalisco, and Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl.⁴⁷ Through them, hundreds of Catholic youth found a bridge to reach the grassroots.

For many years this family of NGOs concentrated their efforts on popular education. Inspired by the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, they emphasized “consciousness-raising.” Just about any kind of service activity could serve as the entry point for this higher goal: literacy, basic education, health and hygiene, housing cooperatives, small-scale artesanry, or food distribution. In the discourse of the time, the goal was for the poor to discover their own situation of oppression and to find their own path to liberation. In this context, the goal of the NGOs was basically educational, offering services along the way.

This promotional approach very quickly showed both its virtues and its limitations.⁴⁸ To begin with, many of the production-oriented projects

did not become consolidated. Economic projects were limited by the egalitarian approach of the promoters, who were very distrustful of any activity that could lead to class differentiation, which was presumed to interfere with consciousness-raising and to encourage short-cuts along the path to social change. In addition, this “overpoliticization” of organizing work led to repeated cycles of desertion by the promoters themselves, many of whom turned either to opposition political activities or to the less frustrating arena of private and professional life.

This approach was also limited by its emphasis on the formation of small nuclei, whereas most mainstream grassroots organizers stressed mass mobilization. Many of these small groups were parish-based and depended on charismatic leaders. Some of the popular education promoters, secular as well as religious, were very distrusting of the mainstream popular movements, perhaps fearing that an alliance could lead to a loss of influence over their community groups. At the same time, many of the key regional and national social movements, such as those involved in the *coordinadoras*, had serious reservations about many of the NGOs. They resented the NGOs’ access to funding and the power that came with it. Most NGOs were seen as “outside” the movements, provoking suspicions that NGO staff wanted to take them over.⁴⁹

The mainstream grassroots movements of the social left and the progressive church emerged at the same time, sharing a concern for directly addressing the felt needs of the urban and rural poor, as well as the need to combine educational work with survival demands. The distance between them began to grow because of a struggle over the leadership of the movements, aggravated by some church activists’ rejection of what they considered to be an overly “economistic” orientation, involving bargaining with the state. In the process of separation, the social left ended up with most of the movements, and the religious NGOs ended up with the relationships with foreign funders. As in any divorce, the terms of the separation marked both partners for many years.⁵⁰

From both directions, several groups tried to bridge this gap. From the social left, groups like the Union of Popular Neighborhoods (UCP) in Mexico City recruited Christian youth and worked closely with NGOs. From the church side, the Jesuits’ Social Commission played an outstanding role in encouraging regional social movements. From the NGOs, in the late 1970s the newly formed Equipo Pueblo worked directly with the *coordinadoras*, opening up relationships between cutting-edge grassroots movements with international development agencies.⁵¹

It was not until much later, in the early 1980s, that more secular, technical, and politically oriented professionals began to set up NGOs

in large numbers.⁵² Analysis, Decentralization and Management (ANADEGES) was a pioneer in bringing together a significant network of more than twenty region- or sector-specific NGOs staffed largely by professionals who had left the public and private sectors. They consciously “deprofessionalized” themselves, raising international NGO and public sector funding to put their skills at the service of community-based groups.⁵³

Mexican NGOs and Social Movements

Most NGOs in Mexico are issue-specific in focus, although many work in both urban and rural areas and quite a few deal with several issues at once. Mexico is just beginning to develop coherent NGO networks within specific sectors, not to mention a more comprehensive set of alternative development policy-oriented alliances.

Housing

The earthquakes that shook Mexico City in 1985 provoked a qualitative leap in NGO development in terms of both NGO linkages to social movements and their networking with each other. Foreign relief and development funding skyrocketed, although it was overshadowed by the magnitude of the devastation and the massive display of volunteer citizen action.⁵⁴ Dozens of new NGOs appeared alongside the more established agencies, and new social organizations emerged independently to face the challenge of reconstruction. One of the government agencies whose track record inspired the postearthquake style of relatively pluralistic bargaining with social movements was the prior experience of the Fund for Popular Housing (FONHAPO), which in turn had been strongly influenced by NGO support for self-built housing.⁵⁵

The earthquakes not only brought buildings down, they also shook the foundations of the established structures of social and political control and representation, including the social left organizations of the urban poor. Until then, CONAMUP had been the principal force defending the demands of urban homesteaders and low-income tenants. CONAMUP leaders had pinned their hopes on NGO funds, hoping that they would receive enough to be able to develop their own reconstruction project and avoid dealing with the state. They were wrong, and they lost their leadership role in the process. CUD then emerged to fill the resulting vacuum between the state and key sectors of the urban poor.⁵⁶

CUD proved itself quite adept at combining mass mobilization with negotiations, obliging the state to make major changes in its original

reconstruction policy. The most important policy changes allowed the residents to remain in their original neighborhoods and expropriated thousands of buildings to stop evictions. Some groups emphasized bargaining over the terms of government reconstruction aid, and others developed close ties with NGOs and pursued more community-based building strategies. These NGO resources were much less, however, than those obtained by the Catholic church and the federal government. The utopian idea that NGO funding could permit the creation of social spaces completely autonomous from the government could not be “scaled up” on a large scale. Material constraints frustrated those for whom self-built housing was to be the foundation of grassroots autonomy, especially in the more densely populated central city. Government contractors built or repaired more than 44,000 housing units in record time, compared with at most a few thousand built by NGOs.⁵⁷

Once the Catholic hierarchy decided to make a pact with the federal government, most grassroots organizations had little choice but to deal with the state. In this context, the signing of the Democratic Concertation Agreement by the Housing Ministry, the newly created Popular Housing Renovation agency, the political parties, the key community organizations and their support groups to regulate the provision of temporary housing, low interest construction loans, infrastructure, and the suspension of evictions opened a new path for conflict resolution between state and society, setting an open-ended pattern that continues to develop today. Unlike past populist welfare programs, this *concertación* (social dialogue) accord did not require community groups to give up their political autonomy. Through their creative combination of mobilization, negotiations, and alternative policy proposals, reconstruction aid increasingly became a citizenship right more than a clientelistic political favor. This “positive sum” bargaining experience between the state and autonomous community groups paved the way for the more democratic-sounding official discourse associated with the Salinas government’s National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL).⁵⁸

Women’s Development

The popular response to the challenge of reconstruction also provoked a major increase in women’s participation in the development process.⁵⁹ But autonomous organizing by women in the urban popular movement had already made a qualitative leap with the formation of CONAMUP’s Women’s Regional Network between 1983 and 1985.⁶⁰ Women had long formed the backbone of the movements, but forming an autonomous political space from which to identify and defend gender-specific demands was unprecedented.⁶¹

182 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

The principal challenge facing grassroots women's support efforts was the gap between middle-class feminist intellectuals and urban poor activists, who concentrated primarily on domestic survival demands.⁶² They differed not only in their conception of the interaction between gender and class issues, but also in their approach to the state. The women active in urban-popular movements challenged the state to meet their material needs, which necessarily involved a pragmatic, apparently nonpolitical combination of mobilization and negotiation, focused mainly on subsidized food programs. In the process of struggling for an autonomous women's space with the male-dominated urban popular movement leadership, however, increasing numbers of women pushed their gender analysis further. Both the intellectuals and the grassroots activists began to bridge the gap with the emergence of a new "popular feminism" that responded directly to the daily realities faced by urban poor women.⁶³

Peasant women's organizing efforts have received little attention in Mexico. The state has played a key role, with its promotion of Women's Agro-Industrial Units (UAIMs) in the agrarian reform sector. Although many women's projects have followed the pattern typical of top-down government projects, UAIMs have also permitted community organizers to launch some modest but precedent-setting self-managed development efforts.⁶⁴ NGO efforts have been of quite small scale, and few of the most consolidated regional peasant organizations have made women's development projects a priority.

Environmental Defense and Sustainable Development

Most environmental NGOs are of relatively recent origin, although the Mexican Ecological Movement dates back to the late 1960s. Through the 1970s and early 1980s, most environmental groups were urban, middle-class membership organizations rather than NGOs in the sense of grassroots support organizations. Even now, most are still relatively weak and somewhat narrowly based—although some groups of "notables," such as the Group of 100, have gained important access to the media to criticize official policies. Even though two national networks exist—the Pact of Ecological Groups and the Mexican Conservation Federation—as well as some regional and sectoral networks, none are sufficiently broad or consolidated to represent the movement as a whole.⁶⁵ Most environmental NGOs that work closely with social movements either are in the anti-nuclear power movement⁶⁶ or are involved in sustainable rural development work with peasant organizations.⁶⁷

One of the sustainable rural development efforts with the longest track record involves close collaboration between university-based ecologists

and the mountain community of Alcozauca, Guerrero. Long a bastion of opposition political activity, democratic municipal authorities worked closely with the ecologists and some of the more open state and federal agencies in a series of community-based agroecological projects.⁶⁸ Another innovative example of collaboration between an NGO and movements for community control over natural resources took place in the highlands of Oaxaca. The movement against a large paper company to recover indigenous community control over forestry resources began in 1967, and Rural Studies and Consulting (ERA) has played a key support role since the early 1980s.⁶⁹

In several endangered regions of intense biodiversity, NGOs are increasingly working with community leaders, government agencies, and international NGOs on regional conservation plans. Some of these groups have begun to shift their approach from traditional conservation, which tended to exclude community participation, to more responsive sustainable resource management programs, as in the conflictive Chimalapas region along the Oaxaca-Chiapas border.

There is one especially unusual case of an urban community movement that “spun off” its own environmental protection NGO. In the late 1980s, the Popular Defense Committee (CDP) of Durango began broadening its support beyond its urban poor base, and developing new alliances among government reformers and local notables, to increase its leverage against hard-line local and state elites. Forming the Ecological Defense and Preservation Committee in 1988, which focused on the health and production effects of water pollution, the CDP moved forward in the transition from contestation to broad-based multisectoral consultation combined with technically solid alternative policy proposals. Beginning with an emergency program that reclaimed and protected seventeen local springs with community groups, they scaled up to develop regional water management proposals.⁷⁰

Rural Development

In the area of NGOs and rural development work more generally, two main tendencies have come together in support of peasant-managed economic development projects. The first tendency is for some of the more traditional religious and secular “promotional” groups to change their approach, with several becoming much more active in their support for more autonomous peasant movement-linked development efforts.⁷¹

The second tendency is for rural development activists to form NGOs that offer the much more professionalized support services that the peasant movement's increasing level of economic organization requires, especially in the areas of credit, marketing, and technical assistance.

