

TELEVISION, POLITICS,  
AND THE TRANSITION TO  
DEMOCRACY IN LATIN  
AMERICA

Edited by  
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the active supporters of the candidate in question and did not need to be persuaded. Indeed, the use of rally scenes on TV became more important than the rallies themselves.

In spite of their growing importance, the mass media are still far from capable of determining election results. Elections are decided by the candidates' ability to project an image compatible with voters' aspirations, their ideological (political, moral, ethical) beliefs, their material interests, and the pressure exerted by their family and friends. The media represent only one field—albeit the most important one—where the contenders do battle. There are other fields: party organizations, campaign funding rallies, sponsoring committees, and caucuses of regional leaders, to name a few. In the end, however, the decisive factor in elections is the identification between voter and candidate.

## NOTES

1. George Gallup, Jr., "The Impact of Presidential Debates on the Vote and Turnout," in *Presidential Debates: 1988 and Beyond*, ed. Joel L. Swerdlow (Washington: League of Women Voters, 1988), 34–42.
2. Elihu Katz and Jacob Feldman, "The Debates in the Light of Research: A Survey of Surveys," in *The Process and Effects of Mass Communication*, ed. Wilbur Schramm and Donald F. Roberts (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1974), 701–54.

## 9

# The Mexican Case: The Media in the 1988 Presidential Election

*Ilya Adler*

Thousands of studies have been conducted around the world on the role of the media in electoral processes. These studies, which have produced rich theoretical frameworks, assume a political system that follows the norms of liberal democracy, combining notions of economic capitalism and democratic rule. This is symbolized in the right of the people to freely elect their rulers. It is the latter assumption that guides research into issues regarding the media's role in elections, including

- The manner in which the media shape the issues and perceptions of a political campaign
- Media practices and biases in reporting these processes
- The relative importance of different media in shaping opinion
- The impact of political advertising
- Access to the media by candidates and parties
- Strategies used by political forces to manipulate the media
- The way the media facilitate or impede the democratic system

The importance of the media can be attributed to their critical role in promoting the public's participation in electoral processes. The media are assumed to inform the choices of the citizens, supposedly the ultimate decision makers.

This chapter reports selected findings and conclusions about the role of the media in the 1988 Mexican presidential campaign, with special attention to the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), or Institutional Revolutionary Party.<sup>1</sup> The chapter begins with a brief description of the democratic and hierarchical duality of the Mexican political system and examines its relation to the Mexican media. The major candidates and the media's role in that election are reviewed.

Two analyses of the role of the media in this election are presented. The first focuses on the features of the media that relate to their role in a democratic process. The second deals with the role of the media in a

hierarchical system. We begin by distinguishing between these two levels of analysis.

### DEMOCRATIC-HIERARCHICAL DUALITY

The nature of the Mexican political system is a source of debate among political scientists, most of whom focus on the contradiction between a democratic and an authoritarian system. The former is based on individualism and a social representation rooted in the sovereignty of the individual through the structure of law and votes. The latter is hierarchical, reflecting the image of society as a whole, comprising various vertically interrelated segments.<sup>2</sup> In this view, social representations are the product of negotiation between the segments or factions.

In the traditional Mexican political system, a democratic, individualistic discourse is used to articulate an essentially hierarchical system. Contrasting individualistic (democratic) and hierarchical (authoritarian) forces are reflected in the contradictory forms of socializing and competing discourses. For example, to assure themselves of speedy or privileged services in public institutions, Mexicans will arrive at an office and mention that someone important has sent them (*vengo de parte del Licenciado X*) or that someone important has arranged the meeting for them (*un arreglo*).

This duality has also been noted in other Latin American societies. In his analysis of the Brazilian political system, DaMatta observed these two contrasting and competing discourses and found that the hierarchical dominated.<sup>3</sup> When Brazilians find themselves obstructed by a legal matter, they negotiate a solution (*jeitinho*, or compromise), or if they cannot negotiate, as may be the case, for example, when getting a traffic ticket, they often allude to the familiar, *Você sabe com quem está falando?* (Do you know with whom you are speaking?) This statement gives the impression that the person receiving the ticket knows someone who is higher up the hierarchical ladder and can therefore pull rank on the ticketing police officer. It would not be unusual for the officer to defer to the person who says this (assuming the person can manage to convince the policeman that he or she is of higher rank). Thus, although the democratic spirit specifies that a traffic ticket is due, the hierarchical system prevails in one-on-one encounters.

The Mexican political system is similar. The duality is reflected in many instances of both formal and informal political discourse—after all, the very name of the ruling party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, is a contrast in terms and in reality. The party may formally oper-

ate under assumed, general democratic principles of law and order, but the way in which individuals maneuver within the system is hierarchical.

Analysis of the media in a dual political system depends on the ability to consider both elements equally and simultaneously. If we want to offer a critical analysis of the media's role in a democratic system, we would be interested in issues of fairness of coverage, openness of the media to different candidacies and opinions, journalistic responsibility, and the like. If we analyze the media from the hierarchical perspective, we must begin from the viewpoint of the system, attempting to explain how the media maintain the existing political hierarchies that guarantee the continuity of the structure as a whole.

This contradiction is reflected in the way the media are organized and have traditionally operated in Mexico. For example, Mexican laws on the media are based on democratic principles: Freedom of expression is constitutionally guaranteed, and the media are mostly owned by private interests. However, Mexican media do not have the legal constraints typically found in liberal democracies, such as libel and slander laws, which, while enacted as safeguards of other individual rights, tend to inhibit freedom of speech.

Mexican media operate in a manner that reflects an ordered hierarchy, controlled by powerful forces of government and private business. Although most media are privately owned, it is commonly known that the owners are in the same social elite as those in government, and they work closely to maintain their status, order, and credibility through mutual agreement or the trade of favors. Thus the contrast between formal regulation of the media and their informal (or negotiated) operation has led to widely differing scholarly conclusions about the degree of press freedom in Mexico, especially in the relationship between the media and government. Merrill, Carter, and Alisky state that "the Mexican mass media traditionally do not criticize the President of the Republic directly, but do sometimes criticize his cabinet ministers."<sup>4</sup>

In a later study, Merrill describes Mexico as a country with "little control" of the press by government, enjoying a ranking similar to West Germany and the United Kingdom.<sup>5</sup> In one of the few systematic historical studies of the content of the Mexican press, Montgomery found that the press becomes more critical of the government in times of social stress; she thus concludes that Mexico enjoys a high degree of press freedom.<sup>6</sup>

But other scholars and journalists who have studied how Mexican media operate have arrived at very different conclusions. Adler and Riding document in detail the many ways government institutions exercise control over the press through co-optive measures, including

monetary offers to journalists and editors.<sup>7</sup> As Adler notes, these actions find little resistance among many members of the media:

Editors are not only aware of this, but condone it, and in many cases, demand it. First, the system [of bribes] allows them to pay reporters unrealistically low salaries. Second, many editors actually receive a "share" of the payment. Lastly, a reporter who is not willing to follow the system may cause a loss of revenue in publicity. According to almost all the journalists interviewed, writing a piece critical of the government without the editor's knowledge and approval is nearly impossible. Television does not escape the system either, and it is known among communicators that popular news programs "sell" time for government news.<sup>8</sup>

Thus the media in Mexico, as hierarchical organizations, demand the right to be free and the opportunity to be corrupt! This is one more manifestation of the inherent contradiction in the Mexican political system.

