
Corruption and Mexican Political Culture

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“*el que no traza, no avanza*”
(Mexican saying)

Introduction

Contemporary Mexican political history brims with dramatic, soap-opera-like scandals, wild accusations, seemingly credible evidence of widespread corruption (high and low; bureaucratic and political) and periodic, almost ritualistic anti-corruption campaigns. Yet the end of the PRI’s long reign coupled with global trends has lifted corruption and the anti-corruption movement to a new level, what Camp, Coleman and Davis (1999) refer to it as the “politicization” of corruption.¹ Indeed, in contrast to just a decade ago, we now have data on everything from the frequency and types of corruption to periodic assessments of the administration’s efforts to curb it. Data compare the levels of corruption in Mexico (perceptions and participation rates) to other countries (Mexico does not fare very well) (Transparency International Corruption Perception Indices) and by state (the most corrupt, the Federal District; the least corrupt, Colima) (ENCBG 2001). The once highly technocratic *Secretaria de Contraloria y Desarrollo Administrativo* (Secodam) has become more engaged and conspicuous, social organizations have become more informed and involved, the press dishes up a daily helping of news on corruption and the “scandal-of-the-moment,” and academics and students have begun to analyze this once-neglected dimension of the polity.

Corruption surfaced as a prominent theme on Vicente Fox’s campaign trail and a priority for his administration. The political outsider lashed out at the deep-seated corruption stemming from years of PRI rule – a generic target easy to blame for virtually all of society’s ills-- and during the first few months in office put together a high-level *Intersecretarial Comisión contra la Corrupción*, an integrated *Programa Nacional para la Transparencia y contra la Corrupción*, and a social pact known as the *Acuerdo Nacional para la Transparencia y el Combate a la Corrupción*. In certain ways Fox’s anti-corruption program resembles those of his predecessors: strong on rhetoric, weak on

¹ On general studies on corruption in Mexico see López Presa (1998) and Morris (1991/1992, 999).

results.² But unlike past anti-corruption campaigns, the current anti-corruption movement features an acute attention to cultural values and the engagement of civic organizations. Such innovations raise important questions: How might these changes influence the dynamic of the anti-corruption campaign? Do they suggest a different outcome for the current anti-corruption drive?

This paper looks at two broad aspects of Mexico’s political culture relating to corruption. Part one examines recent polls gauging the public’s perceptions about corruption and related areas. Data describe the extent to which corruption is considered a national problem, perceptions about levels, areas and causes of corruption, assessments of Fox’s anti-corruption campaign, and confidence in public institutions, politicians and the people. The descriptive studies offer a panorama – a cognitive map -- of Mexico’s “culture of corruption.” As noted, such data have really never existed until now, so besides what they tell us about Mexicans’ views, these polls, the product of social organizations, also represent a new ingredient in the current anti-corruption drive. Part two thus looks at this new component, exploring the range of societal organizations currently engaged in anti-corruption activities. I conclude by discussing how this unique ingredient might potentially alter the nature, dynamic and outcome of the current anti-corruption campaign.

The “Culture of Corruption:” Some Theoretical Issues

Before exploring Mexico’s “culture of corruption” – defined here broadly as popular attitudes and opinions about corruption and participation in the area – it is best to begin by asking about its theoretical relevance and place. While the notion of a “culture of corruption” is generally accepted in the literature, there is little agreement about its significance.³ The key controversy centers on the nature of the relationship linking

² I have provided a preliminary top-down analysis of the Fox anti-corruption program on a separate occasion (Morris 2001). For other overviews of the Fox program and the current situation see Balleca and Corona (2002), Hierro Berrondo (2001/2002), and Vargas Hernández (2001/2002). Suffice it to say that the results thus far have been far from spectacular with most polls showing that the population has yet to acknowledge any positive results, ranking corruption as either the same or more pronounced than a year ago.

³ Four large edited volumes by Williams (2000) and the volume by Heidenheimer and Johnston (2002) pull together many of the major writings on corruption. Two of the standard works in the field are Klitgaard (1988) and Rose-Ackerman (1999).

culture and corruption. One approach sees the attitudes of a “culture of corruption” as outcome – not cause – of years of entrenched political corruption; the other sees such cultural attributes as providing the setting – hence the cause – that gives rise to corruption. The debate is reminiscent of the long-standing debate over the relationship between civic culture and democracy.

One perspective, the structuralist-institutionalist view, sees “culture of corruption” as a consequence of long-standing corruption. This view posits that political corruption undermines confidence in public institutions, weakens the levels of interpersonal trust, reduces regime legitimacy, and saps civic involvement.⁴ Political corruption, in short, breeds political alienation. As Gerald Caiden (2001b, 230) notes, “Every incident of corruption that comes to light, and the seeming inability or indifference of public leaders and institutions to correct it, disillusion people and serves to undermine their leaders’ credibility.” According to Doig and Theobald (2000, 6, cited in Seligson 2002a) corruption also negatively effects the people’s “commitment to collective projects, civic behavior, levels of crime and public order.” Empirical findings of Della Porta (2000), Pharr (2002) and Seligson (2002a) lend support to this view. Using time-series data, Pharr (2002)⁵ links growing citizen distrust of government in Japan to corruption, while Seligson (2002a), looking at Nicaragua, Bolivia, Paraguay and El Salvador,⁶ shows that participation in and perceptions of corruption erodes regime legitimacy and the sense of interpersonal trust.⁷

⁴ This perspective generally focuses on institutional and structural factors as key determinants of corruption. Standard treatments on corruption, like Heidenheimer and Johnston (2002), Klitgaard (1988) and Rose-Ackerman (1999) for instance, stress the structure of the administrative agency, the nature of the bureaucracy, the nature and structure of discretionary and monopoly power, accountability, the shape of governmental institutions, the political checks and balances, etc in focusing on the underlying causes of corruption. They devote minimal attention to culture as a determinant.

⁵ It is noteworthy that Pharr (2002) finds social capital unrelated to levels of confidence in Japan.

⁶ Interestingly, in exploring the case of Costa Rica, Seligson (2002b) does not associate the recent decline in legitimacy to corruption. Still, corruption is considered a major concern of the population.

⁷ On the role of interpersonal trust see Putnam (1993) and Inglehart (1998). For a critique see Seligson (2002c).

Today, many observers draw on this perspective when they argue that corruption threatens democracy (Caiden 2001b, 241). This view, in fact, has become quite common with a near global consensus emerging that casts corruption as the primary obstacle to democracy and even economic development. As López and Hemby (2002) note,

Los principales problemas de América Latina no son la pobreza o el subdesarrollo; son en esencia la corrupción, la impunidad que la sostiene, la creencia resultante de nuestras sociedades de que no se puede hacer nada para frenarlas, y el patrón antidemocrático y devastador de que el Estado es de los funcionarios y partidos que lo controlan y no de los ciudadanos a los que deben servir.⁸

Hinting that the countries of the region are on the brink of democratic breakdown, another observer compares the threat of corruption today to the problems of the 1970s:

Así como en la década de los sesenta, la crisis de los consensos básicos y la violencia política consiguiente constituyeron los antecedentes del quiebre democrático, la corrupción es hoy, quizás, la única amenaza comparable a las anteriores en su capacidad corrosiva y desestabilizadora de las instituciones republicanas (Ferreiro Y. 1999).⁹

The alternate theoretical perspective, the cultural approach, reverses the causal arrow. It presents “culture of corruption” as a cause rather than simply a consequence of corruption. Some of the earlier writers on corruption, whom Klitgaard (1988, 9) refers to as “moralists,” embrace this view. Generally, this group casts corruption as an ethical issue emerging from the moral weakness of society or the persistence of traditional values.¹⁰ The moral overtones of this approach coupled with assumptions regarding the impact of social modernization (the inevitable withering of traditional values) combined to make research on corruption taboo (Klitgaard 1988, 9). But even beyond the early

⁸ “Latin America’s principal problems are not poverty or underdevelopment; they are essentially corruption, the impunity that sustains it, the resulting belief in our societies that nothing can be done to stop them, and the anti-democratic and devastating notion that the State belongs to the officials and the parties that control it and not to the citizens it should serve.”

