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1988-92**

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In the aftermath of the 1988 presidential election, the PRD (Partido de la Revolución Democrática) was founded with great optimism. The vote percentages obtained by the PRD, however, fell well below the vote percentage Cárdenas was officially credited with in 1988. Of twenty-two statewide races the PRD participated in between July 1989 and March 1991, the PRD obtained only 10 percent of the vote. In the 1988 presidential elections in these same states, the FDN (Frente Democrática Nacional) obtained 24.8 percent of the vote.¹ Similarly, in the 1991 congressional elections the PRD obtained a lackluster 8.27 percent of the vote, compared to 31.12 percent in 1988.² This paper will attempt to analyze the decline in the PRD vote compared to the 1988 FDN vote.

One of the principal causes of the decline in the PRD vote could be labeled “fraud fatigue.” Without exception the PRD has been declared the loser in the elections that the PRD (and before it the FDN) felt it had the best chance to win. The PRD has blamed the losses on election fraud. These elections include the July 1988 presidential election, the November 1988 gubernatorial election in Tabasco, the July 1989 election in Michoacán, the December 1989 elections in Michoacán and Guerrero, and the November 1990 election in the State of Mexico. The 1991 congressional elections and the 1992 election in Michoacán produced additional fraud charges.

Inevitably, the confrontation of what it regards as an unending string of frauds has changed the nature of the party. As columnist José Woldenberg commented, “The government’s unscrupulous fraudulent manipulation of election returns has pushed the PRD leadership to the left and at the same time isolated it.”³ It has also provided an easy excuse for failure. PRD member Jorge Alcocer claimed charges of “fraud” are often used to cover the failings of the PRD.⁴ Finally the PRD’s preoccupation with fraud has diverted energy from other organizational tasks. As Cárdenas noted, “The government’s offensive has forced us to devote more attention to conflicts which result from electoral dishonesty, fraud, and imposition.”⁵

Another factor affecting the PRD has been violent attacks on its members. During 1989 and 1990, 73 PRD members were killed, of whom 17 were in Oaxaca, 16 in Michoacán, and 13 in Puebla.⁶ Luis Salazar C. commented on the attacks directed at PRD members: "No one can deny or even minimize the harassment and aggression that this new organization has suffered at the hands of various branches of government. Dozens of dead, arrested, kidnapped, and threatened speak clearly of the hostility with which they have viewed the formation of the PRD."⁷

The political environment in which the PRD finds itself has proved less favorable than the one the FDN faced. In 1988 Mexico was mired in a deep recession, and blame was placed on the incumbents. Several factors have changed. Economic growth resumed, and Salinas promoted the widely approved free trade agreement. Also the political reform and primary elections have improved the PRI's image. All of these have cut into the protest vote.

PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) Deputy Carlos Castillo Pérez commented on the changing political environment in a speech in the Chamber of Deputies on October 18, 1989. He addressed the PRD deputies: "You members of the PRD assumed that the men of the official party and of the government would not change. We assumed that they are indeed capable of change. You believe that reform will not occur within the executive branch and we feel it is worth attempting to reform the executive branch."⁸ The Solidarity program has been especially important, since it has tended to undermine the PRD's base among the poor. As Octavio Rodríguez Araujo noted, "In a country with great needs and inequality, heavy spending should not be minimized even though it insults recipients' dignity and is quite insufficient."⁹

One of the issues that most caught voters' imaginations in 1988 was suspending debt payments. However, the PRI effectively co-opted that issue after the debt renegotiation; its stated position now resembles the PRD position. In the Plan of Action approved after the September 1990 Assembly of the PRI, the official party declared that it proposed "struggling for the full utilization and optimal use of resources freed by foreign debt renegotiation, using them for economic growth and social development in keeping with the nation's ability to pay, and giving special priority to rural areas in reallocating resources."¹⁰

Also, the potential cost of casting a protest vote has risen. In 1988 there was little to lose by voting for, or even electing, a candidate whom the world's financiers might deem too radical. At the time, new credits and new investment had stopped, the

economy was stagnant, and massive debt payments were flowing out of the country. By 1990 the Mexican economy was growing at a modest rate, and the massive flow of new investment more than offset debt payments. Thus, voters had something to lose by a rejection of the PRI. The recent examples of Nicaragua and Chile confirm that nations can pay a high economic price for electing leaders not to the liking of the United States and the international financial community.

Another factor limiting the PRD has been its reliance on the Mexican Revolution of 1910–17 for its ideological inspiration. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas is closely associated with the Revolution since he literally grew up at the feet of the man most closely identified with its achievements, Lázaro Cárdenas. For the younger Cárdenas, despite the great changes in Mexico and the world, the Mexican Revolution still provides guidance. He sees the unmet goals of the Revolution as (1) democracy, (2) eliminating poverty, and (3) an equitable international order.¹¹ Cárdenas reaffirmed the importance of the Revolution when visiting Washington state in 1989: “The PRD is the heir of those who engaged in the armed struggle of 1910, seeking to end inequality and poverty, and above all, seeking democracy.”¹²

Commentators have noted the limited effectiveness of the PRD's appeal to the ideals of the Mexican Revolution. The main appeal of such a message is to marginal laborers and peasants.¹³ Also, the image of the Mexican Revolution, given the crisis of the 1980s, is undergoing rapid change in Mexico, just as the image of the Bolshevik Revolution in the former Soviet Union has undergone change. Columnist Moisés Lawson Villafaña commented on the PRD, “A party can no longer flourish in today's Mexico as the standard bearer of an economic model, the historical model of the Revolution, which has proved inefficient and terribly unjust.”¹⁴ Finally, the Mexican Revolution's appeal to younger Mexicans is weak. As Rodolfo González Guevara noted, “The Mexican Revolution does not mean anything to Mexico's youth nor does it interest them.”¹⁵

