

The problems of political culture in the State of Mexico

Miguel Ángel Vite Pérez

Profesor investigador CIECAS-IPN / miguelvite@yahoo.com

Vivero Ávila, Igor, Castro Domingo Pablo y Nelson Arteaga Botello [coords.] (2007), *Política y cultura: Un estudio exploratorio en el Estado de México*, Miguel Ángel Porrúa, IEEM, Facultad de Ciencias Políticas y Administración Pública, UAEM, México, 95 pp. ISBN 978-970-701-955-3

The need to learn the relation between politics and culture might help to understand and, mainly, explain why in spite of the existence of a democratic regime in Latin America, from a general point of view the citizens, despite their capacity of election through voting, think they eventually have benefited the most powerful groups.¹ This perception is linked to the existence of a polarized socio-economic situation which, according to the Organization For Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), has become a factor that affects trust Latin American people has in democracy, for they are convinced that their governments spend their taxes in a deficient manner.²

Because of this, this collective work, carried out in the State of Mexico, which studies public opinion through a survey carried out in the end of April 2006, helps in the reflection on the way in which most of the citizens consider politics, both in the local and regional spheres.

Nonetheless it also reflects on the Mexican citizens' behaviors, which are not the same, to value politics concreted as democracy; and at the time, the political culture reflected on the practices of the citizens who abide in the State of Mexico, can diverge or be very similar to that in other States of the Country.

Notwithstanding, there is a common starting point compared to the studies previously pinpointed: the citizens' mistrust in politics and politicians, with an extra consideration added: the socializing agents, such as family, altogether with the mass media, do not help the citizens become interested in politics (p. 15).

In this sense, the work that opens this collective book, by Nelson Arteaga

¹In Mexico, according to the 2007 Latin-barometer, 69 percent of the surveyed people perceives the government benefits powerful groups; whereas, 29 percent states it benefits people. "Latinobarómetro 2007. Perciben plutocracias", in *Reforma* Newspaper, International Section, November 22nd, 2007, Mexico, p. 4.

²Twenty-one percent of the Latin American citizens believe the taxes they pay are well used by their respective governors, and 58 percent thinks that the democratic system is the best way to be governed. Marirrodiga, J., "La OCDE avisa de que la pobreza pone en riesgo la democracia. El organismo recomienda invertir en infraestructura y previsión social", in *El País*, November 9th, 2007, Mexico, p. 4.

and Jimena Valdés, who analyze the institutional supports for democracy; this is to say, the institutions that allow the exercise of civil political rights (p. 21); but which have been interpreted, i.e., carry the meaning they show, nevertheless, 77 percent of the interviewees only occasionally or never has talked about politics when they are with friends (p. 28); moreover, 56 percent of the interviewees expressed that politics is irrelevant for them, and 73 percent declared that Mexico is not “that democratic” (p. 29).

Therefore, the two supports or institutions evaluated by the surveyed people with a greater trust are: the Church and the Autonomous University of the State of Mexico (UAEM), showing that the institutions that administer justice and those in charge of “fighting” against crime, such as police and political parties, do not generate citizenship but mistrust, reproducing the weakness of the democratic regime (p. 31).

Consequently, the democratic institutions are not able to generate solidarity but spaces for the reproduction of particular interests proper to the political and economic elites; a democracy of oligarchies.³

The second analysis by Pablo Castro Domingo on political culture and citizenship, reproduced in the State of Mexico, the former understood as a code that allows the individual to reflect on their social action and their being in the world, operated through knowledge and information, values and feelings and illusions and utopias, permits deciphering why theses are not interpreted by the differed actors in the same way, in spite of being shared (p. 35); whereas the latter is defined by the rights and obligations that establish a relation between the individual and the State (p. 37).

With these two pertinent theoretical definitions, the analysis of data is interpreted in a substantial manner. For instance, that a 72.6 percent of the State-of-Mexico interviewed inhabitants is not interested in politics is derived from their precarious life conditions, which have not been transformed by the politicians’ actions and, at the time their promises on electioneering have remained so; in other words, they do not become public policies (p. 40).

³ See Samir Amin (2007), *El Virus Liberal*, Barcelona: Hacer.