⁹ “Just as in the decade of the seventies the crisis over basic consensus and the resulting political violence constituted the antecedents of the breakdown of democracy, corruption is today, perhaps, the only threat comparable to those earlier ones in its capacity to corrode and destabilize republican institutions.”

¹⁰ It is difficult not to view corruption as involving ethics, though the issue is really the question of causality. After all, it is not as if corruption is accepted even in societies where it is deeply entrenched. As John Noonan (1984, 702-3) notes, the fact that bribery is universally condemned suggests the “moral nature of the matter.”

“moralists,” today many attribute corruption to cultural values. Jorge Nef (2001), for example, points to a range of cultural attributes in Latin American to account for the region’s corruption, including particularism (within the inner circle), formalism (the double standard), role expectation of dispensing favors, corporatism, authoritarianism, and even centralism. He places corruption within a broad cultural mix and implies that any profound administrative reform requires fundamental attitudinal and value changes (Nef 2001, 171). Telma Luzzani (2001, 168) writing in Transparency International’s *Global Corruption Report* also points to Latin America’s generalized irreverence for the law as a major factor fuelling political corruption, something she associates with the cultural perception that bribery is a way of life. As she emphasizes “The theory that bribery makes public administration work more smoothly is, astonishingly, quite prevalent in South America”(Luzzani 2001, 173). Analysis by Camp, Coleman and Davis (1999) even show how interpersonal trust (culture) influences one’s perception of corruption.

Going beyond mere attitudes, this cultural perspective also links such attitudes to the nature and extent of political participation (or lack of participation) and this, in turn, to corruption. Just as the *Civic Culture* theory (Almond and Verba 1963) and its derivatives (Inglehart 1998; Putnam 1993) tie social capital and/or interpersonal trust to participation and a civic culture and this in turn to democracy, the view here is that the “culture of corruption” feeds corrupt behavior rather than fostering behavior ensuring good governance. According to Caiden, et.al. (2001, 3).

There seems to be a direct correlation with the extent to which people as citizens are empowered in their societies. Where they fully participate in governance and where a lively civic culture thrives, those in authority have greater difficulty hiding corruption.

As we will see, many in Mexico share this view. Writing in the late 1990s, former Secodam official and recently named commissioner of the institute administering the new Freedom of Information Law, José López Presa (1998, 113) set out this thinking.

Creemos que la ética, entendida como el conjunto de principios morales que permiten a cada cual normar su conducta individual, moderando sus deseos a fin de compatibilizarlos con la vida en sociedad, es una variable indispensable que debe ser tomada en consideración para el estudio de los fenómenos de corrupción.

Una moral sólida constituye un antídoto que permite mantenerse en la honestidad...una baja moralidad predispone a la corrupción.¹¹

In sum, the first approach casts corruption as the independent variable and culture as the dependent variable, while the second perspective reverses the causal arrow with corruption as the dependent variable and culture as the independent variable. Though the two perspectives can be easily pitted against one another – the conflict parallels the criticisms posed against the cultural approach generally¹² -- one question centers on whether the distinct causal equations really matter in terms of developing strategies to fight corruption. On the one hand, the answer seems *a priori*: the only way to curb corruption would be to attack its causes, not its consequences. From this perspective, efforts to alter popular attitudes or the civic culture would inherently fall short because they do not adequately target the underlying causes. And yet, on the other hand, it is plausible that mutual causality exists and that a state of equilibrium somehow links the behavior (corruption) to the underlying attitudes (culture of corruption). Corruption, in short, may foster a culture of corruption, while the culture of corruption provides a setting in which corruption flourishes: a setting in which corruption becomes expected though perhaps not accepted behavior. Indeed, López Presa (1998, 115) argues both sides. Two pages after positing morality as the antidote to corruption, he blames corruption for creating that same morality:

La corrupción no solo causa costos económicos; su carácter perjudicial deriva principalmente del hecho de que debilita los principios morales, afecta el estado de derecho, daña a los principios de autoridad...¹³

This suggests then a dilemma wherein the culture of corruption stands as both product and facilitator of corruption. This dilemma can best be seen in considering corruption’s relationship to democracy: corruption, as many contend, may weaken democracy and yet,

¹¹ “We believe that ethics, understood as a set of moral principles that guide individual conduct, moderating their desires to make them compatible with society’s, is an indispensable variable that must be taken into consideration in the study of corruption. A solid morality constitutes the antidote that allows for the maintenance of honesty...a low morality facilitates corruption.”

¹² For recent critiques of the political culture approach and the *Civic culture* theory in particular see Muller and Seligson (1994), Knight (2001) and Seligson (2002c). Like the criticism noted here, their fundamental point centers on the issue of causality.

¹³ “Corruption not only has economic costs; its pernicious character derives principally from the fact that it weakens moral principles, affects the rule of law, harms the principles of authority.”

at least in the long-term, democracy correlates with lower levels of corruption (see Caiden 2001b; Lambsdorff 1999; Teisman 1999). Viewed from this perspective, efforts to curb corruption by focusing on “cultural” attributes may therefore have the potential to alter the underlying levels of corruption.

That said, the following overview of the current culture of corruption in Mexico should not be considered any less relevant. The purpose here is not to suggest that cultural variables account for corruption or to settle the long-standing theoretical debate. Even for a strict structuralist or institutionalist, attention to the “culture of corruption” remains important for two reasons. First, focusing on the attitudes spinning-off from widespread corruption tells us more about the pernicious long-term social costs of corruption. Second, the type and involvement of social organizations – the strength of civil society – are clearly important variables in shaping the structural and institutional matrix from which corruption springs. Even non-culturalists agree that empowering society to check the power of the state can potentially alter the corruption equation: the only problem is when, in almost tautological fashion, the weakness of society is deemed both cause and consequence of corruption.

Profiling Mexico’s “Culture of Corruption”

Part of grappling with corruption involves trying to understand how corruption is seen by the public. Corruption, in many ways, is deeply ingrained in the Mexican culture.¹⁴ This section presents data on Mexico’s “culture of corruption” based on a series of recent surveys.¹⁵ It focuses on the level or extent of corruption, the types and location

¹⁴ A recent best-seller by Dehesa (2002) and co-published by TM provides a fun, satirical look at this culture. The purpose of the work, according to Reyes Heróles in the prologue, is to prompt reflection through humor.

¹⁵ This section draws on the following polls.

- *Reforma* Polls. The news organization conducted two national telephone surveys in August 2001 and August 2002 of similar size. The 2002 poll included interviews of 851 adults on August 3 and 4, 2002.
- Hewlett Foundation/MORI (1998). This is part of the Expectations for Democracy Survey conducted in Chile, Costa Rica and Mexico and presented in Camp (2001). The survey involved interviews with 1,200 individuals from July 2-9, 1998.
- Encuesta Nacional de Corrupción y Buen Gobierno (ENCBG 2001). This national poll was conducted by Transparencia Mexicana and included interviews with 13,790 heads of households in June and July 2001.

of corruption, cultural correlates and perceived seriousness of corruption, the causes of corruption and the issue of change. With a few exceptions, the data offered is merely descriptive. I hope to obtain the actual data to look more closely at underlying patterns and relationships.