Another problem faced by the PRD is its being repeatedly described as part of the “Left.” In a sense such a charge is unfair. Cárdenas himself rejects the label, preferring the term “inheritor of the Mexican Revolution.”¹⁶ Nonetheless, the PRD is widely perceived as part of the Left and the image is continually reinforced by media references to it as “left” or “center-left.” To the extent the Left label has stuck, it has hurt. As Jorge Castañeda noted, the Left suffers from guilt by association with Cuba

and the former USSR. He also noted that in current economic thinking the Left is associated with failure.¹⁷

To the extent that the PRD is attempting to benefit by representing the Left, it faces difficulties. As French political theorist Régis Debray noted, "Today no valid alternative to the dynamism of the world market has been developed."¹⁸ The Mexican Left has limited appeal. The PSUM (Partido Socialista Unificado de México), forerunner of the PMS (Partido Mexicano Socialista), received only 0.6 percent of the vote in Michoacán in 1986.¹⁹ A poll found only 11 percent of Mexicans considered themselves to be on the left, while 33 percent said they were in the center, and 56 percent on the right.²⁰

The PRD has also suffered due to the changed perception of state ownership of corporations. In general Mexicans share the worldwide acceptance of privatization as a remedy to economic ills. In fact, having viewed the poor performance of many state-owned corporations, Mexicans are often among the most eager to reduce the economic role of the state. As a commentator noted, "Frankly, Salinas could have asked J. P. Morgan himself to buy Telmex, and the man-on-the street would have said, 'Why not? Can't be no worse.'"²¹

Marcela Toledano, speaking for the FDN on the day Salinas was inaugurated, set the tone for Cárdenas's movement in terms of privatization. She stated, "It is necessary to stop the process of privatization of state firms."²² The PRD later adopted this position: "The leading economic role of the state should be strengthened. National democratic planning should provide society with the opportunity to participate in planning, thus democratically defining strategic priorities for development. The State should be the ultimate owner of natural resources."²³

Cárdenas has criticized the sale of the widely disliked phone company, the banking system, and sugarmills, all of which were government owned at the start of the Salinas administration.²⁴ Such broad criticism of privatization raised the question of what, if anything, he would like to be sold.

Cárdenas does not condemn all privatization, although such subtleties are likely to get lost in press reporting. He criticizes current privatization efforts as "turning over the most productive state enterprises to multinational firms." He sees such privatization as resulting from "conditions the foreign creditors have imposed in exchange for debt negotiation and receiving more loans." Cárdenas claims that such decisions should be left to the Mexican government, not tied to debt settlement.²⁵ Cárdenas also feels

privatization should be “rational and strengthen specific economic areas and ensure that new owners have a stake in the well-being of Mexico, and not just engage in speculation, as has been happening.”²⁶

The PRD’s advocacy of government economic control has provided conservatives with ammunition for criticizing the party. For example, Enrique Krauze sees the party’s failure to follow the Spanish Socialist Workers Party (POSE) and recognize the supremacy of the “invisible hand of the market” over the “visible hand” of the state as the reason it has failed to build a strong base. Krauze also notes the PRD has failed to address the question of what is the least expensive way to provide services traditionally provided by the state.²⁷

The PRD has also been labeled vague or fuzzy on issues. Initially this was understandable, since the party was new and brought together such diverse ideologies. Additional factors reinforced this initial impression. It was an easy issue for unsympathetic media to comment on. The delay in defining the PRD’s platform reinforced this impression. It was only at its November 1990 congress that the basic documents such as statutes and declaration of principles were finally agreed upon. To compound the problem, these documents were published only in 1991. When they were finally published, the long, detailed documents were not widely read. The *Criticism and Alternative to the Government Economic Policies*, for example, had a press run of only two thousand.

The vagueness charge put the PRD on the defensive, forcing it not only to say what it was for, but to declare that it in fact offered a concrete alternative. Referring to the supposed failure to offer alternatives, a 1990 pamphlet outlining PRD policy stated, “This pamphlet, the work of the parliamentary group of the PRD, will contribute to wrecking this pernicious authoritarian allegation.” The pamphlet then provided 127 pages of economic analysis.²⁸ In fact PRD proposals are anything but vague. A PRD study on agriculture devoted sixty-four pages to analyzing current agricultural problems. This was followed by thirty-five pages of proposed solutions.²⁹

Another disadvantage the PRD has faced has been generally unsympathetic media coverage. The PRD has been repeatedly described as a “violent” party due to its occupation of city halls and blocking of highways to protest election fraud. Despite the PAN’s having initiated highway blocking in the 1980s, its sacking of the furniture store in Valladolid, Yucatán, and its fatal election-fraud protest in Culiacán, it was never so labeled.

The media double standard was apparent in conjunction with Cárdenas's travels to the United States. On the front page of *Excélsior*, Romeo Flores Caballero characterized Cárdenas's trips to the United States as providing "an invitation for other nations to declare themselves as guarantors of Mexican democracy." The same issue of *Excélsior* reported that PRI President Colosio went to the United States to "improve Mexico's political image."³⁰ Other publications, while never questioning the motive of Salinas's U.S. visits, characterized Cárdenas's trips as "unpatriotic" and "seditious."³¹

Similarly, the media uncritically repeated the PRI charge that Cárdenas was illegally campaigning on election day in Michoacán in July 1989. This was a highly unlikely charge since he was followed all day by dozens of reporters. Rather than questioning the charge or consulting with reporters who were with him, the Mexican press widely repeated the accusation. A *Time* magazine reporter who was with Cárdenas that day responded to the PRI's charge on Univisión news, "How can we believe its other declarations, if we realize that what we have witnessed is a big lie." The correspondent's comments were not broadcast in Mexico.³² The press also uncritically repeated charges, made just before the special mayoral election in Uruapan, that Cárdenas was involved in massive financial fraud. The PRD coordinator responded, "The government periodically unleashes media campaigns to denigrate and slander the PRD, its leaders, and what it represents."³³