## THE CANDIDATES

Traditionally, the PRI's process of nominating its presidential candidate is one of the best-kept secrets in the country. The top leaders of the party, representing various sectors within the PRI, negotiate with the incumbent president to select the party's nominee. However, it is widely believed that the president has the final say, and for this reason, the PRI nomination is popularly referred to as *el dedazo* (the "big finger"), meaning that by pointing his finger, the president can decide the nominee.

Before the 1988 nomination, a small but important faction within the PRI began publicly calling for a more democratic and open nomination. This faction was led by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas Solorzano, a former governor of the state of Michoacán, and, more important, the son of Lázaro Cárdenas, a founder of the PRI and one of Mexico's best known and beloved presidents (1934–1940). This stature made Cárdenas's challenge to the traditional system difficult to ignore or minimize, but his faction, known as "the Democratic Current," was unable ultimately to influence the nomination—at least in the 1988 elections.

Because he believed he could not work within the PRI, Cárdenas left the party and became an opposition candidate under the coalition of leftist parties called the National Democratic Front (Frente Democrático Nacional). His name recognition made him an important con-

tender from the start. The most organized and largest leftist party, the Mexican Socialist Party (Partido Mexicano Socialista, or PMS), however, had already nominated Herberto Castillo. He stayed in the race until June 1988, when increasing pressure from his own party, which saw a unique opportunity to create an alliance, forced him to support Cárdenas. Thus, by election day, Cárdenas was supported by all the parties of the left, as well as by many elements within the PRI, such as peasants and union members, who were attracted by his nationalist and populist positions or who believed the PRI had gone too far to the right.

Meanwhile, the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN), traditionally the most important opposition party, had nominated Manuel Clouthier ("Maquío"), a charismatic self-made entrepreneur known for his publicity stunts. PAN was identified with business interests and espoused a free-market philosophy, proposing a reduction in the size of government and less intervention in the economy.

Two other candidates ran in the elections, but neither gained much support. They were Ibarra de Piedra, a Trotskyite who had years earlier made a name for herself by publicly decrying the "disappearance" of her son for political reasons, and Gumerindo Magana, who had the support of the small but active sector tied to conservative Christian democratic groups.

## MEXICAN MEDIA AND THE ELECTORAL PROCESS

The formal structure of the mass media in Mexico is similar to that found in most liberal Western democracies.<sup>9</sup> Most print media are privately owned but are often linked to political figures or to large business concerns that use them to create alliances with powerful groups.<sup>10</sup> Countless newspapers and magazines are published throughout the country, but only a few have national distribution. This study used only newspapers and magazines from Mexico City, where the federal government is located (table 9.1).<sup>11</sup>

Television and radio, as is the case in other countries, are more formally and directly regulated by the government through licensing. In addition, a number of radio and television stations are operated directly by the government. The only public television network is run at the federal level, but many regional radio and television networks are operated by the states. Because of the political monopoly of the PRI, these public stations usually show little independence from either government or party politics. Publicly owned radio and television stations

Table 9.1  
SELECTED DATA ON MEXICAN MEDIA

<i>Dailies</i>	
<i>Excelsior</i>	Circulation: 175,000-185,000 Key points: Considered the leading newspaper, widely read by the political class. Offers a wide range of information and commentaries.
<i>El Norte</i>	Circulation: 100,000 Key points: Largest newspaper of Monterrey, with good reputation among journalists for being "clean," with a probusiness leaning.
<i>La Jornada</i>	Circulation: 25,000 Key points: Founded by dissidents of <i>Unomasuno</i> , it is the preferred paper of intellectuals, with a progressive leaning. Considered to have a small but politically important readership.
<i>Unomasuno</i>	Circulation: 70,000 Key points: Until the advent of <i>La Jornada</i> , it was the paper of the left. The original director, Manuel Becerra Acosta, was a former director of <i>Excelsior</i> .
<i>El Universal</i>	Circulation: 225,000 Key points: The senior paper of Mexico City, very successful financially and considered center and usually progovernment.
<i>Weeklies</i>	
<i>Siempre</i>	Circulation: 100,000 Key points: A traditionally important political magazine read by the political class. Editorially tends to be identified with the PRI, but it allows regular critical pieces.
<i>Proceso</i>	Circulation: 200,000 Key points: Its director, Julio Scherer, is considered the most influential journalist in Mexico. He founded <i>Proceso</i> when, as director of <i>Excelsior</i> , he challenged presidential power and was forced to leave. Considered to be the most critical publication in Mexico, enjoying a good reputation among journalists.
<i>Television</i>	
<i>Imevision</i>	Key points: Government owned, it reaches most cities in Mexico.
<i>Televisa</i>	Key points: The giant consortium has a virtual monopoly over private television and is the most important producer of television programming. Politically, it tends to be identified with a pro-U.S., probusiness view. Although Televisa is a private consortium, its connection to political leadership is well known and as we shall see later, was made public by Televisa's president.

SOURCES: *World Media Handbook* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1990); Raul Trejo Delarbe, ed., *Las Redes de Televisa* (Mexico City: Claves Latinoamericanas, 1989).

NOTE: All papers are Mexico City, except *El Norte*, which is from Monterrey.

are also operated by institutions of higher education, such as Channel 11, which is run by the Instituto Politécnico (Politechnical Institute).

Most electronic media are private, as in the United States. However, unlike U.S. television and radio, the electronic media of Mexico have no limits to the number of stations that can be owned by a single organization. Thus the giant Televisa consortium in Mexico has a virtual monopoly on private television. Its communications empire extends to radio, films, sports, cable television, records, publishing houses, museums, and other related organizations. It is fitting that in one of the best-known studies of the conglomerate, Televisa is referred to as the "fifth estate."<sup>12</sup>

By law, political parties have limited access to free air time, but this is a small portion of the total time the electronic media devote to electoral matters. Parties are allowed to buy air time, although stations can refuse them. Furthermore, neither television nor radio is required to honor the so-called "fairness doctrine." This U.S. tradition was dropped as a legal requirement by the FCC in 1989, but its basic assumption that news accounts should cover "both sides of an issue" continues to be a mainstream journalistic value. For example, the opposition party may be permitted to broadcast a speech immediately following a presidential speech. In Mexico, there is no legal recourse to the notion of fairness for challenging the news judgment of stations.

## THE ROLE OF THE MEXICAN MEDIA IN DEMOCRATIZATION

The 1988 Mexican elections purportedly demonstrated a strong push toward greater representation, at least as reflected in the development of a multiparty system. If so, how important were the media in bringing about this change? Did the media consequently show a greater degree of freedom despite the political monopoly of the PRI? Were the media important in strengthening opposition parties?

The study on which this chapter is based analyzed journalistic coverage of the elections, with particular attention to the news rather than political propaganda, in the belief that the news should play a responsible role in democracies, informing and educating by reporting on important changes and new trends as they develop.<sup>13</sup> Factors that might indicate a greater media role in influencing the democratic process include the degree to which news about opposition parties was reported and the content and tone of news about the candidates.