1. Level or extent of corruption.

Measuring corruption is certainly no easy task given the nature of the phenomenon. Surveys are currently being used by many as one means to measure it. Most rely on perceptions of the extent of corruption -- a measure that has received some criticism -- though some have sought to look at actual participation rates.¹⁶ In Mexico, corruption is perceived by various publics as widespread. Over 70% of respondents claimed that almost everyone or many in government are corrupt (Table 1), and over 85% in Mexico City agreed that corruption is widespread (Gutierrez 1998). Within the private sector, 39% of respondents said that businesses like theirs make extra-official payments to influence the content of laws, policies and regulations (8.5% of income is spent on such payments), while 62% said that businesses make extra-official payments to lower level officials (5.1% of income) (EGDE 2001). Even among internal auditors within the federal government, 60% recognized as “frequent” the acts of corruption within the areas they supervise (DSFC 2001).

Even participation rates, always lower than the perception of corruption, suggest high levels of corruption. Though 64.7% of respondents in a national poll say they had never been involved in a corrupt act (thus a participation rate over 30%), 18.7% of these

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- Diagnostico Institucional del Sistema Federal de Control (DSFC 2001). This survey of approximately 200 federal auditors (contralorías internas) of the federal public administration was also conducted by Transparencia Mexicana in January and March 2001
 - Percepciones de la poblacion de la ZMG (Guadalajara Metro Area) sobre la Corrupción (2002). Conducted by the Centro de Estudios Estrategico para el Desarrollo of the University of Guadalajara in July 2002, this study featured a simple sample of 604 respondents stratified by sex, age and municipality.
 - Encuesta de Gobernabilidad y Desarrollo Empresarial (EGDE 2001). This poll was conducted by the TEC de Monterrey and included interviews with 3,985 representatives of private companies.
 - Other polls used here are cited in Consultores Internacionales (2001), Ferriss (1998), Gutierrez (1998), and Lagos (1997).

¹⁶ Seligson (2002a) uncovered a correlation between measures of victimization/participation rates and the perception of corruption in four LA countries. For discussion of measurement issues see Seligson (2001).

respondents later admitted they had given *mordidas*, with over 40% of this group referring to extra-official payments to traffic police (ENCBG 2001). In Mexico City, 62% of respondents admitted that at times it was necessary to bribe in order to resolve a problem, while 53% agreed with the statement that it is so difficult to comply with laws and regulations that at times there is no other way but corruption (Gutierrez 1998, 189-197). In the metro area of Guadalajara, 58.4% of respondents said they had not had to provide some sort of gratification to a public servant to resolve a problem or take care of a *trámite*, showing that 41.6% had (Percepciones de la población de la ZMG, 2002). According to representatives of business, between 12% and 18% of all public services they used required some sort of extra-official payments (EGDE, 2001).¹⁷

<p>Table 1 How many in government are corrupt?¹⁸ 42% said almost everyone 34.4% said many 19.3% said few 2.0% said almost no one (Hewlett Foundation/MORI, 1998)</p>
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2. *Types and location of corruption*

A number of survey questions help detail the location and nature of corruption or at least the perception of corruption in Mexico.

State versus Society. Some evidence suggests the view that corruption is more pronounced in the government than within society. On a scale of 0-10 for degree of corruption, government received a ranking of 8.0 in 2002 and 7.9 in 2001, whereas citizens obtained a ranking of 6.2 in 2002 and 6.0 in 2001 (Reforma Polls). Yet when asked to identify the origin of corruption, it seems that the public sees corruption coming from both sources almost equally: 32.3% said it originates among citizens, 31.5% said it originates from government officials and 35.2% said both equally (ENCBG 2001). In a

¹⁷ To provide a bases of comparison, 66.4% of respondents in Mexico felt almost everyone or most were corrupt compared to 74.4% in Costa Rica and 58.2% in Chile. In addition, 46% in Costa Rica and just 20.4% in Chile said corruption was a major obstacle to democracy (Hewlett, Expectations for Democracy Survey, 1998).

¹⁸ Though no linear relationship emerged, the highest income group was more likely to see almost everyone as corrupt.

somewhat related question, the internal auditors of the government saw corruption as more likely to involve federal money rather than private sector funds. When asked where do the illegal resources come from, federal budget or private sector? 49% said federal money, 29% said both, and 22% said private sector (DSFC 2001)

Level of the State and State Institutions. Polls also provide a cognitive map of the areas within government where corruption is most frequent. In comparing federal, state, municipal levels of government, there seems to be a consensus that corruption is greatest at the federal level, though no level is free of corruption (Table 2). Even so, differences exist between the public’s view and that of business as to the precise location of the higher incidences of corruption. Among the general public --though as we will see below police corruption is clearly perceived as the most common form of corruption-- there is the perception that corruption is more pronounced at the “upper” levels rather than other levels of the state sector (Table 3). Yet among business, there is a clear tendency to see lower level corruption more frequent as alluded to earlier with 62% versus 39% acknowledging extra-official payments to lower level officials rather than higher-level officials (EGDE 2001).

<p>Table 2</p> <p>At what level is corruption most common?</p> <p>35% federal level</p> <p>22% state level</p> <p>13% local level</p> <p>26% all equally</p> <p>(Reforma poll 2002)</p>
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<p>Table 3</p> <p>At what level is corruption most frequent?</p> <p>43.3% at the highest levels</p> <p>9.3% the middle levels</p> <p>8.7% lower levels</p> <p>(ENCBG 2001)</p>

In looking even more precisely at governmental institutions, there is a clear pattern depicting the police along with the politicians (*diputados* and political parties) as the more corrupt and business, the president and the army as less corrupt (shown in Table

4). It is worth noting that even the army, which has for years been perceived as less corrupt than other state institutions, still ranks above the half-way point on the scale. A Mexico City poll duplicates these findings, showing that among the areas where more corruption exists, the police ranked first followed by high public officials. Both these groups ranked well above lower level officials and even labor unions (Gutierrez 1998, 189-197).

Police	8.29
Diputados	7.83
Political Parties	7.71
Municipal authorities	7.53
State government	7.42
Public Officials	7.33
Judges	7.16
Empresarios	6.12
President	5.45
Army	5.02

(Percepciones de la poblacion de la ZMG 2002).

Using a different set of institutions, businesses provided a more complex ranking of the most dishonest and most honest institutions. They ranked the federal police, the PGR (Attorney General), IPAB (banking crisis), Customs, Pemex, Congress, and IMSS (Social Security Institute) as the most dishonest and *Bancomext*, the *Banco de México*, and *Presidencia* as the most honest. This survey also asked business about the capacity of social groups to influence government decision-making through bribes. The groups identified as having the greatest corrupt influence included narcotraffickers, organized crime, MNCs, national business, and unions (EGDE 2001).

Type of Government Activity. As suggested by the business survey, many agree that the most common types of corruption involve bureaucratic corruption, generally as part of the process of acquiring a government service, and most specifically when dealing with traffic police. One poll cites as the most frequent form of corruption “official areas where a *tramite* had to be completed” (selected by 29% of respondents) (Consultores Internacionales 2001). The ENCBG poll (2001) showed even more pointedly that over 50% of bribes relate to retrieving a car, avoiding a traffic fine, and other traffic offenses

(at a cost of approximately 10% of the services they receive with an average bribe of about \$11). Table 5 shows perceptions of widespread corruption in other areas like prisons and in the judiciary, while Table 6 shows the most common forms of corruption as viewed by business.

<p>Table 5</p> <p>Incidence of corruption by type of activity</p> <p>67% said mainly given to traffic police</p> <p>57% said it is very common to give bribes to obtain permits,</p> <p>56% said most common practices involve bribes to inspectors and to speed-up <i>trámites</i></p> <p>80% believe the most corruption in the prisons,</p> <p>70% believe most corruption in judicial system,</p> <p>60% among citizens</p> <p>(Reforma poll 2002)</p>

<p>Table 6</p> <p>Most common areas of extra-official payments by businesses (areas where over 50% said they made such payments)</p> <p>facilitate obtaining permits and licenses (57%)</p> <p>facilitate connection of public services (56%)</p> <p>avoid problems with IMSS inspection (51%)</p> <p>(EGDE 2001)</p>
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Types of Corruption. Though the type of activity points to the type of corruption, some questions have focused more specifically on the types of corruption. The evidence from the general public points to bureaucratic corruption and the *mordida* as the most commons form of corruption. In the ENCBG (2001), for instance, the public defined corruption as “los sobornos y mordidas” [bribes and ‘bites’] (24%) followed by dishonest acts of citizens (11%). Respondents from Guadalajara also ranked the *mordida* high on the list in terms of frequency, followed by diversion of funds, unexplained wealth and providing jobs to family and friends (Table 7).