The PRD has been hurt by alliances between the PRI and other major groups. These groups feel they need to present a united front with the PRI to blunt the PRD's momentum. The business community, which before 1988 had been dallying with the PAN as a safe option to the PRI, has embraced the PRI since the PRD's founding.³⁴ Similarly, the PRD has been hurt by the PAN-PRI alliance. As Bertha Lerner noted, "There is no doubt [of] the weakening of Cárdenas' movement and the PRD was one of the central goals of this alliance."³⁵ Finally, as historian John Coatsworth noted, after the 1988 presidential elections the U.S. government lost interest in pressuring Mexico to liberalize its electoral system. Rather than facing the possibility of a PRD victory, the United States preferred to throw its support to the PRI.³⁶

Many potential voters feel that the PRD's plans, as they have been elaborated, simply will not work or will not work as well as Salinas's. The PRD has called for (1) taxing the rich, (2) substantial wage increases, (3) rethinking (at least) the free trade agreement, (4) a strong state sector, and (5) regulating foreign investment. Many feel

that the implementation of such policies would result in massive capital flight. The experience of President López Mateos (1958–64) is illustrative. When he declared that Mexico was on the left within the constitution, roughly \$200 million left the country, plunging it into recession. It took some time for him to convince business that he was not a real leftist and to reestablish business confidence.³⁷

Economist Christopher Whalen commented on what he perceived to be the inviability of the PRD model, “Recalling past prosperity, Cárdenas promises a return to ‘successful’ statist economic policies, without explaining that these policies are the cause of the country’s growing difficulties.”³⁸ Columnist Eduardo Borrell Navarro commented on this same problem, “Up until now Cárdenas has not made it clear how his party, embracing former socialists and Trotskyists, proposes to get owners of capital to repatriate it, and get them to invest Mexico’s resources in a non-inflationary manner.”³⁹ PRD economist Ifigenia Martínez downplays these concerns, noting that in fact the largest capital flight in Mexican history occurred during the presidency of De la Madrid and resulted from a lack of confidence in the economy. She sees PRD policies as restoring the health of the domestic market, making Mexico safe to invest in, and thus increasing investment.⁴⁰

As one might assume, the government has not looked favorably on its rival. Cárdenas observed: “We are operating in a hostile environment. This makes our struggle more difficult. The government puts every conceivable obstacle in our way.”⁴¹ Comments by PRI officials have reinforced the negative image of the PRD. Guerrero Governor José Francisco Ruiz Massieu described the PRD as “the party of blood and violence.”⁴² The PRI has also used ads to undermine the PRD. Just before the municipal elections in Guerrero, the PRI took out a full-page ad that proclaimed, “The PRD is for violence in Guerrero.”⁴³

Official labor followed the government’s lead. CTM (Confederación de Trabajadores de México) leader Fidel Velázquez declared: “There are many armed people in Mexico who have plans to destabilize the country. Authorities at the highest levels know there are opposition members—specifically the PRD—who are involved with drug traffickers because the weapons they use to occupy city halls cannot come from anywhere else.”⁴⁴

Other attacks were less obvious. For example a *gacetilla*, presumably paid for by the PRI, had headlines proclaiming, “Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, the coordinator of the PRD, makes irresponsible charges of vote fraud.”⁴⁵ In general the government is

much more critical of the PRD than of the more middle-class PAN, since the PRD is seen as a threat posed by the lower classes.⁴⁶

The PRD's response to the Salinas administration has not proved fruitful either. Since Salinas's inauguration, Cárdenas's followers have refused to meet with the president, claiming that he represents an illegitimate government that should not be dignified by such a meeting. Initially, when Salinas appeared weak, that might have been a wise tactic. However, as Salinas's political stature has risen and the PRD's has fallen, the PRD has clung tenaciously to this policy. That has left it open to the charge that it is intransigent.

Once it became apparent that the PRD would refuse to talk to him, Salinas repeatedly extended invitations for dialogue. In his 1989 State of the Nation address, Salinas stated: "I have invited all the political parties to dialogue. Most of them have accepted in a serious, responsible manner." This created the image of Salinas as a reasonable president, and the PRD as obstinate. Rather than using interviews to ask Salinas embarrassing questions, and then reporting the response (or lack of one) to the public, Cárdenas has always put conditions on talks, leaving himself isolated. For example when asked what he would do if Salinas requested direct talks, Cárdenas replied: "We would have to know why he wanted them and what he wanted to talk about. We would have to fix an agenda and make the discussion public because we can't, as we have said, legitimize what cannot be legitimized with a photo opportunity."⁴⁷

Some potential voters were inevitably alienated by the hard-line stance a faction of the PRD took vis-à-vis the government. Heberto Castillo reflected such a stance after the July 1989 elections in Michoacán: "We will make life impossible for the government. We will call on the public to use its imagination and block government action in any way it can."⁴⁸

The hard line vis-à-vis the government has led to criticism both from within and outside the PRD. Jorge Alcocer, who resigned from the party in protest, noted PRD policy was based on the "unfounded hope that there would be some sort of collapse of the government, that Salinas could not govern, and that would be followed by mobilization and change until new elections were called. But that didn't happen, and it's not going to happen."⁴⁹ Alcocer also criticized the PRD for being so obstinately antigovernment that it failed to join the PRI and the PAN in supporting political reform. Rather than confrontation, Alcocer felt that the PRD should "force the

government to permit a series of changes which would open the way to substantive change in the political and economic life of the country.”⁵⁰ Similarly, González Guevara, even after joining the PRD, noted, “Our attacks on the President and the government have been so exaggerated that they have done the PRD more harm than good.”⁵¹