Although the new openness of the Mexican print media during the campaign is significant, it could hardly be the basis for mass political mobilization in a country where most citizens do not read newspapers. In Mexico, the press is a vehicle for the political class,<sup>14</sup> and although many newspapers are published, their circulations are modest. *Excelsior*, the leading political newspaper in the country, claims to have a circulation of roughly a quarter-million but probably does not exceed 200,000, according to information given to us by present and former journalists of the newspaper. Television reaches a wide audience as the worldwide news source of choice.<sup>15</sup> Best known among Mexican television news broadcasts is Televisa's "24 Hours" (24 Horas). The radio industry is not as monopolistic as television and print. Nonetheless, opposition parties were largely shut out of radio broadcasts.

Randomly chosen contents of *Excelsior*, with selected coverage by *Proceso*, *Siempre*, and *La Jornada*; "24 Hours"; and some radio interviews were studied here. Although there are many other news outlets in Mexico, the ones used in this analysis are considered among the most important, in terms of both audience reach and political impact. In addition, journalists from all media who covered the election provided additional material about then-current and groundbreaking journalistic practices.

#### Campaign Coverage in the Print Media

We analyzed a sample of articles appearing in *Excelsior* on twenty-four days randomly chosen between January and May 1988, reviewing for each day the average amount of space devoted to each of the candidates' campaigns, the average number of op-ed pieces about the campaign, and the average number of stories about each candidate. Photographs were not included in these computations (table 9.2)

The PRI campaign received more coverage in *Excelsior* than all other campaigns combined, with more than 50 percent of the total reporting on the presidential campaign process. This volume, however, can hardly be explained by newsworthiness alone. Everyone then in Mexico knew that the 1988 elections were important because of the strength of the opposition parties. The emergence of political forces might have been deemed especially newsworthy because it represented "something new." For example, the 1980 candidacy of John Anderson in the United States, which ultimately gained about 5 percent of the votes, received an impressive amount of coverage in both print and electronic media.<sup>16</sup>

The only newspapers that extensively and regularly covered the campaigns of political parties other than the PRI, especially those of Cárdenas and Clouthier, were *Excelsior*, *El Universal*, *La Jornada*, and *Unomás-*

Table 9.2  
AVERAGE DAILY COVERAGE\* IN *EXCELSIOR* OF  
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN THE 1988 MEXICAN  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION FROM A SAMPLE OF  
TWENTY-FOUR DAYS (JANUARY-APRIL 1990)

Candidacy	Column Inches of News Stories	Number of News Stories	Number of Op-Ed Pieces
Salinas de Gortari	98.5	4.0	2.3
Cárdenas	30.1	1.1	0.4
Clouthier	30.3	1.2	0.2
Castillo	28.4	0.9	0.3
All Others	5.0	0.3	0.1
Coverage of Elections by Political Columnists			
All Candidacies: 89.4**			

\*This includes editorials, op-ed pieces and letters to the editor. It does not include political columnists.

\*\*The writing of political columns makes it difficult to create exclusive campaign categories. However, in a limited sample drawn on a paragraph-by-paragraph basis, the PRI campaign was the main focus in 75 percent of the cases.

*uno*. *Excelsior* gave significantly more coverage to opposition parties than it had given in previous campaigns. *Proceso*, a weekly magazine important in the recent history of Mexican journalism as a forum for critical coverage of Mexican politics, printed an interview in which opposition candidates interviewed agreed that in comparison to electronic media, print media provided significant space to their campaigns. Cárdenas, the former PRI leader who became the opposition candidate most threatening to the party's hegemony in the presidential elections, characterized press coverage of his campaign as "objective and truthful, but scarce." In the interview published by *Proceso* on March 7, 1988, he stated, "While the press publishes one story a day on the opposition candidates, if that much, the official candidate [Salinas de Gortari] gets many pages."

The press did break new ground by printing criticism of the official candidate, Salinas de Gortari. For example, *Siempre*, one of the most important political weeklies in the country, wrote on October 14, 1987, immediately after the candidacy of Salinas de Gortari was announced:

The nomination fell on Carlos Salinas de Gortari, who was up until now, Secretary of Planning and Budget. And the irony is that we seem to have reached such extremes [in Mexico] that it is no longer required of him [the candidate] to possess a solid preparation nor great knowledge about the issues.



To publish harsh criticism of the person expected to be the next Mexican president was considered by journalists and observers a "break with tradition." As one informant journalist noted, "The tradition in Mexico is that there are three 'sacred' subjects journalists dare not criticize: the Virgin of Guadalupe, the Army [Estado Mayor], and the President. Obviously, we have broken with one taboo."

Of the print media analyzed in this study, *Proceso* was the most relentless in its critical coverage of the PRI campaign and the lame duck presidency of Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado. It was also the only national print outlet that regularly covered the media as a campaign issue, devoting many articles to details of PRI methods, some corrupt, of procuring the support of the media.

#### *Campaign Coverage by "24 Hours"*

The news program "24 Hours," anchored by the best-known Mexican television journalist, Jacobo Zabludovsky, has long enjoyed first place in the ratings and is seen throughout Mexico, as well as on many Spanish language television stations in the United States. Ideologically, Televisa is aligned with big business and is strongly pro-U.S. and antileft, as documented extensively by Gutierrez Espindola.<sup>17</sup> Its conservative right-wing tilt is especially evident in its coverage of international news and often does not correspond to the official government position on international issues. Perhaps because its programming is perceived by the public as independent from the government in international news, Televisa programming, and in particular "24 Hours," has received high ratings.

At the same time, Televisa is vulnerable. From the right, it is attacked as a monopoly and as protecting the PRI's privileges in coverage and news angles. From the left, it is the target of critics who advocate a publicly owned television industry. Televisa is therefore likely to be aligned with government positions, especially relating to the institution of the presidency.

In the early stages of the 1988 campaign, the president of Televisa, Emilio Azcarraga, declared that "Televisa is with the PRI," surprising journalists and intellectuals with its open endorsement. Discussion centered on how the endorsement might have hurt the candidacy of Salinas de Gortari, as well as speculation about reciprocal favors from the PRI. The statement was interpreted by some as proof that the PRI had lost touch with its traditional populist base and had become identified with the interests of big business. Nevertheless, until the campaign

Table 9.3  
DISTRIBUTION OF COVERAGE BY "24 HOURS" OF  
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES DURING THE 1988 MEXICAN  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS (APRIL 4-JUNE 24, 1988\*)

Candidate	Number of Stories	Average Length of Story	Total Time
Salinas de Gortari	74	1 min./55 sec.	141 min./40 sec.
Cárdenas	10	55 sec.	8 min./51 sec.
Clouthier	7**	31 sec.	4 min./9 sec.
Castillo	9	50 sec.	7 min./30 sec.
Ibarra de Piedra	7	38 sec.	4 min./23 sec.
Magaña	3	48 sec.	2 min./23 sec.

\*Only news that directly covered the campaign was included. Excluded from the table are general election stories (technical, etc.) or general political stories unrelated to the campaign.

\*\*Not included is one particular story that lasted 7.5 minutes; it is discussed at length in the text.

started, "24 Hours" was regarded as a more independent television news source than government-owned stations (table 9.3).

In nightly editions of "24 Hours" between April 4 and June 24, 1988, more than 80 percent of the time devoted to the campaigns was focused on the PRI candidate. Coverage of opposition parties was infrequent, and the occasional stories were short. There was a hierarchy in the distribution of time assigned to the opposition candidates. The difference between the time allotted the PRI candidate and all the others, however, was such that all the opposition candidates appeared equally important, or equally unimportant. Especially noteworthy was the reduced coverage of Clouthier (even less than that of Castillo) although as the candidate of the traditionally strongest opposition party, Clouthier might have been considered more newsworthy. But reduced coverage of Clouthier's campaign was no accident.