Among those responsible for investigating corruption, the types of corruption are more even more detailed. Here 39% said the most frequent corruption involved individuals operating with knowledge of other workers at various levels in the organization, 31% said the most frequent type of corruption involved a group with collaboration of workers at various levels, 12% said by individuals working in secret, and 6% said by individuals with knowledge of others at the same level (DSFC 2001).

corruption. Here, 57% of business generally and 62% of big business were willing to provide resources (EGDE 2001).

As noted earlier, many observers link corruption to confidence in public institutions, interpersonal trust and attitudes toward democracy. Indeed, Mexicans exhibit exceedingly low levels of confidence in their public institutions: a finding confirmed by many studies in the past (see Klesner 2001). In the Hewlett Foundation/MORI survey (1998), 67.8% of respondents had little or no confidence in the government.²⁰ Such poor confidence was particularly focused on the press (66%), the police (65%), political parties (63%) and Congress (61%). Many feel that such confidence is a consequence of corruption. As shown in Table 8, respondents perceiving higher levels of corruption exhibit lower levels of confidence in the government than others. The group seeing minimal corruption actually exhibited less confidence, but this group only contained 25 respondents.

Table 8
Perceptions of corruption and confidence in government
(n=1199) (Hewlett Foundation/MORI, 1998)

Confidence in the government	How many in government are corrupt?				
	Almost everyone	Many	Few	Almost no one	NS/NC
A lot	2.9	3.9	11.8	-	18.2
Somewhat	23.0	27.6	27.1	7.5	31.5
Little	42.1	42.8	40.3	54.9	36.3
None	30.8	24.4	18.2	32.6	7.6

Interpersonal trust is often thought to relate to corruption. In terms of interpersonal trust, data from the Latinobarometro in 1996 shows 64% of Mexicans believe that others are generally dishonest and 72% believe that others are not law-abiding (Lagos 1997). Data from the 1998 Hewlett Foundation/MORI poll, however, showed Mexicans were remarkably trusting given the high levels of perceived corruption. In Mexico, 43.7% of respondents considered others reliable, a level far above the 22.5% in Costa Rica and 19.9% in Chile. Still a relationship does seem to exist linking trust with

²⁰ This is more than reported in Costa Rica (46.2%) and Chile (47.6%), countries with lower perceived levels of corruption than Mexico (Hewlett, Expectations for Democracy Survey, 1998).

perceptions of corruption. As shown in Table 9, 67.9% of respondents who consider people reliable believed that almost everyone or many in government are corrupt compared to 83.3% of those who do not. From a slightly different angle, another poll found 67% of respondents agreeing that honest people become frustrated in the society (Consultores Internacionales 2001).

Table 9

Trust and Perceptions of Corruption
(n = 1199) (Hewlett Foundation/MORI, 1998)

How many in government are corrupt?	Are people reliable?		
	Yes	No	NS/NC
Almost Everyone	31.1	51.0	38.3
Many	36.8	32.3	37.3
Few	26.2	13.7	22.3
Almost no one	3.5	0.9	-

Another area commonly associated with Mexico’s “culture of corruption” is weak respect for the law. In a battery of questions, the Hewlett Foundation/MORI (1998) identified what Power and Clark (2001, 59) consider a “proxy for the propensity to intervene against free-riding or norms-transgressing individuals” or a measure of respect for law. In this measure of *civismo*, Mexicans were found to have low levels of respect for the law with a mean ranking of 1.59 (on a scale of 1-5) compared to 4.49 for Costa Rica and 2.06 for Chile. The ENCBG (2001) also provides some support for this view. Here, only 37% of respondents said it is important to respect the law because it benefits everyone, while another 11% said law should be respected because of the fear of authority (ENCBG 2001).

Another cultural factor often linked to corruption centers on citizen involvement, specifically a low propensity to denounce corruption. One survey found that of those involved in a corrupt act, less than 1/3 said they denounced it. The most cited reason for not doing so was to avoid problems/reprisals (22.7%), followed by a lack of efficacy (it would not make a difference, a view cited by 16.8%) (ENCBG 2001). The government auditors generally agreed with the citizens: 43% cited fear of reprisals as the most

important reason why people do not denounce corruption. Lack of knowledge of how to report it came in second, cited by 25% of the auditors (DSFC 2001).

As noted earlier, many contend that corruption undermines and perhaps threatens democracy. In looking at the relationship between perceptions of corruption and satisfaction with democracy, Tables 10 and 11 provide some support to the proposition. As shown, respondents perceiving high levels of corruption and those viewing corruption as the major obstacle to democracy are more likely to be somewhat or very unsatisfied with democracy.

Table 10

Perceptions of Corruption and Satisfaction with Democracy
(n = 1199) (Hewlett Foundation/MORI, 1998)

How satisfied are you with democracy in this county?	How many in government are corrupt?				
	Almost Everyone	Many	Few	Almost No one	NS/NC
Very Satisfied	2.8	3.0	20.9	16.8	11.7
Somewhat satisfied	15.2	31.2	30.5	22.8	14.2
Neither	10.1	12.6	17.6	27.0	23.1
Somewhat unsatisfied	29.1	27.9	19.2	30.6	34.3
Very unsatisfied	40.7	23.5	11.8	2.7	9.6

Table 11

Perceptions of Corruption and Satisfaction with Democracy
(n = 1199)(Hewlett Foundation/MORI, 1998)

How satisfied are you with democracy in this county?	What is the major obstacle to democracy in this country?					
	Corruption	The government	Political parties	Poverty	People’s Passivity	Lack of education
Very Satisfied	5.1	6.7	13.3	10.8	10.8	3.3
Somewhat satisfied	21.3	24.5	30.7	25.5	18.6	28.1
Neither	7.6	14.5	16.1	25.4	15.6	21.2
Somewhat unsatisfied	31.2	26.0	26.6	26.8	20.3	14.5
Very unsatisfied	33.7	27.2	11.5	11.4	33.0	30.9

4. *Causes of corruption*

Though we can assume the general public spends little time reading the literature on corruption, the political culture does contain certain assumptions and attitudes regarding the underlying causes of corruption. Many of the polls tap these views, but the data reveals no clear pattern. On the one hand, there is a tendency to see the government and the laws as the major problem. 77% of respondents in the Mexico City poll, for instance, agreed that corruption prevails because the guilty go unpunished (Gutierrez 1998, 189-197). Another poll found a majority (54%) expressing the view that the legislation that is applied is inadequate, while 37% said it was insufficient (Consultores Internacionales 2001). The internal auditors share this view: 79% said the laws, regulations and legal norms are not adequate to prevent and combat corruption, while 51% believed their investigative authority needs to be strengthened (DSFC 2001). On the other hand, many also tend to blame the culture and society for the country's corruption. In the Reforma poll, for example, 44% identified "*la cultura y education de los mexicanos*" as the principal cause of corruption compared to just 14% who said "*la falta de aplicación de la ley.*" Another poll, in a word association query, found corruption associated with ambition. And when asked if dishonesty implied lack of identity and national values, 77% of respondents said yes (Consultores Internacionales 2001).