One of the most outstanding examples is the Center for the Support of Popular Movements in Oaxaca (CAMPO), which has provided key assistance to one of Mexico's most important autonomous organizations of small-scale coffee producers.⁷² The Maya Rural Development Institute has also played a strategic support role for peasant-managed economic development initiatives, especially in the state of Guerrero. Another example is Peasant Communication, a rural development support NGO in the Chiapas highlands, which emerged from the rank and file rural teachers' movement. Unlike traditional NGOs, these groups were formed by experienced activists and leaders from the grassroots movements themselves.

The ANADEGES national community economic development network combines characteristics of both tendencies, and is especially active in central and southern Mexico. As yet, no national network of these peasant movement-oriented rural development groups exists, although there has been some collaboration in specific areas, such as alternative credit policies.⁷³

Two of the most promising technical support agencies are the new national networks of regional peasant-managed credit unions and fertilizer distributorships, which emerged to fill the gap left by the rollback of state agricultural enterprises. The National Association of Social Sector Credit Unions and the National Association of Social Sector Fertilizer Agents were both created by the regional peasant organizations themselves, and have been struggling to keep up with the demand.⁷⁴

Human Rights

Mexican citizens have long struggled against political persecution and police abuse, but only after the arrival of political refugees from South America did those efforts begin to coalesce into an organized human rights movement. Previous generations had fought to free political prisoners, especially after waves of repression in 1959 and 1968, but these efforts did not yet identify as a human rights movement.⁷⁵ As mentioned above, the first organizations began to form in the late 1970s, to defend the rights of political prisoners taken in Mexico's counterinsurgency campaigns of the early and mid-1970s.

Mexico's human rights movement began to grow in the early 1980s, in part through the defense of the rights of large waves of political refugees fleeing military violence in El Salvador and Guatemala. By the late 1980s, at the same time as awareness of and protest against electoral violence and police abuse grew sharply, the movement began to spread and thicken its presence throughout the country.⁷⁶ There were only four human rights NGOs in 1984, but seven years later there were sixty. As

one of Mexico's leading human rights activists put it, "We now have many allies and constitute what the sociologists call a 'social movement.' We have moved from protest to proposition."⁷⁷

Of all the NGO sectors, the human rights network is one of the most broadly based, including many church-oriented groups and reaching across the political spectrum. At the national level, the Mexican Commission for the Promotion and Defense of Human Rights, the Mexican Human Rights Academy, the "Fray Francisco de Vitoria" Human Rights Center and the "Miguel Pro" Human Rights Center are perhaps the most prominent groups.⁷⁸ Recently, the first broad-based national network of democratic lawyers was also recently founded.

Increasingly, civic-minded professionals are forming their own local commissions at the city and state level, taking dramatic personal risks of retribution by police officials. The human rights movement's degree of organizational consolidation at the local level remains quite uneven, however, with important advances in the Chiapas highlands under the auspices of Bishop Samuel Ruiz, a staunch defender of human rights and social justice in one of Mexico's most poverty-stricken and violent regions, but with major gaps in other hard-hit regions (e.g., Guerrero, Hidalgo, and Veracruz).⁷⁹ Increased attention to the problems of police abuse and political violence, internationally as well as domestically, led to the creation of a governmental National Human Rights Commission, which is nominally committed to working with the NGO sector. International attention has been crucial for the creation of the political space within which the human rights movement can grow and consolidate.

NGO Convergence

NGOs are making important advances at the sectoral level, and in some cases they have formed important sectoral networks (e.g., community health). Mexican NGOs still lag, however, in the formation of multisectoral networks that effectively articulate social movements, grassroots economic development support work, and alternative public policy at the local and national levels.⁸⁰ Three factors led to the formation of the first major national network: the 1985 earthquake, the political effervescence of 1988, and the government's new tax law initiative of 1989. In Mexico, NGOs are legally defined as "civil associations," or nonprofit organizations of individuals. In December 1989, the Finance Ministry sent to the congress a proposed law called the "miscellaneous tax," which would treat NGOs and cooperatives as though they were large corporations, threatening both philanthropic and development projects. The government argued that these two types of organizations were used by profit-oriented companies to avoid taxes. From

the NGOs' point of view, the government was attempting both to broaden its tax base and to "impose some political controls on autonomous sectors. But whatever the motive, the new tax threatened the existence and the work of those civil associations that wanted to serve society."⁸¹

The convergence among the independent-minded NGOs was also sped up by a June 1990 national meeting called between welfare agencies and NGOs, backed by the Mexican private sector and the Catholic church, to discuss three issues: their status in the context of new tax laws, the opportunity to participate in international debt swaps, and the growing problem of extreme poverty. In addition, the Catholic church's active role in earthquake relief, through its Community Support Fund (FAC), permitted it to consider taking advantage of international debt swaps for its welfare and development projects. In this context, the government and the moderate-to-conservative private foundations raised their discussions to a higher level.⁸²

The June meeting served as a warning to the more independent-minded NGOs that the government, the church, and the private sector were developing a new level of coordination, which could displace and subordinate them. Some of the most representative of the left-oriented NGOs met in response to discuss their identity, the Salinas government, the new tax law, and the challenge of finding a more stable form of coordination. More than seventy-five NGOs founded the Convergence of Civic Organizations for Democracy in August 1990.⁸³

The Second and Third National Encounters followed quickly, including 120 NGOs. The Convergence proposed an alternative tax law that would recognize their status as nonprofit agencies, but the ruling party-controlled congress paid no attention. By the third meeting, electoral democracy became an important priority, especially the twin problems of fraud and abstention. The Convergence then joined with the Mexican Human Rights Academy and the San Luis Potosí Human Rights Center to coordinate precedent-setting poll-watching in the hotly contested August 1991 governor's race.⁸⁴ The Convergence also backed the Mexican Network of Action Towards Free Trade in an effort to democratize information about government-to-government trade trilateral talks, as well as to include issues of the environment, labor, and human rights on the integration agenda.⁸⁵ The new network represented a step forward, although its identity remained rather vague.⁸⁶

NGOS and Municipal Democratization

Until 1988, PAN was the party that most successfully capitalized on growing discontent at the municipal level. But after the surprisingly strong showing of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas's 1988 broad center-left nationalist presidential

campaign, the pattern began to change.⁸⁷ The first phase of this upsurge of electoral opposition created a sensation of real possibilities for change at the local level, especially for autonomous regional social organizations that successfully mounted the presidential wave.

After the massive antifraud protests in July and August 1988, the disparate coalition of semiofficial nationalist parties, exmembers of the official party (the Democratic Current), Catholics, the social left, and the independent left-wing Mexican Socialist party, who had come together in support of Cárdenas's candidacy, began to come apart. Eventually, the semiofficial parties returned to the progovernment fold, leaving the Democratic Current of the PRI together with the political party-oriented and grassroots left, which together formed the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The party-building effort began at the national level, and quickly faced the challenge of a series of municipal- and state-level elections without a political presence on the ground.

By late 1991, of the 191 municipalities in opposition hands, 97 were under PRD administration (down from a high of 116), and 47 were with the PAN.⁸⁸ Most of the PRD victories were in villages and towns in a handful of states, however. The PAN remained a powerful force in key cities of the north, including several state capitals (e.g., Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, Durango, San Luis Potosí, Saltillo, and Mérida). Cárdenas had run especially well in urban areas as well, and even the official tally ceded him the crucial Mexico City metropolitan area.⁸⁹ The PRD's efforts to capitalize on this early success had limited results, however, leading to important municipal gains only in the core states of Michoacán and Guerrero. These victories were often partial, because the government recognized only some of them. Repression was fierce; tanks were called out to dislodge protesters from town halls they claimed were theirs.

In 1990 and 1991, however, the PRD did not win even partial electoral victories.⁹⁰ Fraud and abstentionism were key factors behind this failure to consolidate the gains of 1988 at the local level. Almost as important, however, was the PRD's difficulty reaching out to incorporate many of those who had mobilized behind Cárdenas's presidential race.

The 1988 election was a gigantic step toward finding a political expression for growing social discontent, but the transition from sectoral organizations to building a representative political party at the local level proved remarkably difficult. In 1988, many saw the wave of support for Cárdenas as a result of the years of grassroots organizing. Taking advantage of a major split within the political class, many social movements joined together and entered the political arena. There is some truth to this view, but it is only partial. With the benefit of hindsight, it is more than likely that most Cárdenas voters were disorganized citizens

who did not identify with or participate in social movements or political organizations (although they may have formally been members of official corporatist groups).⁹¹ It is therefore quite consistent that large numbers of people could support Cárdenas, who symbolized nationalism, social reform, and honest government, yet not feel attracted to traditional forms of political party organization under new PRD labels.⁹²

By the time the PRD's municipal advances peaked, the NGOs were still trying to catch up with the events of 1988. Their role in municipal democratization efforts remained quite limited. The vast majority of international funding agencies were unwilling to finance electoral activity in Mexico because it could be interpreted as foreign intervention in domestic politics. Even when political parties were not directly involved and the issue was support for grassroots development efforts that might get involved in local electoral politics, foreign funders were extremely wary—understandably, given the increasingly fine line between grassroots development and electoral politics. The result, therefore, has been very little NGO support for newly democratized municipal administrations, in a context in which the conventional public sector resources for local services are often frozen because of political hostility.⁹³

The problem is not only one of lack of external funding, however. New ways of thinking about the role of NGOs in local-level public administration are only now beginning to emerge and be debated. Opposition municipalities themselves met at the First National Municipalist Convention in Mexico City in September 1990, and exchanged ideas about how to democratize public administration and how to face common problems.⁹⁴ The convention was the opening shot that set off a wave of intense activity among NGOs, social organizations, and municipalities, leading to a series of fora and discussions throughout the country.⁹⁵ Since then, several new NGOs have begun to specialize in municipal development, and other established NGOs have opened up related lines of work.⁹⁶ Several have come together in the new Interinstitutional Network, which is beginning to generate proposals and projects for increasing local autonomy and community participation in municipal planning and management through its Municipal Support Network (RAM).⁹⁷

The Political Underdevelopment of Mexican NGOs

Mexican NGOs are far from having the institutional life, the political impact, or the social presence that their counterparts have in Chile, Brazil, or Peru. With a few notable exceptions, the presence of NGOs in Mexican politics and social change is remarkably limited.