Effective analysis of television news includes examination of both audio and visual elements, because the message transmitted and received is derived from both components.<sup>18</sup> Stories on the PRI usually contained long sound bites from candidate Salinas de Gortari, while the voice in stories about opposition candidates was usually that of the anchorperson or reporter. In only two stories on Cárdenas was his voice actually used.

The tone used in reporting on the candidates differed sharply. Stories about Salinas de Gortari were usually read enthusiastically, and he was always referred to with the reverence accorded a president. Stories

about the opposition were read in a flat voice, and the candidate was sometimes referred to as "another candidate."

Sarcasm was sometimes evident in stories about opposition candidates, especially Cárdenas. In one instance, a news story reported a speech Cárdenas had given in which he stated, "My government will be pluralistic and there will be room for representatives of all the parties . . . but not for those of the PRI." The camera switched to the anchor-person, who raised his eyebrows and added, "Not so pluralistic."

Differences were also noted between the visual images used in news stories of the PRI and those of opposition candidates. In most cases, visuals of Salinas de Gortari showed large and enthusiastic crowds or showed the candidate in command. By contrast, visuals for opposition candidates usually showed few supporters, and in the case of Cárdenas, often focused on students, giving the impression that his candidacy attracted only the "young and educated." Few of the images depicted peasants or workers attending Cárdenas's rallies, although it was well known that in some parts of the country he held significant strength among those groups.<sup>19</sup>

Eventually, "24 Hours" became an issue of the campaign, and opposition parties uniformly criticized its rather exaggerated bias in favor of the PRI. The opposition criticism could not be easily dismissed, because dissent came mostly from the candidate of PAN, a party that represents private free-market ideology and has a strong following among many groups that otherwise identify themselves with the economic philosophy of Televisa.

Frustrated by PAN's inability to secure time on television and radio, Manuel Clouthier made the allocation of media time a campaign issue. With the support of other opposition parties, PAN organized Resistencia Civil, a formal boycott of Televisa, especially "24 Hours." One sticker displayed on many cars around the country read, "Don't Watch 24 Hours Because It Doesn't Tell the Truth" (*No Vea 24 Horas Porque No Dice La Verdad*). Clouthier routinely appeared throughout the country with his mouth covered by adhesive tape to symbolize the electronic media blackout he charged had been imposed on him and his party.

When the opposition parties persisted in making the electronic media an issue of the campaign (and one that was reported by selected print media, such as *La Jornada*, *Proceso*, and *Excelsior*), Televisa attempted to answer the accusations. Zabludovsky, in one newscast, read the entire text of a paid op-ed advertisement that had been published in various newspapers and was signed by Alcoa de la Vega, secretary of the Union of Workers in Mexico's television and radio industry. It took Zabludovsky 7.5 minutes to read the entire text, giving the impression

that the opinions expressed by the op-ed ad were part of a factual news story. The last words of the text, read in a careful, slower pace, stated, "Mr. Clouthier is not fooling anyone. Thus ends the public statement."

In another broadcast, Zabludovsky explained and defended the journalistic criteria Televisa used to cover the opposition:

We studied the procedures in other countries. In Italy, the four most important [television] channels have distinct political orientations and function accordingly, favoring their preferred party. . . . In the United States, the political parties can buy as much air time as they want. In Televisa, we believe that the political parties should be assigned air time in the news in proportion to the quantity of votes that they received in the last elections.

In the same editorial, Televisa demonstrated how, by this formula, Cárdenas may actually have received more coverage than was fair. Zabludovsky concluded by stating that the "respect" owed to the audience did not allow Televisa to give in to the opposition candidates' demands. The credibility of "24 Hours" appeared to have been hurt as a result of the controversy.

#### *Radio Coverage*

We were unable to systematically tape radio news programs during the campaign. Instead, radio journalists who had worked on the campaign were interviewed, and radio coverage of the campaigns in selected sites in the state of Veracruz and Mexico City were taped.

Because control of the radio industry is not as monopolistic as that of other media, opposition candidates were, in a few instances, interviewed freely or able to buy commercial time. Some talk shows gave significant air time to opposition candidates; however, even this coverage was minute in comparison to the time and scope given to Salinas de Gortari's campaign. In Veracruz, for example, each of the three candidates was allowed access to radio interviews, but the official candidate received full coverage of all his campaign events. The opposition parties, especially PAN, protested their lack of access to radio.

Nevertheless, both Clouthier and Cárdenas regarded radio opportunities as very important. In Veracruz, when Cárdenas was interviewed in the regionally known news program, "Ocho en Punto" (Eight O'Clock on the Dot), he stated

I have had, I must say, the important opportunity to campaign on radio. That is, there have been many stations in different parts of

the nation, which, in my opinion, performed their duties, opened their doors to us and allowed us to reach their audiences, as is happening here. But, on the other hand, if we look at what official television has done, it mentions almost nothing about what we are doing every day. With us, sometimes it's "candidate X was in this town," and that's it.

While disc jockeys or radio reporters could not deviate from the "official" guidelines, callers were frequently able to offer sharp criticism or state their support for opposition parties. One radio reporter said, "Basically, when the official candidate is in town, you have to be careful. But once he is gone, they [the PRI] don't pay that much attention to what we do. Things happen very fast in radio."

As the first medium to broadcast the name of the official PRI candidate, radio was critical in the *destape*, or "uncovering," when the official candidate is announced. There is highly charged speculation surrounding the announcement, because the name of the candidate is kept secret. However, in the hours preceding the official announcement that Salinas de Gortari was the candidate, one radio station aired what became known as the "false uncovering" (*destape falso*). In a taped interview, Alfredo del Mazo, believed by many to be favored as the candidate, referred to and extended congratulations to Sergio García Ramírez, another possible candidate, as the party's nominee! Such a blunder by an important politician like Alfredo del Mazo was the topic of much discussion, even after the elections.<sup>20</sup> Many journalists placed such importance on this affair because it gave radio the status of a player, not just a transmitter in Mexican politics.

Radio grew in significance during the campaign because it occasionally became a conduit for public expression through talk shows and interviews with opposition candidates. But it is important to note that it was the strength and persistence of the opposition candidates that ultimately forced radio stations to grant them greater access.

## THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN THE HIERARCHICAL SYSTEM

The campaign, in our estimation, is a process in which two fundamental political rituals take place. One ritual plays out the drama of uncertainty (ambiguity), which in turn serves to ratify the importance and dominance of negotiations and engages members of the political class in an ongoing activity of interpretations that ultimately define "reality." The candidate becomes the symbol by which uncertainty is resolved as

he travels around the country. A second ritual involves the transformation of the candidate of choice into a national symbol with kinglike qualities. (This is well illustrated in the "scenario creation" of Brazilian soap operas as described in Venicio de Lima's chapter in this book.) We found that the role of the print media was mainly instrumental in the ritual of uncertainty (and negotiations) and television was used mainly to transform the candidate-negotiator into the president-king of the republic.