Another reason for the decline of Cárdenas’s coalition is the loss of the opposition parties that made up the FDN. As columnist Rafael Abascal Macías noted, “Much of the FDN’s ability to mobilize people was supplied by the parties which refused to disappear.”⁵² When the alliance dissolved, these parties retained many of their members. In twenty-one state elections in 1989 and 1990, former FDN members (including the CDPs) exceeded the PRD’s vote in thirteen cases.⁵³ Also, the parties of the FDN were never stigmatized as “violent” or “subversive,” so it was psychologically easier to vote for them than it was to vote for the PRD.⁵⁴ Accelerating the departure of the former members of the FDN was their inevitable, and often successful, wooing by the PRI with cash and patronage, the old glue that cemented the PRI’s diverse pre-1988 alliance.⁵⁵

Another problem faced by Cárdenas backers has been converting a mass following into a political party. In January 1989 Cárdenas commented on this problem, “Our task is now to build the base committees, to encourage people to discuss problems in them, and start organizing and mobilizing people.”⁵⁶ Herberto Castillo made the reason for this clear: “There is an urgent need to institutionalize the PRD. We cannot continue to follow a single person, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, as we did during the election campaign.”⁵⁷

More than a year after Cárdenas’s initial call for a new party, it was clear that the party was still poorly organized. It was also clear that one could not blame the press for misrepresenting the situation, since PRD members themselves were the ones complaining. Late in 1989 Cárdenas stated, “The work of organizing the party has not been and is not easy for anyone.”⁵⁸ The PRD paper *Seis de Julio* was even more blunt, “The main problem of the PRD is its lack of organization.”⁵⁹

Even after another year had passed, there was still strong internal criticism about the lack of organization. Cárdenas noted in December 1990 that one of the reasons for the election loss in the State of Mexico was the lack of organization.⁶⁰ After joining the PRD, González Guevara commented on the reason for the decline of the PRD vote relative to the FDN, “The PRD does not have an internal structure.”⁶¹

This organizational failure was even more pronounced at the state and local level. The PRD had planned twenty-two state congresses before its November 1990 National Congress; however, only nine occurred. The PRD ordered six of these to be repeated due to flaws in the initial congresses. In Morelos the congress was disrupted and a pistol was drawn in a dispute in which one group charged that another was allied with a former PRI governor who had tried to pack the meeting with PRI loyalists.⁶² In November 1990, Heberto Castillo noted, "In the Federal District our party has widespread support, but very poor organization."⁶³ In Guerrero the organization was so spotty that in the 1989 election only an estimated 30 percent of polling places had PRD poll watchers.⁶⁴ In fact a PRD report noted that given the low level of grassroots organization to fund and support campaigns, candidates were left largely on their own, converting nomination into more of a punishment than an honor.⁶⁵

The single biggest organizational problem of the PRD was the persistence of blocs within the party. Even before it was formally organized as a party, an observer declared, "Factions and subfactions within the tenuous alliance seem to threaten to withdraw every other day to raise their bargaining power in the group."⁶⁶ The Green Party, one of the 1988 alliance members, did in fact withdraw. The principal internal split has been between former PRI members, the Democratic Current, and members of leftist parties such as the PMS. Further complicating the picture, the Mexican left was not unified before 1988, and the old divisions continued inside the PRD. In fact, a report on the Executive Committee of the PRD noted it was carefully chosen to represent the following constituencies: the Democratic Current with seventeen representatives, the Mexican Socialist Party with six, the Punto Crítico Study Group with four, the Movement to Socialism with three, and the National Revolutionary Civic Association with two.⁶⁷ This delicate balancing act continued even after the first PRD congress. An Analysis of the political origins of National Council members selected at the congress showed that twenty-one came from the Democratic Current, and the remaining members were divided among the twelve different leftist groups that had joined the PRD. The number of members from each of the twelve groups was published.⁶⁸ It appears that the PRD often adopted a zero-sum mentality, and that leftist groups focused on gaining representation at the expense of other leftist groups, without trying to increase the number of new recruits.

Inevitably these splits extended below the national level. In the Chamber of Deputies, twenty-four of the forty-eight PRD deputies demanded the removal of their

Chamber leader, former PRI-member Ignacio Castillo Mena. He in turn challenged those demanding his removal and called the group, led by former PMS member Pablo Gómez, adventurists. He also noted the door was open for them to leave the party if they wished.⁶⁹ In Nayarit both PMS and Democratic Current factions of the PRD held conventions and sent lists of selected candidates directly to Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas for his personal approval.⁷⁰ In Baja California Sur there was a definitive rupture, as the former members of the Democratic Current left the PRD to form the Democratic Party of Baja California Sur, leaving the state PRD in the hands of former PMS members.⁷¹

A variety of other problems impeded the organizational efforts of the party. A lack of financial resources, especially compared to the government-funded PRI and the relatively affluent PAN, was constant. Normally, groups of like-minded people meet, form a party, and then seek a leader to represent them. In the case of the PRD, a handful of leaders were looking for a base.⁷² The PRD also suffered from negative publicity just at the time the movement was creating an image in the public eye and was being scrutinized to determine its course. La Quina's arrest was handled poorly. After the arrest, PMS Deputy Gilberto Rincón Gallardo commented, "The authorities used the criminal charges just so they could repress the oil workers."⁷³ Such declarations were seized upon by those trying to discredit the party Cárdenas was organizing. For example, PRI Undersecretary Gándara Magaña wrote, "What a great error those leaders of the new left made when they tried to repay their campaign debt to La Quina with their public support for him, a support which is shared by virtually none of the population."⁷⁴ Critics of La Quina's arrest were confronted with the same delicate task faced by those criticizing President Bush's invasion of Panama. How do you criticize without seeming to defend a scoundrel? In the Mexican case some did this better than others. Elena Poniatowska simply referred to La Quina's replacement as his "moral twin brother," emphasizing continued corruption in labor. Similarly, Adolfo Gilly commented that La Quina had been replaced "by an equally corrupt but more docile leader."⁷⁵