The omnipresent role of the state is one key factor explaining the relative political underdevelopment of Mexican NGOs. Until dramatic cuts in social spending in the 1980s, the Mexican state had a significant presence in the provision of basic services. Whereas in several South American countries NGOs are the key actors behind community-based survival strategies, Mexican government agencies continue to play a leading role, for example, in the distribution of low-cost milk or the organization of rural food stores and community kitchens (*comedores populares*). Access to these social “safety net” programs is often conditioned on political loyalty to the ruling party, further limiting the space for independent community development efforts by NGOs.

Another reason for the relative weakness of Mexican NGOs is their extremely limited access to external funding, at least before the 1985 earthquake. For many European and North American NGOs, Mexico was a democratic country well on its way to industrial development—a regional power with oil resources.⁹⁸ The situation has changed. The 1985 earthquake and the impressive grassroots response showed that Mexico did not fit the image of the foreign funders. Mexican democracy, in spite of its stability, began to seem increasingly undemocratic; the make-up began to wear off. But foreign funders arrived late, and their resources had much less of a qualitative impact on grassroots social change than they had in places that received proportionately much more money much earlier, such as Central America or Chile.⁹⁹

Internal factors are also important for explaining the relative weakness of Mexican NGOs. A significant number of the pioneer NGOs dedicated their energies to welfare activities or popular education projects that were disconnected from the main lines of social movement-building in the 1970s. In sharp contrast to the Brazilian experience, for example, for many years there was little communication or coordination between the principal NGOs and most cutting-edge popular movements.¹⁰⁰ The church-based actors focused on small groups, but the mainstream popular movements had to be sustained by their own resources and whatever they were able to extract from the government through mass mobilization. This gap was not only the result of the NGOs’ lack of funding and political outreach; many social organizations were also strongly nationalistic and quite skeptical of NGOs’ foreign funding, especially from governments. Given most NGOs’ isolation from the most dynamic areas of social change, it is not surprising that many key staff eventually changed careers, getting involved in political party activity or joining the public sector.

Mexican NGOs have also been limited by their lack of connection to the cutting edge of national intellectual life. In contrast to many other Latin American countries, where NGOs constituted a key space for the most important intellectuals, most of Mexico’s most creative thinkers

190 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

worked either in universities or for the government. Only recently have intellectuals begun to flock to the NGOs.

These patterns have been changing rapidly since the late 1980s. The divorce between grassroots movements and NGOs has often ended in happy marriages. Many grassroots support organizations have become much more politically flexible, shifting from "consciousness-raising" among the unorganized poor to providing important technical assistance to self-managed development projects embedded in social movements that are autonomous from NGOs as well as the state. They have become much more institutionally consolidated and have professionalized their work, becoming an important alternative for growing sectors of activists and technicians who want to offer concrete support services to grassroots development initiatives. Some social movements have created their own NGOs, such as the Popular Defense Committee of Durango's ecological program. The organizational and technical support offered by a growing number NGOs to social movements is increasingly significant, and a comprehensive analysis remains to be done. In the context of grassroots development projects, the relationship, although not free of conflict, is fruitful and mutually enriching. From an atmosphere of competition and cannibalism, Mexican NGOs have created a climate of tolerance and understanding of differences.

Future Directions

Mexico's grassroots movements have a rich and diverse history, but they have yet to democratize local government to a significant degree. They have yet to create a broad, unified, and representative national political alternative. They have, however, become important counterweights to centralized state power in some regions and in certain policy areas.

One of the most important trends has been the shift from an emphasis on socioeconomic demands (*revindicaciones*) to political and electoral rights at both the local and national levels. The results so far have been quite mixed, with the centralized state retaining a great deal of the political initiative. The most important steps toward pluralistic, representative local government have been taken at the municipal level, although one governorship was ceded to an opposition party for the first time in 1989.

There are many reasons behind the government's remarkable success, so far, at recovering the political initiative after its 1988 setback at the polls. Control of inflation and renewed economic growth are certainly widely appreciated, after so many years of crisis and insecurity. The government also developed a sophisticated response to the grassroots

movements shift toward the electoral arena during the mid to late 1980s. With the president's National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), social welfare and infrastructure projects have been skillfully targeted to politically contested areas.¹⁰¹ PRONASOL is a catch-all presidential strategy with many different component programs ranging from relabeling traditional federal revenue-sharing to the states and municipalities to creative rural development efforts inspired by past NGO successes.

PRONASOL projects are accompanied by a powerful official discourse of community participation and "co-responsibility" between the state and the citizen, and they require the formation of local solidarity committees, which in turn choose from a set menu of possible community improvement projects, such as electrification, paving roads, fixing schools, and so on. The political goal is to promote a direct link between PRONASOL (the symbol of the president) and the local community, often bypassing both local authorities and traditional political bosses.¹⁰² Although PRONASOL appears to decentralize, in practice it centralizes power in the presidency, provoking serious subterranean conflicts between *salinistas* at the federal level and more traditional *priista* state authorities. PRONASOL has had a mixed record with the more consolidated autonomous social organizations, bargaining with some and bypassing others in the name of delivering services directly to the base. To what degree attendance at official public assemblies will turn into genuine community participation remains an open question.

Within the wide range of PRONASOL activities, the revenue-sharing for building roads, bridges, and water supplies is the most conventional, and therefore the most open to potential political manipulation, but most opposition municipalities also benefit. These infrastructural projects represent the bulk of PRONASOL spending.¹⁰³ The rural development projects include some of the only production-oriented PRONASOL supports, but the amounts are very small, a symbolic but important substitute for the withdrawal of other state agencies from providing credit for peasant crops such as basic grains and coffee.

PRONASOL's most innovative projects are probably those carried out by the National Indigenous Institute. In an effort to make up for years of neglect of Mexico's most oppressed citizens, INI's budget increased eighteen-fold during the first three years of the Salinas government. INI's two largest lines of development work were credit "on your word" for low-income indigenous coffee-producer organizations and the creation of NGO-style revolving credit funds, ostensibly managed by regional councils of indigenous organizations.¹⁰⁴ In spite of drawing many key staff members and practical lessons from NGOs, however, PRONASOL has largely ignored Mexico's more autonomous NGO communities,

192 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

perhaps as part of its effort to bypass what it calls "entrenched interests." Interestingly, PRONASOL also blocked World Bank efforts to fund Mexican NGOs directly.

Social and political groups that persist in pressing charges of fraud, and thereby contest the government's legitimacy, tend to be excluded from the few remaining spigots of official social spending. In the context of most Mexicans' continuing economic crisis, community-based organizations are obliged by their members to deal with immediate material needs. They end up having to balance their priorities between social and political rights. The choice has been made all the more difficult by the daunting limitations faced by the PRD, which appeared in 1988 to have the potential to represent large sectors of hitherto disenfranchised citizens. First, the party has been dominated by political forces that are not accustomed to balanced relationships with autonomous social movements and therefore have been unable to incorporate and represent them. Second, in spite of its partial successes on the municipal front, the PRD has been generally unable to make the transition from contestation to proposition. The central government, and PRONASOL in particular, has been closely attuned to these weaknesses, encouraging the social movements to find alternative, less confrontational forms of political representation outside the PRD.¹⁰⁵

Local government has become a key arena for the expression of this tension—even Juchitán, long a standardbearer for left municipal power, entered into PRONASOL agreements with the government.¹⁰⁶ After three years, PRONASOL officials proudly reported that they worked with all but two of Mexico's opposition municipalities.¹⁰⁷ By implication, if opposition municipal movements managed to overcome the various biases and obstacles embedded in the electoral process, they had shown themselves strong enough to be worthy of access to federal PRONASOL funding. By the very end of 1991, however, contestation of municipal power fought its way back onto the political agenda. September and October 1991 witnessed mass civic movements that toppled fraudulently elected governors in the states of Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí. These victories were partial because the results were negotiated elite compromises rather than the results of voter choice.

These mobilizations were followed by an even more remarkable movement, which turned even more "micropolitical" conflicts into truly national political issues. The fraudulent municipal elections in the Gulf coast state of Tabasco clearly denied the PRD two town halls. Local and state PRD leaders led a mass protest march to far-off Mexico City, learning from the San Luis Potosí experience how to challenge state power peacefully, without risking repression. Winning widespread popular support along the way, and with some sympathy from church officials,

the march was warmly received in Mexico City's main plaza. After having made such major concessions to the center-right, the president was under pressure to show greater even-handedness than in 1989 and 1990. Negotiations produced PRD-led municipal councils, and the hard-line governor was removed from office a month later. The Tabasco protests put small towns on the democratic map in a new way, and may point toward an upturn in the PRD's fortunes.¹⁰⁸

In conclusion, some local governments have become more democratic and/or pluralistic, either formally or in practice, but so far even the most positive achievements have been limited to blocking the imposition of traditional clientelist conditioning of development policies, rather than pioneering innovative new forms of participation in public administration. Few local governments have carried out creative new social and economic policies on any significant scale.¹⁰⁹ A growing number of experimental initiatives have emerged from small towns and villages, leading to a broadening and deepening of local democratization, especially in the areas of rural development and environmental policy. Even though Mexico is now an overwhelmingly urban nation, and elections tend to be more closely monitored and therefore cleaner in urban areas, it is ironic that there may be more opportunities for innovation in those exceptional rural areas that have been democratized.

Where there has been progress toward local level democratization, NGOs have played an important support role. But the transition from social demands and political opposition to a political alternative based on new proposals for locally based development policies has been difficult. In this context, NGOs in Mexico have been part of the problem as well as part of the solution. Many have long rejected formal public administration, whereas others have entered the political arena as contenders. So far, neither type of NGO has focused seriously on developing alternative public policies.

