

**CONGRESO DE RESPONSABLES
DE PROYECTOS DE CIENCIAS SOCIALES
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**EL ROL DE LAS ORGANIZACIONES NO
GUBERNAMENTALES Y LA SOCIEDAD
CIVIL EN LA NUEVA DEMOCRACIA
MEXICANA**

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I would like to say at the start that my research project has involved a number of outstanding Mexican graduate students, including Guillermo De Los Reyes, who is now studying for his PhD at the University of Pennsylvania, and Antonio Lara, who is with us today, as well as others at the University of the Americas, Puebla, who have made a contribution. I want to thank CONAYCT for making that possible.

My work, and the work of the students who work with me, concentrates on the contributions which voluntary groups make or can make to Mexican democracy. As I laid out the original CONACYT project in July of 1998, whose title is "Buscando el Nuevo Rol de las Organizaciones Intermedias y de la Sociedad Civil en la Nueva Democracia Mexicana", the research seemed to divide nicely into a theoretical study and into a more practical phase.

I was fortunate to be asked to help edit a special volume of the *Annals* of the American Academy of Political and Social Science, which enabled me to publish much of the results of the theoretical part of the project in September 1999 as a volume entitled *Civil Society and Democratization*.

In another piece of luck, my research project has become ever more timely in the last couple years as civil society¹ and its supporting organizations attract renewed and increased attention, as do social capital and political culture,² -- a reminder that “the politics of a country reflect the sense of culture”.³ Understanding what creates a viable political culture that will support democracy in Mexico has taken on increased importance in the

¹ “As a first approximation, civil society may be defined as all social interests not encompassed by the state or the economy. In its political aspects it also excludes private life, although recent attacks by feminists and others on the public/private distinction make this boundary less clear. Prominent examples of civil society in action would include the early bourgeois public sphere discussed by Habermas, the insurgent ‘free spaces’ in U.S. political history constituted by women, blacks, workers, farmers, and others, the democratic opposition in Eastern Europe prior to 1989, and, in the West, feminist, antinuclear, peace, environmental, and urban new social movements... Civil society is a heterogeneous place, home to the Michigan Militia as well as the movements I have mentioned.” John Dryze, “Political Inclusion and the Dynamics of Democratization,” *American Political Science Review*, 90 (1): 481 (September 1996).

² “In an article of 1956, Gabriel Almond, building upon conceptions of culture created by such sociologists and anthropologists as Clyde Kluckhohn, Ralph Linton, and Talcott Parsons, defined a specifically political area of culture that, in collaboration with Sidney Verba, he proceeded to study empirically in five democracies. The findings were published in 1963 in *The Civic Culture* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963). A few years earlier, working independently of Almond, Samuel Beer and Adam Ulam presented a somewhat different definition of the concept in a comparative government text of 1958 (*Patterns of Government*, New York: Random House, 1958).” William T. Bluhm, *Ideologies and Attitudes: Modern Political Culture* (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974) p. xii.

³ Clifford Geertz, *La Interpretación de las Culturas* (Barcelona, Spain: España, Editorial Gedisa, 1992), p.262.

aftermath of the Cold War, and fortuitously today there is a “renaissance”⁴ in political culture research -- or a “return”, as Gabriel Almond puts it.⁵

Resurgent Theories

Research studies⁶ suggest that this resurgent interest in a political culture approach to democratization in countries like Mexico derives its impetus from various quarters.⁷ This resurgence has inevitably led to more concern *per se* about voluntary organizations and was a main reason for my decision to carry out a CONACYT project. Lipset remarked in *Union Democracy* (1956) that these groups make more difficult the triumph of such movements as Communism and Fascism and help mobilize diversity in the political arena. They are, at least ideally, a training ground for politics, a source of new ideas, and a significant method of communication.⁸ But whether that is completely true in Mexico today remains open to question.

⁴ See Ronald Inglehart, “The Renaissance of Political Culture” in *American Political Science Review*, 82 (December 1988).

⁵ “To speak of a return to political culture implies that there was an earlier time when political culture studies were here at hand and prospering, that this was followed by a time in which the approach declined, and these studies are once again prospering.” Gabriel Almond, “Forward: The Return of Political Culture”, in *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, ed. Larry Diamond (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993), p. ix.

⁶ E.g. and variously Larry Diamond ed., *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries* (Boulder CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1993). Marshall G.S.Hodgson, *Rethinking World History: Essays on Europe, Islam and World History*, (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Robert A. Packenham, *The Dependency Movement: Scholarship and Politics in Development Studies*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge and London, 1992. Thomas Sowell, *Race and Culture: A World View*, Basic Books, New York, 1994

⁷ See Guy Sorman, *The New Wealth of Nations* (Stanford CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1990), p. 198.

⁸ Seymour Martin Lipset, *Union Democracy* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1956), pp. 16, 82-86.