### *The Conventional View*

Many researchers have concluded that the media in Mexico are best described as a communications tool supporting the hegemonic domination of the powerful class, a combination of capitalists and other leaders of the PRI. Its members, if not emerging from the entrepreneurial class, find in this coalition the possibility of becoming future members of this class. This analysis is based on the influential work of Gramsci, who developed the theory of hegemony to explain how capitalism manages to survive in liberal democracies without using physical threat.<sup>21</sup>

If this analysis applies to Mexico, it follows that Mexican media have taken a leading role in indoctrinating the population to accept social inequalities as natural. Some studies have suggested a correlation between viewing commercial television in Mexico and a more materialistic, individualistic, and pro-U.S. preference.<sup>22</sup> These studies do not, however, provide enough evidence to conclude that the PRI, as a unique political institution that uses a different discourse from that of commercial television, is able, through the media, to convince people to vote for its candidates. If media coverage gave the PRI an electoral advantage, how can we explain the recent strength of the opposition?

If the media are to be persuasive in elections, they must have some credibility among their audiences. The relationship of source credibility and persuasion is complex, and there is substantial evidence that the credibility of the initial source is important in determining impact.<sup>23</sup> Previous research on the general credibility of the Mexican media dismisses them as credible sources of information.

In a survey of a sample of government workers in Mexico City, Adler found that more than 80 percent of respondents polled believed that the press was not credible when covering issues affecting the Mexican government or the PRI.<sup>24</sup> Recent observations in Eastern European countries with highly censored and controlled media tend to show that press control does not automatically create believers.<sup>25</sup> If anything, therefore, the Mexican elections could be considered, in terms of rally-

ing votes for the dominant party, a significant failure of the power of the media.

The print media manifested their independence during the 1988 presidential campaign, in part by indicating that they were not wholly committed to PRI interests. During the campaign, a dramatic rise in the circulation of critical publications such as *Proceso* and *La Jornada* seems to support the theory that a demand exists for a more independent, critical press. Despite the increased public interest, critical comments were the exceptions, and the media did not significantly change their practices. As in former elections, media attention focused mainly on the campaign of the PRI candidate.

Journalists interviewed during the campaign indicated that press coverage for the PRI was secured through a very expensive system of co-optation in which reporters, editors, publishers, photographers, and other media representatives received ample reward for devoting their space and time to the PRI candidate. These rewards often supported the newspapers and magazines, according to interviews. In exchange, the press was expected not only to give ample coverage to the PRI campaign but also to accept photographs and news bulletins furnished directly by the PRI campaign and publish them as news reports (*gacetas*). Few publications could claim that they were not participants in this co-optation. *La Jornada*, for instance, which represents the interests of the left, was often difficult to find in Mexico City during the campaign, precisely because it gave ample coverage to the candidacy of Cárdenas. Nonetheless, it has been reported that *La Jornada* accepted *gacetas*. Many reporters for *La Jornada* resented this practice, and as a compromise, the publishers agreed that *gacetas* would be published in a different typeface so that at least the journalistic community would know.

#### *A Different View*

The PRI campaign, including its use of the media, was more than a series of strategies to elicit votes. Past PRI campaigns, even those that were uncontested, were very similar in style and size to the 1988 campaign. For example, former president Lopez Portillo, who ran unopposed in 1976, received more coverage in *Excelsior* than Echeverría in 1970 and roughly the same as de la Madrid in 1982.<sup>26</sup> The PRI also continued to assign great importance to newspapers and magazines, and the majority of reporters following the 1988 PRI campaign represented print media. This focus on print media hardly suggests a vote-eliciting

mentality, since Mexicans, like citizens in most other countries, get their news from television and radio. Although Mexico has many newspapers and magazines (more than fifteen dailies in Mexico City, for example), print media penetration in the general population is not high. Therefore, the important question is, What is the rationale for the PRI's expensive and exhausting preoccupation with the media, especially the print media, if this effort is not to secure votes?

#### *The Presidential Campaign*

To answer this question, it is essential first to describe the role of the presidential campaign in the Mexican political system. In Mexico, two important questions traditionally exist regarding presidential elections: Who will be the PRI candidate, and once that is known, what he will do and with whom will he ally himself when he is in power?

The PRI incorporates diverse groups and organizations as well as leaders who espouse a variety of ideologies and interests. To guarantee that each group represented by the PRI has a chance to find a place in the government, the Mexican political system is presidential, and the president serves only one term. The presidential system ensures that a large number of jobs will be assigned to new people every six years, and therefore those groups that do not find their place in one administration always hope to be part of the next. As soon as the party's nominee is announced, interest shifts to how the new power structure will be organized, how each actor will be placed in the next administration.

#### *The Campaign as Political Ritual*

During the campaign, the PRI candidate—often referred to as “the official candidate”—travels to every region of the country, where a series of events and ceremonies, best described as political rituals, is organized. Social rituals, of which political rituals are a type, are especially important in moments of ambiguity that border on potential disruption of the social order.<sup>27</sup> In political campaigns, Mexican media provide arenas for these political rituals so they can be shared with the larger public.<sup>28</sup>

The campaign rituals symbolically represent two fundamental processes in the political cycle. During the campaign, new alliances are established and defined. The establishment of a new governing coalition is expressed in conflict and resolution during these rituals. Campaign rituals secure the presidential nature of the political system: They

transform the person-candidate into an almost mythical figure of king-president, who represents an understanding of the problems and concerns of the people as well as a vision of the solutions.

### *The Media and Political Ritual*

In recent years, some media scholars have begun looking at the role of the media in significant social rituals. Elliott's excellent study of press rites in Great Britain illustrates how the press is used to maintain social relations.<sup>29</sup> In this analytical framework, the press is an integral part of society; production and audience are not separate components. The repetitive, or ritualistic, manner in which certain stories are covered (about terrorist acts, for example) is explained by what anthropologists have proposed as a central function of many rituals: the desire to bring about a sense of togetherness, especially in times of ambiguity.

The ritualized nature of the campaign is duplicated in the media, which become an additional component in the rituals of the campaign. A ritualized reporting of the campaign takes place. At each important stop during the 1988 PRI campaign, the press typically published statements made by regional leaders and common folk, outlining their needs and problems. The candidate's speech then addressed these problems and offered solutions.

When the candidate visited a town, local newspapers published advertisements and editorials from various groups (such as unions and associations) giving their welcome and support to the candidate and "next president" of Mexico. Political commentators filled pages of print that provided additional interpretations of events occurring on the campaign trail. The publicity, in the form of advertisements, television and radio programs, banners, posters, buttons, and scenic arrangements, were much the same at each of the campaign stops, often being transferred from one stop to another. This cycle was repeated from city to city, region to region, day in, day out.

### *The Importance of Interpretation*

In Mexican politics, facts are scarce while interpretations proliferate. Nowhere is this more evident or far-reaching than during the presidential campaign. These interpretations are fundamental to an understanding of the political system.<sup>30</sup> Interpretations (and their link to the process of political negotiations) begin during the campaign and reflect the negotiations between the candidate and different sectors and leaders at both the national and regional levels. Thus, in each event of

the campaign, both conflicts and resolutions are represented. The seating order of leaders, the speeches made by the candidate and other leaders during these campaign ceremonies, the presence or absence of personalities on the campaign trail, are all facts interpreted in terms of alliances and relations between the candidate and diverse groups around the country.

