

**From “*Pochos*” to Heroes: the Incorporation of the Mexican Diaspora  
into their Homeland Polity**

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Mexico has pursued different forms of involvement and interaction with its expatriate community in the United States. In the late nineteenth century and until the great deportation of Mexicans during the depression years, the Mexican government was highly involved in the social, political and cultural life of émigrés in the United States (Santamaría Gómez 2001). Having a relatively small population, which further declined as a result of the Revolution, Mexico also followed during that period an unsuccessful policy of discouraging emigration, since there was the view that the entire population was needed to rebuild the country. Emigrants that went north, notwithstanding, and were perceived as adopting Anglo-Saxon values, were called *Pochos*, and in the national imaginary they were considered traitors.

The somewhat close relationship established with the expatriate community during the first few revolutionary governments, changed to a more distant one from the 1940s to the 1980s when the Mexican government turned inward and focused its energy on promoting economic development while at the same time it became suspicious of any involvement in Mexico's political affairs by people living outside its national territory. During that period, the government recognized that it could not prevent emigration, even though the exploitation of emigrants in the United States was seen as an offense to the national pride. For instance, now that the population was growing at a rapid pace, emigration started to be seen and even used as a safety valve to contain political conflict at home. For this reason after negotiating the second guest worker program with the United States during World War Two, the Mexican government made sure that *braceros* or laborers were recruited from Mexico's central plateau, a region densely populated and with limited job opportunities (Corwin 1978). In this second period, the only defined policy towards Mexicans abroad was to protect the rights of Mexican workers in the United States (both of *braceros* and undocumented immigrants) and to assist them with consular support. Since the government had a foreign policy doctrine of non-intervention in the political life of other countries (so as to avoid the intervention of other countries in Mexico's political life) it did not intervene in Mexican-Americans' struggles to gain political rights in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s.

By the 1990s, the distant attitude towards the Mexican population in the United States and even of scorn towards émigrés that adopted Anglo-Saxon values changed again in favor of a more interactive and involved relationship. Thus, since that decade the Mexican government has implemented a series of policies that differentiate among the various groups that integrate the Mexican population in the United States. First there have been policies aimed at improving relations with Mexican-Americans so that they become an important ally in Mexico's foreign policy agenda towards its northern neighbor. Second there have been policies targeted towards expatriates that have settled in the United States. Here the main goal has been to mobilize and organize them, so that they participate more actively in the economic development of their places and country of origin. Finally, the Mexican government has maintained its active policy of defending the rights of Mexican workers in the United States regardless of their legal status. This goal, for instance, acquired even greater priority when Vicente Fox became president. One of Fox's major foreign policy goals has been to negotiate with the United States a program to regularize the status of undocumented Mexicans that are currently in that country.

Emigrants have become so relevant in Fox's discourse that he has even revalued their previous status in national rhetoric as traitors, and has called them "heroes".

The different interactions between the Mexican government and the Mexican community abroad over a century have provoked different responses from expatriates. From the beginning of the twentieth century to the mid 1930s Mexican émigrés were highly interested in Mexico's political developments, a situation that was encouraged by Mexico's political class, particularly by the one that emerged from the Revolution. The limited interaction between the Mexican government and the Mexican community in its northern neighbor after the 1940s discouraged any mobilization and claims-making focused on the homeland. This lack of mobilization was facilitated by the fact that Mexican emigration to the United States evolved from being political and economic in nature, to being mostly economic. Thus while emigrants from the beginning of the twentieth century represented different strata and educational levels of the Mexican society most emigrants after the 1940s were young, male, and temporary laborers from the countryside, with low education levels. By the 1980s the political democratization that was taking place in Mexico motivated émigrés to look back again to their country of origin, a situation that was encouraged by opposition leaders from the left who courted the support of expatriates to advance their political agendas. The new policies implemented by the Mexican government in the 1990s towards Mexicans abroad encouraged the involvement of expatriates in Mexico's economic and political life. This situation was also facilitated by the fact that many Mexicans had by then achieved a stable legal and economic status in the United States, and thus had the time and financial means to be involved in activities focused on their homeland.

This paper traces the interactions between the Mexican state and the Mexican community in the United States. These interactions will be studied by using a political opportunity structure approach that considers how Mexico's different institutions and institutional practices have motivated or inhibited the mobilization of Mexicans in the United States towards their home and host countries. The main point I want to stress is that political developments in Mexico and Mexican institutional practices towards Mexicans abroad have clearly determined the ways in which Mexican immigrants have mobilized and organized themselves in the United States. They have also shaped their political agendas towards their home and host countries. For instance, the political mobilization of Mexicans in the United States has been expanding as new structures of opportunity are being opened up for them in their homeland. In this regard, to the extent that Mexicans in the United States have developed a social movement<sup>1</sup> towards their homeland, and more recently probably towards their host country, the successes and limitations of this social movement have been clearly determined by the recent institutional actions taken by the Mexican state towards Mexicans abroad, many of which have, whether intentionally or not, allowed emigrants, to acquire a new consciousness about their capacity to influence political events in their home and host country.

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<sup>1</sup> Here I follow the definition of social movement applied by (Costain 1994; Mcadam 1999).

## **The incorporation of Mexicans into their homeland polity: a political opportunity structure view**

The structure of opportunity and constraint created by institutions and institutional practices of the United States have affected the ways Mexicans have mobilized, organized and incorporated in their host country. This, however, has not been the only factor in determining the political attitudes of Mexican immigrants. Their interactions with the structure of opportunity of their homeland have also played a crucial role.

As has been demonstrated by the literature on transnationalism, emigrants tend to retain many emotional ties with their countries and places of origin that propel them to get involved in what happens there. These emotional ties and the motivation to participate in their place and/or country of origin do not always translate, however, into political action. Political developments in the homeland as well as its policies (or lack of policies) towards émigrés shape the possibilities for emigrants to become politically active towards their homeland. These opportunities and constraints also determine the extent to which the political agenda they articulate towards their country of origin will succeed.

Mexico has created a variety of incentives and obstacles relating to expatriate participation in Mexican political life. These have resulted from specific political events in Mexico, from the perceptions Mexican political elites have held about expatriates, and from the policies that have been implemented as a result of those perceptions. My analysis of the impact of Mexico on Mexican American political life includes how emigrants have been incorporated into the idea of the Mexican nation (national cleavage structures); the channels that have been opened or closed by different institutional actors and legal arrangements for their participation in the political process (institutional actors and legal arrangements); the ways emigrants have been able to insert their demands within the political system (prevailing elite strategies/political culture and idioms); and, finally, specific events that have mobilized expatriates towards political developments back home (contingencies of time and place)(Koopmans and Statham 2000).

**1. National cleavage structures.** These refer to ideological spaces available for emigrants to articulate political demands towards their homeland. They include institutionalized debates about who belongs to the nation and who does not and how access to political membership has been historically constructed. With respect to Mexico they encompass the ways Mexican expatriates have been included within the highly nationalistic discourse used by Mexican institutions and political actors; as well as within the general notions of democracy and citizenship that have prevailed in that country.

### **1.1 The Mexican nation and Mexicans abroad**

President Ernesto Zedillo declared at the outset of his presidency that the Mexican nation was not limited to the physical territory of the country. This was affirmed in his National Development Plan 1995-2000, in the chapter called “the Mexican nation.” The new notion of the Mexican nation offered by Zedillo was the basis of the initiative to Congress that reformed Mexico’s nationality laws in 1997. This reform, which took

effect in 1998, allowed Mexicans to naturalize as citizens of another country while retaining their Mexican nationality. This meant in practice meant that they would keep or obtain (for Mexican-Americans with at least one Mexican parent) important economic rights such as the acquisition of property in places restricted only to Mexicans

Even if some Mexicans abroad considered the new nationality law unsatisfactory because it said nothing about the right to vote from abroad, Zedillo's redefinition of the nation, and his reform of the nationality laws reflected a dramatic change in the notions that the Mexican state had had until then about what it meant to be a member of the Mexican nation.

Since independence Mexico has been a strongly nationalistic country. Nationalism served two purposes: first, establishing a new, cohesive country from a former Spanish colony; second, counterbalancing the constant threat to Mexico's sovereignty represented by European powers (such as France that from 1861 to 1867 imposed a puppet emperor in Mexico), and the United States (which on two occasions invaded the Mexico's territory).

Although the Mexican population has never been homogeneous,<sup>2</sup> Mexican political authorities and intellectuals argued that Mexico was a nation-state integrated by a *mestizo* people, that is, people from joint European-Indigenous ancestry. The political class that emerged from the Mexican Revolution enthusiastically embraced this conception. Concerned about unifying the country after years of war, this elite developed a nationalistic discourse that reinforced the notion of a *mestizo* state in which the various indigenous groups existent in the country were gradually fused with one another and with a lesser number of Spanish (Castilian) people to form a basically undifferentiated whole.