In contrast to the South American experience, in which NGOs often played the role of bridge between political and social change, most NGOs in Mexico have been followers rather than leaders. The remarkably successful preemptive role of the state, combined with long-standing underfinancing from abroad, are certainly key parts of any explanation. The continuing obstacle confronting the democratization of the electoral system certainly challenges all efforts to open up creative new approaches to public administration. Both grassroots movements and NGOs face the classic challenge of Mexican politics: What kinds of new styles and institutions make it possible to change the system even more than one is changed by it?

Notes

This study was carried out with research support from the Learning and Dissemination Office of the Inter-American Foundation. The authors are grateful to Josefina Aranda, Vivienne Bennett, Charles Reilly, and Jennie Purnell for their thoughtful comments on an earlier version.

1. This paper deals primarily with grassroots movements and local governments. Local politics more broadly defined would include trade unions, which will not be addressed here.

2. On the Mother's Committee, see Elena Poniatowska, *Fuerte es el Silencio* (Mexico City: Era, 1980). The FNCR set an important precedent with its broad networking among opposition groups, bringing together both partisan and social organizations in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since the late 1980s, human rights groups began growing throughout the country, developing much stronger local roots. For overviews, see *Human Rights in Mexico: A Policy of Impunity* (New York: America's Watch, June, 1990); Miguel Concha, "Las violaciones a los derechos humanos individuales en Mexico: 1971-1986," in Pablo Bonzález Casanova and Jorge Cadena Roa, eds., *Primer Informe sobre la Democracia: Mexico 1988* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI/UNAM, 1988); *Mexico: Human Rights in Rural Areas* (London: Amnesty International, 1986); and *Mexico: Torture with Impunity* (New York: Amnesty International, 1991).

3. See *Unceasing Abuses: Human Rights in Mexico One Year After the Introduction of Reform* (New York, America's Watch, September, 1991) and *Mexico: Torture with Impunity*, note 2. It should be noted that the Mexican government grew increasingly sensitive to international pressure on human rights issues in the course of 1991. It remains unclear whether this is the beginning of a long-term, sustained commitment or more of a short-term reflection of concern for the government's image during the delicate negotiations for a North American Free Trade Agreement.

4. On church-state relations, see Martín de la Rosa and Charles Reilly, eds., *Religion y Política en México* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1985). On recent developments in church-state relations, see the special issue of *El Cotidiano* 7, no. 35 (May-June 1990).

5. See *New Perspectives Quarterly* 8, no. 1 (Winter 1991).

6. In the 1920s, when the political system was very much in flux, two kinds of governors were key. One type was the highly autonomous politico-military warlord, who ruled a personalistic political machine and occasionally rebelled against the national state. The other key variant was the more "modern" political machine-builder, who created an organized following based on interest groups, innovative policy reforms, and semicompetitive politics. These so-called "laboratories of revolution" served as important forerunners of what was to become the "inclusionary corporatist" reforms of the 1930s. On state politics in the 1920s, see Thomas Benjamin and Mark Wasserman, eds., *Provinces of the Revolution* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1990).

7. See Sergio Elías Gutiérrez, "El municipio y los gobiernos de los Estados," in Brigitte Boehm de Lameiras, ed., *El Municipio en México* (Zamora: El Colegio de Michoacán, 1987), p. 297.

8. Carlos Martínez Assad and Alicia Ziccardi, "Política y Gestión Municipal," in Jurdi Borja et al., eds., *Descentralización y Democracia—Gobiernos Locales en América Latina* (Santiago, Chile: CLACSO-SUR-CEUMT, 1989). In Mexico, "municipality"

refers to cities, towns, or rural counties. Many include both urban centers and surrounding smaller towns and rural areas.

9. On municipal autonomy demands during the prerevolutionary period, see Francois Chevalier, "La libertad municipal, antigua y permanente reivindicación Mexicana," *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 51, no. 2 (April-June 1989). On municipal demands during the revolutionary period and its aftermath, see Armando Bartra, *Los Herederos de Zapata* (Mexico City: Era, 1985).

10. Before his assassination, the new mayor moved quickly to carry out innovative local development programs such as market regulation to control entrenched commercial monopolies, accountability of local police, promotion of cooperatives, and community participation in public health measures. See Paco Ignacio Taibó and Rogelio Vizcaino, *Las Dos Muertes de Juan Escudero* (Mexico City: Cuadernos de Joaquín Mortiz, 1990).

11. See Martínez Assad and Ziccardi, note 8, pp. 290-291.

12. Note the experience of The Civic Union of San Luis Potosí, led by Dr. Nava against the famous *cacique* Gonzalo Santos. See Enrique Márquez, "Political Anachronisms: The Navista Movement and Political Processes in San Luis Potosí, 1958-1985," in Arturo Alvarado, ed., *Electoral Patterns and Processes in Mexico* (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for US-Mexican Studies, 1987); Carlos Martínez Assad, "Nava: De la rebelión de los coheteros al juicio político," in Martínez Assad, *Municipios en Conflicto* (Mexico City: GV/IIS/UNAM, 1985). The Navista movement arose again, thirty years after its birth, unseating the government's candidate for governor in 1991. The Guerrero Civic Association's struggle against governor Cabellero Aburto in the early 1960s was also very important. See, among others, Armando Bartra, "La Aruda Construcción del Ciudadano," unpub. ms., 1991; and Baloy Mayo, *La Guerrilla de Genaro y Lucio* (Mexico City: Ed. Diogenes, 1980).

13. The Federal District has a special status because it is ruled directly by the executive branch. Recently, a largely symbolic delegate assembly was created, but the "regent" remains the principal authority. On changing structures of representation in the capital, see Peter Ward, "Government Without Democracy in Mexico City: Defending the High Ground," in Wayne Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter Smith, eds., *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures* (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for US-Mexican Studies, 1989); and Diane Davis, "Divided Over Democracy: The Embeddedness of State and Class Conflicts in Contemporary Mexico," *Politics and Society* 17, no. 3 (September 1989).

14. See the INI's 1990 *Programa Nacional de Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, 1991-1994*.

15. For an overview of ethnicity in Oaxaca, see Alicia Barabas and Miguel Bartolomé, eds., *Etnicidad y Pluralismo Cultural: La Dinámica Etnica en Oaxaca* (Mexico City: INAH, 1986). On indigenous local government, see, among others, Pedro Carasco, "The Civil-Religious Hierarchy in Mesoamerican Communities: Prehispanic Background and Colonial Development," *American Anthropologist* 63, no. 3, (June 1961); and Philip Parnell, *Escalating Disputes* (Tucson: University of Arizona, 1988). It should be noted that the banner of the *municipio libre* sometimes serves as a cover for traditional forms of intolerance, as in the case of the violent expulsion of protestant minorities (e.g., San Juan Chamula, and Chiapas).

16. Floriberto Díaz Gómez, "Principios Comunitarios y Derechos Indios," *México Indígena*, no. 25 (1988). On the Mixe, see also Marcelino Domínguez, "Poder comunal: Instrumento de autodesarrollo: Caso de Cacalotepec Mixe,

Oaxaca," *El Medio Milenio*, no. 3 (June 1988); and Salomon Nachmad Sitton, "Reflexiones sobre la identidad étnica de los mixes. Un proyecto de investigación por los propios sujetos," *Estudios Sociológicos* 8, no. 22 (January–April 1990). See also Parnell, note 15.

17. See *Testimonios Indígenas, Yalalag* (Mexico City: Equipo Pueblo, 1988). For excellent overviews, see also Fausto Díaz Montes, "Elecciones municipales. Conflicto y negociación: Oaxaca 1986" and "Los conflictos municipales en Oaxaca," in *Cuadernos de Investigación* (Universidad Autónoma "Benito Juárez" de Oaxaca, 1989) and Moisés Bailón, "Los problemas de Morro Mazatlán: La lucha por el control de una agencia municipal en el estado de Oaxaca," *Estudios Sociológicos* 8, no. 22 (January–April 1990).

18. Not all municipalities are divided into these local branches, and most branches that do exist lack the right to elect their local authorities. In these cases, one of the few elected organs of representation is the *ejido*, the agrarian reform community that administers land-use rights. In the late 1930s, at the time of Mexico's major wave of land reform, most rural adult males had voting rights in *ejido* assemblies, but now *ejido* members are often an elderly minority within their communities, leaving their wives, adult children, and landless neighbors unrepresented. When the Salinas government presented its proposal for amending the constitution's land reform provisions in November 1991, it mentioned this very real problem of representation as one of its motives, but the proposed amendment itself did not actually deal with the issue.

19. For a semiofficial overview of this process, see Gilberto Meza and Antonio Padilla, *Los Nuevos Electores, Actores sociales e insurgencia municipal en el Mexico de los 80's* (Mexico City: El Nacional, 1991). For an opposition overview, see Adriana López Monjardin, *La Lucha por los Ayuntamientos: Una utopía viable* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI/UNAM, 1986).

20. The PAN's successful 1990 campaign for Merida's city hall is a classic case, based on extensive civic mobilization in defense of the ballot box. See Carlos Castillo Peraza, "La batalla por Merida," *Nexos* no. 158, February 1991. Panista civic organizations formed the National Citizen's Front in 1991, led by the DHIAC (Integral Human Development and Civic Action); see *La Jornada*, May 9, 1991. Quite recently, these movements have begun to exercise clout statewide. The PAN's pathbreaking victory in the 1989 Northern Baja California governor's race was followed up in 1991 with civic mobilizations that succeeded in annulling PRI "victories" in two highly controversial governor's contests (Guanajuato and San Luis Potosí). This paper will not attempt to include these grassroots middle-class movements, which have yet to be fully studied. For important contributions, see Soledad Loaeza's historical *Clases Medias y Política en Mexico* (Mexico City: Colegio de Mexico, 1988) and María Luisa Tarrés, "Middle-Class Associations and Electoral Opposition," in Joseph Foweraker and Ann Craig, eds., *Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990).

21. As López Monjardin put it, "often peasants are not in the position of 'opting' for electoral struggle, rather they are obliged to get involved because the key to the social vise which grips their region is locked in the town hall." See Adriana López Monjardin, "Los procesos electorales como alternativa para la disidencia rural," in Jorge Zepeda Patterson, ed., *Las Sociedades Rurales Hoy* (Zamora: EWI Colegio de Michoacán, 1988).

