

Further the PRD: advances in the research on the Mexican political left wing

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Vivero Ávila, Igor (2006), *Desafiando al Sistema, la izquierda política en México. Evolución organizativa, ideológica y electoral del Partido de la Revolución Democrática (1989-2005)*, Porrúa-UAEM., México, 368 pp.
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The book to be presented has a great value. In the first place it was a necessary publication, for both the academy as well as for the political life of our country. For the academy because the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and the political parties and organizations that formed it have been the least studied in the wide range of political parties in Mexico. There are several works and researches on the PRI (Hernández, 1998; Garrido, 1994; Báez, 2001), several volumes on the PAN (Loaeza, 1999; Misrahi, 1998), but there are few texts on PRD or the Mexican left wing in general (Bartra, 1982; Bruhn, 1997, 1998; Carr, 1996). The academy gets shyly toward the analysis of the political parties after 1988, when numerous approaches on the hegemonic system-party start coming to light, led by the works of Giovanni Sartori (1980) principally. Gradually start the research on the old and new parties. Nonetheless, to this approach a text that accounted for the origin, evolution, performance and perspectives of the Mexican transition heir, the PRD was missing. That is the reason why the book by Igor Vivero was, in the first place, definitely necessary.

In the second place, the decision of studying, not only the PRD, but also the Mexican left wing as a whole is, to say the least, notable. But doing it with such hardness and following step by step the most complete theoretical instruments is even more remarkable. The author carefully knits the theory with the object of study, he does not leave any loose end; the central axes of the analysis are not left to the hazardous or free interpretation from the readers. These are being accompanied throughout the text. Each theoretical proposal precedes the approach to reality. The approach is theoretical and allows creating new lights over such complex and intricate phenomena and as political parties can be, particularly those that are in formation, as it has been the case of the PRD in Mexico. Even for those knowledgeable on political parties the author's approach on the PRD helps knowing the core of the party through the analysis of the electoral, historical and organizational facets that explain it as a government alternative in the country.

In this same sense we find in the book a rich methodological contribution to the study of the political parties. In terms of theoretical development,

the part about the analysis of the political parties has been a matter that, to the date, is unfinished, given the deep dynamic of these in the context of the contemporary democracies; that goes from its displacement from the Non-Governmental Organizations or the direct democracy, particularly in Western Europe, until its entrenchment in Latin America. The range of parties, trends, organization forms and their different impacts in the political systems is impressive. That is why when a text offering careful and disciplined methodology to study the political parties appears, this becomes an obliged consultation work.

Another important merit of the book is that its approach to one of the most controversial political parties from the current political spectrum in Mexico helps clearing the manipulative media information and presents a more objective look. If the political phenomena are nowadays being crossed by a strong mediatic charge, the analyses from the theory as that by Dr. Vivero are absolutely healthy; especially when the political parties have chosen as a privileged means of communication the mass media, hence, a text that clarifies such information based on particular interests is really useful for everybody, general public and specialists from the academy.

It is worth doing a pass over the book since it could be a study guide of the political parties. Along with Panebianco (1990) and Kriesi (1992), Dr. Vivero approaches in the first chapter the origin of the PRD, doing so exhaustively and punctually, even more, he leads us to walk on the foundations of the Mexican left wing. The study performed within the extended political Mexican system context and the deep transformations of the last three decades. It is in this very context that the author uses as an analytical conductor thread the opportunity structure (OPE) to study the emergence of the PRD. He highlights as a feature of the party the agglutinative presence of the personalist leadership and not the structure or the organization's ideology. Similarly, reading this first chapter can be seen the great internal contradictions, that as they unite the party, they also fragment it.

In this chapter it would have been interesting to deepen on the importance of the social mobilization that accompanied the PRD in its construction as a political party and mainly in the defense of its first

electoral triumphs. Without this mobilization we could not understand so easily the party's political power. The author mentions it, but not thoroughly, being it probably one of the keys of the political change that has been taking place in Mexico since 1988.

In the second chapter the structure and working of the PRD are fully approached. Here stands out the analysis of the formal-organization part, and the not very visible informal part of the internal policy of the party. The former is at plain sight through its statutes, the composition of its internal organs and its ideological bases, everything that is part the daily movement of the party. However, the invisible part—that is where the fine threading of the power is knitted—is constituted by the different currents or factions that integrate the organization, as well as by the dominant coalition. The called Cardenistas (Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Rosario Robles), the Muñozledistas (the Arcoiris —*rainbow*— group), the Amalistas (Nuevo Sol —*New Sun*—), the Chuchos (Nueva Izquierda —*New Left wing*—) and some others, are groups that are looking for overtaking positions by means of the informal practice of alliances, bargaining and agreements. The dominant coalition has been through Cárdenas, Muñoz Ledo and Amalia García, successively. By the first years of the current decade such coalition would be led by Andrés López Obrador. The interview our author makes to the called moral leader of the PRD, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas S. is very illustrative throughout this part of the analysis.