Nevertheless, television has become the most influential media in the State of Mexico, mainly in electoral periods, on decisions at the time of voting in favor of a party. Thus 57 percent of the interviewees said they access political information everyday by means of television (pp. 42-44).

On the other side, values help construct political images, among people in the State of Mexico, 35.7 percent of the citizens relates democracy to freedom, 18.15 percent to legality, 10.7 percent with electoral processes, 10.3 percent with a particular form of government, which makes Pablo Castro affirm: “[...] that the subject of democracy is faintly associated to elections or a sort of government, as they are spheres usually related to it” (p. 50).

Nonetheless, the interviewees do not reduce democracy to elections, as 38.3 percent thinks democracy must have as a task crime combat, 24.8 percent redistribution of population’s welfare, 14.8 percent indicates attention must be paid to minorities, 13.5 percent identified it with elections (pp. 51-52).

State of Mexico’s democracy is not perfect and certain social practices, as underscored by Pablo Castro, distort it, thus 51.3 percent believes that the greatest obstacle for democracy is corruption (p. 53).

The State’s democracy is also of low quality since its citizens do not take part into organizations and associations, important to consolidate public space. 36.2 percent takes part into religious associations, 29.3 percent in sport ones, 14.2 percent in neighborhood, 11.6 percent in syndical and 10.3 percent in political associations (p. 54).

Finally the work by Igor Vivero Ávila studies the perceptions the inhabitants of the State have on politics and democracy (p. 61). A first perception is mistrust; consequently, politics for the interviewed people, circa 50 percent, is not important for their lives.

In this case, women and youths are the least interested in politics, as well as those less educated. Out of those who are, for instance, between 18 and 25 years of age, 55.6 percent stated to be scarcely interested in politics; whereas those with university education, 30.6 percent, was very interested in politics (p. 64).

For Igor Vivero a possible explanation of this tendency is that the

inhabitants of the State of Mexico perceive politics as complex (55.1 percent), which can be explained, in accordance with the author, by electioneering, characterized by the intensive use of disqualifying messages between contenders (p. 65).

Media campaigns, with their disqualification dosages, can be observed in the fact that 37.8 percent of the inhabitants of the State said television has a heavy influence on the thinking of politics, which does not necessarily leads to a greater level of trust; only 14.1 percent of the interviewees stated having confidence in what was expressed on television (p. 71).

The institution in charge of organizing elections in the State of Mexico, the Electoral Institute of the State of Mexico (*Instituto Electoral del Estado de México, IEEM*), has neither a good level of trust among the citizens; only 18.7 percent of the surveyed people trusts IEEM, which is interpreted by the author as a result of the media scandals of alleged corruption in 2004 and 2005 (p. 72). Nonetheless, I consider it was rather a product of the institutions' weakness and their incapacity to create citizenship or be support for the rights and obligations of the relation produced between the individual and the State.

Separately, democracy for the inhabitants of the State of Mexico means freedom, it was expressed by 35.7 percent of the surveyed people, and the function democracy should perform is the fight against crime, 38 percent assigned it that function (p. 74-75). These data indicate that democracy is not seen as a way of government, but as a regime that must carry out particular tasks related to the dangers related to the very life and private patrimony. This is to say, as the author says, to solve the citizens' problems (p. 75).

In the book's conclusions the little linkage there is between citizens with politics in the State of Mexico is stressed (p. 81). Because of this, the answer to this problem was elaborated in the analyses by the authors in their respective chapters to present the reasons why democracy in the State of Mexico and in Mexico, has scant appreciation among the citizens.

Finally another success by the authors of the book is to propitiate an annex with technical data of the sample size, the methods used for its calculation and the number of surveys applied, including the questionnaire's questions.

Miguel Ángel Vite Pérez. Doctor in Sociology from the Universidad de Alicante, Spain. His research lines are: social welfare and inequalities, poverty, social inequality, regional and urban development. His most recent publications are: *The new social Mexican inequality* (*La nueva desigualdad social mexicana*) (2007); “The new social vulnerability” (*La nueva vulnerabilidad social*) in *revista Economía y Gestión del desarrollo* (2007).