22. For the most developed comparison of urban social movements and their

efforts to build grassroots democracy, see Oscar Nuñez, *Innovaciones Democrático-Culturales del Movimiento Urbano-Popular* (Mexico City: UAM-Azcapotzalco, 1990).

23. See Armando Bartra, note 12, for an in-depth discussion of this problem.

24. In some regions *caciques* did not bother to convert their political machines into branches of the official mass organizations, leading to a quite uneven presence throughout the country in practice (the "Swiss cheese state," as Alan Knight put it, citing Jeffrey Rubin in "Historical Continuities in Social Movements" in Fowleraker and Craig, note 20.)

25. For further discussion of this point, see Nuñez, note 22.

26. On the difference between the "social" and "political" (or party-oriented left, see Julio Moguel, *Los Caminos de la Izquierda* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos, 1987); and Nuñez, note 22.

27. Important urban-popular movements emerged in Chihuahua, Monterrey, Zacatecas, Durango, Tlaxcala, Acapulco, and greater Mexico City, as well as in Oaxaca, Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Baja California, among others. Useful case studies include: Jurge Alonso, ed., *Los Movimientos Sociales en el Valle de México*, 2 vols. (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1986); Victor Orozco, "Las luchas populares en Chihuahua," *Cuadernos Políticos* 9 (July–September 1976); Vivienne Bennett, "The Evolution of Urban Popular Movements in Mexico Between 1968 and 1988," In Arturo Escobar and Sonia Alvarez, eds., *From Protest to Proposal: The Making of Social Movements in Contemporary Latin America* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, forthcoming 1992); Menno Vellinga, "The Small Margins of Autonomous Development: Cooptation and Control of Urban Social Movements in Monterrey, Mexico," *Boletín de Estudios Latinoamericanos y del Caribe*, no. 41 (December 1986); and Nuñez, note 22.

28. The most notable case at the time was the 1976 gubernatorial election in Nayarit. Most observers agree that the Popular Socialist party candidate won, but its national leaders were willing to trade away their victory for a senatorship.

29. See the case of the Popular Defense Committee (CDP) of Durango, which emerged from the Cerro de Mercado civic movement. See Julio Moguel, "Local Power and Development Alternatives: The Experience of the Urban Popular Movement in a Region of Northern Mexico," paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., April, 1991. Note also the origins of the CDP of Chihuahua, in the course of a broad movement against a repressive governor (Orozco, note 27). Key peasant movements in Puebla, Zacatecas, Guerrero, and Oaxaca were also preceded by intense student-worker-teacher civic movements for university reforms.

30. The philosophy of "co-responsibility" between state and society, which inspired the government rural food distribution program and urban self-built housing programs of the 1980s, draws on this tradition, and these largely successful antipoverty efforts later inspired the Salinas presidency's National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL).

31. See Julio Moguel, note 29. See also Paul Haber, "Collective Dissent in Mexico: The Political Outcome of Contemporary Urban Popular Movements" (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1992).

32. The efforts by the political left and the autonomous social organizations to organize the growing popular discontent in the early 1980s through "civic strikes" failed. See various articles in Barry Carr and Ricardo Anzaldúa, eds., *The Mexican Left, the Popular Movements and the Politics of Austerity* (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for US-Mexican Studies, 1986).

33. The PAN won city halls in municipalities that accounted for 70 percent

198 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

of the state's population, provoking a debate within the federal government about whether to recognize such defeats in the future. The "alchemists" won, leading to conflicts across the north, which culminated in massive fraud in Chihuahua's 1986 gubernatorial election. The civic protests that followed were probably the most extensive so far at the state level. On the secret debate within the De la Madrid administration over whether to open up, see Hector Aguilar Camín, *Después del Milagro* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 1988), among others.

34. On state and local electoral politics in the mid-1980s, see Alvarado, note 12; and Martínez Assad, note 11. Few studies exist on the way in which the new PAN municipalities actually exercised power. In at least one major city, the municipal administration was reportedly quite authoritarian. See Tonatiuh Guillén López, "La ideología Política de un municipio de oposición. El PAN en Ciudad Juárez (1983-1985)," *Frontera Norte* 2, no. 3 (January-June 1990).

35. For further reflection on the role of the *coordinadoras*, see Luis Hernández, "Las coordinadoras de masas," *El Cotidiano* 7 (July-August 1990); and Julio Moguel, "Las coordinadoras de masas," *Hojas* 1 (March 1990). On the politics of the urban-popular movement more generally, see Oscar Nuñez, note 22; Juan Manuel Ramírez Saíz, "Organizaciones populares y lucha política," *Cuadernos Políticos* (January-March, 1986); Ramírez Saíz, *El Movimiento Urbano-Popular en Mexico* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1986, 1990); "CONAMUP," *Testimonios UAG* 1, no. 1 (1983); Ricardo Hernández, *La Coordinadora Nacional del Movimiento Urbano Popular: Su Historia, 1980-1986* (May-June, 1986). CONAMUP estimated its active membership in the early 1980s at 100,000 families (cited in Ramírez Saíz, *El Movimiento Urbano-Popular en Mexico*, p. 175). For useful syntheses in English, see Sheldon Annis, "What is Not the Same About the Urban Poor: The Case of Mexico City," in John Lewis, ed., *Strengthening the Poor: What Have We Learned?* (Washington, D.C.: Overseas Development Council, 1988); Vivienne Bennett, note 27; Sally Covington, "Urban Popular Movements in Mexico: Grassroots Action for Change," Bildner Center for Western Hemisphere Studies Working Paper, No. 8, April 1990; Paul Haber, note 31; and Juan Manuel Ramírez Saíz, "Urban Struggles and Their Political Consequences," in Foweraker and Craig, note 20.

36. On changes in the peasant movement in the 1980s, see, among others, Armando Bartra, "Prologo al libro de Gustavo Gordillo: *Estado, Mercados y Movimiento Campesino*," *Pueblo* 12, nos. 144/145 (May-June, 1989); Armando Bartra, "Pros, contras y aseguenes de la 'apropiación del proceso productivo,'" *El Cotidiano* 39 (January-February 1991); Jonathan Fox and Gustavo Gordillo, "Between State and Market: The Campesinos' Quest for Autonomy," in Wayne Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter Smith, eds., *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures* (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for US-Mexican Studies, 1989); Emilio García, "La disyuntiva real de la CNPA en la coyuntura actual," *Hojas* 1 (March 1990); Antonio García de León, "Encrucijada rural: El movimiento campesino ante las modernidades," *Cuadernos Políticos* 58 (September-December 1989); Neil Harvey, *The New Agrarian Movement in Mexico 1979-1990*, University of London Institute of Latin American Studies Research Paper 23, 1990; Luis Hernández, "La fantasma del general: Notas sobre la cuestión electoral y el movimiento campesino," in Carlos Monsivais et al., *Crónica del Nuevo Mexico* (Mexico: Equipo Pueblo, 1989); Luis Hernández, "Respuestas campesinas en la época del neoliberalismo," *El Cotidiano* 7 (January-February 1990); and Luis Hernández, "Doce tesis sobre el nuevo liderazgo campesino en Mexico: Notas sobre la UNORCA," paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., April 1991. Several key articles

are collected in "Los nuevos sujetos del desarrollo rural," *Cuadernos Desarrollo de Base 2* (1991).

37. See Ilan Bizberg, "Poder local y acción sindical en situaciones de enclave: Las elecciones en Monclova en 1978 y 1982," in Jorge Pauda and Alain Vanneph, eds., *Poder Local, Poder Regional* (Mexico City: Colegio de Mexico/CEMCA, 1988).

38. In the early 1980s, the COCEI was active in both the CNPA and the CONAMUP because its mass base included both urban poor and neighboring peasants. On the COCEI, see Jeffrey Rubin, "State Policies, Leftist Oppositions and Municipal Elections: The Case of the COCEI in Juchitan," in Alvarado, note 12; Jeffrey Rubin, "Popular Mobilization and the Myth of State Corporatism," in Foweraker and Craig, note 20; Jeffrey Rubin and Vivienne Bennett, "How Popular Movements Shape the State: Radical Oppositions in Juchitan and Monterrey, Mexico, 1973-1987," paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, New Orleans, 1988; and Julio Moguel, "La COCEI y su triunfo sin retorno," *Pueblo* 12, no. 146 (August 1989). For a recent overview from a participant's point of view, see Oscar Cruz, "Juchitán: La lucha por un ayuntamiento popular," in Deiter Paas, Diego Prieto, Julio Moguel and Agustin Sanguinés, eds., *Municipio y Democracia, Participación de las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil en la Política Municipal* (Mexico City: Fundación Friedrich Naumann/PRAXIS, 1991).

39. The Independent Popular Front (FPI) was another pioneer, founded in 1973 and based among the urban poor, students, and rank and file trade union groups in greater Mexico City. Its first electoral efforts were carried out in 1979 through a group without electoral registry, just after the 1977 national political reform—the People's Electoral Committee. After becoming the Union of Popular Neighborhoods (UCP), its leader ran for mayor of the city of Naucalpan in 1981. For a history of the UCP, see Mario Enzástiga Santiago, "La Unión de Colonias Populares de Cara al Movimiento Urbano Popular, Recapitulación Histórica," in Jorge Alonso, ed., *Los Movimientos Sociales en el Valle de México*, vol. 1 (Mexico City: Ediciones de la Casa Chata/CIESAS, 1986). See also Oscar Nuñez, note 22.

40. See Kevin Middlebrook, "Political Liberalization in an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Mexico," in Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Latin America* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Wayne Cornelius, "Political Liberalization in an Authoritarian Regime: Mexico, 1976-1985," in Judith Gentleman, ed., *Mexican Politics in Transition* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987).

41. Entire academic departments developed grassroots support programs, such as housing programs, legal services, adult education, and health services. Over time, some of these activities became increasingly consolidated and integrated into the regular activities of the university, as in the cases of the state universities of Guerrero, Puebla, and Sinaloa. Others grew apart from their alma maters, launching private nonprofit service agencies or outright social organizations, as in Oaxaca and Zacatecas. See Humberto Sotelo, "La Reforma Universitaria y el movimiento popular de 1973," in Jaime Castillo Palma, ed., *Los Movimientos Sociales en Puebla*, 2 vols. (Puebla: ONU-IISUNAM-UAP, 1984); Escuela de Autogobierno, UNAM, *Historia del Frente Popular de Zacatecas* (Mexico City: Equipo Pueblo, 1988); and Jose Enrique González, Gabriela Contrera, and Enrique Velásquez, "Mito y realidad en la Universidad Pueblo," *Teoría y Política* 14 (January 1986).