Another highly publicized incident involved Cárdenas's position on the foreign debt. On December 7, 1988, when he visited the Overseas Development Council in Washington, Cárdenas commented on the debt question: "New terms have to be negotiated with the banks. We have never recommended unilateral decisions in the area."⁷⁶ Once back in México, on March 18, 1989, Cárdenas stated: "As a first step

our party proposes immediate suspension of debt payment under the current terms. We must begin a negotiation which recognizes mutual responsibility.”⁷⁷

Cárdenas’s apparent contradictions on the debt question soon led the press to comment he had one position for U.S. consumption and another for Mexico. The National Association of Revolutionary Engineers noted that if Cárdenas really opposed a unilateral debt moratorium, his position was to the right of president of the Business Coordinating Council (CCE).⁷⁸

Cárdenas’s subsequent efforts to clarify his debt stand only left the picture more muddled. In 1990 he noted: “At no time has the moratorium been presented as a unilateral decision by the government of Mexico. It doesn't appear in any documents, not in those of the Democratic Current, nor in those of the FDN, nor in any speeches of the FDN candidate, nor in any PRD document.”⁷⁹

Cárdenas was on shaky historical ground when he made such a statement. The platform of the Democratic Current stated that it advocated “the suspension of debt service as long as there is no just reduction of its amount, based on national interest, its market value, and an acknowledgement that lenders share responsibility for the debt problem.”⁸⁰ Similarly, in a 1988 preelection survey by the paper *La Jornada*, Cárdenas responded to the question of how he would deal with the foreign debt: “Negotiation must be carried out in a radically different way than it is now. To achieve this, it is necessary to stop the hemorrhaging of resources by suspending debt service for a time.”⁸¹

In addition to its strong stand on debt, the biggest asset the FDN took away from the 1988 elections was its commitment to democracy. A major factor undermining the PRD has been the tarnishing of this image; critics have seized on the issue. Thus, for example, economist Luis Pazos noted that despite PRD leaders’ profession of democracy, “None of them participated in it when members of the PRI.”⁸²

The first major blow to the PRD’s democratic image came with the nomination of Martha Maldonado as the PRD’s candidate for governor in Baja California. The nomination was widely described in the press as a “destape.” For example, Sergio Haro and Oscar Hinojosa wrote, “Cárdenas’ destape was a copy of a PRI destape. Salinas announced Margarita Ortega’s candidacy in the presidential residence, and Cárdenas announced Marta Maldonado’s in his residence in Las Lomas.”⁸³

Cárdenas was forced to defend the nomination procedure, noting that PRD members in Baja California had discussed candidates and agreed on Maldonado.

Cárdenas said she had then called on him to announce the decision.⁸⁴ Even if that version was more accurate, it merely shifted decision making to the Mexican equivalent of a bunch of good old boys in a smoke-filled room. If neither membership nor the press was even aware the process was going on, it can hardly be called democratic.

The PRD also failed to create procedures accepted by its own members as democratic. The primary to select candidates for the July 1989 elections in Michoacán was widely criticized. Dissidents claimed that PRI-style tactics were used, including people voting more than once and choosing candidates by *dedazo*.⁸⁵ PARM members charged the primaries were rigged against its members.⁸⁶ Guadalupe Ortiz Murillo, the former PRD representative to the Federal Electoral Commission, noted candidate selection in Michoacán was undemocratic, and, if the PRD was not careful, it would end up like the PRI.⁸⁷ Not surprisingly, those outside the party made similar comments. Columnist Edmundo González Llaca noted the PRD “resorted to forms of candidate selection that would make a dinosaur blush.”⁸⁸

The 1990 primary to select candidates for the special mayoral election in Uruapan was also criticized. The Union of Colonias Populares and the PRD municipal committee claimed state officials had imposed the PRD mayoral candidate on Uruapan. They stated: “We are in the PRD because they promise democracy. But if we see that they are using the old tactics of the government party, we’ll just sit out the elections.” The state PRD proceeded to expel fourteen party members from Uruapan who claimed the procedures were rigged. Regardless of whether the primary was actually rigged, the issue dragged on for days in the press, damaging the PRD’s image.⁸⁹

The PRD’s democratic image was also tarnished by disputes swirling around Porfirio Muñoz Ledo. The first flap involving Muñoz Ledo began when Cárdenas was campaigning in Nayarit. He was quoted as saying that Muñoz Ledo should clarify his actions there in 1975.⁹⁰ In 1975 Muñoz Ledo was president of the PRI and Alejandro Gascón Mercado had just been defeated as the PPS candidate for governor in what many regarded as a stolen election.

Although Cárdenas later denied he had stated that Muñoz Ledo should clarify his 1975 acts, Pandora’s box had been opened.⁹¹ Muñoz Ledo tried to put the matter behind him by saying there were irregularities in the election and that he had denounced them at the time. The PRI paper *El Nacional* not only quoted his 1990 statement, but published what Muñoz Ledo had actually said concerning the elections

in 1975. He had declared them to be “fair and democratic” and had claimed that they expressed the will of the majority.⁹² While little was actually clarified about the 1975 election, the matter was discussed on the front page of *El Nacional* for days and was widely publicized in other media.