This discourse evidently excluded many groups from the idea of the nation. The large indigenous population of the country, for example, did not have a distinct space in this conception. Although the governments that emerged from the Revolution consistently exploited as part of an idealized view about Mexico's pre-Hispanic cultures, the indigenous people that descended from those cultures were perceived as a problem from the point of view of national unification and economic advancement. As a result, many efforts were oriented towards their assimilation into the mainstream culture, to the detriment of their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Mexican emigrants were also excluded from the idea of the nation. However, the view of their role was ambiguous. On the one hand, the state has always shown a deep concern about the fate of those that emigrated to the United States in search of work. . As a result from 1900 until the 1930s the government attempted, futilely, to discourage emigration, which was viewed as a drain of the national labor force. Even when Mexico agreed to the *Bracero* programs of the 1940s and 1960s, which implied an acceptance by the government that emigration was unavoidable since the country could not provide all

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<sup>2</sup> World Almanac figures describe the ethnic composition of the country as 60 percent mestizo, 10 percent European and 30 percent native-American see: <http://www.ivacation.com/ivhalmanac/almanac.asp?CityID=356>

of its population with economic opportunities, Mexican authorities followed a policy of discouraging emigration by advising of the risks of going north.

On the other hand, those emigrating north were viewed critically and in many occasions they were portrayed as traitors. Mexican intellectuals and politicians were suspicious of those emigrants that adopted “American values”. In general, those Mexicans that established themselves in the United States, even if their integration was partial, were despised because they were thought as adopting English terminologies and American values in detriment of their Spanish language and their Mexican heritage. This critical attitude grew in part out of the fact that a main element of Mexican nationalism was anti-Americanism, a product of the constant threat that the United States represented for Mexico. Therefore, anyone perceived as embracing the American culture was viewed with scorn.

By the mid-1950s negative attitudes was extended to poor laborers or *mojados* whom Mexican authorities had usually treated as innocent victims of unfortunate circumstances. A specific event contributed to this. Mexican officials closed several entry points on the border with California in January 1954 with the goal of preventing employers from recruiting *braceros* without meeting Mexican conditions spelled out in the *bracero* convention of August 2, 1951. This provoked aspiring *braceros* to fight “like caged animals against Mexican police and border guards in an effort to cross over and sign up with waiting contractors (Corwin 1978; 186).”

This spectacle of Mexicans against Mexicans, which was graphically registered by the national press, shocked not only Mexican authorities but also the public. Increasingly afterwards, emigrants were seen less as “humble *campesinos* driven involuntarily into the jaws of Anglo capitalists” (Corwin 1978; 186), and more as laborers who allowed themselves to be exploited by American employers.

In the mid 1980s when a large number of émigrés were granted legal status in the United States, Mexican authorities realized that the situation of expatriates in the United States would change dramatically. First the newly legalized would certainly settle permanently in the United States and bring their families with them, a situation that would diminish their direct ties to Mexico. Second, their living conditions would improve with legal status that would facilitate their adaptation to the American society. Their loyalty to Mexico, and the remittances they sent, therefore, could not be taken for granted anymore. A new policy towards expatriates was needed. Emigrants evidently could not be regarded simply as victims of Anglo employers, even if many would not be able to regularize their immigration status and would thus continue to confront bad working conditions. Emigrants, however could not also be perceived as traitors, or as people that abandon their Mexican heritage because most of them had maintained a strong sense of Mexican identity a situation that was reflected in the food they ate, their constant display of Mexican flags in different situations, the hometown associations they were establishing to support the development of their places of origin, and other attitudes they showed.

At the policy level, however, major changes towards expatriates did not take place until 1990. The government of Carlos Salinas de Gortari institutionalized the relationship between the state and Mexicans abroad by creating the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad within the Ministry of Foreign Relations.

The Salinas administration also represented a period in which the traditional anti-Americanism of the Mexican political system changed. The deep economic crises of the 1980s showed that Mexico could not develop economically by applying only inward looking policies, but that it needed to find a way to integrate itself into the world economy. The solution offered by the Salinas government was to look for a rapprochement with the United States. This situation along with the realization by the political class that formerly excluded groups had to be incorporated into the polity facilitated the reformulation of the idea of the nation introduced in 1995 by Ernesto Zedillo, Salina's successor.

Zedillo's reformulation of the idea of the nation as extending beyond Mexican borders as well as the reforms in the nationality laws that were approved in 1996 implied that Mexico no longer expected emigrants to return to the country, but recognized that they could be Mexican and at the same time integrate into American society. For instance, this last issue became a major goal in Zedillo's policy towards Mexicans abroad particularly after the approval of Proposition 187 in California showed that the best way for the Mexican government to defend Mexicans abroad was to motivate them to become American citizens so that they could become a political force in the United States and defend their interests themselves.

In 2000 Vicente Fox, Zedillo's successor, went beyond Zedillo's ideas by arguing that Mexican emigrants were not only members of the Mexican nation but also national heroes, thus converting them into important subjects for his administration. Two days after his inauguration, on December 3, 2000, Fox hosted a special reception for Mexicans abroad that included a wide delegation of both well-known Mexican-Americans and successful expatriates. At this unprecedented event he vowed that he would govern "for 118 million Mexicans" –the 100 million in Mexico and the 18 million people of Mexican descent in the United States (Smith 2000). This commentary showed the relevance Mexicans abroad would have for his government but it created confusion and skepticism among Mexican-Americans as well as political pundits both in Mexico and the United States. While Zedillo's argument that the Mexican nation extended beyond the Mexican borders, represented mostly a symbolic gesture that attempted to reconcile Mexico with its émigrés and with Mexican-Americans, Fox's goal of governing those Mexicans that resided outside Mexico's territory brought with it a complex political content that was difficult to digest. Fox was probably trying to say that he wanted to be accountable to Mexicans abroad as he was to Mexicans within the national territory, but his ill-fated suggestion raised many questions with difficult and controversial answers: how can he govern for a group of people that did not vote for him? How can he govern a specific population within the territory of another sovereign country that is the United States? What can he offer them? How can he be accountable to them? How can he expect them to comply with Mexico's law? Certainly, Fox's suggestion showed the complexities of

incorporating into the idea of the nation and into the polity of a country of emigrants a population group that lives beyond the national border and that can be in the position of claiming simultaneous allegiances to two sovereignties. Despite these doubts, Fox's discourse, as well as Zedillo's reformulation of the idea of the nation, have certainly opened new opportunities for the mobilization of Mexican expatriates in the United States, since they now have a legitimate claim on Mexico's destiny, as has been recognized by the last two Mexican presidents.

## **1.2 Citizenship, democratization, and the incorporation of emigrants into Mexico's polity**

In the last decade Mexican emigrants to the United States have articulated as one of their main agendas the acquisition of political rights in their homeland. This type of demand has not emerged exclusively within the Mexican community in the United States. Other emigrant groups have made similar demands in the last few years, including Dominicans, Haitians, Colombians, Ecuadorians, Indians, Turks and many others. Even though these claims towards emigration countries have become a common feature at the end of the twentieth century, the Mexican case is still striking. Before the 1980s, Mexican emigrants would not have demanded political rights in their homeland for the simple reason that properly speaking these rights were not yet available or relevant to many Mexicans residing in Mexico. The demand for political rights is linked, for instance, to the structures of opportunities that Mexico's democratization process and changing notions of citizenship have opened for the participation of Mexicans abroad in Mexico's political affairs.

## **1.3 Political rights: An old demand?**

The desire for the right to vote from abroad is very old. In 1929 a group of Mexican expatriates raised this issue with José Vasconcelos, then a candidate for Mexico's presidency (Santamaría Gómez 2001). The plea, however, had not even the remotest chance of being considered in Mexico because the democratic rights that these émigrés were seeking were not relevant in Mexico at that time. For instance, in the same year Vasconcelos was forced into a long political exile in the United States when his opponent, Pascual Ortiz Rubio the candidate of the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), which later became the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was finally elected Mexico's president. After that election, the PRI consolidated its control of Mexico's political life for more than sixty years. Although elections were held every six years, they were not competitive and they did not determine Mexico's political destiny. This situation guaranteed that no such demands from expatriates would emerge until 1988 when Mexican elections became meaningful again. In this regard, we can argue that the search for the right to vote from abroad articulated by Mexican expatriates in the last two decades does not represent a continuation of the old demand. They are not really connected because they emerged in very different contexts and under very different circumstances.

The expatriates' demand to vote from abroad can be traced, in contrast, to Mexico's democratization process and the struggles of many sectors of the Mexican

population to acquire effective political rights. These struggles emerged clearly at the end of the 1960s with the student movement, but became more prominent during the 1970s and 1980s. During those years one aspect of citizenship as described by Marshall (Marshall 1992), the political one, became more prominent in Mexican debates than it ever was before. Scholars, intellectuals, and leaders from the opposition all argued for an opening in the political system and the inclusion of a greater proportion of the population, who were deprived of real citizenship rights because their votes were controlled, and in the cases where they were not, they did not count because electoral competition did not really exist. Citizenship in Mexico was thus linked to the notion of democracy until the 1970s and 1980s. Prior to those decades, the notion of citizenship was not really connected to political rights in the national debate (although it was in the Constitution) but rather to social and civil rights.