The third and fourth chapters are dedicated to a couple of crucial subjects for any political party: their ideological location in the left-right party spectrum and the electoral success. On the former aspect, the author, as he does in the whole book, demands from himself an analysis depth that surpasses the schematic and superficial visions of what we know as left wing parties and right wing parties.

For the latter, a statistical analysis is used, based on a time series in the last three legislatures, and in the comparison with the other two largest Mexican parties: PRI and PAN. Let us say that in order to locate the PRD it was necessary to locate the other two parties, creating a sense of spectrum that is quite volatile for the analyst and finally for the electorate.

In this part, the competence by ideological niches exercise between political Mexican parties and the statistical analysis of opinion from the

representatives on some variables such as religion, democracy or economy, enrich and define with better empirical elements the location of the PRD in the Mexican left wing.

The part of the book that corresponds to the electoral trajectory is impeccable for two reasons; because based on an analytical model that includes the evolutionary dynamic of the other two largest political Mexican parties allows the reader to observe the noticeable advance of the PRD as an alternative party in the Mexican power, and changing from being an almost inexistent option in 1990 to the close-to-be winner of the last presidential elections. At this point we still find more interesting elements approached by the author. For example, the impact of the PRD in the Mexican parties system, which altered the composition and competitiveness of the whole system, and we would add, speed up the creation of the IFE (Electoral Federal Institute). Mexico is changing through a non competitive party system to a competitive one, and in this transition, the PRD plays a central role, as the author demonstrates it.

We have to add that in this chapter Dr. Vivero also analyzes the presence of the party at a national level and identifies the electorate who supports this party. It is a party placed in the central region of the country, whose main electors are farming workers, merchants and professionals. All of them are part of the faithful and stable political clientele living in the Federal District, Michoacan, State of Mexico and Morelos (40% of their national vote, pag. 216). In order to carry out the study on sociodemographic aspects, the author uses analytical tools such as the competitiveness and volatility, national and regional voting percentages and the multiple regression, and he also illustrates geographically the electoral relevance of the party.

The study of the PRD at national level can immensely vary in respect to the regional or local analysis. The political parties acquire absolutely distant characteristics depending of their geographical location and their range of influence. Even if it was not the intention of the author to take on this approach, a superficial look at the particularities of the party in the states can be noticed, and its incursion at local level is scarce. To make this analysis would enrich the text in their spatial and in the profoundness of its analysis level.

The chapter is, at the same time, the most ambitious one, but perhaps for that reason the weakest in methodological terms, this is, the perspective of the politics compared to the political parties is extremely attractive; however, the exercise can still be weak if we do not part from the generally used premises to make compared politics, such as the comparison between very different or very similar units or the same case (single-case), compared historically. To begin with, the author opts for what would be the most similar parties (left-winged) in Latin America. But we have to mention that with such exercise it is assumed the risk of what we are trying to compare does not cover the minimum requirements of the comparison and it is not possible to constitute a deep explanation.

However, the author assumes the risks and takes on a significant task, to compare the PRD with other parties considered as left-winged in Latin America: the FREPASO from Argentina, the Partido del Trabajo Brasileño, the Frente Amplio Uruguayo and the Partido Socialista Chileno. Once more, the descriptive statistical analysis, the use of the variables, the equality of measurements and the test of results are the means to investigate the position of these parties in the party spectrum and their possible similitude with the PRD.

This part is interesting because it is an important contribution for the study of the political parties in Latin America and for the studies of compared politics in the subject. However, it is the part that demands a further theoretical development, an even more precise approach to the compared politics tools. To check, for example, the variables, the cases, the analysis units and the observations, since each one of these need a previous definition, justification and relevance. To establish the analysis level since we can vary the deepness levels for each case or unit, and this evidently alters our comparison. The strictness in the selection of units, of the variables, the establishment of equivalences, the possible deviations and the slant corrections, grants the results reliability. Similarly, the decision has to be made and make it explicit regarding if a qualitative or quantitative analysis is to be made, or if it will be attempted to combine both analyses.

The comparative task starts with the purpose of comparison (or research question) and the variable(s) to be explained. To compare is constituted as

the means to explain the political phenomena observed, since in the end it is tried to construct a theory that helps answering the question based on the products of the comparison (Landman, 2000). Without a doubt we are asking the author a theoretical-methodological and empirical observation development that was not proposed and that eventually exceeded his initial purposes, hoping this comment incites in the future to carry on a rich research as the one presented here.

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