The PRD’s democratic image was further undermined by another incident involving Muñoz Ledo. In the fall of 1990, Muñoz Ledo decided he wanted to be the PRD candidate for the 1991 gubernatorial election in Guanajuato. There was a significant obstacle facing Muñoz Ledo: the state constitution of Guanajuato. It stipulated that in order to be eligible for governor a person had to either be born in the state or have lived there for five years. Muñoz Ledo quite clearly did not meet either of these qualifications. Not only had he been born in Mexico City, but at the time he decided to launch his candidacy, he was serving as PRD senator for the Federal District.

Muñoz Ledo declared himself to be eligible by virtue of “blood right,” based on his family’s having settled in Guanajuato in the late 1600s. Only in recent times had his family moved to Mexico City. Not surprisingly, this set off a strong media reaction. A headline in *El Universal* announced, “Muñoz Ledo acts unconstitutionally in Guanajuato.”⁹³ Columnist Federico Arreola commented, “Muñoz Ledo is a man who knows a lot of dirty tricks, which he learned in the PRI, and a man of little morality, which he showed in Guanajuato.”⁹⁴

Muñoz Ledo’s aspiring to the gubernatorial nomination also provided the opposition fertile ground for criticism. Vicente Fox, who was nominated in October 1990 as the PAN candidate for governor of Guanajuato, noted: “It is understandable that a person like Muñoz Ledo, due to his egocentrism, would want to be a candidate. However when a political institution like the PRD defrauds both its members and the citizens at large, it appears to me to be irresponsible.”⁹⁵

Samuel del Villar, the PRD legal adviser, declared that Muñoz Ledo was not eligible to be governor since Mexico does not recognize blood rights. Rather than accepting the opinion of his own party’s legal adviser, Muñoz Ledo dismissed del Villar’s opinions as “suspicious,” and stated that he should stop “interfering with the internal affairs of Guanajuato.”⁹⁶ This was a strange charge coming from someone who not only was living in Mexico City, but was serving as a Federal District senator. All in all the matter reflected poorly on the PRD since, with few exceptions, such as del Villar, the entire party structure supported Muñoz Ledo’s candidacy.

The carpetbagger phenomenon has also tainted the party's image. The case of Muñoz Ledo has already been mentioned. Similarly, in 1992, Heberto Castillo was the PRD candidate for governor of Veracruz. There was no question of the legality of Castillo's candidacy—he was born in Ixhuatlán de Madero, Veracruz, in 1928. However, Castillo's parents moved to Mexico City when he was still in grade school.⁹⁷ Thus, his return to Veracruz as a candidate half a century later cast the PRD more in the role of employment agency for idle politicians than a force for democracy.

The PRD's being centered around one person, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, also created problems. Cárdenas was aware of this, noting: "I realize that much of the campaign response is still centered around one person, around me. It isn't easy to translate an electoral response into a consistent party organization."⁹⁸ Two years after the call for its founding, a columnist remarked, "The PRD continues to be the patrimony of a single man."⁹⁹ The difficulty of transforming the following of an individual into a formal party was indicated by a poll conducted before the elections in the State of Mexico. Only 29 percent of the respondents could identify the party that represented Cárdenas.¹⁰⁰

A year after Cárdenas's call for the founding of a party, a PRD internal document noted: "Only with Cárdenas is it possible to have important public gatherings. A party such as the one we wish to construct cannot and should not rely only on the popularity of one of its leaders."¹⁰¹ This domination of the party both formally and informally became the subject of criticism. After resigning from the PRD, Jorge Alcocer observed: "It's not a secret that the main decisions are taken outside the party headquarters. What is important are these informal decisions, not the debates and meetings of the formal party organs."¹⁰² Alcocer also criticized Cárdenas's role in the party: "Cárdenas's leadership has become a negative factor. I feel it is retarding the development of the PRD and that it inhibits, in various ways, the participation of many capable party leaders who are important in their own right."¹⁰³

Rather than pressing the issue of decentralizing power, the party simply wrote rules that concentrated it. The party's statutes (Art. 42, Sec. VII) provided that the party's president name all members of the National Executive Council. The National Council would then approve or reject them as a bloc. The party's president, of course, was Cárdenas. Heberto Castillo criticized this: "I continue to feel that it is undemocratic to give one member of the leadership, regardless of what his surname is, the power to choose members of the Party's National Executive Council."¹⁰⁴

Cárdenas's dominant role in the party has not only produced complaints, but is closely associated with the PRD's reduced vote percentage. Since his name has not appeared on a ballot since 1988, the PRD has failed to attract voters whose principal loyalty is to Cárdenas. Some of those who voted him for in 1988 felt nostalgia for his father, but have yet to identify with the PRD.

The PRD was also hurt by the difficulty of extending its vision to the local level. The responsibilities of local officials, filling potholes and treating sewage, do not easily lend themselves to differing ideologies. This has made it difficult to appeal to voters as a PRD candidate. It was also difficult to come up with a catchy sound bite like "suspend debt payments" (if indeed Cárdenas's movement stood for that) to describe local programs.

An example of this difficulty can be found in the campaign material of Patricia Flores Carlos, the PRD's 1991 candidate for state legislature from District 13 in Monterrey, Nuevo León. Her campaign pamphlet stated:

Democracy is creating and promoting laws which respond to the interests of the residents of this district concerning matters such as traffic, ecology, marginal areas, social development, urban development, education, and preserving neighborhoods as the nucleus of family development.

It is hard to disagree with such goals; however, all of them could just as easily have been promised by a PRI or a PAN candidate.