Indeed, a major concern is being expressed that all is not well in the relationship between civil society and democracy, and not just in Mexico but in the United States too. An alarm has been sounded by Professor Robert Putnam of Harvard that democracy is in danger from a decline in voluntarism as the number of “couch potatoes” grows and watching television replaces civil participation.⁹

However, Lipset cautioned in *Agrarian Socialism* (1950) that *individual* organizations rise and fall, and that so far no complex society has discovered the secret of equilibrium when it comes to *particular* ones maintaining their stability and social gains.¹⁰ While Putnam has made a valuable contribution by sparking debate over whether voluntarism has ebbed, just the spirited social exchanges of the Internet and the enormous non-paid activity in constructing World Wide Web archives shows another side.¹¹ All manner of discussion, lobby and support groups have sprung up via the Net.¹² It is significant that the design for my research project involves extensive use in its second or practical phase, of the Net.

Putnam relies on surveys which show a decline in conventional membership in organizations that may have declined because of changes in

⁹ Ichiro Kawachi, Bruce P. Kennedy, and Kimberly Lochner, “Long Live Community: Social Capital as Public Health,” *The American Prospect*, 35: 56-59 (November-December 1997).

¹⁰ . Seymour Martin Lipset, *Agrarian Socialism: The Cooperative Commonwealth Federation in Saskatchewan*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950), pp. 82, 332.

¹¹ Of course it will be argued that computers are a solitary pursuit, but chat groups on the Internet are participatory and the members arrange face-to-face meetings.

¹² See Janet Moursund, “Social Support on the Internet”, in *Mapping Cyberspace: Social Research on the Electronic Frontier*, ed. Joseph E. Behar (New York, NY: Dowling College Press, 1997), pp. 53-78.

interest and constituency rather than a lack of public spirit. But research by Brent Morris shows that some of the organizations that Putnam cites as evidence of the recent decline in volunteerism actually began their decline long ago.¹³

A higher divorce rate, decrease in family size, increased percentage of women in the labor force and the geographic mobility have been blamed for a supposed decline in associational life. On the other hand, a greater number of single people and less family commitments might argue for a rising need among the lonely for joining groups.

Refurbishing Theories

Professor Ann Boyles remarks, "This blossoming of civil society, as represented by non-governmental organizations, community-based groups, academic institutions, and others, is significantly reshaping the international agenda."¹⁴ That understanding democracy requires understanding civil society, social capital and political culture, is not a new idea.¹⁵ Steven Brint claims that Aristotle was the first to emphasize the ties between democracy and political culture,¹⁶ and to assert that political culture was the key to holding power in society.¹⁷

¹³ S. Brent Morris, *A Radical in the East* (Ames, IA; Iowa Research Lodge No.2, 1993), *passim*.

¹⁴ Ann Boyles, "The Rise of Civil Society", *One Country*, 2 (January-March 1997).

¹⁵ Sidney Verba, "Comparative Political Culture" in *Political Culture and Political Development*, ed. Lucian W. Pye and Sidney Verba (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965,) p.514.

¹⁶ Steven Brint, "Sociological Analysis of Political Culture: An Introduction and Assessment", in *Research on Democracy and Society Vol. 2*, ed. Frederick D. Weil (Greenwich, CT: Jai Press, 1994), p.3.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The present interest in how a healthy political culture is maintained,¹⁸ is almost synonymous with an interest in the conditions fostering democracy.¹⁹ Larry Diamond remarks, “But increasingly, scholars are recognizing the symbiotic nature of the relationship between state and civil society, in the process of democratic consolidation and more generally. By enhancing the accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, and hence legitimacy of the regime, a vigorous, pluralistic civil society strengthens a democratic state and moves it toward consolidation.”²⁰

While it is therefore almost universally agreed that voluntarism and associationalism are pivotal to nurturing and sustaining democracy, the situation in Mexico, which in transition from a nondemocratic situation, requires more thought than it has received.²¹ Voluntarism is not democracy’s panacea. Nor are all organizations axiomatically democratic helpmates. After all, to take two Mexican examples, Opu Dei is an Non-Governmental Organization and the Freemasons are also an NGO.

18. See Larry Diamond, “Economic Development and Democracy Reconsidered” in *Reexamining Democracy: Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset*. ed. Garry Marks and Larry Diamond (Sage Publications, Newbury Park CA, 1992), pp. 116-120. (California), 1992, 116-119.

19. “But the development of a stable and effective democratic government depends upon more than the structures of government and politics: it depends upon the orientations that people have to the political process — upon the political culture. Unless the political culture is able to support a democratic system, the chances for the success of that system are slim.” Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963), p.498.

20. Larry Diamond, “Consolidating Democracy in the Americas”, *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 550: 34 (March 1997).