42. By 1981, a comprehensive survey of regional producer organizations found that two-thirds had been founded through the initiatives of government agencies, and most of the rest were connected to the official peasant organization. See María Teresa Fernández and Fernando Rello, *La Organización de los Productores* (Mexico City: DICONSA, 1984); and Fox and Gordillo, note 36. For a detailed case study, see Jonathan Fox and Luis Hernández, "Offsetting the Iron Law of Oligarchy," *Grassroots Development* 13, no. 2 (1989); Luis Hernández, "La Unión de Ejidos 'Lázaro Cárdenas,'" *Cuadernos de Desarrollo de Base* 1, no. 2 (1990); and Jonathan Fox, "Democratic Rural Development: Leadership Accountability in Regional Peasant Organizations," *Development and Change* 23, no. 2 (April 1992).

43. On state-peasant movement interaction in the context of government rural development programs more generally, see Jonathan Fox, *The Political Dynamics of Reform: State Power and Food Policy in Mexico* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1992); and Julio Moguel, ed., *La Historia de la Cuestión Agraria Mexicana*, vol. 9 (Mexico City: Siglo XXI/CEHAM, 1990).

44. The cases of Oaxaca and Chiapas were the most successful. See Maria Cook, "Organizing Opposition in the Teachers' Movement in Oaxaca," in Foweraker and Craig, note 20. On the dramatic 1989 teachers' mobilization for union democracy nationwide, see Carlos Monsivais et al., *De las Aulas a las Calles* (Mexico City: Equipo Pueblo/Información Obrera, 1990).

45. On Mexican left-wing parties and currents more generally, see Julio Moguel, note 26. See also Carr and Anzaldúa, note 32.

46. For an insightful history of NGOs in Mexico, see Luis Lopezllera Mendez, *Sociedad Civil y Pueblos Emergentes* (Mexico City: Promoción del Desarrollo Popular, c. 1988); and Luis Lopezllera Mendez, "Las Organizaciones civiles por las autogestión de los pueblos," *IFDA Dossier* 77 (May-June 1990).

47. For a view that stresses the points of convergence between grassroots movements and religious activists, see Miguel Concha Malo et al., *La Participación de los Cristianos en el Procesos Popular de Liberación en México* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI/UNAM/IIS, 1986). See also de la Rosa and Reilly, note 4. For case studies, see Oscar Nuñez, note 22; and Jose Alonso, "La iglesia y los movimientos urbanos populares: Un estudio de case en Ciudad Nezahualcoyotl," in Jorge Alonso, ed., *Los Movimientos Sociales en el Valle de México*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Ediciones de la Casa Chata/CIESAS, 1988). For a rural experience, see Francisco Vanderhoof Boersma, *Organizar la Esperanza, Teología Campesina* (Mexico City: CEE, 1986).

48. For a self-history of one such current (PRAXIS), with Jesuit origins, see José Sotelo, "Nosotros tambien hacemos la historia con el movimiento popular ("We also make history with the popular movement")," paper presented at Gestión y Políticas Institucionales para ONGD de America Latina, Rio de Janeiro, August, 1987, Monograph 22. The title is revealing.

49. The NGOs—like the National Center for Social Communication (CENCOS), which opened their doors to grassroots movements, organized press conferences, and denounced government abuses—were a minority and not strong enough to change the dominant tendency.

50. Note the cases, for example, of the Union of Uniones in rural Chiapas, as well as the "Land and Liberty" Popular Front in Monterrey.

51. On the first decade of the Equipo Pueblo, see Luis Hernández and Gabriel Torres, *La Búsqueda del Sujeto Social* (Mexico City: Equipo Pueblo, 1987).

52. Professionals from the nominally "apolitical" secular private sector had

also been involved in both rural development and urban small business, especially through the Mexican Rural Development Foundation (FMDR) and the Micro-Enterprise Development Foundation (ADMIC). See the FMDR evaluation by Martin Diskin, Steven Sanderson, and William Theisenhuesen, "Business in Development: A Workable Partnership," *Issues in Grassroots Development* (Rosslyn, Va.: Inter-American Foundation, 1987). On ADMIC, see Robert Blayney and Diane Bendemane, "The Inter-American Foundation and the Small and Micro-Enterprise Sector," *Issues in Grassroots Development* (Rosslyn, Va.: Inter-American Foundation, 1988).

53. On ANADEGES' philosophy, see Gustavo Esteva, "Regenerating People's Space," *Alternatives* 12, no. 1, (January 1987). In some cases, ANADEGES affiliates developed innovative new policies, which they carried out under contract to the public sector. One of the network's core groups, the Committee to Promote Rural Development Research (COPIDER), launched a program called "Solidarity Funds for Peasant Development" in 1983. COPIDER was contracted by the state government of Guerrero (then relatively liberal) to launch these revolving "on your word" credit funds, which did not require low-income peasant producers to put up collateral. Since 1988, in the context of sharp cuts in conventional farm credit, the Salinas government's Solidarity program began to carry out a similar program nationwide, reaching many producers with relatively symbolic amounts of essentially consumption support (US\$100 per family).

54. See, among others, Carlos Monsivais, *Entrada Libre: Crónicas de una Sociedad and Se Organiza* (Mexico City: Era, 1988); Juan Briseno Guerreo and Ludka de Gortari Krauss, "De la cama a la calle: Sismos y organización popular," *Cuadernos de la Casa Chata* (Mexico City: CIESAS, 1987), p. 156.

55. In the process, the housing NGOs ended up creating some of the most important sectoral networks in Mexico, including the Inter-Institutional Network and participants in the Habitat International Coalition. Mexico's oldest housing NGO is the Operational Housing and Settlement Center (COPEVI), founded with church ties in 1963. COPEVI gave birth to the Housing and Urban Studies Center (CENVI) in 1979. Both NGOs played important roles in the partial reorientation of government low-income housing policy in the early 1980s. Policy changes included the founding of a new agency (FONHAPO), which broke with tradition by dealing with the urban poor in a relatively more equitable, efficient, and less clientelistic way. On FONHAPO, see José Antonio Aldrete Haas, "The Decline of the Mexican State? The Case of State Housing Intervention (1917–1988)" (Ph.D. dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1990) also published as *La Deconstrucción del Estado Mexicano* (Mexico City: Alianza Editorial, 1991); Cristina Casanueva et al., *Vivienda y Estabilidad Política* (Mexico: CIDAC/Diana, 1991); and Annis, note 35.

56. As René Bejarano observed, CONAMUP "lost its opportunity to take the initiative, to build a lasting organization, and to participate in what would be a five year long reconstruction process. CONAMUP leaders wavered between overconfidence and sectarianism, gambling that the thousands of demonstrators who called for the democratization of the reconstruction process would fade away as quickly as they had appeared. See René Bejarano, "Un lustro de temblores," *Hojas* 2 (May–June, 1990). See also Gerardo Bohrquez, "Tendencias actuales del movimiento urbano popular en Mexico," *El Cotidiano* (September–October, 1989).

57. On official and alternative reconstruction efforts, see various articles in the special issues of *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 51, no. 2 (April–June 1989);

202 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

Sociológica, Revista de Estudios Urbanos y Demográficos 2, no. 1 (January–April, 1987); and *El Cotidiano* 2 (November–December 1985). See also Annis, note 35. On NGO housing programs and their links with community organizations, see René Coulomb, “Democratización de la gestión urbana,” *Ciudades* no. 9 (1991); Juan M. Ramírez Saíz, “Autogestión y movimiento urbano popular,” in *Movimientos Sociales y Autogestión* (Mexico: Fundación Friedrich Naumann, 1988); and Hilda Salazar, “Organizaciones No Gubernamentales de Vivienda,” unpublished monograph, Servicios de Apoyo Local, Mexico, 1991. See also Marta Schteingart and Luciano d’Andrea, *Servicios Urbanos, Gestión y Medco Ambiente* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México/CERFE, 1991).

58. On *concertación* bargaining experiences between the state and urban popular movements, see Haber, note 31, and Moguel, note 29.

59. See the many case studies detailed in Marta Schteingart and Alejandra Massolo, eds., “Participación Social y el Sismo,” *Cuadernos de Trabajo* (El Colegio de México/UNICEF) 1 (1987).

60. See *Las Mujeres Tenemos la Palabra*, III Encuentro Nacional de Mujeres de la CONAMUP, Equipo Pueblo, Mexico, 1988; Gisela Espinosa, “La organización de las mujeres del movimiento urbano popular, 1983–1985,” unpublished ms., 1990; interviews in “Mujeres Unidas,” *Sojourners* 15, no. 5. (January 1990); Dolores Lozano Pardini and Christina Padiolla Dieste, “La participación de la mujer en los movimientos urbano-populares,” in Luisa Gayabet et al., eds., *Mujeres y Sociedad* (Guadalajara: El Colegio de Jalisco/CIESAS, 1988); and Alejandra Massolo, “Las mujeres en los movimientos sociales urbanos de la ciudad de México,” *Revista Iztapalapa* 9 (June 1983).

61. This process unfolded largely without input from existing feminist organizations. The key NGOs that provided support services for women’s movements included CIDHAL (with women’s centers in Mexico City and Cuernavaca); Mujeres para el Dialogo, a popular education group of religious origin, which worked primarily in rural areas; and EMAS, the Women’s Team for Social Action, which also carried out popular education work. One of the first experiences with women’s centers was carried out by Mexico’s first female governor. See Ana Bertha Velasco Rocha and Blanca Estela Cortes Montano, “Una experiencia feminista: El Centro de Apoyo a la Mujer de Colima,” in Luisa Gayabet et al., note 60.