Since the Mexican revolution had a powerful social content, the 1917 Constitution that resulted strongly emphasized social entitlements and liberal rights that would be advanced through the consolidation of post-revolutionary institutional arrangements around the corporatist state and an ambitious agrarian reform (Domingo 1999).

All these goals established by the Constitution gave the political regime that emerged from the Revolution a legitimacy to act on behalf of the different social sectors integrated in its corporatist structure even though it lacked democratic legitimacy obtained through electoral processes. For many years, social justice framed the idea of citizenship, and was the major promise in governmental discourses. By 1982, when the “Mexican miracle” stop producing economic growth and the country entered into a deep economic crisis, the goal of social justice got somewhat lost as the state no longer had the necessary resources to reproduce its corporatist and clientelist alliances with different sectors of society. This is the moment when the notion of democratic rights starts to become the central idea of citizenship. From then on, the national debate centered on opening the political system to include formerly excluded actors and political parties, a situation that was facilitated by electoral reforms implemented in 1977 with the goal of permitting a viable opposition. Young people, the middle class, and urban groups, even if not well organized, called for a greater voice in the polity. By the late 1980s, but more clearly by the early 1990s, this same agenda had been adopted by emigrant organizations that represented a sector of the population that was historically excluded not only from the polity but also from national development projects.

The event that marked a turning point in the way Mexicans abroad related with the Mexican political system was the 1988 election. Until then, expatriates had not articulated any specific political demand towards the Mexican state. Although a few years earlier there were attempts by Chicano political activists to organize the Mexican community in the United States around a demand for democracy in Mexico, they were not very successful, probably because they centered on an abstract agenda<sup>3</sup>. The political campaign that preceded the 1988 presidential elections gave them, in contrast, a very concrete political agenda: to participate in Mexico’s democratization process by helping

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<sup>3</sup> This information was recollected by Denisse Dresser during an interview with Ben-Garza a longtime Chicano activist in California (Dresser, 1993:99).

Cuahtémoc Cárdenas, the candidate of the *Frente Cardenista* or Cardenista Front, to win the presidential elections against Carlos Salinas, the PRI candidate. Visits by Cardenas to California during his campaign helped mobilize expatriates who formed various groups to support him.

Those who mobilized in favor of Cárdenas belonged to a sector of dissatisfied expatriates that had emigrated in the 1980s as a result of Mexico's economic crises and that represented an emigrant profile different from the one that had characterized the Mexican emigrant of previous decades (Dresser, 1993: 99). This sector included electricians, mechanics and people with higher levels of education, many of whom were already politically active in Mexico through their participation in unions and student or professional organizations. In other cases people within this group had acquired some political experience in the United States through their participation in pro-immigrant and pro-labor rights organizations<sup>4</sup>. A large number of the members of this sector had achieved a stable legal and socio-economic status in the United States that facilitated their participation in political causes. This sector was not properly organized prior to 1988. Cárdenas' political campaign, however, and later on the relationship they built with the Party of the Democratic Revolution which succeeded the *Frente Cardenista* after the 1988 elections, finally gave them concrete reasons to organize and to articulate new demands of the Mexican state. By the 2000 elections people within this sector also provided important support from the United States for Fox's campaign for the presidency against the PRI. For instance, many of the people that supported Cárdenas in 1988 also supported Fox in 2000 as it merged from interviews conducted for this research.

In summary, the demand for political rights articulated by Mexican emigrants in the last decade could not have taken place without important changes in the notion of citizenship in Mexico, as well as the opening of Mexico's political system. First, changes in the notion of citizenship created a space in which emigrants could articulate their demand for citizenship rights. Second, the opening of Mexico's political system converted emigrants into a new political constituency for whose support political parties would start to compete.

**2. Institutional actors and legal arrangements.** Institutions and legal arrangements in the home country determine the channels of access for emigrants and they can be more open or closed. These include availability of citizenship rights for expatriates, specifically political rights such as the right to vote and to hold political office. They include the relationships of emigrants with their homeland state institutions and political actors such as the executive and legislature at the national and local levels, the electoral authorities, and political parties. In addition it includes debates about centralism and federalism as well as the ways in which the dismantling of the developmental institutions of the state has transformed the relationship between émigrés and the Mexican state.

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<sup>4</sup> This information is corroborated in the individual profiles of those that supported Cárdenas described by (Martinez Saldaña 2002): 215-218.

## 2.1 Mexican Citizenship and the Incorporation of Mexicans abroad

The ways citizenship has been structured in Mexico's constitutional and legal arrangements has clearly determined the type of political mobilization that emigrants have articulated towards their homeland, as well as the extent to which they have been able to assert political influence in their country of origin.

As was seen in the previous section, the acceptance of emigrants and Mexican-Americans as members of the Mexican nation did not imply their access to full citizenship rights. When reforming the nationality laws to allow dual nationality, Mexican authorities were particularly careful to differentiate between nationality and citizenship, a distinction that already existed under Mexican law.

When the Zedillo administration devised the idea of reforming Mexican nationality laws to allow dual nationality, his administration had the goal of facilitating the naturalization in the United States of Mexicans who were eligible for U.S. citizenship but did not obtain it due to fear of losing their Mexican nationality (and with it some economic rights in Mexico such as their property rights in communal lands or *ejidos*). In addition, the reform had two additional goals: gaining back the loyalty of those Mexicans who had naturalized already as American citizens by allowing them to recover their Mexican nationality; and cultivating the loyalty of Mexican-Americans by giving them the right of obtaining Mexican nationality and with it the possibility of acquiring property in places restricted only to Mexicans. The universe of this reform was thus clearly limited to Mexicans who had already acquired United States citizenship or were in a position to acquire it, and to Mexican-Americans that is people of Mexican descent born in the United States. For this reason Mexican authorities did not consult the general Mexican community in the United States about their views but only Mexican American organizations, and a few first-generation Mexican organizations (Santamaría Gómez 2001).

Although Zedillo demonstrated commitment to grant Mexicans abroad a new status within the nation, his administration was, for instance, consistently opposed to granting citizenship rights to expatriates, a demand that had emerged since 1988 within Mexican communities abroad and was being supported by the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD). The Zedillo administration perceived this issue as complex and as a one that would galvanize a lot of opposition inside his own party, and from other sectors of the country's political and intellectual community. His government's opposition to voting rights for expatriates had many bases. First, it was widely assumed by his government and many members of the PRI that if elections were conducted among the Mexican community in the United States, they would be lost to the opposition<sup>5</sup> because the vote from abroad would be punitively directed against the PRI. Even though the government apparently conducted a survey that showed that the electoral preferences of

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<sup>5</sup> Ross Pineda has argued that in private conversations with PRI Congressmen they expressed that fear. See (Ross Pineda 2000)12.

Mexicans abroad were no different from those of Mexicans in Mexico<sup>6</sup>, there was widespread concern that emigrants would vote against the PRI. Second, there was a technical issue: the implementation of an electoral process abroad would be expensive and challenging considering the large number of Mexicans living in the United States, their distribution across the territory, , and the difficulty of estimating their exact numbers since many of them were undocumented. A related consideration was that there were also doubts that Mexico's electoral laws could be effectively implemented and enforced beyond Mexico's territory, a situation that would limit the legitimacy of the electoral results from outside of the country. Third, there was a nationalistic concern. Even though Zedillo was willing to redefine the idea of the Mexican nation to include the Mexican community abroad, granting them political rights was seen as something that could affect Mexico's sovereignty since the number of potential voters abroad was huge as compared to other countries that allowed emigrants to vote from abroad. Thus they had the capacity of deciding elections without residing permanently in Mexico and, therefore, without having to face directly the consequences of their electoral decisions. Finally, there was a foreign policy dimension. Mexican authorities were well aware that to implement an electoral process of the size and magnitude of the one Mexico would have to conduct in the United States would require the collaboration of American authorities at the national and local level. This certainly would require the negotiation of some kind of agreements for which Mexico would have to pay a price in detriment of other foreign policy goals with that country (Zárate 2004). In addition, there was also the fear of how American authorities and American public opinion would react to a Mexican election conducted in the United States. Would immigration authorities detain undocumented emigrants when they went to vote? Would American public opinion turn against naturalized Mexican immigrants by questioning their loyalty to the United States?

Many of these questions had no direct answers until some serious research was conducted or until electoral processes were actually implemented beyond Mexico's territory. Despite this, the movement in favor of granting emigrants the right to vote from abroad continued to gain strength. In the context of a vital democratization process, the emigrants' demand to vote from abroad was evaluated as a "historical debt" Mexico's democracy owed them (Zárate 2004). Mexican emigrants, they argued, did not leave the country voluntarily but as a result of years of authoritarian rule and disastrous policy making. Mexico's democratization process could not, therefore, be completed until they were incorporated into the political system.

