
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Mexico's Left: The Paradox of the PRD by Dag Mossige

Review by: Brandon Van Dyck

Source: *Latin American Politics and Society*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (Fall 2014), pp. 190-193

Published by: Distributed by Cambridge University Press on behalf of the Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Miami

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43284925>

Accessed: 08-08-2018 19:04 UTC

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Cambridge University Press, Center for Latin American Studies at the University of Miami are collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Latin American Politics and Society*

stronger tax capacities has not been fully examined. While Schneider persuasively distinguishes the different roles played by elites in El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala and the type of tax outcome they produced, this book does not analyze with similar depth the case of Costa Rica, where precisely a different tax capacity developed. Throughout the book there are hints and statements on this topic, but the hypotheses that were fully examined for the abovementioned three low-tax-capacity cases might have been better tested if similar analysis could have done with a case that produced a very different outcome. This might be a standing topic for an upcoming research agenda.

Despite the book's significant contributions to understanding the nature of taxation in these countries, several relevant topics remain understudied. For instance, the role played by lending international agencies, primarily the IMF, in pushing for the Value Added Tax. The author does not test whether countries adopted higher domestic consumption taxes and lower trade taxes as a result of "tax advice" and external pressure or because of the interplay of domestic elites in search of a specific model of state building. Another topic underexamined is tax evasion, which transcends the problem of state capacities because it constitutes an option of resistance used by elites and individuals. Given that the countries under study have the highest tax evasion rates on the continent, a further analysis of the strategic behavior of elites that used tax evasion as a recourse could have enhanced the understanding of these tax regimes.

Schneider's book is nonetheless a must-read for any scholar who looks to grasp the inner functioning of political actors and institutional makeup in Central American nations. Schneider goes through the painstaking process of making sense of different political outcomes and presents vivid examples of the difficulties of constructing effective states and institutions. This work is a very good comparative effort that examines how weak governments adapt to the international markets. By focusing on tax regimes, Schneider illuminates the cumbersome process whereby elites sometimes construct state capacities and at other times erode them, as the author says, "like termites dismantling a home, reducing it to dust."

Marcelo Bergman

Universidad Nacional de Tres de Febrero

Dag Mossige, *Mexico's Left: The Paradox of the PRD*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013. Tables, figures, bibliography, index, 325 pp.; hardcover \$75.

Founded in 1989, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) has established itself as the leading left party in Mexico, one of three major national parties, and a perennial contender for national and subnational power. Despite this, the PRD lacks a clear self-definition and remains conflict-ridden and weakly routinized. Since the PRD's inception, party factions, called *corrientes*, have engaged in bitter and near-constant struggles over ideology, program, electoral strategy, and coveted party leadership positions and candidacies. National leaders have reached little agreement on the party's ideological or programmatic identity. The PRD still has not devel-

oped stable formal rules and procedures for selecting candidates, selecting the party president, or distributing party posts. Top party leaders have flouted basic electoral rules, such as the ban on running for party president twice in a row. Procedures intended for long-term use have rarely endured more than a few years. Crucially, the PRD elites who compete against each other in primaries for top internal leadership positions or major candidacies have frequently alleged fraud (e.g., the 1997 internal election for the mayoral candidacy in Mexico City) or even refused to recognize the results (e.g., the 1999 and 2008 internal contests for party president).

The PRD's internal dysfunction, often publicized in the mass media, has damaged the party's image among the broader electorate. Both internal and external critics have argued that the PRD, by modeling democracy so poorly internally, disqualifies itself as a governing alternative and force for democracy in Mexico.

Why does the PRD remain conflict-ridden? Why does it still lack a clear self-definition? Why, still, do major groups within the party not accept the outcomes of internal contests? These questions lie at the heart of Dag Mossige's book. Mossige argues that all of the PRD's internal woes stem from a single factor: the longstanding and still-unresolved internal fissure between "movement advocates" and "party builders." For Mossige, the PRD remains internally dysfunctional because it still has not decided whether it is a movement or a party.

Mossige locates the origins of the party-movement divide in Mexico's 1988 presidential election. In that election, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, left-leaning ex-governor of Michoacán State and one of the top elite in the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), defected from the right-tacking PRI and ran for the presidency on an antineoliberal platform. Although PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari officially prevailed, most Mexicans and virtually all Cárdenas supporters believed that the PRI had won by fraud. In May 1989, the left-wing PRD was born, with Cárdenas at the helm.

Party *corrientes* immediately split into "rupturist" and reformist camps. Rupturists envisioned the PRD as a hybrid party movement and preferred tactics of mass mobilization to achieve party goals. They advocated a clean break with the fraudulent, repressive PRI regime and promoted a strategy of "intransigence": uncompromising opposition and confrontation. In contrast, reformists envisioned the PRD as a traditional institutional party. They believed that the PRD should seek to reform the Mexican political system gradually by working within it. The reformists also put a premium on internal routinization, or the consolidation of internal decision-making rules in key areas like candidate selection.

Although the terms *reformist* and *rupturist* fell out of use after a few years, the underlying cleavage between party builders (reformists) and movement advocates (rupturists) did not go away with time, according to Mossige. From the 1990s to the middle of the first decade of the 2000s, tensions between the two sides remained unresolved and simmered beneath the surface (chapter 3). Then, tensions dramatically resurfaced and, in Mossige's account, have since threatened to tear the PRD apart on multiple occasions (chapters 2, 4–8).