Two examples demonstrate the importance of this process. Gomez-Tagle offers data from a recent election for the Chamber of Deputies and the three former Chamber elections.<sup>31</sup> After a careful follow-up of those cases in which the opposition parties challenged the election results, Gomez-Tagle concludes that

- Without a doubt, vote fraud by the PRI had taken place in some districts.
- Nevertheless, one could not prove to the Electoral Commission that vote fraud had occurred.
- Although vote fraud could not be proven, in some cases the Electoral Commission recognized irregularities and declared those elections void.
- Nevertheless, decisions to declare the elections void were the result, not of direct pressure by any particular electoral district, but of a global negotiation between the PRI and each party.
- In many cases, the fraud that occurred had not been necessary to guarantee the PRI victory.

This ambiguity is central to the political culture. For example, in the issue of vote fraud, a frequent scenario in Mexican politics, opposition parties (as well as PRI candidates vis-à-vis their own party) are forced to negotiate with the PRI. In this case, the deputy of the PRI who has won a seat in the Chamber of Deputies cannot claim this victory as a personal triumph but must admit a debt to the party apparatus. Thus, in the electoral process itself, "there is a system of accountability and verification of votes which guarantees that interpretations will prevail over facts, and that the process of negotiation will prevail over individual sovereignty."<sup>32</sup>

### *The Media and the Process of Interpretation*

For the political class, correct interpretation is a central issue because it means identification with the leaders to whom power and privilege will be granted in the new administration. Since interpretation is not an easy task, the political class needs guidance from both formal and informal sources of information. The press, but not the electronic media,

provides an important source for interpretations of how the new administration is being shaped and how alliances are being built. Therefore, it is not as important that the facts are correct as that the interpretations are on target.

Journalists assigned to cover the PRI campaign were often charged to provide readers with interpretations about the relevant power struggles dramatized in the rituals. As one informant journalist noted,

Frankly, the newspapers don't really have to send reporters just for the purpose of covering the events of the campaign. We get all the information, with photos, directly from the PRI, so that the only important thing we have to do in the campaign is to report on those subtle symbols that may reveal who is going to be in—or who will be out—in the new government.

This role allows members of the political class who cannot or are not invited to be present at campaign ceremonies to figure out how the power game is proceeding. Through the press, the political class can reduce its uncertainties. For this reason, political columnists, particularly those who chronicle political life and the campaign, are an elite among the press corps. Most reporters covering the PRI campaign are guests of the PRI, with their expenses paid by the PRI and their incomes supplemented. The political columnists are considered special guests with special status. They get better hotel rooms, have more access to the candidate, and are granted more favors. These columnists are well known and regularly read by members of the political class.<sup>33</sup> A similar role is played by some journalists, who are neither guests nor, apparently, financially supported by the PRI. They follow the campaign and interpret the events, as did journalists representing the weekly magazine *Proceso* in the 1988 campaign.

The political chroniclers fill their columns with revealing facts of the campaign, and through these hermeneutic exercises help direct and shape "authorized" versions of the facts. The press can thus be viewed as the organ by which both "facts" and "interpretations" are presented to the political class.

This status is reserved for the press, not for the electronic media, because the vast amount of information that the political class requires can be accommodated only by print media. For example, a photograph of the candidate shaking hands with a given personality quickly becomes a lead story about the state of negotiations among groups pictured, or it may signify a position of relative power to the person who appears "close" to the candidate. One photojournalist remarked that he frequently received generous monetary offerings from people in re-

turn for a photograph showing them shaking hands with the candidate. Photos that show the magnitude of public manifestations, lists of pictures of the "special guests" (politically significant persons) who attend those events, and the like, are all valued pieces of information.

Our analysis of the political columns in *Excelsior* that targeted "significant" themes in the campaign revealed the following:

- The presence or absence of national and regional leaders on the campaign trail, especially stressing those who were seen often or those presumed to wield political power.
- Who is talking to whom—almost "gossip," in which the simple fact that two politicians are seen together or greeting each other is presumed to have meaning.
- Dissent within the party. This is not a common theme; however, it appeared often in the case of "La Quina," the leader of the Oil Workers' Union, in which much speculation centered on his supposed "secret" support for Cárdenas.
- Lists of candidates for Congress and Senate, the most-discussed topic often interpreted in terms of who were close associates and supporters of Salinas and who were members of the "system." Much of this discussion involved the ability and power of the candidate and his close associates, as well as key leaders of the PRI, to place their people on the list. These references were then interpreted as the result of negotiations, which were also "graded" in terms of the degree of relative power they reflected. Much attention was devoted to the Working Sector of the PRI, which was generally considered (interpreted) not to have favored the selection of Salinas de Gortari.

#### *Uncertainty as Power*

Uncertainty (ambiguity) is also a useful source of power for the candidate. Organizational sociologists have long recognized that uncertainty becomes an important source of power for individuals or subunits within organizations.

Crozier's analysis of the French tobacco-processing industry suggests that work in this industry is so highly mechanized and standardized that little is left to chance.<sup>34</sup> The only important area of uncertainty within the organization is the possibility of machine breakdown. He found that mechanics who could successfully deal with this eventuality enjoyed considerably more power than would be predicted on the basis of their formal position in the organization. He concluded that subunits

that cope more effectively with uncertainty are more likely to acquire power. Similarly, Goldner reported that the industrial relations unit in a manufacturing organization maintained its base of power by "its use of the union as an outside threat."<sup>35</sup>

### *Uncertainty and the Media*

In interviews during the 1988 campaign, some reporters underscored the "contradictions" (ambiguity) present in the candidates' speeches. For instance, at times, Salinas spoke "with all candor" that the one-party system was a thing of the past. He would at other times stress his adherence to the "goals of the Mexican Revolution." This was sometimes interpreted as a warning against a quick, reformist interpretation of his oft-stated program of modernization.

Contradictory messages kept people wondering and presumably unable to act—especially if they would be affected by the candidate's ideology. The press is a fundamental instrument in the diffusion of these messages of uncertainty. For example, in one of the speeches he made in Puebla on February 19, 1988, Salinas de Gortari stated, "In politics, alliances carry a price. Those that are made with my party will see a positive response in actuality. Those that are made against my party will, also in actuality, have to live with the consequences." This statement was made in a speech to the Mexican Union of Electricians and the all-important Oil Workers' Union. Commentaries in the critical press had indicated that the leaders of the Oil Workers' Union were unhappy with the nomination of Salinas de Gortari and his policies.

In the days that followed, columnists, as well as other politicians, interpreted Salinas de Gortari's remarks. He was criticized because the speech seemed to contradict the new democratic spirit with which the candidate was presumably identified, and some questioned whether he truly wanted to "hear Mexico speak," his campaign slogan. Was this statement a message to the opposition or to members of the PRI, targeted by the candidate because of their lukewarm support? Those who defended the candidate simply noted that it was not unusual for candidates to reward those who had supported them. One journalist interviewed by the author pointed out that some PRI members who wrote their interpretations in the newspapers had been identified with factions of other PRI leaders, and Salinas's statement enabled him to keep attention focused on himself:

It doesn't really matter what he meant. At the time, the country was busy figuring out the potential impact that the candidacy of

Cárdenas was having on the traditional base of support of the PRI, especially in the organized labor sector. As soon as he [Salinas] said those words, everybody started to talk about what he meant by it. He kept them very busy for quite a few days.

Thus, the press disseminates the campaign rituals to a larger audience, serves as an arena where messages create ambiguity (both as an exercise of power and a facilitator of the negotiation process), and is a source of interpretation of campaign events. Ambiguity is served by a style of journalism that might be termed "user-unfriendly." A reader must have great knowledge about who's who to understand both the events and the interpretations found in the press. For example, the frequent publications by commentators never reveal if the author is a journalist, a politician, or a private citizen.