Notwithstanding Zedillo's opposition to granting political rights to Mexicans abroad, his administration tacitly approved this possibility in April 1996 by signing as a witness of honor the "Bucareli Table" accords in which Mexican political parties and authorities agreed to reform Article 36 of the Constitution to facilitate the vote in presidential elections outside of Mexico's territory. The reform, which was finally approved in Congress on July 31<sup>st</sup> of the same year, included the elimination of the requirement to vote in specific electoral districts for presidential elections. This would permit voting in any jurisdiction within or beyond Mexico's territory. This was not the

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<sup>6</sup> This survey was mentioned to Raúl Ross Pineada in personal conversations with the presidential adviser José Luis Barros Horcasitas, but we do not have a copy of it (Ross Pineda 2000).

main subject of the “Bucareli table” accords. The government’s main goal in these negotiations was to approve definitive reforms to the Federal Code for Electoral Procedures and Institutions (COFIPE) that would guide Mexico’s electoral processes from 1997 onwards. These negotiations were particularly difficult. When the time came to sign the main commitments one of the three main political parties in Mexico, the National Action Party (PAN), left the negotiation table as a protest against the government on issues not related with these reforms. Thus, the other two main political parties, the PRD and the PRI, stayed alone to finish the process. With the goal of keeping the PRD involved in the negotiations the PRI accepted many PRD’s demands that under different conditions it would certainly have rejected including that of allowing the constitutional amendments to article 36<sup>7</sup>.

This last point of the agreement as well as the subsequent reforms to the Constitution in July that allowed voting from abroad in presidential elections, passed, curiously enough, almost without public notice in Mexico. At the moment, the main news was the unprecedented changes that were to be implemented to the COFIPE, the most important of which was that the government accepted to hand over to civil society the complete control and implementation of Mexico’s electoral institutions and processes. This change was considered a crucial step in Mexico’s democratization process and one that would certainly have lasting consequences. There was not, therefore, a national debate over whether émigrés should vote in Mexico’s national elections, and, for instance, the subject was left unsolved, because no procedure or legal framework was designed for its implementation. However, the reform to the Constitution did help mobilize Mexican political activists abroad, who now concentrated their energy on lobbying the authorities that could influence the further elaboration of the law. These included, specifically, the Federal Electoral Institute and Congress. Activists have argued that the question was no longer whether Mexicans abroad should vote in Mexico’s elections, because that was now guaranteed by the Constitution<sup>8</sup>, but how to make that possibility happen.

On November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1996 a large package of changes to the COFIPE was finally approved. Within this package there was a reform that had the apparent purpose of legislating the right to vote from abroad. However, the topic was considered so difficult and conflictive, that the reform actually delayed the possibility of implementing it, by conditioning the elaboration of the necessary law 1) to the integration of the National Citizen Registry (Renaci), which would provide identity cards for all Mexicans, including those living abroad, and then 2) to the establishment of a commission of specialists by the General Counsel of the National Electoral Institute that would conduct a study on the viability of implementing presidential elections abroad.

Because of the confusion created by this article, nothing happened for more than a year until April 29, 1998 when the IFE’s General Counsel finally approved the formation

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<sup>7</sup> In this account I follow the notes of Raul Ross (Ross Pineda 2000).

<sup>8</sup> It is important to point out that the reform to article 36<sup>th</sup> of the Constitution did not make any explicit reference to the right to vote from abroad. It only opened its viability by eliminating the requirement that people had to vote for presidential elections in their respective district.

of a specialists commission to study the subject without the need to wait for the integration of the Renaci . After six months the commission presented a long report in which they provided responses to the concerns expressed by members of the Zedillo administration and at the same time argued that the implementation of the 2000 presidential elections abroad was completely viable. In the report the commission concluded that there was no judicial, economic, or logistic condition that could deny the right to vote to Mexicans abroad. It also didn't see any international obstacles to the vote.

The fact that the report was written by specialists without specific connections to any political party increased the legitimacy of the movement in favor of the right to vote from abroad, and showed Mexican political leaders in the United States that there was a chance that this right could be obtained in the near future if they lobbied effectively the right persons and institutions at the right time. What had seemed in the early 1990s as an unviable dream was becoming a real possibility: in just a few years, Mexicans abroad were reevaluated in the national imaginary as members of the Mexican nation and were allowed to keep or recover their Mexican nationality and with it important economic rights, The Constitution was no longer an obstacle to obtaining the vote from abroad because article 36 was reformed with that goal in mind. Finally, there was a study commissioned by probably the most prestigious Mexican institution at the moment, the IFE, and conducted by independent specialists, that argued that there were no legitimate reasons to deny Mexicans abroad the right to vote. The ball was now in the hands of the Mexican Congress that needed to define the ways in which this process could be implemented.

This scenario, and particularly the conclusions of the report, made it difficult for Mexico's different political actors to openly oppose the right to vote from abroad, even if they still may have had legitimate doubts. The PRD was already openly in favor. Other political parties, however, had not taken positions prior to the report. After it was released, the PAN, which originally assumed a neutral position on the subject and had expressed some technical concerns about its viability, finally took a favorable position. The same occurred with Mexico's smaller political parties. In the next year, members of the various opposition parties would introduce initiatives in the Congress seeking to clarify and advance the political rights of Mexicans abroad. None of these initiatives were approved due in great part to opposition from the PRI.

For the PRI the situation became complicated after the report, because many of the reasons presented by the party and the government to oppose granting emigrants the right to vote from abroad were publicly questioned by the specialists. One of the main problems created by the report, however, was that it argued that it was feasible to implement voting from abroad for the 2000 presidential election. The party knew that these elections would be the most competitive it had ever confronted, and including into the process a new constituency whose political behavior was yet unknown further complicated the situation for them. Furthermore, there were still highly nationalistic groups within the party that blatantly opposed granting political rights to expatriates since that could threaten Mexico's sovereignty.

There were, however, some members for whom it became clear that opposing this initiative might further galvanize Mexicans abroad against the party, with negative consequences for its candidates at the local and national level. On many occasions expatriates had appeared to influence the selection of candidates and the political preferences of family members and communities of origin even if they were not yet able to vote. Furthermore, it was no secret that they could represent an important source of campaign funding, even if that was illegal under Mexico's electoral law (Hughes 1993).

Although the party had been cultivating a relationship with Mexicans abroad since at least the beginning of the 1990s through governmental policies and the creation of political committees in different cities (Hughes 1993) (Dresser 1993), fear of the unknown consequences for the party and the country of granting emigrants the right to vote was still very large. For this reason, on July 8<sup>th</sup>, 1999 the Mexican Senate, still dominated by the PRI, voted against an initiative proposed originally by the PAN and approved already in the lower house of Congress on April 29th that would have allowed Mexicans abroad holding a voting identification card to vote in the 2000 elections. Although this initiative was considered quite modest by the advocates of the cause, and would have created a limited number of potential voters, the PRI was not yet ready to accept it.

The party's attitude clearly changed after the 2000 presidential elections. Although many members may still have had their personal doubts about the wisdom of granting political rights to emigrants, few were willing to expose those doubts openly. The support that the campaign of Vicente Fox received from Mexicans abroad, both financially and politically, made it clearer than ever that even though emigrants could not vote yet they were already important political actors that had to be taken seriously.

## **2.2 Citizenship After the 2000 Presidential Elections**

After the 2000 presidential elections no political force in Mexico has been openly opposed to granting political rights to emigrants. For instance, such an attitude has become "politically incorrect", and there are now few opponents (politicians, intellectuals or ideologues) that are willing to articulate a concrete stance against the issue. If anything, politicians and analyst are arguing that the procedures to finally implement Mexico's electoral processes abroad have to be thought of with a lot of care, so that Mexico's sovereignty would not be affected. The main concern now expressed is that to implement an electoral process in the United States, where most Mexican expatriates reside, Mexico would have to sign some sort of agreement with that country, a thing that may require Mexico to pay some price (Gomez Mena 2004).

The fact that very few in Mexico express now open doubts about the entitlement of emigrants to political rights similar to those that Mexicans residing in Mexico have, has certainly galvanized expatriates and has motivated them to increase their demands towards their homeland. Since 1999 (Ross Pineda 2000) emigrants started to demand not only the right to vote from abroad in presidential elections but also the right to be elected.

For this last purpose, they have proposed the creation of a 6<sup>th</sup> electoral circumscription that would facilitate the selection of candidates for both houses of Congress.

In theory, a situation like that would be the only one that really grants them full citizenship rights as stated by the Mexican Constitution. As we said before, the Mexican constitution ties the notion of citizenship to the acquisition of two political rights: the right to elect and the right to be elected. So far émigrés have not gotten any of them, although most political actors now agree that they should get the right to vote. The right to be elected is considered a more controversial issue, although the PRI and the PRD have already included expatriates in their lists for Congress for the 2000 and 2003 electoral processes, and there has been already one émigré that was elected for the lower house in the PRI list. In this regard, emigrants have exercised already some political rights even if they have been yet officially granted to them.

### **2.3 The executive and the incorporation of expatriates**

Much has been said about the role of the executive in relation to nationality and citizenship issues. In this part, therefore I will concentrate on the different public policies it has implemented towards Mexicans abroad, and the ways in which they have created opportunities and constraints for the political mobilization of emigrants towards their home and host countries. I will also consider the extent to which these policies have influenced the political demands emigrants have articulated in the last two decades towards both countries.