The same problem of designing a distinctly PRD local program became apparent in Morelia. In his inaugural address, Mayor Maldonado listed some twenty-one problem areas he would address, including environmental problems, better bus service, parks, jobs, street vendors, and garbage collection.¹⁰⁵ While all were laudable goals, none reflected a PRD approach, as opposed to just generic good municipal administration. When specifically asked how, other than being efficient and honest, he would incorporate PRD ideology into municipal administration, Maldonado responded by saying he would "respect the Constitution and laws."¹⁰⁶ Again, this is laudable but does not differentiate the PRD from other parties.

The party has often been criticized for being too standoffish, likely a product of its initial belief that it could attain power alone. It has criticized popular movements for taking badly needed Solidarity money, thus isolating itself from them.¹⁰⁷ The PRD

founded its own group, the Democratic Peasant Union, which cut it off from other peasant groups.¹⁰⁸ Similarly it failed to accept an alliance with the CDPs as equals.¹⁰⁹ Finally it failed to back Rulfo in Baja California when it could have. This would have left the PRD with a share of the glory rather than the legacy of a mediocre campaign.¹¹⁰

The PRD's problems were highlighted by the December 26, 1990, resignation of Jorge Alcocer from the PRD. Alcocer had a long (for a thirty-five-year old) career in the Left, having joined the Mexican Communist Party in 1978, and then having stayed with it through its mergers to form the PSUM and then the PMS. He was a PRD leader who served as the PRD's representative to the Federal Electoral Commission.

At the time of his resignation, Alcocer voiced a wide range range of criticisms of the PRD. He charged that the National Executive Committee of the PRD was dominated by former members of the PRI, to the exclusion of socialists, specifically former members of PSUM. He also criticized the party for being too centralized. Other of his criticisms were quoted above. Most of his views had been aired before, but they were particularly damaging, due not only to his stature within the party, but to the widespread publicity they received.

Despite having fallen behind what they had initially hoped to achieve, PRD organizers have by no means given up. As of 1992, the PRD effort might be compared to that of Polish Solidarity in 1985. The common feature of both movements is having lost ground. The hope for the PRD is ultimately what saved the Polish movement from obscurity, the incumbents' inability to manage the economy. PRD hopes are largely based on Salinas's early economic promise fading. This is not an unlikely event given the near collapse of the economy at the end of the terms of Salinas's three immediate predecessors and the faltering of the Mexican stock market in mid-1992. The other crucial ingredient to a 1994 PRD success—it was hoped—would be the presence, once again, of Cárdenas's name on the ballot.

Appendix
Comparison of 1988–1991 State Electoral Results (Percentages)

Tabasco (Nov. 1988)	19.9	20.5 ^a
Jalisco (Dec. 1988)	23.9	10.1 ^b
Zacatecas (Dec. 1988)	22.3	0.7 ^c
Baja California (July 1989)	37.2	2.8
Campeche (July 1989)	16.3	2.0
Chihuahua (July 1989)	6.8	1.2
Durango (July 1989)	18.8	3.2
Michoacán (July 1989)	64.2	40.3
Zacatecas (July 1989)	22.3	5.6
Oaxaca (Aug. 1989)	30.3	6.7
Veracruz (Sept. 1989)	31.1	6.0
Aguascalientes (Oct. 1989)	18.7	1.8
Sinaloa (Oct. 1989)	16.8	4.2
Puebla (Nov. 1989)	17.7	6.3
Tamaulipas (Nov. 1989)	30.2	9.0
Tlaxcala (Nov. 1989)	31.0	7.5
Guerrero (Dec. 1989)	35.8	24.3
Michoacán (Dec. 1989)	64.2	42.3 ^d
Hidalgo (Jan. 1990)	28.3	5.6
Quintana Roo (March 1990)	24.1	9.4
Nayarit (June 1990)	36.8	10.3
Baja California Sur (July 1990)	25.9	2.8
San Luis Potosí (Aug. 1990)	8.8	1.6
Estado de México (Nov. 1990)	51.6	14.5
Yucatán (Nov. 1990)	1.6	1.9
Morelos (March 1991)	57.7	20.7

Note: Vote percentages for the 1988 federal election are from *El Cotidiano*, Sept.–Dec. 1988, p. 16. Unless otherwise indicated, vote percentages for state elections are from Medina (1991: 18).

^aGómez Tagle & Holtz 1989: 25 (percentage is for FDN gubernatorial candidate).

^b*La Jornada*, Dec. 13, 1988, p. 7 (percentage is for Cardenista Coalition of Jalisco).

^c*La Jornada*, Dec. 13, 1988, p. 13 (percentage is for PARM).

^d*Motivos*, March 23, 1992, p. 23.