Indeed, research on how politicians interpret the press indicates that only those with much experience in Mexican politics find newspapers useful. Others find them too difficult to decode without the help of "experts."<sup>36</sup> An example was provided by an ex-journalist and public affairs specialist who worked for a Mexican government ministry on a newsletter in which newspaper articles were translated into "straight facts" for the American public. She often found that the articles were clouded with such uncertainty that many times the actual information was wrong:

I think the journalists themselves were wary of interpreting or reporting the facts wrongly; their articles were written with such ambiguity that should the journalists have printed the wrong information, they could easily have said that the reader interpreted the information incorrectly. This made it difficult to extract factual information from the articles, but left journalists with an "escape," should an angry politician accuse them of misinterpreting what he had said. The only way I could be fairly certain the facts were correct, was if they were repeated at least five times in separate articles.

### *The Candidate as National Figure*

The PRI campaign served to construct the person of the president of the republic. During the campaign, the candidate traveled through the country and received endorsements, heard complaints, accepted petitions, and spoke with diverse persons and groups who demanded privileged positions of negotiation with the candidate. In this process of listening to regional problems, the candidate became identified with all



parts of the country. Simultaneously, because of his willingness to listen, he was identified with solutions to regional problems.

As the candidate traveled through the country, references were always made to his particular connection with each region. In Puebla, he was presented as a fellow "Pobiano" because at some point in his life he had worked in that state; in Veracruz, he was a "Veracruzano" because his mother was a teacher in that state; in Tlaxcala, he was identified with that state because he had conducted his field research there as a student. These images of the candidate as belonging to every region of the country were repeated by the local media during each of the campaign stops.

The candidate's identification with each region was, however, manifested most symbolically in the ritualized hearings (*audiencias*) in which he listened to local concerns and pledged his commitment to solve problems. In these elections, the PRI used both television and radio as important forums for such hearings. The slogan adopted by the candidate, "Let Mexico Speak Out" (*Que Hable México*), was used in every region where the candidate appeared on television and radio to answer questions from the general public. These carefully staged ceremonies were used to convey the candidate's sincere desire to "hear the people" and make an endless list of commitments.

In addition to regular broadcast appearances Salinas de Gortari made to answer callers' questions, local television and radio stations often dedicated the entire day to covering all the local events of the campaign. Popular disc jockeys were recruited to give this coverage a festive spirit, and local personalities from both the political and entertainment world acknowledged the importance of the visit. The image was clear: This was not the visit of a presidential candidate as much as the visit of the president-king making a stop to meet his people and offer himself as the answer to their problems.

Television images during these stops were carefully staged to present the candidate as godlike and demonstrate the wide support of the general population. His words were reported as if they were divine and were almost always followed by shots of ever-present large crowds of supporters. The manner in which he was portrayed as delivering his speeches, the photo angles, the portrayal of the candidate as identifying with all the regions of the country, transformed him into a national symbol.

#### *Media as Symbols and Instruments of Power*

Some people interviewed believed that because television and radio are the most widely used news media, the campaign exploited them to se-

cure votes. It could be that this was the intention, but if anything, this may have had a boomerang effect. The PRI seemed to have overlooked the fact that a certain degree of media credibility is required for effective persuasion. Televisa's uncritical, outspoken support of the PRI and automatic derision of opposition candidates is one example of how television's credibility was thrown into question during the campaign. But as one expert in media-government relations told me, "It doesn't matter, does it? They [the electronic media] pleased the one person [Salinas de Gortari] they needed to please!"

The media, of course, cannot be viewed as outside forces in the political system. They represent their economic and political interests, which are also part of the negotiation process. For many newspapers and magazines, the campaign represents the single most important source of income, not only during the campaign, but in the future as well, because the campaign establishes the relationship of media with the new administration. Most publications offer the official candidate their unconditional support from the very start of the campaign, exercising a rigid self-censorship, because they wield little power to survive economically without the resources that the campaign (and the future administration) provides. Journalists know that the president can ultimately dictate to other government institutions whether or not a TV station or radio or publication is to be favored with government income during his administration.

In 1976, *Excelsior* confronted presidential power under the administration of Luis Echeverría and found it too strong. Ultimately, the system of co-optation brought with it the threat of financial sanctions. As a result of the power struggle, *Excelsior* was forced to "fire" its editor, Julio Scherer, who then began to publish the well-known weekly *Proceso*. The fact that *Proceso* has managed to survive without traditional sources of revenue (government publicity, bribes, and so on) is a noteworthy chapter in the history of Mexican journalism. That does not mean, however, that other publications could duplicate the success of *Proceso*.

The more important newspapers and magazines, such as *Excelsior* or *Siempre*, did publish harsh criticisms of the candidates, especially in the beginning of the campaign. These criticisms themselves became a hot topic of interpretation. For example, many of the politicians believed that the harsh criticism of the PRI candidate by *Siempre* in the beginning of the campaign was simply a negotiating ploy, a way of securing greater resources for its owner and staff. Other interpretations suggest that the publisher, who was dying, was mentally unstable or wanted to leave a mark in journalism, or that the publisher of *Siempre* had a personal dispute with Salinas de Gortari. Whatever the reason, the reactions to these criticisms proved once again the dominant role of



interpretations in Mexico. Likewise, when television stars appeared with the official candidate in the campaign events, this was interpreted as the general support that Televisa was giving the candidate and not the personal support of the stars themselves.

Given the importance of the media in shaping "facts" and constructing the image of the president, media outlets are necessarily seen as important instruments of power. The meaning that members of the political class assign to the media lies in its symbolic manifestation of power. From the moment of the *destape*, it is expected that the candidate will secure favorable treatment in the media and successfully shape the form and content of the media's campaign coverage. Furthermore, it is expected that the candidate will dominate the news.

During the first few weeks of this campaign, following the announcement of Salinas de Gortari as candidate, the lame-duck president, Miguel de la Madrid, still dominated the front page of newspapers and lead stories of television and radio newscasts. This was interpreted by specialists in press-government relations as a sign of political weakness of the candidate. An expert told us, "If he [Salinas de Gortari] can't get his name in the top story of the front page [*ocho columnas*], then there isn't much he will be able to accomplish [in his administration]."

Ultimately, the political class interprets control of the press not so much in terms of how effective media are in persuading the general public as in symbolizing the minimum requirement of the president—his ability to wield power.

## CONCLUSIONS

In this overview of the role of the media in the 1988 presidential elections, we have tried to present two distinct lines of analysis. In the process of redemocratization, there was, without a doubt, a new openness that had not existed prior to 1988. But on the whole, the majority of the media did not change its practices and generally continued to conduct its reporting in the traditional way.

The print media chosen for this analysis are primarily the leading print outlets in Mexico. *Excelsior* should not, therefore, be considered a typical example of press coverage around the country. Print news outlets such as *Excelsior* are concerned about maintaining high readership and therefore cover events of importance even at the cost of offending the ruling party. Their prestige also gives them enough journalistic muscle to be more open and critical. But they are the exceptions. Had

this analysis included other, more representative, newspapers, the hegemonic presence of the PRI would have been far greater.