#### **2.3.1 Historical background**

During its formative period in the nineteenth century, the Mexican state had limited control of its northern frontier. Since the country was still struggling with state formation, and national integration.

When the United States annexed Mexico's Northern territories in 1848, there was some concern about the future of those Mexicans that were left behind. For this reason the Mexican government attempted to negotiate the best terms for them with the American government when giving up the territories and allowed them to keep their Mexican nationality. After, that, however, there was not much involvement from the part of the Mexican authorities in their future. During that period and until the first decade of the twentieth century, those Mexicans that remained behind as well as their descendents struggle to adapt to their particular situation in their new country and developed a new identity highly determined by their particular circumstances. These circumstances were characterized by a widespread discrimination from the American society because of their Mexican origin. Therefore, except for a white elite, which was able to easily integrate into the American society through intermarriage and other means, most of them were segregated in *barrios*, and rural-colonies where they spoke Spanish, and continue to practice their family customs (Gutiérrez 1999).

On the verge of the Mexican Revolution a lot of Mexicans migrated north, a situation that changed considerably the composition of the Mexican population in the

United States. From that period and until the mid-1930s Mexican émigrés and people of Mexican origin that were living already in the United States were highly involved in Mexico's political developments. This was related to the fact that that Mexican politics at the time were not only played in Mexico's territory but also north of the border, among other reasons because many emigrants had left the country for political reasons. Dissent against the authoritarian government of Porfirio Díaz was initially expressed from Texas, where many of his political enemies had taken refuge. From there too Francisco I. Madero promulgated the *Plan de San Luis*, which called for the insurrection against the Díaz regime, and marked the initiation of the Mexican Revolution.

During the Revolutionary period, there was still even more Mexican emigration to the United States representing different political and social extractions from the Mexican society. From there they followed the conflict, which in many occasions was extended inside American territory, since many military factions crossed the border back and forth to get armaments and financial support from expatriates. The latter not only provided the revolutionary groups with financial resources, they also helped in the recruitment of men, with espionage, in the elaboration of propaganda, and in lobbying the American government to recognize the different governments emerging from the Revolution. This support for the Revolution came from both Mexicans and Mexican-Americans. Those opposed to the Revolution, many of them members from the old political and business class of the Díaz government exiled north of the border were also politically active trying to obtain military, and financial aid from American authorities with the hope of reinstalling in Mexico a government favorable to their interests.

The intensive participation of expatriates in Mexico's political developments made it only natural that Mexican political and military leaders visited the communities north of the border and used them as a political arena to advance their agendas.

The different Mexican presidents that governed the country during all that early period of the twentieth century did not have a specific policy towards Mexicans abroad. They however, made some efforts to control emigration to the United States, which became a major national concern particularly considering that the size of the Mexican population diminished considerably due to the revolutionary wars (Corwin 1978).

As a result of the great depression, a large number of Mexicans in the United States were deported back to Mexico. This situation along with a new highly nationalist and inward looking attitude of Mexico's elite marked a decline in the interactions between Mexican political actors and the expatriate community. For more than forty years, the Mexican government did not interact with Mexicans in the United States, except for its goal of defending the rights of Mexican laborers, who were seen as highly vulnerable to the exploitation of Anglo employers. Therefore, both expatriates and Mexican-Americans alike turned their attention to the United States. This situation was facilitated after the World War Two in the case of Mexican-Americans since new opportunities were opened for some of them to integrate into the American society and polity.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the Mexican government avoided any intervention in the Chicano Movement. When the leadership of that movement visited Mexico to request support from the Mexican government they did not receive any response, a situation that generated resentment and distrust among them towards the Mexican authorities for many years. The president at that time, Luis Echeverría (1970-1976), however, took the most active interest in expatriate colonies since the government of Lázaro Cárdenas, and in the summer of 1972, he toured different Mexican-American communities.

This trip created a strong impression on president Echeverría and as a result, Echeverría supported, for some time the establishment of a new labor accord between Mexico and the United States but by 1974, when it became evident that the American government would not support such an idea he abandoned that plan. Influenced by new advisers like sociologist Jorge Bustamante who insisted that Mexico should not subsidize American economic imperialism with a cheap labor program, he then followed the policy of protecting by any means possible undocumented workers and their families already in the United States.

During Echeverría's government there was also, for the first time, a greater institutional attempt to understand the reasons behind Mexican emigration to the United States. In this regard, in the fall of 1972 Echeverría created a commission<sup>9</sup> to study the topic, which produced unprecedented data about illegal emigration to the United States. Thanks to the information provided by the commission, remittances were regarded, for the first time, as a pillar of the Mexican economy. For then onwards, Mexican authorities would focus on guaranteeing that they continued to flow into Mexico, a situation that would mark, in later years, the policies implemented towards Mexicans abroad.

Echeverría's successor, López Portillo (1976-1982), implemented also, few public policies towards Mexicans abroad. Perhaps the most notorious aspect during his administration was the attempt to have a more systematic relationship with Chicano organizations by creating the *Comisión Mixta de Enlace* (Mixed Linking Commission). This commission promoted various meetings with those organizations, which were presided by the Labor Ministry, to discuss various topics related with Mexican emigration to the United States. However, neither López Portillo, nor Miguel de la Madrid, who succeeded him in 1982 attempted to establish a relationship with the first generation Mexican community in the United States. Their timid rapprochement was only with Mexican-Americans. This can be explained by two facts: first, the first generation Mexican community was not organized yet, and the Mexican government did not have any specific interest at the time in organizing it and; second, this community was not considered as a settled community in the United States, but only as a temporary one that would return to Mexico once things improved in the country.

When President Carter proposed a double amnesty plan that would grant permanent immigrant status to all aliens who have resided in the United States before January first, 1970 and a non-deportable alien status to those that had taken up residence

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<sup>9</sup> The complete name was *Comisión Intersecretarial para el Estudio del Problema de la Emigración Subrepticia de Trabajadores Mexicanos a los Estados Unidos de América*.

between that date and December 31, 1976, the López Portillo administration showed a skeptic response. Even though his government had expressed its desire of solving the problem of illegal immigration, which was seen as a national crisis, the proposal offered by Carter was not attractive to the Mexican government.

In this regard, permanent residency was seen as a potential cut off of remittances to Mexico a situation that this country could not afford. This view, however, was not officially expressed anywhere and it is clear that the Mexican government avoided all along to take any position on the different amnesty proposals introduced in the American Congress between the 1970s and early 1980s. When in 1986 the United States Congress finally approved an immigration amnesty that benefited 3.5 million persons, more than half of whom were from Mexico, the Mexican government had not choice but to deal with the new scenario: a large portion of Mexicans abroad would finally settle with their families in the United States, and as a result will probably send much less money to Mexico. This situation pointed towards the need of a new set of policies that would help guarantee the loyalty to Mexico of the expatriate community as well as the continuous flow of foreign currency that they sent daily to the country in the form of remittances.

The relationship with Mexican Americans and with first generation Mexicans that have settled in the United States was finally institutionalized during the administration of Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) when in 1990 his government created the Program for Mexican Communities Abroad (PMCA).

Officially, the PMCA was established in response to a direct demand of Mexican-American organizations to increase the relevance that Mexico placed on its Mexican communities in the United States and to develop systematic policies to attend their demands (González Gutiérrez and Schumacher 1998; González Gutiérrez 2003). In addition, however, and more prominently, it was also created as a response to the widespread support that the Cárdenas 1988 bid for the presidency had among Mexican communities in the United States (Smith 1998):222. As a result of this situation the Mexican government realized that first generation Mexicans that had settled in the United States had the capacity and the potential of politically mobilizing towards their homeland with unexpected consequences for the PRI.

The PMCA had two implicit short-term goals. The first goal was to cultivate the ties between the Mexican government and the Mexican-American community so that the latter could become an important ally in lobbying the American government at a time when Mexico's foreign and economic policy goals had become more attached than ever to political developments in the United States (De la Garza 1997). The second goal was to formalize the relationship between the Mexican government and Mexican expatriates to mediate and control when necessary their influence in Mexico's political developments.

The program's main tasks were to change the image of Mexican communities abroad in Mexico; to educate Mexicans abroad about Mexico's reality; to help them establish organizations that can help them acquire better representation in their adopted

communities; and to collaborate with other institutions in the United States at the local and national levels to design and develop public policies that would help elevate the living conditions of Mexicans and people of Mexican descent (González Gutiérrez and Schumacher 1998):190-191.

In this regard, the PMCA was presented as an instrument for cooperation between Mexico and the United States with long-term goals as well. The guiding idea was that by tightening the relationship with the Mexican community abroad, Mexico not only would strengthen the identity and sense of belonging of Mexicans on both sides of the border towards the Mexican nation, but would also increase its economic and cultural ties with the United States. After all, both Mexico and the United States could benefit from the economic and social improvement of the Mexican communities in the United States (González Gutiérrez and Schumacher 1998):194. The program would, thus, require an unprecedented negotiation with different instances of the American government at the local and national levels.