21. Dennis Kavanah, *Political Culture* (New York NY: Macmillan, 1972), p.11

As Lipset pointed out in *Elites in Latin America*, high-status social clubs have sustained the governing class and major agricultural organizations are the preserve of the elite.²² So voluntary organizations *per se* are not a helpmate of democracy, something sometimes forgotten in current discussions. Furthermore, economic problems can be so dire that they seem on initial examination to dominate the situation and to require governmental rather than private solutions.

Still, if economics and government helped create the problems of some nation states now trying to democratize, it is not as clear that economics and government alone is going to solve the problem. For example, in the case of Mexico²³ the hopeful changes as far as democracy is concerned are primarily outside the formal government structure. ²⁴ In fact, Mexican politics cannot be entirely understood by studying government structure as so much of the decision making takes place in the informal spheres.²⁵ ***Despite efforts to blame government, it is civil society which in Mexico as in some other countries has been much of the problem.***

Ronald Inglehart warned: “There is no question that economic factors are politically important, but they are only part of the story. I argue that

²² Seymour Martin Lipset, “Values, Education, and Entrepreneurship,” in *Elites in Latin America*, ed. Semour Martin Lipset and Aldo Solari, (London, England: Oxford University Press, 1967), p.9.

²³ Lucy Conger, “Mexico: Zapatista Thunder”, *Current History*, 93 (581): 115 (March 1994).

²⁴Jorge Alonso ed., “Introducción”, in *Cultura Política y Educación Cívica*, (Mexico City, Mexico: Grupo Editorial Miguel Angel Porrúa, UNAM, 1993), pp.7-10.

²⁵ Ibid. Also see Peter L. Berger, *Para una teoría sociológica de la religión*, (Barcelona,, Spain: Editorial Kairós, 1971).

different societies are characterized to very different degrees by specific syndrome of *political culture* attitudes; that these cultural differences are relatively enduring, but not immutable; and that they have major political consequences, being closely linked to the viability of democratic institutions.”²⁶ So they do, with particular relevance to emerging democracies such as that of Mexico.²⁷

Problems of Mexican Voluntarism

Mexican political culture and therefore Mexican voluntarism has not entirely lost its strong *personalismo* flavor. Personalismo often comes ahead of the law, and from personalismo there comes *caudallismo*, authoritarianism, along with popular apathy.²⁸ The great political cartoonist Thomas Nast portrayed a feisty Mexican in the pages of *Harper's Weekly* in the 1880s, with cutlass in one hand and pistol in the other.²⁹ Nast conceded

²⁶ Ronald Inglehart, “The Renaissance of Political Culture” in *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 82, No. 4, December 1988, 1203.

²⁷“...until recently rather little attention has been directed to how political culture affects the possibilities for democracy in the less developed world and the newly transforming polities of the former communist bloc.” Larry Diamond, “Introduction: Political Culture and Democracy”, in (ed.) Larry Diamond. *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder & London, 1993, 15. See also, Jacqueline Peschard (Coordinadora). *Cultura Política: Congreso Nacional de Ciencia Política*. Colegio Nacional de Ciencias Políticas y Administración Pública, A.C., 1996.

²⁸. In rural states such as Chiapas, this caudallismo sometimes depends on the control of information and suppression of speech, on bribery and on patronage. it could be argued that Marcos is simply substituting his version of personalismo or even caudallismo for the PRI version. Implementing a real democracy in Mexico means many of the values associated with the PRI and with personalism will have to die and a real civil society created. See Juan E. Méndez, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch/Americas, “Human Rights and the Chiapas Rebellion”, Testimony before the United States House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, *Current History*, Vol.93 No. 581, March 1994, 121.

²⁹. John J. Johnson, *Latin America in Caricature*, University of Texas Press, Austin, 1993 [1980], 213. See Paul Rich and Guillermo De Los Reyes, “Mexican Caricature and the Politics of Popular Culture”, *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol.30 No.1, Summer 1996, 133-146.

with his drawings that Mexicans were a forceful, if not always lovable, neighbor.³⁰ With the consolidation of one-party control in the late 1920s after the Revolution, cartoons of Mexico change. The rise of the PRI produced the sombreroed dozer, the Mexican slumped on the ground in a perpetual siesta, a big sombrero shading him from the world.³¹ How to make the disenchanting want to return to the civil society they so distrust is a major challenge.³² Generalizations made about Mexican democratization have not spoken to this dilemma.³³ In fact, some Mexicans are more afraid of reconciliation than the uncertain alternative.