If Mexico is to become a stronger democracy, it is likely that the structure and practice of Mexican journalism must undergo fundamental changes. Perhaps the role of the press will diminish considerably, or at least, fewer resources might be allocated to the press from the campaigns and their players. A stronger democracy will also require a more independent press, one that can truly reflect the changes taking place. A healthy democracy undoubtedly requires responsible news media. In Mexico, as elsewhere, the question will be the ability of journalists to gain that independence, which will require, among many things

- Realistic salaries to journalists so that they need not be co-opted
- More independence for news divisions of television and radio stations
- The breakup of the monopolistic nature of the television industry as a whole

Changes might even include granting journalists partial power to regulate their own profession, because there is little doubt that the kind of unregulated journalism that works to a satisfactory degree in other countries has not worked in Mexico. As Hernan Uribe writes in his *Journalism Ethics in Latin America*, in Mexico "freedom of expression has become, in reality, the freedom of the rich."<sup>37</sup>

But from the point of view of the traditional (hierarchical) political system, the media serve important functions that explain why the PRI spends so many resources and pays so much attention to them even though vote getting is not the principal preoccupation.

The press, on the one hand, has an important role in the rituals of the campaign through which the drama of political negotiations and alliances is played. The press is also an arena for members of the political class who are participants in and affected by the formation of the new power structure. Therefore, the press makes it possible to extend those rituals to other political players who cannot be present at campaign events. Through the press, the political class can indirectly participate in the drama of ambiguity and resolution that the campaign represents.

On the other hand, the electronic media, especially television, concern themselves with campaign rituals that build the image of the president. The strong presidentialism of Mexico's traditional political system requires that candidates assume a like image: They must be portrayed as knowledgeable, concerned, and above all powerful.

These contrasting roles assigned to the press and the electronic

media make it necessary to analyze both forms. The analysis from the perspective of rituals explains their distinct place in the "traditional" system, which seems to be rooted in strongly held political cultural traits. Perhaps future campaigns will require a different role for the media, but any changes that might take place will no doubt be affected by the residuals of tradition. That is why understanding this tradition becomes all the more necessary.

## NOTES

1. This chapter is based on data collected from a larger ethnographic study of the 1988 PRI campaign by Larissa Lomnitz, Claudio Lomnitz, and Ilya Adler in "El Fondo de la Forma: La Campaña Presidencial del PRI en México, 1988," *Nueva Antropología* 11 (1990): 45-82.
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7. Ilya Adler, "Media Uses and Effects in a Large Bureaucracy: A Case Study in Mexico" (Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, School of Journalism and Mass Communication, 1986); Alan Riding, *Distant Neighbors* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1985).
8. Adler, "Media Uses and Effects."
9. For a review of the Mexican broadcasting industry and its role and importance in Mexican politics, see Raul Trejo Delarbre, ed., *Las Redes de Televisa* (Mexico City: Claves Latinoamericanas, 1988); Fátima Fernandez Christlieb, *Los Medios de Difusión Masiva en México* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos Editor, 1984); Miguel A. Granados Chapa, "La Radio en México: Otros Comentarios," *Prensa y Radio en México* (Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Sociales, Centros de Estudios de la Comunicación) 1 (1978): 45; among others.
10. Fátima Fernandez Christlieb, *Los Medios de Difusión Masiva en México* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos, 1984).
11. For an in-depth analysis of the relationship between the state and the broadcasting industry in Mexico, see Elizabeth Mahan's "Mexican Broadcasting: Reassessing the Industry-State Relationship," *Journal of Communication* 35 (1): 60-75. In this analysis, Mahan shows how the relationship tends to give Televisa the upper hand.
12. Raul Delarbre, ed., *Televisa: El Quinto Poder* (Mexico City: Claves Latinoamericanas, 1985).
13. By propaganda, we mean paid ads that filled the papers, usually in the form of statements of support by various public and private associations, institutions, party factions, and so on. A more difficult distinction deals with party-sponsored propaganda that appears as regular news stories—called a *gaceta*. Because they are not "obvious," such stories were treated here as part of the news. However, the reason photos were excluded from the analysis is that the author had reliable information that these were, on the whole, completely packaged by the party and were considered propaganda.
14. Adler, "Media Uses and Effects."
15. Adler, "Media Uses"; *World Media Handbook* (New York: United Nations Department of Public Information, 1990).
16. Michael Robinson and Margaret A. Sheehan, *Over the Wire and on TV: CBS and UPI in Campaign '80* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1983).
17. José Guíerrez Espindola, "Información y Necesidades Sociales/Los Noticieros de Televisa," In Delarbre, *Televisa*.
18. Doris Graber, "Content and Meaning: What's It All About?" *American Behavioral Scientist* 33 (2): 135-52.
19. These descriptions of Televisa's coverage are based on monitoring of the broadcasts done by Lomnitz, Lomnitz, and Adler in the larger ethnographic study, "El Fondo de la Forma."
20. Jorge Herrera, *La Radio el PRI, y el Destape* (Mexico City: Diana, 1988).
21. Antonio Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, ed. Quinton Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1971.) First published in six volumes between 1948 and 1951.
22. A. Martín del Campo and M. Robeil Corella, "Commercial Television as an Educational and Political Institution: A Case Study of Its Impact on the Students of Telesecundaria," in *Communication and Latin American Society: Trends in Critical Research, 1960-1985*, ed. R. Atwood and E. McAnany (Madison, Wis.: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986).
23. See Michael Singletary, "Components of Credibility of a Favorable News Source," *Journalism Quarterly* 53:316-19. Also see Leo Jeffres, *Mass Media Processes and Effects* (Prospect Heights, Ill.: Waveland Press, 1986), especially pages 195-200 for a detailed discussion on media credibility.
24. Adler, "Media Uses and Effects."
25. In Eastern Europe, decades of tightly controlled media and ideological indoctrination did little to secure favorable votes for Communist candidates once free elections were held. The point here is not that the media have no effect on electoral outcomes but that such effects cannot be assumed simply on the basis that one party or one dominant class has a greater ability to disseminate its messages.
26. Petra Secanella, *El Periodismo Político en México* (Mexico City: Prisma, 1984).
27. Arnold Van Gennep, *Rites of Passage* (New York: Johnson Reprint, 1969); Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974).
28. Other candidates obviously also traveled, but our research did not allow us to follow those campaigns and make comparisons in terms of strategies or symbolic meanings. The discussions they conducted were played out in the press (not on radio or television), and as such, they were internal discussions, within the political class, rather than discussions with the general electorate. Adler argues that the press in Mexico should be regarded as an arena where political struggles are expressed—an arena agreed on by the members of the active political class.
29. Philip Elliott, "Press Performance as Political Ritual," in *The Sociology of Journalism and the Press*, ed. H. Christian (London: University of Keele, 1980).
30. Lomnitz, Lomnitz, and Adler, "El Fondo de la Forma."
31. Silvia Gomez-Tagle, "Democracia y Poder en México: El Significado de los Fraudes Electorales en 1979, 1982 y 1985," *Nueva Antropología* 9 (3): 127-57.
32. Lomnitz, Lomnitz, and Adler, "El Fondo de la Forma."
33. Adler, "Media Uses and Effects."
34. Michel Crozier, *The Bureaucratic Phenomenon* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
35. Fred H. Goldner, "The Division of Labor: Process and Power," in *Power in Organizations*, ed. Mayer N. Zald (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1970).
36. Adler, "Media Uses and Effects."
37. Hernán Uribe, *Ética Periodística en América Latina* (Mexico City: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1984).