After more than ten years of being implemented this program had many domestic consequences in Mexico but also in the United States. For example, its goal of organizing Mexicans in the United States has helped mobilized Mexicans as never before towards their homeland. For many years, Mexican authorities (including consulate officials and state governors) encouraged expatriates to organize around hometown associations (HTA) and state federations a form of organization that was natural to some émigrés coming from rural areas. This encouragement helped increase the number of Home Town Associations from a handful that existed prior to the 1990s to more than 1000 by the year 2000. At the beginning, the HTA and state federations (SF) acted in a non-political way, focusing mostly on collecting funds to improve the infrastructure and living conditions of their places of origin. Over time it became evident, however, that they were acquiring important political influence at the local and sub-national levels, as they were having a great influence in determining the selection of candidates for political office, as well as the ways in which municipal and state budgets would be implemented. More recently, HTAs and SF have joined forces with expatriate political organizations that emerged independently from the Mexican government and have demanded from Mexico's Federal authorities the right to vote from abroad.

The creation of these organizations has also represented an empowerment of Mexican expatriates in their host country. By interacting with Mexican authorities at the highest level, the leaders of these organizations have learned that they have a political strength that could be exercised at both sides of the border. Therefore, in the United States they have participated in lobbying campaigns in favor of specific causes and they have established important links with different pro-immigrant organizations.

In the year 2000, when he became president of Mexico, Vicente Fox established a parallel structure to the PMCA that created a lot of confusion in the relationship between Mexico and the Mexican communities abroad. This structure was the Presidential Office for Mexicans Abroad (POMA). This office was created with the goal of giving émigrés and Mexican-Americans a privileged access to the Mexican president. It was presided by

a Mexican-American, Juan Hernández, who acted as an ambassador of the Mexican president to those communities. During his trips to the United States, Hernández constantly raised the expectations of the Mexican community by promising them, that they would be able to vote in Mexican elections soon, a promise originally made by president Fox, and by encouraging them to invest in Mexico under very privileged conditions.

In the end, the office had little achievements, except that of increasing the political expectations of émigrés towards their homeland. When in August 6<sup>th</sup>, 2002 President Fox decided to disappear the office and create instead the National Council for Mexican Communities Abroad dependent on the Foreign Affairs Ministry, different organizations intensely protested the decision and demanded an explanation. Why if they have acquired a privileged access to the Mexican president would they now accept being assigned again to the dominion of the foreign affairs ministry? This situation certainly created a tense relationship between the Fox administration and the expatriate community, which for two years generally supported its governmental actions. By then, not only there was not any action taken by the Mexican government that pointed towards granting them the right to vote from abroad, a promise Fox made to them, but their concerns were now diminished within the Mexican governmental structure to a lower level.

The government explained that the new Council, which attempted to integrate the functions of the PMCA and the POMA would include as a central structure the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IMA). The creation of this institute was in response to leaders of first generation Mexican organizations in the United States that complained the emigrants did not have any voice and representation in the decisions taken towards the Mexican community abroad<sup>10</sup>. Its goal was to integrate a representative body, in which the expatriates voice could be heard. The government argued that the institute would have a Council, which would be integrated by 120 counselors. 100 of these counselors would be elected from within the different communities in the United States, 10 counselors would be Mexican-American leaders selected by the Mexican government and 10 counselors would be representatives from different states from which emigrants come from invited by the foreign affairs ministry. The body would be presided by the president of the institute and a technical office would define its agenda.

This proposal generated again a lot of opposition among émigrés. Three groups were easily identifiable. First there were those that had been very active since the early 1990s in lobbying for the right to vote from abroad and that now were integrated in the Coalition for the Rights of Mexican Abroad. Political activists linked with the most left-wing sectors within the PRD integrated the second group. Its members joined its forces with a third group integrated by presidents and former presidents of state federations that have become politicized in the last few years, and with Mexican businessmen from California and Texas, (some of whom are linked with the PRI), and together they signed the California Act. This Act rejected the IMA as legitimate institution and instead

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<sup>10</sup> Interviews of the author with members of the Coalition For the Political Rights of Mexicans Abroad during September and October 2002.

proposed the creation of an autonomous one integrated by delegates from Mexican communities abroad according to state of origin, and with the capacity to have a direct interlocution with Mexican ministers, and members of Congress.

Although the Council was finally integrated, this opposition and the conflictive selection of candidates in different American cities put the government on the defensive side and diminished the legitimacy of the new body. Overall, this situation showed the extent to which Mexican communities had become politicized in the last decade, thanks to the structures of opportunity opened by the Mexican government and the high level of receptiveness that Mexican authorities have shown to them.

#### **2.4 The role of sub-national governments**

Decisions taken by the executive power at the federal level are not the only ones that have opened up structures of opportunity for the participation of émigrés in Mexico's political life. In the last two decades state governors and local authorities from entities that produce high emigration levels have had an interaction with expatriates as intense as federal authorities. For instance, prior to the creation of the PMCA which was a turning point in Mexico's relation with its diaspora, some governors, such as Genaro Borrego from Zacatecas (1986-1992), were already visiting their expatriates with the goal of tightening ties with them, and guaranteeing that remittances would keep flowing into their economies even when emigrants and their families chose to settle in the United States, particularly as a result of the 1986 amnesty. These visits helped expatriates organize around their places and state of origin, and motivated them to participate more actively in the economic and social development of their hometowns. Although originally these policies of rapprochement may have had the goal of controlling the political and economic participation of expatriates, eventually, they also allowed emigrants to identify their economic and political strength and acquire greater autonomy *vis a vis* the governments of their states of origin and even the federal government. By the beginning of the twentieth first century, many organizations created with a focus on their place or state of origin, had already articulated independent political agendas focused on their home country and in some cases even on their host country.

The active role played by sub-national entities in the incorporation of expatriates is directly related with the processes of deregulation and decentralization that the Mexican state implemented during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of the deep economic crisis the country confronted since 1982. The dismantling of the developmental and interventionist state forced sub-national and local authorities to find new ways to finance the economic and social development of their regions in other ways that were not dependent on the Federal government. One form available for states that produced high levels of emigrations was by motivating their population residing abroad to participate in the economic development of their places of origin, a situation that was already viable for many expatriates since by the late 1980s many had acquired a stable socioeconomic situation in the United States.

The governor of Zacatecas that substituted Borrego, Arturo Romo Gutiérrez (1992-1998), first established a program negotiated with the state federation of Los Angeles in 1992 called 2X1 in which every dollar invested by the organizations would be matched one time by the state government and one time by the Federal government, a compromise that was also negotiated with the Ministry of Social Development at the time, Luis Donaldo Colosio.

Between 1993 and 1995 the federal government under the administrations of Salinas the Gortari and Ernesto Zedillo, implemented the program *Solidaridad Internacional* or International Solidarity, which was the version oriented towards émigrés of the original Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (National Solidarity Program) or PRONASOL. This program worked along with the PCMA and institutionalized the 2x1 model negotiated with Zacatecas by allocating a specific budget to match every dollar raised by a HTAs or a SF with one dollar by the federal government and one dollar by their state of origin (Goldring 2002). This program was, thus, used by the government of Zacatecas to keep supporting the investments made by the Zacatecan Federations of Chicago and Los Angeles in different regions of the state. Few other governments took advantage of this program including the one from Guerrero<sup>11</sup>, although never as consistently as the one from Zacatecas.

When the International Solidarity program ended due in great part to a new economic crisis that started in December 1994, the state of Zacatecas kept implementing the program 2x1 through special agreements between successive governors, the federal government, and the Zacatecan Federations in the United States. The implementation of the 2x1 program brought important investment to the state, but also created tensions between the local political class and the emigrant community. This was particularly true when municipal governments were forced to allocate some of their budgets assigned already to other priorities to the projects suggested by different HTAs. Evidently, with this program emigrants were acquiring a political strength at the local and state level that represented a constant challenge to the clientelistic arrangements that had existed in a state dominated for many years by the PRI without any opposition. Since émigrés established a system to supervise the transparent implementation of the funds, in cases where they suspected corruption they immediately protested, a thing that was not well received by local politicians who thought that since emigrants did not reside in the state anymore they should not have such a great capacity to influence the decision-making process in Zacatecas.

When Vicente Fox arrived into power, the Federación Zacatecana del Sur de California as the Zacatecan Federation had been called since 1997, had become so strong due to the quantity of money it was able to raise that the president of the organization at the time, Guadalupe Gómez de Lara<sup>12</sup>, was able to get direct access to him. In February 2000, Gómez was invited to a meeting in Mexico about remittances and in a public presentation he told the president that the federation would raise 5 million dollars to

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<sup>11</sup> Interview with a president of an organization from Guerrero in Chicago, October 5, 2001.

<sup>12</sup> This information is based on an interview on May 21, 2004, in Atlanta, Georgia, and a follow up of Mexican and American press in the last four years.

invest in Mexico, if the federal government matched this money with the implementation, among other things, of a 3x1 program at the national level. The president took the challenge seriously and a month later he traveled to California. There he announced the official launching of the 3x1 program, which has now become a signature policy of his administration towards expatriates.