5. *Change*

This final area incorporates views on whether the level of corruption in Mexico has changed in recent years, the impact of recent reforms, and perceptions as to what needs to be done. Surveys conducted at different times in the recent past all concur in the view that corruption has either increased or, at best, remained the same, but it has not declined. In Mexico City in 1998, for example, a stunning 81% of respondents felt that corruption had increased in the last few years as opposed to just 18% who argued it had remained the same or declined (Gutierrez 1998, 189-197). More specifically, 54% thought the government was having no success at stopping corruption and only 5% said the government was doing a lot (cited in Ferriss 1998). Even in the 2000s, following the defeat of the PRI, this perception has largely persisted. In late 2001, 35.5% said corruption had increased since last year, while 20.6% said it had fallen (ENCBG 2001).

Table 12 shows the most recent results. And as shown in Table 13, even respondents in Jalisco were unable to see any significant change since the PAN took power in the state more than 7 years ago. Such results are particularly interesting given the prevailing view that alternation in power will help reduce corruption (a view shared by 48.6% of respondents, though 39.1% said it would not have an impact) (ENCBG 2001) and that a majority see the current government as less corrupt than previous administrations (58% agreed with such a statement and 31% disagreed)(Reforma poll 2002).

<p>Table 12</p> <p>Has corruption increased, decreased or remained about the same compared to last year at this time?</p> <p>48% increased 29% declined 22% remained about the same</p> <p>(Reforma poll 2002)</p>

<p>Table 13</p> <p>Has corruption increased, decreased or remained about the same in Jalisco since the PAN took power in the state?</p> <p>19.7% increased 12.6% had decreased 67.7% remained the same</p> <p>(Percepciones de la poblacion de la ZMG 2002)</p>
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Perceptions of the future are only a bit better than assessments of the present. Though 60% of respondents felt that Fox will be able to reduce corruption “a little,” just 13% believed he would be able to reduce it “a lot” and 25% said he would not be able to diminish it all (Reforma poll 2002). These expectations varied by areas as shown in Table 14.

In expressing views on how to curtail corruption, the ENCBG poll revealed the most important institutions to be the family and teachers rather than the government, suggesting the importance of attacking the values and morals associated with the “culture of corruption.” Even the Church ranked higher than the government in terms of helping to combat corruption (ENCBG 2001).

In sum, as shown here, Mexico’s “culture of corruption” encompasses the generalized beliefs that politicians are corrupt and enjoy immunity, that the government

institutions do not work right and cannot be trusted, that extra-official payments are routine in dealing with the police and bureaucrats, that within society there is a generalized disrespect for the law and a sense that denouncing corruption is futile or personally dangerous, that the situation has gotten worse in recent years, that corruption has a pernicious impact on the country and the society, and that despite the fact that President Fox may be less corrupt than his PRI predecessors, the prospects of substantially altering this situation are slim.

Table 14

Expectations of changes in corruption over the next 2 years.

>Areas where corruption is more likely to increase:

In the judiciary

24% said it would increase

19% said it would fall

In state government

22% said it would increase

19% said it would fall

In city government

23% said it would increase

21% said it would fall

>Areas where corruption more likely to decrease:

In the presidency

14% said it would increase

38% said it would fall

In ministries

16% said it would increase

30% said it would fall

In the federal government

19% said it would increase

24% said it would fall

In congress

19% said it would increase

22% said it would fall

(EGDE 2001)

Yet despite this profile, indicating perhaps the magnitude of the task at hand, there is an emerging trend within this culture of corruption involving a broader popular concern and civic involvement in the fight against corruption. In some ways, this component arises as a result of government initiative, and yet, it has arguably taken on a

life of its own, potentially altering in a fundamental way the nature of the Mexican anti-corruption campaign. Attention now turns to these trends marking the current anti-corruption scenario.

The New Environment: Targeting the “Culture of Corruption”

One of the more unique features of the current anti-corruption drive in Mexico – besides the fact that the president is not of the PRI persuasion -- involves trends associated with the country’s “culture of corruption.” This includes 1) the growing recognition of the role of popular attitudes and culture in facilitating corruption, 2) the presence of anti-corruption initiatives targeting culture and popular attitudes, and 3) the increasing involvement of social organizations in the struggle.

Rooted in the view that morals, ethics and civic engagement are critical ingredients in fighting corruption (Caiden, Dwivedi and Jabbra 2001, 5), the current situation in Mexico finds both state and social organizations demanding and promoting cultural change. Federico Reyes Heróles (1999), president of *Transparencia Mexicana* (TM),²¹ the Mexican chapter of the international NGO Transparency International (TI) -- after noting how the TM survey shows that the majority of Mexicans (55%) respond to rules in “the most brutal and primitive way” (to avoid punishment) and that only 15% understand the values of rules in themselves -- posits

Without the solid foundations of a culture of lawfulness, institutional reforms will always be weak. Needless to say that unless a culture of respect towards lawfulness is implanted, popular corruption problems will prevail.

Reyes Heróles proceeds to blame the “problem of perception” -- wherein everyone takes for granted that others will be corrupt – for facilitating corruption: a situation, he contends, must be broken by identifying areas of honesty to serve as reference points, thereby helping to restore trust in institutions.²²

²¹ TM was formed in July 1999. Chaired by Federico Reyes Heróles, the editor of *Este País*, it includes academics, social activists like Sergio Aguayo of Alianza Cívica, and former government officials such as Sergio García Ramírez, the former Attorney General, and Ulises Schmill, former Supreme Court judge.

²² There is no doubt that targeting the culture in fighting corruption and promoting popular participation are objectives shared by the international anti-corruption movement and constitute part of the new orthodoxy on corruption. Klitgaard (1988, 58, 186), for instance, points to both the need to change the public’s “attitudes toward corruption” and participation as vital in the fight against corruption. (see also

Such arguments in Mexico have become commonplace. Ronén Waisser (2002), for example, in a paper presented at a recent conference in Mexico on corruption, attributes corruption to “la carencia de una cultura ética en los sistemas educativos, la impunidad, la falta de gobernabilidad, así como la ausencia de lineamientos de normas de integridad apropiadas dentro de las fuentes de trabajo.”²³ The preface to the poll sponsored by the Tec de Monterrey (EGDE 2001) makes a similar point:

Aunque la corrupción involucra principalmente al sector público, este fenómeno no es exclusivamente su responsabilidad, por lo que su combate no puede centrarse sólo en acciones dirigidas hacia el gobierno. La sociedad civil y el sector privado también gravitan, con diversas acciones, alrededor del problema de la corrupción gubernamental y, por lo tanto, son parte insoslayable de las soluciones para prevenirla y desarticularla.²⁴

Klitgaard et.al. 2000). At the level of international activism, TI certainly champions this approach. Its non-confrontational strategy centers on education and mobilization. According to Galtung (2001, 200) “TI’s most focused interest today is on empowering, equipping, and rapidly training a global web of tri-sectoral partners to actively regain control of and responsibility for all their interactions.” Strategies such as the integrity pact are designed specifically to cut through the prisoner’s dilemma facing business and its competitors, to break what Galtung (2001, 195) calls the “corruption scenario.” Enhanced participation targets the lack of trust that exists between the citizens and the government and the sense of isolation the people feel from the decision-making process. As one TI document states in describing the situation in Venezuela, “The Venezuelan population is resigned in its belief that corruption and underdevelopment will not cease to exist and it has largely adopted an apathetic attitude towards combating corruption. One way of reversing this trend is through the systematic and continuous use of workshops that clearly demonstrate the negative effects of corruption and the possible ways to fight corruption” (TI’s *Latin American Anti-Corruption Tool Kit*, Introduction- electronic).

The World Bank and other institutions engaged in the global anti-corruption movement also embrace this strategy. Though the World Bank acknowledges that “Corruption is a symptom of fundamental economic, political and institutional causes... [and] The major emphasis must be put on prevention, that is, on reforming economic policies, institutions, and incentives...” it nonetheless emphasizes the role of civil society. “Civil society and an independent media are, arguably, the two most important factors in controlling systemic corruption in public institutions. Corruption is controlled only when citizens are no longer prepared to tolerate it. Private groups, professional organizations, religious leaders, and civil organizations all have a stake in the outcome of anticorruption initiatives and an interest in the process. They also may play an important role as watchdogs of public sector integrity” (World Bank 1999, see also World Bank 2001).