The theorizing which I have tried to survey today is, of course, only a part of our CONACYT project. The second part is a large scale survey of voluntary groups in Mexico in order to see how they are doing in the post 1994 climate, what their plans are, and most important what they would like to see done to create a more congenial environment for the growth of NGOs. The survey is unusual in that it will be taken almost entirely via the Internet, and when completed will be available as part of a large web site we are

30. Johnson, 67, 71, 139, 273.

31. After the Mexican Revolution with its widespread anarchy from 1911 to the beginning of the 1920s, Mexicans may well have been weary of confrontational politics and endless quarrels. Thus one-party rule was welcome, along with the suppression of many voluntary organizations. But not all Mexicans were quiescent. For example, the pages of the rightist C newspaper *El Sinarquista* during the late 1930s and early 1940s are full of anti-government articles, photographs of demonstrations, and vituperative cartoons.

32. But, in the long run, "short of building dikes in the Pacific Ocean", land reform is not going to solve the campesinos' problems. See Mitchell A. Seligson, "Agrarian Inequality and the Theory of Peasant Rebellion", *Latin American Research Review*, Vol.31 No.2, 1966, 140-157.

33. Nonetheless, as the Mexican indigenous movements acquire a higher profile, a positive picture may not appear. Fond notions that harmony and balance prevail among Indians, in contrast with the power-seeking and violence of mestizos, have already begun to look like a stereotype.

developing on voluntarism in Mexico. We think that as a corollary of this phase of the project that we have developed some interesting insights into the methodology of the Web. Put briefly, we feel that there is a close connection one getting close by the day, between use of the Net and Web and the long range prospects of a voluntary movement. In short, we are building a state of the art web page on Mexican voluntarism.

Lack of Trust

To sum up, our work on voluntarism arises out of the perception that a lack of trust is a problem at all levels of Mexico.³⁴ This is alarming because, as Diamond points out, "...Social trust and cooperativeness, and overarching commitments to the system, the nation, and the community moderate the conflicts and bridge the cleavages of politics. Trust also facilitates the vertical ties between vigilance and allegiance toward authority, between elites and their constituencies that keep politics functioning within the institutional boundaries and constraints of democracy."³⁵ This notion of trust, which is tied of course to the accumulation of social capital in a any vigorous civil society, has been explored in Francis Fukuyama's book *Trust*, where he has advanced a refurbished or revived thesis about how what he prefers to call intermediate institutions sustain democracy.³⁶

³⁴*Ibid.*, 8.

³⁵"However Almond and Verba argue that the distinctive property of a 'civic culture' is not its participant orientation but its mixed quality." Larry Diamond, "Introduction: Political Culture and Democracy", in (ed.) Larry Diamond. *Political Culture and Democracy in Developing Countries*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder & London, 1993, 14. See also Larry Diamond, "Is The Third Wave Over?", in *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 6, November 1, January 1995, 33,

³⁶. Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, The Free Press, New York, 1995.

Michael Folly and Bob Edward's mention that "...civil society, understood, as the realm of private voluntary associations, from neighborhood committees to interest groups to philanthropic enterprises of all sorts, has come to be seen as an essential ingredient in both democratization and the health of established democracies."³⁷ In the view of Fukuyama, "Many Latin Catholic countries like France, Spain, Italy and a number of nations in Latin America [such as Mexico] exhibit a saddle-shaped distribution of organizations, with strong families, a strong state, and relatively little in between. These societies are utterly different from socialist ones in any number of important ways, particularly with regard to their greater respect for the family. But, like socialist societies, there has been in certain Latin Catholic countries a relative deficit of intermediate social groups in the area between the family and large, centralized organizations like the church or the state."³⁸

Mexico does seem to be experiencing a strengthening of its civil society, as the practical phase of our project is showing and which I will discuss in a few minutes, and perhaps it will acquire the civic culture which the enthusiasts for civil society as a guarantee of democracy are promoting.³⁹ In the words of de Tocqueville, "Among laws controlling human societies there is one more precise and clearer, it seems to me, than all

³⁷Michael Foley and Bob Edwards, "The Paradox of Civil Society", in *Journal of Democracy*, Volume 6, November 1, January 1995, 38.

³⁸. Fukuyama, 55. "The incompleteness of models that ignore cultural factors is becoming increasingly evident. In Catholic societies from Latin America to Poland, the church plays a major role despite the demise often predicted by economic determinists", Inglehart, 1203.

³⁹. Changes in the Mexican tax code now encourage nonprofits. "Mexico's New Nonprofit Sector...", *Mexican Policy News*, Fall 1993, No.9, 12.

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the others. If men are to remain civilized or to become civilized, the art of association must develop and improve among them at the same speed as equality of conditions spreads.”⁴⁰

Does all the discussion and theorizing about voluntarism apply to modern Mexico...our investigations hopefully will help to see if the new theories connecting voluntarism with democracy do indeed fit fact, and whether the worldwide debate about these issues has relevance to these unique, bracing times in Mexico.

Dr. Rich invites correspondence about these issues and hopes to hear from anyone interested in these topics.-

⁴⁰. de Tocqueville, 517.