The political influence of Zacatecan émigrés acquired during years of constant dealing with the authorities of their state of origin was already being felt, for instance, in Zacatecas and Los Angeles. In 1998 the Federation of Los Angeles helped in the election of Ricardo Monreal, as the first PRD governor of the state. For that purpose they created the *Frente Cívico Zacatecano* (Civic Front) an organization with a specific political orientation. Since then the *Frente Cívico*, has supported not only political causes in Zacatecas beyond the election of Monreal, but also in California. For example, in last place they promoted the political campaigns for Congress of two Democratic leaders, as well as the political campaigns of Gray Davis for Governor, Cruz Bustamante for Lieutenant Governor, and Lee Vaca for Sheriff of Los Angeles.

Besides the state of Zacatecas, other states have also opened up opportunities for the participation of expatriates. A notorious case is that of Guanajuato. Although the government of Guanajuato did not originally implement an ambitious program to motivate the investment of expatriates in their state of origin such as the one from Zacatecas, it certainly gave them since 1994 a strong institutional support to help them organize and participate more effectively in the economic life of their communities of origin. In September 1994, the first PAN governor from the state, Carlos Medina Plascencia, visited the large community of Guanajuatenses in Dallas and provided them with ten thousand dollars, so that the HTAs existent in that city could integrate into a wider organization representing the whole state of Guanajuato, which was eventually called Casa Guanajuato. This money was used by the newly created organization as a down payment to buy a building where they could hold their meetings as well as different activities oriented to the Guanajuatense community in Dallas. The governor that followed Medina Plascencia in Guanajuato, Vicente Fox, also provided an on-going support for the organization. The strong relationship established between the leadership of Casa Guanajuato in Dallas and Vicente Fox, eventually translated into a strong support from the Guanajuato community in Dallas for his campaign for the presidency in 2000. Guanajuatenses in Dallas have not acquired the same level of political autonomy than the one acquired by Zacatecans in Los Angeles, however, they have been able to exercise important political influence in their communities and state of origin.

The examples of Zacatecas and Guanajuato show how structure of opportunity for the participation of émigrés in their homeland's political life have been created simultaneously at the national and the sub-national levels. State level policies towards expatriates may have had the original purpose of controlling the political attitudes of expatriates (Zacatecas) or establishing a stronghold for an opposition party within the Mexican community in the United States (Guanajuato), while at the same time motivate emigrants to invest in their states of origin. However, by helping emigrants to organize and by giving them a specific purpose (that of participating in the economic development

of their places of origin) they have also showed them that they have a political and economic strength that they could exercise to define the destinies of their states and country of origin and of their places of residence.

#### **2.4.1 The National Governor's Conference: a new space for the participation of emigrants**

In the last four years, after Mexico elected for the first time in more than 70 years a presidential candidate that did not belong to the PRI, the country has been confronting an uncertain process of institutional redefinition. One of the major subjects of debate has been the extensive centralism that still exists in Mexico, even when in the Mexican constitution Mexico is defined as Federal country. In this context, different authorities at the sub-national level have demanded greater autonomy from the Federal government, and greater participation in the distribution of the national income. For that purpose, on July 13, 2002, fifteen governors from different political parties integrated the *Conferencia Nacional de Gobernadores* (National Governor's Conference) or CONAGO to have an impact in the definition of different policies that traditionally were decided by the executive.

During its XIII meeting in Monterrey, Nuevo León on September 29, 2003 this organization decided that it should also play an active and independent role in the definition of Mexico's policies towards Mexicans abroad. This resolution emerged from the attempt by different governors since 2002 to establish a relationship with different expatriate organizations, not only with those organized around their respective state, for their own political purposes. The governor of Oaxaca, for example, organized an event in December 2002 in which different governors, emigrant leaders and legislators declared that they will try to build the necessary consensus in Congress so that an initiative that grant Mexicans the right to vote from abroad could pass. Although nothing has yet happened in this respect, these activities have become very common. For instance, since the Monterrey meeting governors that belong to the CONAGO have become very active in developing a relationship with a variety of Mexican organizations in different American cities, creating also a strong pressure over the executive to present a final initiative that would finally grant expatriates the right to vote from abroad in the 2006 presidential elections. In this regard, the CONAGO has become a new space from which emigrants have been able to exercise their influence to advance their political agenda in Mexico.

#### **2.5 Congress, political parties and the incorporation of the Mexican Diaspora**

For many years the Mexican Congress had little to say about the relationship between the Mexican state and the Mexican communities abroad. In a presidential system in which the president concentrated so much authority, the legislative power was clearly controlled by the executive, who defined the country's policy process. Since 1997, however, when for the first time the PRI did not obtain the absolute majority in the lower house, executive decisions could not pass anymore without the development of alliances with opposition political parties. This situation gave a new life to the lower house of

Congress and converted it, for the first time, into a check and balance of the executive power. In the Senate, the PRI still maintained its control by obtaining the absolute majority, however, it was not able to gather enough seats to keep the qualified majority of two thirds, to approve constitutional reforms. Thus, although the Senate was still a remnant of the authoritarian system there were signs that pointed towards a new democratic change in this body as well.

In this context, the Mexican Congress became a place in which Mexicans abroad would try to exercise their influence to obtain political rights in Mexico, and in which political parties would also try to demonstrate their new interest towards expatriates by proposing various initiatives that would attempt to grant them those rights. Since 1997 and until December 2003, 13 initiatives were introduced in the lower house of Congress with the purpose of legislating different aspects related with the political participation of Mexicans abroad in Mexico's political life. Until the year 2000 the opposition played the leading role in introducing these initiatives as the PRI still opposed the extension of full citizenship rights to Mexicans residing outside of Mexico's territory. After the year 2000 members of the PRI became also active promoters of the political rights of expatriates as it became evident for them that they represented a potential constituency that they could not afford to lose. Despite this active stance of congressmen of the 13 initiatives, only two made it to the floor and were finally approved. One of them, introduced by the PRD on April 30<sup>th</sup> 1998 gave the official authority to the Federal Electoral Institute to determine the procedures by which Mexicans abroad could exercise their right to vote. The second one, introduced on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 1999 had the goal allowing those Mexicans that resided abroad and held a Federal Electoral Institute voting identification card to vote on the 2000 presidential elections. The initiative was approved in the Chamber of Deputies on April 29<sup>th</sup> but it was finally defeated in the Senate. All other initiatives were turned to various committees where they were never discussed. This situation is striking considering that some of these initiatives were supported by members of both the PAN and the PRD. Officially these parties, along with other smaller parties represented in Congress, had already declared a stance in favor of granting expatriates the right to vote from abroad. Therefore, if they joined their forces they could have gotten enough votes to at least take these initiatives out of the committees so that they could be discussed in the floor. None of the parliamentary fractions of these parties was able or willing, however, to mobilize enough votes to get them out of the committees. After the 2000 elections even the PRI had change its original position and now supported granting political rights to expatriates. However, none of the initiatives presented after that year were able to pass beyond the committees, even now that all the political parties in Mexico had declared a favorable position on the subject, and therefore there was the chance of gathering enough votes to approve them at least in the lower House.

Why have so many initiatives related with the political rights of Mexicans abroad been turned to commissions where they were finally put into the "freezer"<sup>13</sup> even when the country's major political forces had declared a favorable view on the subject? The answer to this question lies in the fact that although all the major political parties had

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<sup>13</sup> In Mexico's parliamentary slang an initiative is put into the freezer when it is turned to a commission, and there it is never discussed and turned back to the floor.

declared their support to granting political rights to Mexicans abroad, they still have many doubts about what the consequences would be for them if Mexican elections were implemented abroad. Therefore, internally, they remain very divided on the subject. This will become more evident by making a short review about the dynamics between Mexico's three major political parties and Mexicans abroad.

### **2.5.1 The PRD**

The PRD<sup>14</sup> has been the major promoter of the right to vote from abroad. It also was the first one that attempted to mobilize the support of the Mexican community in the United States in favor of their three times presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solórzano. As was said before, Cárdenas campaigning in 1988 in different American cities ignited the interest of many expatriates on Mexico's political developments and created incentives for them to organize around a political agenda focused on Mexico's democratization. For many years after 1988, the PRD maintained links with Mexican political activists, particularly in California and Illinois. However, the party did not establish any structure in the United States or formalized any relationship with them. In 1999 Amalia García became the first president of the party that formally campaigned in the United States, attempting to establish a real party base in that country. During her trips to different American cities, she promised émigrés that the party would create a formal structure for their participation in its internal political processes. As a result, in July 2001 the party statutes were reformed thus allowing the affiliation to the party of Mexicans residing in other countries. Emigrants were allowed to send delegates and to participate in the internal selection process of the party that took place on March 17<sup>th</sup> 2002. During that meeting the party elected presidents of base committees in cities where there were at least 20 affiliates, and by established five state committees in California, Illinois, Washington, Texas and New York.

Even though the party has been very proactive in attempting to incorporate Mexicans abroad, there is also a lot of internal fear about the influence Mexicans in the United States can exercise over the party. The major PRD leaders in the United States belong to the most extremist line within the party, since many of them are political emigrants that left the country in the early 1970s when the Mexican government persecuted and detained people identified with the extreme left.