USAID’s anti-corruption project, AAA, also embraces this view, providing grants to NGOs to “promover la cooperación, participación y relaciones del trabajo de la sociedad civil con instituciones del gobierno federal en el marco de la definición de políticas y ejecución de los programas de transparencia y integridad de estas instituciones” [as well as activities designed to] “fomentar la supervisión por parte de la ciudadanía de políticas estatales y/o municipales de planeación, presupuesto, rendición de cuentas, así como la ejecución transparente de programas en éstos ámbitos de gobierno” (*Atatl* No. 1. 2002).

²³ “The scarcity of an ethical culture in the education system, the impunity, the lack of governability, as well as the absence of norms of integrity acquired within the workplace.”

²⁴ “Although corruption involves primarily the public sector, this phenomenon is not exclusively its responsibility, such that the fight against it cannot center only on actions directed at the government. Civil society and the private sector also gravitate, through various actions, around the problem of government corruption and, therefore, are an undeniable part of the solutions to preventing and tearing it apart.”

Even during a recent *Coloquio para el Análisis de Encuestas Nacionales sobre Cultural Política y Prácticas Ciudadanas*, José Woldenberg, the director of Mexico’s Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), echoed this cultural argument:

El asunto se revela como preocupante porque no hay democracia que se sostenga con firmeza sin una base ciudadana bien enterada de la cosa pública... vale la pena preguntarse si la democracia es posible sin políticos, parlamentarios, y partidos que gocen del aprecio (*El Universal* 15 de agosto de 2002).²⁵

It is within this broader context that many of the organizations involved in the struggle against corruption now highlight education as vital in fighting corruption. According to Reyes Heróles (1999) civic education and promoting a different ethics within society gets at the “root of the problem.” Lopez Presa et.al. (1998, 116) similarly, emphasizes education as a means to strengthen the people’s sense of responsibility, while Waisser (2002) and Weberry (2002) concur in stressing the need to alter the ethic lessons taught to children in schools. Even Woldenberg concluded his statement on civic culture by emphasizing the role of education: “la cultura civica, la asimilación de las practicas y las actitudes ciudadanas propias de la democracia se fortalecen sobre todo en el espacio escolar” (*El Universal* 15 de agosto de 2002).²⁶

In addition to highlighting the importance of morals and education, this new thinking also attacks the inactivity of society and thus calls for a more participatory culture. Lopez Presa et. al. (1998, 325), for example, lashes out at a culture that discourages people from filing complaints or holding the government accountable. He points to the need to create mechanisms to facilitate the people’s involvement in denouncing corruption and the need to get professional organizations involved in promoting codes of ethics within their particular areas (1998, 103).

The government, to be sure, shares these views and has played a significant role in helping to fashion this new approach. The “vision” contained in the *Programa*

²⁵ “The matter is of concern because no democracy can firmly sustain itself without a citizen base that is well informed about public matters. . it is worth asking if democracy is possible without politicians, legislators, and parties that enjoy such respect.”

²⁶ “a civic culture, the assimilation of citizen practices and attitudes appropriate for democracy are strengthened above all in the school.”

Nacional para la Transparencia y Contra la Corrupción is “to restore confidence and credibility.” One of the program’s four objectives is to “gain involvement of society.” And one of the program’s six strategic action lines centers on creating agreements with society (see *Programa*). Secodam’s *Primer Informe* (May 25, 2001) notes how the administration “busca construir una nueva cultura donde predominen los valores de la transparencia y la honestidad.”²⁷ Indeed, Francisco Barrio and Secodam officials stress this thinking during virtually every public appearance. In the translated words of the Secretary, “I am convinced that everyone’s participation is necessary in order to succeed in this endeavor [creating a society where laws are respected and there is no impunity]” (Secodam, *Reading about Transparency* No. 1, May-June 2001). An article in a recent issues of Secodam’s “*Para leer sobre Transparencia*” (6 marzo-abril 2002) titled “*Corresponsabilidad en el combate a la corrupción: Recuperando la confianza*” notes that corruption has created the perception that “se vale romper las reglas” [it is ok to break the rules] and that it undermines confidence in laws, in government and in society itself. It goes on to contend that confidence is what holds society together and when corruption exists it undermines the confidence and creates distance between citizens and government. In fact, the government contends that there actually exists what it calls “anti-values” which “se enseña y se aprenden como si fueran valores, ejemplo: ‘es mas vivo el que se aprovecha de los demás’, ‘los que son benos son aburridos’, ‘lay leyes son para violarlas’ among others (Loria 2001).²⁸

What is being done?

Today, the range of social organizations and their activities in the anti-corruption drive are many and broad. By itself, their activity constitutes an incipient change in the underlying culture of corruption characterized by inaction and political alienation. Organizationally, the country now sports a relatively high profile national chapter of TI, *Transparencia Mexicana* (TM), whose activities focus exclusively on the corruption issue. Beyond TM though, many of the nation’s major academic institutions, professional

²⁷ “seeks to construct a new culture where values of transparency and honesty predominate.”

²⁸ “are taught and learned as if they were values, for example: ‘the person that takes advantage of others is smarter,’ ‘people that are good are boring,’ ‘laws exist to be broken.’

organizations and the press have all become involved in the fight in some form or another. Many engage in activities designed to alter the prevailing views of society regarding ethics and corruption. Activity in the areas of research, education, and professional norms stand out.

One important area of activity centers on the analysis of corruption. In contrast to a few short years ago, a range of organizations and individual researchers – with support from the many international institutions involved in this arena -- focus on corruption, helping to promote a deeper understanding of the issues involved. In November 1999, the leader in the area, TM, co-sponsored with the Mexican Embassy the “Transparency and Corruption: Trends in Mexico” conference. The gathering brought together international and national experts to discuss the causes and consequences of corruption and to explore and analyze anti-corruption strategies. Another conference, “Mexico contra la Corrupción,” was held in April 2002. Sponsored by a wide range of organizations (Cemex, CIDE, IFE, ITAM, Television Educativa, TM, UNAM, OEA, USAID, World Bank, the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars, and the Fundación Friedrich Ebert), it too featured a wide range of papers from a variety of perspectives (see Waisser 2002). In addition, TM has provided in-depth analysis evaluating Mexico’s implementation of the OECD Convention on Combating Bribery of Foreign Public Officials, signed in December 1997,²⁹ and it conducted the national survey and the survey of internal auditors within the federal government cited earlier.

TM is certainly not alone in this pursuit. The *Universidad de Guadalajara* and ITESM (Tec de Monterrey) also conducted surveys exploring perceptions of corruption, both cited earlier, while UNAM has agreed with Secodam to refine the methods used to measure corruption. The Tec de Monterrey has other such projects in the works, including a survey of public officials, focused interviews with businesses as a follow-up to the survey on business opinion, consulting with businesses to help identify obstacles to the creation of a culture of transparency and legality in the sector as well as to generate strategies to foment this culture (EGDE 2001). Such efforts are supplemented by a

²⁹ TM found a good faith effort of the Mexican legislation to implement the requirements of the Convention, yet noted that the actual scope of the legislation will not be clear until after specific cases have been brought (TI Working Paper, February 25, 2000).

handful of researchers at these and other institutions. One study by Fernando Tenorio Tagle of UAM, Unidad Azcapotzalco, for example, entitled "Ciudades seguras" focuses on the lack of political will to fight corruption in key institutions like the procuradurias, police forces, and public ministries in the DF, Tlaxcala, Campeche and Queretaro. With 96% impunity of crime, the study identifies corruption as a major contributor to the crime problem (cited in *Notimex* 25 de Julio de 2001).