Notes

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1. Medina 1991: 18.
2. *El Financiero Internacional*, Sept. 9, 1991, p. 11.
3. Woldenberg 1990: 104.
4. *El Universal*, Nov. 25, 1990, p. 8.
5. *Comunica*, June 15, 1990, p. 4.
6. PRD 1992: 115.
7. Salazar C. 1990: 14.
8. Quoted in Carrillo 1990: 37.
9. Rodríguez Araujo 1991: 112.
10. PRI 1990: 49.
11. Author's interview with Cárdenas, Sept. 1990.
12. *Excélsior*, Nov. 11, 1989, p. 12A.
13. Segovia 1989, p. iv.
14. *El Financiero*, Nov. 26, 1990, p. 44.
15. *Mira*, Feb. 14, 1990, p. 18.
16. Author's interview with Cárdenas, Dec. 1988.
17. Castañeda 1990: 55–59.
18. Debray 1990: 28.
19. Sirvent 1990: 43.
20. *Uno más Uno*, July 6, 1989, p. 9.
21. *Mexico Journal*, Oct. 2, 1989, p. 11.
22. *Correo del PRD*, Jan. 1990, p. 8.
23. PRD 1990c: 30.
24. *Excélsior*, May 28, 1989, p. 4A; *La Jornada*, Nov. 17, 1990, p. 11; *Uno más Uno*, May 4, 1990, p.1.
25. *Nexos*, July 1990, p. 42.
26. Author's interview with Cárdenas, Sept. 1990.
27. Krauze 1992: 116–17.
28. PRD 1990a: 3.
29. PRD 1990b: 38–137.
30. *Excélsior*, Jan. 14, 1990, pp. 1A & 30A.
31. *Mexico Journal*, Jan. 9, 1989, p. 8.
32. *La Jornada*, July 5, 1989, p. 9.
33. *La Jornada*, May 25, 1990, p. 5.
34. *Proceso*, Sept. 18, 1989, p. 8.
35. Lerner 1989: 16.
36. *Mexico Journal*, Nov. 13, 1989, p. 39.
37. *Wall Street Journal*, Nov. 1, 1963, p. 1.
38. Whalen 1990: 42.
39. *Excélsior*, April 24, 1989, p. 6A.
40. Author's interview with Martínez, April 1992.
41. *El Norte*, April 20, 1990, p. 2A.
42. *Seis de Julio*, Nov. 29, 1989, p. 6.
43. *Uno más Uno*, Nov. 28, 1989, p. 36.
44. *Uno más Uno*, April 11, 1990, p. 1.
45. *La Jornada*, May 22, 1990, p. 6.

46. Galindo López 1989: 16.
47. *Nexos*, July 1990, p. 38.
48. *El Universal*, Aug. 2, 1989, p. 2.
49. *Proceso*, Jan. 7, 1991, p. 8.
50. *Proceso*, Jan. 7, 1991, p. 11.
51. Author's interview with González Guevara, Dec. 1991.
52. *El Financiero*, May 10, 1989, p. 36.
53. Medina 1991: 18.
54. *Excélsior*, Jan. 11, 1989, p. 30A.
55. Reding 1989: 692.
56. *Duro*, Jan. 21, 1989, p. 5.
57. *Proceso*, Aug. 14, 1989, p. 34.
58. *Estrategia*, Nov.-Dec. 1989, p. 44.
59. *Seis de Julio*, Dec. 20, 1989, p. 5.
60. *El Universal*, Dec. 18, 1990, p. 2.
61. Author's interview with González Guevara, Dec. 1991.
62. *Proceso*, Aug. 13, 1990, p. 21.
63. *Proceso*, Nov. 19, 1990, p. 15.
64. Melgar 1990: 104.
65. *Proceso*, Oct. 23, 1989, p. 13.
66. *Mexico Journal*, Jan. 16, 1989, p. 11.
67. *La Jornada*, May 8, 1989, p. 10.
68. Romero M. 1991: 50.
69. *El Norte*, June 1, 1990, p. 13A.
70. *Proceso*, May 7, 1990, p. 32.
71. *Excélsior*, Jan. 28, 1990, p. 29A.
72. *Mexico Journal*, Feb. 20, 1989, p. 21.
73. *Uno más Uno*, Jan. 11, 1989, p. 5.
74. *Jueves de Excélsior*, March 30, 1989, p. 39.
75. Poniatowska 1989 & Gilly 1990: 65.
76. Cárdenas 1990: 45.
77. *Correo del PRD*, Jan. 1990, p. 16.
78. *El Economista*, May 10, 1989, p. 5.
79. *Nexos*, July 1990, p. 41.
80. *Corriente Democrática* 1987: 20.
81. Delgado 1988: 63.
82. *El Financiero*, Dec. 26, 1988, p. 4.
83. *Proceso*, April 10, 1989, p. 28.
84. *La Jornada*, April 8, 1989, p. 2.
85. *Excélsior*, Nov. 28, 1989, p. 33A.
86. Sirvent 1990: 43.
87. *El Financiero*, Oct. 13, 1989, p. 40.
88. *Excélsior*, Nov. 2, 1989, p. 9A.
89. *La Voz de Michoacán*, May 7, 1990, p. 3E, & May 12, p. 3E.
90. *El Universal*, Sept. 22, 1989, p. 1.
91. *La Jornada*, Sept. 23, 1989, p. 8.
92. *El Nacional* (Sept. 25, 1989, p. 1) quoted Muñoz Ledo's statement that he denounced irregularities in 1975. It also quoted his declaration in 1975 that the elections were "fair." When originally published in *El Nacional* (Nov. 21, 1975), Muñoz Ledo's declaration was on page 7. When it resurfaced (Sept. 24, 1989), it made page 1.
93. *El Universal*, Sept. 23, 1990, p. 26.
94. *El Norte*, Oct. 26, 1990, p. 4A.
95. *El Economista*, Oct. 23, 1990, p. 25.
96. *Uno más Uno*, Oct. 11, 1990, p. 5.

97. Arista Jiménez 1987: 42.
98. *Mexico Journal*, Dec. 11, 1989, p. 18.
99. *El Universal*, Nov. 25, 1990, p. 2.
100. *Uno más Uno*, Oct. 10, 1990, p. 5.
101. *Excélsior*, Oct. 15, 1989, p. 29A.
102. *Proceso*, Jan. 7, 1991, p. 7.
103. *Proceso*, Jan. 7, 1991, p. 10.
104. *El Universal*, Jan. 3, 1991, p. 6.
105. *La Voz de Michoacán*, Jan. 2, 1990, p. 12A.
106. Author's interview with Maldonado, April 1992.
107. PRD 1990c: 79.
108. Moguel 1991: 25.
109. Haber 1989: 38.
110. Valderrábano 1990: 96.

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