62. For the most comprehensive overview of NGOs working on women’s issues in Mexico, see Programa Interdisciplinario de la Mujer (PEIM), “Organizaciones no gubernamentales que trabajan en beneficio de la mujer,” *Documentos de Trabajo* (El Colegio de México/UNICEF) 2 (1988). Some groups carried out support work for women workers, including COMO, the Orientation Center for Women Workers, which worked in the *maquiladora* sector; and MAS, Women Trade Unionists. On COMO, see Sally Yudelman, *Hopeful Openings* (Kumarian Press, 1987); and Kathleen Staudt, “Programming Women’s Empowerment: A Case from Northern Mexico,” in Vicki Ruiz and Susan Tiano, eds., *Women on the US-Mexico Border, Responses to Change* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987). On MAS, see Teresa Carillo, “Women and Independent Unionism in the Garment Industry,” in Foweraker and Craig, note 20. Texas-based American Friends Service Committee groups also provided important support work for women in the *maquiladoras* industrial sector. See Rachel Kamel, “This Is How It Starts: Women Maquila Workers in Mexico,” *Labor Research Review* 11 (1989).

63. See Elizabeth Maier, “La Coordinadora de Mujeres ‘Benita Galeana,’ (Las Benitas): Una experiencia en el desarrollo de la lucha genero/clase en México,”

unpublished ms., 1990; Lynn Stephen, "Popular Feminism in Mexico," *Z Magazine* 2, no. 2 (1990); and Lynn Stephen, "Women in Mexico's Popular Movements: Survival Strategies Against Ecological and Economic Impoverishment," *Latin American Perspectives* 19 (Winter 1992). Many of the most important NGO support efforts for women involved health education. NGOs have formed three networks in the health area: the Popular Health Movement, made up basically of grassroots groups; PRODUSEP, composed primarily of community health promoters; and the Medicinal Plant Fair, a regular meeting of promoters and traditional healers, which focuses on alternative medicine such as herbal treatments, acupuncture, and homeopathy. Although many of these groups began with the idea of building community organizations around health issues, most have had to change their focus and emphasize health care itself and the training of community promoters.

64. The first multicomunity network of UAIMS emerged in Nayarit. See Fox and Hernández, note 42; and Lynn Stephen, "The Gendered Dynamics of Rural Democratization: Brazil, Chile and Mexico," paper presented at the International Congress of Americanists, New Orleans, 1991. For the most complete overview of rural women's development issues so far, see Josefina Aranda Bezaury, ed., *Las Mujeres en el Campo* (Oaxaca: UABJO, 1988). On the Oaxaca experience of government programs for rural women, see Margarita Dalton, "La organización política, las mujeres y el estado," *Estudios Sociológicos* 8, no. 22 (January–April 1990).

65. According to a comprehensive survey of environmental NGOs and public policy, this lack of unity and coordination helps to explain their limited impact on public policy. See Edith Kurzinger-Weimman, ed., "Política ambiental en Mexico: El papel de las organizaciones no gubernamentales," Mexico City, Instituto Alemán de Desarrollo, preliminary report, April 1990. See also Patricia Gerez, "Movimientos sociales ambientalistas en Mexico," *Cuadernos desarrollo de base* 2 (1991). In terms of policy-oriented ecological research, the government-funded Eco-Development Center (CECODES) has played a very important role. Some recent anti-air pollution efforts by the Mexico City government may be attributed in part to pressure by environmental groups, although more general electoral motives (e.g., the one day per week driving ban and the closing of the main oil refinery in the city) may have been more important.

66. The Chernobyl disaster provoked the emergence of a very broad movement against the Laguna Verde nuclear plant in Veracruz, which involved both civic groups and technical support and research. It is worth noting that an unusual alliance of indigenous peasants and ecologists blocked the construction of a planned nuclear installation at Lake Pátzcuaro in 1980—perhaps the first such victory in Latin America. On nuclear politics in Mexico, see Dimitris Stevis and Stephen Mumme, "Nuclear Power, Technological Autonomy and the State in Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 26, no. 3 (1991).

67. The Environmental Study Group (GEA), for example, has a long track record of working with peasant organizations. For their view of NGO work, see Gerardo Alatorre and Jasmine Aguilar, "Las ONGs en el ámbito rural: Su identidad y su papel como instancias de apoyo a grupos campesinos en aspectos productivos y ecológicos," paper presented at Foro sobre movimientos sociales en el campo, UNAM, October 1990. See also the applied research and action journal *Pasos*.

68. See Julia Carabias, Carlos Toledo, and Javier Caballero, "Aprovechamiento y manejo de los recursos naturales renovables en la región de la Montaña de Guerrero," in Enrique Leff, Julia Carabias, and Ana Irene Batis, eds., *Recursos*

Naturales, Técnica y Cultura, Estudios y Experiencias para un Desarrollo Alternativo (Mexico City: UNAM/SEDUE/UNEP, 1990). More generally, see "La Experiencia democrática," *Indígena* no. 2, November 1989.

69. Miguel Szekeley and Sergio Madrid, "La apropiación comunitaria de recursos naturales, Un caso de la Sierra de Juárez, Oaxaca," in Enrique Leff, et al., note 68. On peasant-managed forestry projects, see also David Bray, "The Struggle for the Forest: Conservation and Development in the Sierra Juárez, Oaxaca," *Grassroots Development* 15, no. 3, (December 1991); Gonzalo Chapela, "De bosques y campesinos: Problemática forestal y desarrollo organizativo en torno a diez encuentros de comunidades forestales," *Cuadernos Desarrollo de Base* 2, no 2 (1991); and Carol Zabin, "Grassroots Development in Indigenous Communities: A Case Study from the Sierra Juarez in Oaxaca, Mexico" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Berkeley, 1989).

70. See Moguel, note 29. On the CDP more generally, see also Haber, note 31. Further documentation is needed of reportedly innovative urban resource management experiences in opposition-controlled city halls in León, Guanajuato (water), and in the state capital of San Luis Potosí (garbage).

71. The cases of SEDAC (Adult Education Services) in Hidalgo and Save the Children in Sonora are notable examples.

72. CEPCO has the largest membership in the national network of smallholder coffee growers (CNOC). On the CNOC and its regional members, see Luis Hernández and Gabriela Ejea, eds., "Cafetaleros: La construcción de la autonomía," *Cuadernos desarrollo de base* 3 (1991). See also Luis Hernández, "Café: privatización y concertación social," *El Cotidiano* 7, no 38 (November–December 1990); and Luis Hernández and David Bray, "Mexico: Campesinos and Coffee," *Hemisphere* 3, no. 3 (Summer 1991).

73. See, for example, Irma Juárez, "Taller nacional de crédito alternativo al campo," *Sociológica* 5, no. 13 (May–August, 1990), which reports on a workshop convened by a wide range of NGOs, including the Equipo Pueblo and ANADEGES, among others.

74. On the new credit union network, see David Myhre, "Campesinos as Bankers: Democratizing Finance in Rural Mexico," presented at the XVI Congress of the Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., April 4–6, 1991.

75. When Amnesty International won the Nobel Prize in 1977, the Mexican government had not even allowed the local branch to legally register.

76. Because the systematic documentation of human rights violations in Mexico is relatively recent, it is difficult to draw conclusions about whether patterns of abuses have increased or decreased over the last decade or two. The independent print media have grown freer and bolder in recent years, leading to better coverage, especially in the Mexico City daily *La Jornada* and the newsweekly *Proceso*.

77. Marieclaire Acosta, "Prologo," in America's Watch, *Los Derechos Humanos en México* 1992 (forthcoming).

78. See, for example, the "Fray Francisco de Vitoria" Center's regular journal *Justicia y Paz*. As an aside, the activities of the Mexican League for the Defense of Human Rights should also be noted. Their work is limited to the defense of "their" prisoners—those involved with a small ultraradical group known as the National Democratic Popular Front (FNDP). The FNDP is considered by some informed observers to be the civilian wing of a small clandestine military organization.

79. Church-linked human rights groups working the indigenous Tarahumara

highlands in Chihuahua, in the north, have also made significant advances. Cross-border alliances with US environmental NGOs such as the Texas Center for Policy Studies led to widespread critical discussion of a related World Bank-funded forestry project, contributing to its suspension in 1991.

80. Few overviews of NGOs in Mexico are available. The most substantive overview of NGOs in Mexico is still Lopezllera Mendez, *Sociedad Civil*, note 46. The new Mexican Center on Philanthropic Institutions has served as a well-endowed clearinghouse, supported in part by the Fundación Universo Veintiuno, Compartir Fundación Social and the Fundación Adolfo Autrey. It published the impressive-looking but rather superficial *Directorio de Instituciones Filantrópicas* in 1990.

81. See Rafael Reygadas, "Convergencia para la Democracia," *Este país*, September 1991, p. 20.

82. On a past attempt to build a shared platform between the government and welfare agencies in 1979, see Luis Hernández, "Convencion nacional de instituciones de Servicio y asistencia social," *Pueblo* 12, no. 140 (January 1989). On a related front, even the PRI has been part of the growing convergence between NGOs and political parties. Note, for example, the very prominent Fundación Miguel Alemán, which has spent approximately \$10 million since 1983, largely in the state of Veracruz. Alemán, the former chairman, was a major television magnate and son of the former president. The important network he built through his foundation's public works and technical assistance will certainly be useful in his 1991 campaign for senator on the PRI ticket (*Proceso*, no. 752, April 1, 1991).

83. The network's members worked in nineteen states, and its leaders estimated that they "accompanied" as many as one in ten low-income Mexicans (Reygadas, note 81, p. 20). They began publishing a bulletin (*Convergencia*) in May 1991.

84. Their documentation of fraud played a key role in legitimating the opposition candidate's dramatic peaceful protest march on Mexico City, which convinced the president to reverse his initial decision to support the official results, leading in turn to the fall of the ruling party candidate. Because of logistical, social, and political constraints, the observers were unable to reach beyond the urban areas—a serious problem in a predominantly rural state.