For instance, émigrés tried already to exercise some influence over the party by creating in 2003 a new organization called MUSA (Mexicans in the United States), which attempted to become a quasi-political party representing Mexicans in the United States. The goal of this failed organization was to get money from the Federal Electoral Institute in Mexico to finance their political activities, and to pressure the PRD to include Mexicans abroad in their lists for Congress in 2003. Situations like this have made moderates have many doubts about the consequences of extending political rights to expatriates. In addition, they fear, as the other political parties, that an election in the

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<sup>14</sup> The following information presented about the PRD was recollected through interviews during a trip to Mexico in September 2002.

United States could be unfavorable to them, even though they have been working on establishing a strong structure in that country.

### **2.5.2 The PAN**

The PAN<sup>15</sup> has been less active with respect to Mexicans abroad, even though president Vicente Fox has had great popularity with Mexicans in the United States. During the 2000 elections there were various groups established to support Fox's campaign. However, the party did not take advantage of this situation to create a structure in the United States. Nonetheless, by December 2001 the party reformed its statutes to allow Mexicans abroad become members of the party, although they were not allowed to play an active role in the internal political processes. This was because to be an "active member" of the party it was necessary to train the new member for six months, a situation that can not happen in the United States since the party is not allowed by Mexican law to open up a bank account to finance any instance to do that. The party has assumed all along that Mexicans abroad would be able to vote in the 2006 elections. However, as in the PRD there is a widespread fear about the influence they can exercise over the party. In addition, it is clear that Fox's popularity among the Mexican community in the United States has diminished in the last couple of years, since he has not been able to achieve the final negotiation of an immigrant regularization program with the United States. Therefore, there is a lot of uncertainty about how favorable to them could be an election implemented abroad.

### **2.5.3 The PRI**

As was said before, the PRI was originally opposed to granting political rights to Mexicans abroad. However, in the last three years members of the party have been trying to position themselves with the Mexican community in the United States in case Mexicans are eventually allowed to vote in Mexico's political processes. In contrast to the PRD and the PAN, this party has not reformed its statutes to allow the membership of expatriates. This also results from the fact that the affiliation to this party has tended to be collective and not individual, as its structures still respond to the corporatist model that prevail in Mexico for many years. Nonetheless, in April 2003, the National Executive Committee of the party established a program aimed at mobilizing the support of Mexicans abroad and establishing a formal structure in the United States (Ochoa 2003). Despite these efforts, the party still has a weak structure abroad. This situation and the fact that many members still fear an unfavorable result for the party if elections are implemented in the United States has diminished the support towards the goal of granting political rights to Mexicans residing abroad.

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<sup>15</sup> The following information presented about the PAN is based on interviews in September 2002 in Mexico City, and on a follow up in the Mexican and American press.

In summary, Mexican political parties have created important opportunities for Mexicans to participate in Mexico's political life by mobilizing them, but they also remain as one of the main obstacles allowing their formal participation in Mexico's political processes.

### **3. Prevailing elite strategies/ Political culture and idioms.**

This category refers to the rules and procedures that have historically emerged within the Mexican political system to manage and resolve political conflict among the elites and for dealing with new political challenges. It considers the extent to which emigrants have been benefited or affected by these procedures and the new ways in which they are now able to take advantage of disagreement among the national elite.

Mexico's political system was for many years a big dilemma for scholars. In contrast to other Latin-American countries it was a fairly stable country since the 1930s, and although it had many authoritarian features, during the 1950s and 1960s some American academics believed that the country had a pluralist system, even if in a diminished form as compared with the American one (Tucker 1957; Vernon 1963; Scott 1964). By the 1970s a consensus emerged that the country had an authoritarian regime (Kaufman 1977; Reyna 1977; Smith 1979), but even this was elusive to define, because authoritarianism in Mexico did not look like the authoritarian regimes established elsewhere at the time, and because many sectors of society had at least some form of representation within the system through the PRI's corporatist structure. Whatever the political situation that led to Mexico's *sui generis* political system, a few things were clear, conflicts among the elite were solved within the system itself at least until the 1980s, and emerging political challengers were consistently co-opted into the system through the corporatist structure of the state even until the early 1990s when signs that country was moving towards a new regime were already very evident. In addition during the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s new electoral laws were developed to gradually allow the inclusion of an emerging opposition that could not be co-opted through traditional corporatist structure.

Some sectors, however, were consistently excluded from the political system: those that were never integrated into Mexico's modernization process. These included people from the countryside, many of whom became emigrants. Some areas such as Mexico's Central Plateau (which includes states such as Michoacán, Jalisco, Guanajuato, and Zacatecas) were highly populated and this surplus of population evidently could not be absorbed into Mexico's industrial development, and neither into the agricultural force. In this area, thus there were great chances that political conflict could emerge since the early 1940s, and that this conflict could create great challenges to the regime. As Corwin (Corwin 1978: 184) has pointed out, government officials and planners, but not the public, were aware of this situation, and for this reason, they sought to select *braceros* from that region of the country with some success during World War II. The perpetuation of the migratory networks created since then certainly helped contain political conflict that could create lots of instability in the country. In this regard, emigration became an element that helped guarantee Mexico's political stability for many years.

When Mexico liberalized its economy in the 1980s and 1990s, people from the countryside kept being excluded from Mexico's process of economic development. Those that emigrated north, however, were thought by bureaucratic elites as crucial actors to be included in the development of at least certain regions of the country, where the state could not invest anymore. As a result emigrants became a new player in Mexico's economic and life. As has been seen all through this chapter, the problem for the dominant elites, however, was that this new player had developed autonomous political demands linked to those articulated by the opposition. At the beginning the response of the political system was the one it knew best: to co-opt emigrants and incorporate them as a new corporative sector within the state. Some consular officials in different American cities, who tried to control emerging first generation Mexican organizations in their respective consular regions, at least, followed this strategy.

The new degree of political autonomy that emigrants had developed in the last few years, have demonstrated Mexican authorities that it was necessary to develop new strategies to facilitate their necessary participation in Mexico's economic development while at the same time mediate their political participation through institutionalized means.

The Fox administration has adopted two new strategies in this regard. First it created the Institute for Mexicans Abroad (IMA) mentioned already above which attempts to grant émigrés some participation in the decision-making process of the policies implemented towards them. Second, it has recognized as legitimate the demand of émigrés to participate in Mexico's electoral processes, and for that reason has developed an initiative that would allow them to vote in Mexico's presidential elections. Whether these strategies will succeed in mediating the political challenges that the incorporation of émigrés represents is still early to know. What is clear, is that meanwhile, emigrants have been able to take advantage of the divisions existent within the national elite, by lobbying different actors at the same time, and by pressuring different political parties to include them in their lists for Congress.

#### **4. Contingencies of time and place**

A large part of the incorporation or reincorporation of émigrés into their homeland polity is determined by specific balances of power and the alliance structure existent at a given time. The composition of the party system, the relative strengths of certain political parties over others, and divisions within the elite at a given moment open up opportunities for the incorporation of emigrants that may not be available in other contexts.

For many years Mexico had a hegemonic party system in which electoral competition was almost none existent or very limited. By the 1990s, as a result of the country's democratization Mexico became a multiparty system with three main parties that together took 90% of the vote, though none managed to cross the 50% threshold. Different electoral processes held at the local and national level since 1997, have shown

that the three main parties are highly competitive and have the chance to win elections. These processes, however also have shown that swing voters, which represent around ten percent of the electorate, are the ones who define most elections. In this regard, Mexico has now a scenario of unstable political alignments, which is particularly promising for the incorporation to the system of new political actors such as émigrés. As Costain has pointed out, “unstable alignments indicate governmental weakness, which in turn lessens the costs for new movements to form (Costain 1994): 24” and to participate.

Potentially, emigrants represent a very attractive new constituency because they are not yet aligned with any political party. This situation creates strong incentives for Mexican political parties to mobilize and compete for their attention. If allowed to vote, these incentives could become even larger because they could represent between 10 and 15 percent of the Mexican electorate assuming that all of them vote (which is very unlikely according to some analysts (Cornelius and A. 2003)).

This situation shows that on top of all the elements that have been mentioned in this chapter, that have facilitated the organization and mobilization of Mexicans abroad towards their homeland in the last two decades, the current competitiveness that persists today in Mexico’s political system creates a particular good scenario for their political participation. There is one caveat, however: since émigrés represent a political sector of the population that is not yet clearly aligned with any political party, political parties are also skeptic of fully incorporating them into the political process. In other words, they are very interested in mobilizing them, because if expatriates are allowed to vote they can help define an election in favor of one specific party. However, none of the parties knows right now what their political attitudes may be, a situation that creates a lots of risks for them. As it was already argued before, these the reason why, Mexico’s political parties have all taken a position in favor of granting emigrants the right to vote from abroad, but also why none of them have allowed this situation to happen. In this context, it is possible to see in the next few years a scenario in which greater links are built between the expatriate community and Mexico’s political system, and in which their political participation will increase through different means (for example by being integrated into the plurinominal lists for Congress of each political party), but it will not be formalized through the final implementation of the political rights they have demanded during the last decade.

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