Universities have been particularly active in not only promoting research on corruption, but also in developing courses and seminars on corruption and ethics for government officials, the society and students. With funding from the World Bank, the Tec de Monterrey runs a "virtual course" entitled "*Gobierno Abierto y Participativo*" for public officials (see ITESM web page; *El Mural* 29 de Julio de 2001). In late 2001, the government reported that more than 1,500 public workers had taken the course (*Para leer sobre transparencia* 4 (Noviembre-Diciembre 2001). In May 2002, it ordered officials to take this on-line course to help train them in "valores, eficiencia y calidad en los servicios que prestan" (*El Universal* 12 de Julio de 2002).³⁰ The Tec is also planning on conducting a cycle of conferences entitled "*La Etica es un Buen Negocio*" that will involve consultants, entrepreneurs, and experts on ethics and transparency in business. Targeted at businesses, plans are to broadcast the conferences via satellite to other Latin American countries. (*Para leer sobre transparencia* 4 (Noviembre-Diciembre 2001). IPADE has also conducted courses to five groups of high-level officials entitled "Control de Procesos e Información Directiva." The Universidad Iberoamericana (UIA) has similarly agreed to develop a model program for training public servants of the various agencies with the objective of creating a culture of service, honesty, transparency and accountability (*Para leer sobre la Transaprencia* 1 May-Junio, 2001). In January 2002, the philosophy faculty at the Universidad Pontificia de Mexico organized a diplomado on "Etica de las politicas publicas." They tried unsuccessfully to get Secodam officials to attend. A few months later, noting the need for a new ethical culture in the country, an official from the school offered once again to teach a course on ethics to the government (*El Universal* 22 de Septiembre de 2002).

³⁰ The four hour course is divided into the 12 values highlighted by Fox in his inaugural address. It includes various examples of ethical behavior and dilemmas. The course is not obligatory, nor a requirement for advancement or higher pay.

These institutions have also developed or have promised to develop new courses and seminars for students and to alter curricula to include ethics and the study of corruption. Secodam signed an agreement with the peak organization the *Asociación Nacional de Universidades e Instituciones de Educación Superior* (ANUIES) to incorporate the study of ethics and corruption into college curricula. In a separate accord, 11 universities agreed to craft specialized codes of honors for their programs in Accounting and Administration (Secodam web site). The Tec has agreed to encourage students to do their social service internships in anti-corruption programs at Secodam, while for its part, UNAM has agreed to foment studies about corruption and public policies, including the creation of a prize for student research on corruption (*El Universal* 11 de septiembre de 2002). UNAM has also received special funding from the World Bank to develop a program to compile information and data on corruption in Mexico. The project includes fellowships for students focusing their research on political corruption (discussion with World Bank official, July 2002).

Other programs focus more specifically on the general public and particularly children. Together with Secodam and IFE, CONACULTRUA conducted a drawing contest for kids entitled "*Adios a la Trampa*" (Waisser 2002). CIDE, Secodam, USAID, and ANUIES also sponsored an essay contest called "*Primer Certamen Nacional de Ensayo sobre Transparencia, Rendición de Cuentas y Combate a la Corrupción en México*" in which 231 contestants participated. A range of groups (Cinemark, the World Bank, Fundación Telemex, Kodak, and Labo Filmes) also came together with Secodam to produce the film *Cuando sea Grande*, a movie about a 5 year old boy facing a string of ethical challenges. The movie is slated to be shown in over 100 theaters across the country (*Notimex* 28 de Agosto de 2002). Meanwhile, TM is working with the Children's Museum to elaborate a program that would enable children to fight corruption (Reyes Heróles 1999). Even at the local level, such programs are emerging. In February 2002 in Monterrey, civic organizations along with government staged "*La Caravana por la Honestidad*" to help bring attention to the struggle against corruption. A reported 3,000 people and 500 vehicles participated in the event including Barrio and the rector of the Tec de Monterrey. Meanwhile in Empalme, Sonora, as part of the national program "*Municipios por la Transparencia,*" a group of youths took to the streets and the

government offices to hand-out information about government services and the costs of *trámites* and to help citizens process their complaints (*Para leer sobre transparencia* 6).

In addition to TM and universities, professional organizations have also become more involved in the anti-corruption effort, focusing particular attention on the ethics of their members. The *Instituto Mexicano de Ejecutivos de Finanzas* (IMEF), for example, has agreed with Secodam to provide information to members about best practices and to work to improve the quality of the public services they receive. IMEF has also promised to present detailed proposals for reforms to the government. The *Federación de Colegios, Institutos y Sociedades de Valuadores* in a similar accord has agreed to include in their plan of study aspects regarding professional ethics, while the *Federación de Colegio de Ingenieros Civiles de la Republica Mexicana* has agreed to elaborate and apply a Code of Conduct among its members. The *Barra Mexicana Colegio de Abogados* also signed-on to promote a code of ethics among its members, to organize conferences and workshops on ethics, and to promote throughout the country’s law schools a professional culture of ethics. The *Barra* also agreed to work with Secodam to offer a *Diplomado* entitled “*La corrupción y estaregias para combatirla.*” In a similar fashion, the *Camara de la Industria de la Radio y la Televisión* (CIRT) has agreed to promote and diffuse measures to fight corruption and to promote the free flow of information. It also agreed to channel complaints and denouncements from the population. The CONCAMIN (*Confederación de Camaras Industriales de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos*) has also agreed to channel complaints and proposals from its members and to work with universities to train future business leaders in the area of ethics. CANACINTRA (*Camara Nacional de la Industria de Transformación*) has promised to collect the codes of ethics of companies and to sensitize business to the importance of ethics. COMPARMEX (*Confederación Patronal de la Republica Mexicana*) has guaranteed to promote a culture of honesty in relations between its members and the government, to elaborate official codes of conduct and train its members in ethics, and to create a commission on ethics in business. CONCANACO (*Confederación de Camaras Nacionales de Comercio*) has signed an accord promising to promote honesty and transparency in its dealings with the government. Even the business magazine *Expansion* signed an accord to publish articles on the subject, to make public

its code of conduct, to create a section on ethics in business, and to publish results of list of businesses that do well in the area of ethics (Secodam web site).

While much of the activity of such organizations is targeted at society, a lot is focused on the government. Universities are engaged in training government personnel as noted and many professional organizations are involved in canvassing members for specific ideas on reform to present to government officials. CONCANACO and COPARMEX, for instance, have both agreed to become observers of government bidding processes and to take a lead role in promoting transparency in their member’s dealings with the government. TM also targets much of its activities on the government. In early 2000, it presented a series of proposals to the presidential candidates and later published “*10 Acciones a favor de la transparencia y contra la corrupción,*” a document it then presented to President Fox.³¹ CIDE, meanwhile, sponsors the *Programa de Presupuesto y Gasto Publico*, providing detailed information on the public budget, ensuring transparency in this once obscure area.

Just as Secodam has promoted the view that culture bears part of the blame for corruption, it has also played a critical role in promoting public information programs and mobilizing the participation of society in the anti-corruption endeavor. Indeed, most observers agree that the “public relations” section of Secodam (First Floor), “*La Unidad de Vinculación y Transparencia,*” has witnessed the most growth and received the most attention under Fox and Barrio.³² As noted above, Secodam has sponsored or co-

³¹ The 86 page document highlights the following actions: sweeping reforms in the judicial system (ending the monopoly of the Public Ministry, creating civil service for police, create judge for penal institutions, legislative power to designate Attorney General, Public Ministry independent of the judicial police, etc.), enhancing access and quality of public information (greater use of computer technology, makes public acts of government, make use of public money among journalists a crime, new law of information), promoting career civil service in specific areas of the administration (especially in judiciary, Career civil service system), improving and broadening mechanisms of accountability (reform of the Law of the Budget and Public Accounts, indicators of efficiency, citizens oversight at the municipal level), strengthening or creating new organs for oversight and control (Comptroller independent of the executive, agency with autonomy, Civil Consejo against corruption), stimulating and enriching a culture of legality (campaign to modify culture of impunity by publicizing cases of prosecuting corruption, promoting education of civil values, moral consciousness), improving the quality of regulations in public administration (simplification, extend the law of procedures to the state and local level, administrative reform in terms of salary, incentives, *Tramitanet*, reforming the system of supervision of the banks), strengthening the tax system (greater controls, less evasion), reforming social institutions (INFONAVIT), and promoting an integral approach to fighting corruption (Create a National Anti-corruption plan, social program).