85. Since the launching of the "free trade vs. fair trade" debate over the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the Mexican Network has worked closely with the Action Canada Network and the Washington-based Mobilization on Development, Trade, Labor and the Environment. These lobbying networks are part of a broader process of increasing dialogue among NGOs in Mexico, the United States, and Canada that goes beyond NAFTA. Key steps were first taken in September 1988, when a nascent binational NGO, Mexico-US Diálogos, convened a discussion among US NGOs about Mexico (primarily trade unions, environmentalists, immigration rights groups, and policy analysts). This process began to become more binational in June 1989 at a meeting held at the Overseas Development Council, which brought cross-border NGO concerns "inside the beltway" (of Washington, D.C.) for the first time. The third meeting was held at the Texas Center for Policy Studies in June 1990, when the desire for NGOs and social organizations on both sides to get to know one another was greatly stimulated by the proposed North American Free Trade Agreement. This was followed up by a fully trilateral meeting in Chicago in April 1991, which then spun off a Trilateral Exchange of Agriculture and the Environment, hosted by leading national peasant organization networks in Mexico City. For

206 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

overviews of the political dynamics of cross-border alliances, see, on the initial phase, Jonathan Fox, "Time to Cross the Border: Paying Attention to Mexico," *Radical America* 22, no. 4 (September 1989). More recently, see Cathryn Thorup, "The Politics of Free Trade and the Dynamics of Cross-Border Coalitions in U.S.-Mexican Relations," *Columbian Journal of World Business* 25, no. 2 (Summer 1991).

86. They defined themselves as

a forum for exchange, support, knowledge and training, a broad forum for news and denunciations, a space for coordination and a sum of our efforts, linkages and mutual respect. Our challenges are: to have a real political impact; to find ways of dealing with our financial problems; to construct our identity through the practice of our struggle for democracy rather than theory, to have a real impact on public opinion; to know how to defend our interests—as in the case of the tax law—to be able to develop alternative proposals and to take on tasks freely; improving our responses both quantitatively and qualitatively. The popular movement should be the focus of our action, and we should get involved from the bottom up. We should advance technically and improve our efficiency, with coordinated participation, respect for autonomy and diversity, finding a variety of ways to show our solidarity with the popular movement.

(Cited in Gustavo Castro Soto, "Memoria: Segunda Encuentro Nacional de la 'Convergencia de Organismos Civiles por la Democracia,'" Mexico City, 1990.)

87. See, among others, Cornelius et al., note 36; Foweraker and Craig, note 20; Mosivais, note 44; Pablo Gonzalez Casanova, ed., *Segunda Informa sobre la Democracia: Mexico el 6 de Julio de 1988* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI/UNAM, 1990); and Jaime Gonzalez Graff, ed., *Las Elecciones de 1988 y la Crisis del Sistema Politico* (Mexico City: IMEP/Diana, 1988).

88. See Eduardo Fernández, "Municipio y Partidos Políticos," *El Financiero* 25 (November 1991). Most of the other non-PRI municipalities were in the hands of semiofficial parties, which briefly joined the *cardenista* opposition in 1988.

89. Salinas's claim to victory was based on the so-called "green vote"—very high turnout and PRI support in remote rural areas where access to information, freedom of assembly, and opposition political party presence was very limited. On the geographic distribution of the official tally, see Arturo López, et al., *Geografía de las Elecciones Presidenciales de México* (Mexico City: Fundación Rosenbleuth, 1989). For a sophisticated statistical critique of the official data, see Barberán et al., *Radiografía del Fraude* (Mexico City: Ed. Nuestro Tiempo, 1989).

90. For a balanced overview of the 1990 local elections in the states of Coahuila, Hidalgo, Mexico, and Yucatán, see Miguel Angel Rivera, "Elecciones: Nueva situación geopolítica," *El Cotidiano* 7, no. 39 (January–February 1991). See also Miguel Angel Rivera, "PRD: El partido que nació el 6 de julio o el que se fundó el 5 de mayo de 1989," *El Cotidiano* 7, no. 42 (July–August 1991).

91. For a provocative elaboration of this point, see Sergio Zermeno, "Crisis, Neoliberalism and Disorder," in Foweraker and Craig, note 20.

92. Most of those who ended up in the top leadership of the PRD came either from the PRD or the Mexican Socialist party, and their political behavior followed traditional top-down patterns. For the best analysis in English of this

gap between "social" and "political" Cardenismo, see Paco Ignacio Taibó, "A New Politics With Deep Roots," *The Nation*, December 10, 1990. Some groups from the social left turned to the formation of a new political party, the Labor party (PT). See Luis Hernández, "El partido del Trabajo: Realidades y perspectivas," *El Cotidiano* 40 (March–April 1991).

93. On the difficulties facing NGO-municipal collaboration, see Dieter Paas, "Municipio y ONG en Mexico: Una relación difícil," in Paas et al., note 38.

94. The effort to bring together PRD municipal activists from all over the country was an important step, but the dominant organizing concept turned out to be quite narrow. Instead of broadening the notion of municipal politics, the proposed Municipalista movement was to be based on opposition mayors alone. This structure would exclude representation from becoming increasingly multiparty, not to mention possible new forms of citizen participation and representation in local governments that have yet to be created.

95. See "Memoria: I Convencion Nacional Municipalista," Mexico, forthcoming. Also note the seminar "Participación de las Organizaciones de la Sociedad Civil en la Política Democrática," organized by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation, PRAXIS, and a new NGO that would later be called De Base. See Paas et al., note 38. For a municipal reform proposal emphasizing the need for the creation of municipal legislatures and autonomous local funding mechanisms, from one of the founders of De Base, see Julio Moguel, "La necesaria reforma del 115 constitucional," *Unomásuna*, November 25, 1991.

96. Democratic municipal administration has a very limited track record, and NGOs are just beginning to learn how to offer constructive support. Examples do exist, however, including the Guerrero and Oaxaca cases of community-based sustainable resource management cited above. The Assembly of Mixe Authorities (ASAM) in the Oaxaca highlands has built a variety of teams to support grassroots development projects, bilingual legal services, and the defense of traditional culture. Several NGOs in the state of Morelos have opened a training center for staff members of democratic townships to help prevent them from being absorbed by the official bureaucracy. The Equipo Pueblo, a key grassroots support organization throughout the 1980s, helped to systematize the Durango Popular Defense Committee's experience in electoral politics. See Marcos Cruz, Gonzalo Yañez, Elio Villaseñor, and Julio Moguel, *Llegó la Hora de Ser Gobierno* (Mexico City: Equipo Pueblo/PRAXIS, 1986). In general, however, NGOs are still learning how to bring together social movements, community-based economic development, and democratic local government.

97. Founded by eleven NGOs in 1989, the Interinstitutional Network emerged from progressive religious networks, primarily working on housing, cooperatives, and popular education. See its new international bulletin, *Mexico Insight* (number "0" appeared in 1991).

98. Official development aid has also been relatively small, excluding macroeconomic debt and stabilization agreements. US AID has had a very low profile because in aggregate terms it considers Mexico a "middle income" country (although recently it has increased its support for environmental projects through US NGOs). Until the mid-1980s, the Inter-American Foundation concentrated its grassroots development activities outside of the mainstream of social movements, supporting the business-oriented FMDR and church-linked popular education-oriented projects. Also until recently, the European political party-oriented foundations had difficulty finding appropriate counterparts. For example, the German Social Democratic party-linked Friedrich Ebert Foundation supported

208 *Mexico's Difficult Democracy: Grassroots Movements, NGOs, and Local Government*

the ruling political party and its trade union branch, whereas the Christian Democratic Konrad Adenauer Foundation supported the FMDR.

99. For example, according to World Bank estimates, international NGOs channel at most US\$10 million annually to Mexico's poorest states (Oaxaca and Chiapas), whereas Guatemala and Honduras receive more than \$40–80 million each.

100. This difference might have been due to the contrasting roles of the progressive church hierarchy in each country's popular movement—fundamental in the case of Brazil, and marginal in most of Mexico. Whereas most of Brazil's bishops sheltered movements for social change and democratization in the 1970s and 1980s, most of the Mexican Catholic church hierarchy has been hostile or indifferent to social movements (with the notable exceptions of the states of Morelos, Oaxaca, and Chiapas).

101. See, for example, relevant articles in *Proceso*: August 6, 1990 (no. 718); October 22, 1990 (no. 729); October 29, 1990 (no. 730); and November 5, 1990 (no. 731). See also Denise Dresser, "Neopopulist Solutions to Neoliberal Problems: Mexico's National Solidarity Problem," *Current Issue Brief* 3 (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for US-Mexican Studies, 1991); Julio Moguel, "National Solidarity Program Fails to Help the Very Poor," *Voices of Mexico*, no. 15 (October–December 1990); and Julio Moguel, "El Programa Nacional de Solidaridad, para quien?" *Cuadernos desarrollo de base* 2 (1991).

102. As the president once told a long-time friend, a historic leader of the radical urban popular movement: "You were my teacher [I learned from you that]: everywhere I go I leave a base of support."

103. Access to precise, disaggregated data is difficult.

104. As with any innovative government development program, the record so far is mixed. In Oaxaca, for example, after two years in operation, of the twenty regional credit funds, five had succumbed to local political elites and other conflicts, and ten still operated as de facto branches of the regional INI office. Only five had truly "taken off" and become relatively autonomous, self-managed development agencies run by pluralistic councils of representative organizations (according to internal INI documents and preliminary field research).

105. The emergence of a new national network of local, regional, and state-level political parties may lead in new and unpredictable directions. Seventeen such groups met at the Second National Gathering of Local Parties and Organizations, listed in their strongly profederalist policy statement in *La Jornada*, December 12, 1991.

106. This scandalized some PRD leaders, but local COCEI authorities decided that it was their prerogative to spend public money on public works. See Cruz, note 38, and COCEI mayor Hector Sánchez's speech in *Solidaridad a Debate* (Mexico City: El Nacional, 1991).

107. Reported by Carlos Rojas in *Solidaridad a Debate*, *ibid.*

108. *La Jornada* provided nuanced daily coverage throughout the months of December 1991 and January 1992. For an overview of the seven governors who fell during the first half of the Salinas Administration, see Ted Bardacke, "Another Governor Bites the Dust," *El Financiero Internacional* 1, no. 33, February 10, 1992.

109. For a comprehensive statement about the importance of further research on the actual practice and experience of opposition governance in Mexico, see Victoria Rodriguez and Peter Ward, "Opposition Politics, Power and Public Administration in Urban Mexico," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 10, no. 1, 1991.