The catalyzing events for the revival of party-movement tensions center on the 2006 presidential election. In 2005, the Vicente Fox administration, his conservative

National Action Party (PAN), and the PRI used dubious legal means to attempt to block the 2006 presidential candidacy of PRD leader Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). The PRD and its allies mobilized in response, and the federal government backed off. These events, according to Mossige, energized PRD movement advocates, confirming their suspicions of Mexico's new democratic regime and vindicating their mobilizational tactics. After AMLO lost the 2006 election narrowly to the PAN's Felipe Calderón, he alleged fraud, publicly rejected the legitimacy of Mexico's political system and institutions, called on his supporters to do the same, and set up a parallel government called the Legitimate Government of Mexico (GL). Movement advocates rallied around AMLO and the GL, arguing that in 2006, as in 1988, the political system had committed fraud against the left, and that a stance of rejectionism, confrontation, and mobilization must follow. Reformist party builders, such as Jesús Ortega, drew the opposite lesson, citing public disapproval of AMLO's postelectoral behavior as evidence that the PRD, in order to avoid marginality, had to adapt to new realities by embracing institutional politics and pursuing gradual reform.

Mossige observes that the revived party-movement divide has generated numerous internal crises for the PRD in recent years, perhaps most prominently in the 2008 election for PRD president, which pitted Jesús Ortega against movement advocate and AMLO favorite Alejandro Encinas. Due to fraud allegations from Encinas, the PRD leadership could not reach agreement on who had prevailed. It took eight months and the intervention of Mexico's highest electoral court, the TEPJF, for Ortega to assume the party presidency.

Despite his increasingly toxic relations with the PRD, thoroughly documented in chapters 5 through 8, AMLO secured the party's 2012 presidential nomination. After losing, however, AMLO formally exited the PRD to lead the personalistic, ambiguously defined National Regeneration Movement (MORENA). Few of the PRD's movement advocates defected with AMLO, so that the PRD national leadership at present remains highly divided between movement advocates and party builders. Mossige therefore concludes with the question, to what extent will the PRD's movement advocates "bow to the majority will" of the PRD's moderate, social-democratic *corrientes* "or remain an intransigent internal opposition hindering the PRD's institutionalization" (307)?

Mexico's Left is a welcome, needed addition to PRD scholarship. Most existing studies of the party's internal dynamics concern the pre-2006 era, which makes Mossige's thorough examination of the 2006 election and its aftermath particularly valuable. The empirical chapters (2–8) succeed in demonstrating that the PRD's party-movement fissure remains a serious impediment to internal stability and routinization. The book is factually rich, based on one hundred interviews with national party leaders, research in PRD archives, and participant observation in national-level party and faction meetings. Mossige's quotations from archives and in-depth elite interviews shed fascinating light on present-day PRD elites' competing visions for the party.

One might contest the book's central theoretical premise, that the PRD's internal woes are puzzling and require explanation (chapter 1). Citing the party's

ambiguous self-definition, internal strife, and weak routinization, the author suggests that “the PRD, from the point of view of the political science literature, simply did not behave in ways consistent with those of other political parties” (5). Yet it is quite common for long-lasting, electorally successful parties to possess ambiguous self-definitions; to suffer intense, perpetual internal conflict; and to lack stable formal procedures for adjudicating internal conflicts. Latin American examples include the Peronists in Argentina, ARENA and the FMLN in El Salvador, the Socialists in Chile, and entrenched clientelistic machines in Brazil, Colombia, and Honduras (e.g., Brazil’s PMDB). Arguably, mass-based Latin American parties that do become highly routinized (e.g., Brazil’s Workers’ Party) are the ones that should puzzle us.

Mossige also might overstate the risk of a “complete breakup of the PRD” (21). Since the 1990s, the PRD has dominated Mexico’s left partisan spectrum and, in election after election, has received a sizable hardcore vote (*voto duro*). This hardcore vote, combined with the financial spoils that now accompany office in Mexico, creates a powerful electoral and material incentive for PRD members not to defect. For reasons like these, it is generally rare for major established parties to suffer fatal schisms, even if they are characterized by high levels of internal conflict and low levels of routinization (e.g., the Argentine Peronists, the main Salvadoran parties).

The foregoing comments notwithstanding, Mossige’s book is a thought-provoking, thoroughly researched study of the PRD’s internal life, which will interest and benefit scholars of the PRD, of Mexican politics, and of political parties in Latin America and beyond.

Brandon Van Dyck
Lafayette College

Peter H. Smith and Andrew Selee, eds., *Mexico and the United States: The Politics of Partnership*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2013. Tables, figures, bibliography, index, 243 pp.; hardcover \$55, paperback \$22.

The bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States has changed dramatically since the Cold War dominated U.S. foreign policymaking and the PRI dominated Mexican politics. Whereas the two countries appeared to keep each other at arm’s length in the past, Mexico and the United States now “interact with arguably the broadest and densest set of bilateral relationships of any pair of nations” (John Bailey and Tonatiuh Guillén-López, 61). Though the ties that bind the two countries are more numerous and complex than ever, the relationship is still characterized by huge power asymmetries. The result is an uneven partnership in which collaboration and conflict, persuasion and compulsion occur simultaneously. This book is an impressive effort to analyze U.S.-Mexico relations in a radically changed global context.

Mexico and the United States is divided into two parts. The first section consists of three chapters that outline a loose analytical framework designed to make sense of the cooperation, or lack thereof, between the two countries. The second section