³² Indeed this is one of the main criticisms of the Fox program: that it is mainly PR and focuses little on reforming the structure and operation of the bureaucracy or on prosecuting corrupt officials. TM would

sponsored an incredible range of activities with social organizations and signed almost 100 agreements with various social organizations. The agency has also engaged in many high-profile projects targeting the general public and Mexico's underlying "culture of corruption." Its publicity campaign "*Ya no más mordidas*," for instance, has placed anti-corruption logos on milk cartons, in movie theaters, and on vehicles (*Para leer sobre transparencia* 4 (Noviembre-Diciembre 2001). Through its many publications and web site it seeks to inform and alter general perceptions regarding corruption. The 8 page bi-monthly *Para leer sobre transparencia* includes everything from information on the nature of corruption, comparative data and blurbs on new books on corruption to instructions on how citizens can denounce corrupt acts. The publication also, of course, highlights the many measures and advances of Secodam and the Fox team in fighting corruption.

Secodam has also developed special programs for children, including school programs, ethics exhibits in museums, drawing contests, and a special web site. Created in August 2001, the web site for children, teachers and parents promotes ethical values, explains what corruption and the common good are, highlights the importance of honesty, and seeks to get children involved as spies/agents taking on special "missions" to promote transparency. It calls on kids to form their own "transparency gangs," provides detective "kits," and even comics with ethical stories (www.00corrupcion.gob.mx/, October 2001 report "A Cuatro Meses de 'Controlando la Corrupción, Hacia una estrategia integrada," and "Para leer sobre la transparencia" No. 3).

At the other end of the spectrum, the government works with professional organizations to promote ethics and transparency by promoting the development of Codes of Conduct, including a brochure on how to deal with corruption within the organization (see "Los Programas de Integridad y el éxito de las organizaciones," *Para leer sobre transparencia* 5 (Enero-Febrero 2002; and *Empresa Transparente* 2001).

Finally, any discussion of the many social organizations now involved in the anti-corruption movement in Mexico would be incomplete without mention of the press. As Lawson (2002) highlights, the Mexican press has become more aggressive in recent years

probably be quick to add that few of the concrete reforms it recommended (previous footnote) have been made.

in their coverage of topics once considered taboo, including corruption. Not only has a more independent media emerged that seeks to "uncover and follow up on scandalous incidents" (Lawson 2002, 139), but the press now also provides an outlet to report on the various studies on corruption and the activities of social organizations and even helps put together conferences on corruption or investigate corrupt behavior.³³ In July 2001, for example, *El Grupo Reforma* sponsored a panel composed of academics, business leaders and government officials looking at the impact of corruption on the private sector. According to the report, the presenters showed how corruption has a detrimental impact on development and investments and thus emphasized the need to "convince others of the advantages that can be obtained from acting in a legal and transparent manner" (*Mural 2 de Julio de 2001*). In an even more compelling example unique in the history of Mexico, *Grupo Reforma* conducted an undercover investigation in the state of Mexico to see how easy it was to pay a bribe to obtain an auto verification sticker. The investigative group worked with a mechanic to make sure a car could not pass the test, and then took it to various locations. In virtually every case, the group was able to pay bribes and obtain the permits (Padgett 2002).³⁴ In addition to these sorts of activities, the press has also played a more active role in exposing wrongdoing and maintaining pressure on the government. In August 2002, for example, the press exposed, for the first time, the excessive amounts and limited transparency behind the financing of the political parties. *Proceso* presented a detailed list of irregularities, calling this an area that has been neglected but should be part of "democratic transparency" (*Proceso 22 de agosto de 2002*).

Conclusion

Despite a long history of corruption and anti-corruption campaigns, the current anti-corruption climate and program in Mexico seems different in many ways. In the past, anti-corruption campaigns were the product of an authoritarian government intent on using the mantle of reform to maintain political support, regenerate faith in the regime,

³³ Lawson (2002, 151) attributes the greater coverage to heretofore neglected topics like scandals and corruption to the growing professionalism within the media owing to growing competition.

³⁴ The government has been in engaging in this sort of investigation for a few years now under their "simulated user" program (López Presa 1998).

steal the reformist thunder from opponents and (re)assert presidential control. The programs, definitely top-down, technical in orientation and strong on the rhetorical, were inherently limited. For one, the reforms were orchestrated by the president and depended almost entirely on his political will.³⁵ And since the reforms were designed to protect power rather than share or loose it, the president’s political will generally fell far short of actually curtailing corruption. Second, the reforms tended to be more technical in nature and rarely tried to empower society since this would in many ways challenge the power of the president and the government and perhaps undermine the reformist initiative. The president certainly wanted to incite, inform and mobilize the support of the people, but primarily to strengthen rather than weaken his political hold on the system.

Today’s anti-corruption scenario involves much more public involvement than in the past, more attention to popular ethics, and nestles within a much more pluralistic setting. A more active, participatory society creates a dynamic of growing expectations and growing pressures on the government to act and produce results. This means that the standards of judging anti-corruption efforts in Mexico may be undergoing change. This situation alters the equation, moreover, by limiting the reformist gains accruing to the president as he is increasingly seen as lagging behind demands that in some way he has helped fuel (and certainly helped fuel him). Stated differently, the current dynamic may push the boundaries of “political will” that defines the outer limits of any anti-corruption program. Though Fox certainly wants his anti-corruption drive to help him and especially the PAN, survey data suggest that he has been unable to do so thus far.³⁶ And even though the public sees Fox as perhaps less corrupt, they do not see his anti-corruption campaign as particularly productive. In addition to increasing the pressures and expectations, the emergence of a new cast of political/social actors also provide personnel for a new set of autonomous institutions being established to monitor the government, perhaps even a new class of politician. Just as IFE has done a remarkable job of dealing

³⁵ The study by Tenorio Tagle referred to earlier emphasized the lack of a political will to fight corruption in law enforcement agencies as a major cause of crime (see *Notimex* 25 de Julio de 2001).

³⁶ The debate following the release of TI 2002 Corruption Perception Index in which Mexico’s ranking fell was telling. The results provided ammunition to TM and others to criticize the government’s program, while Barrio, in defending the administration, initially questioned the methodology of the index. Fox, eventually, used the opportunity to promise renewed focus on fighting corruption.

with electoral corruption, new institutions are emerging, like the institute for the new Access to Information Law that will serve to promote accountability.

The general literature on corruption emphasizes that “self-monitoring is suspect” (Rose-Ackerman 1999, 163), that “anti-corruption drives have notoriously short-life spans” (Klitgaard 1998, 90), and that “corruption cannot be expected to wither away just because a reform government has taken power” (Rose-Ackerman 1999, 226). Such propositions certainly help explain the patterns of past anti-corruption campaigns in Mexico and preach caution when assessing the current installment. Certainly, public opinion in Mexico echoes this pessimistic and yet realistic position. Evidence presented here shows that Mexicans generally believe that those in government are corrupt, that confidence in public institutions is severely limited, that respect for law is low, that Fox is failing to effectively curtail corruption, and that he probably will not be able to during his term. Yet, at the same time, the current situation in Mexico also features something seemingly unique: a growing recognition within society of the problems associated with corruption and a growing involvement or empowering of civil society in the fight. Perhaps this, combined with the recent democratic breakthroughs, suggests that the current anti-corruption campaign might just enjoy an outcome different from those of the past. At least this time, many more analysts are poised to explore this and related questions.

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