



Juan Pablo Zamora/Cuattrosucro



Javier Tapia/Cuattrosucro

The most recent polls say First Lady Martha Sahagún and Minister of the Interior Santiago Creel are the two front-runners for the PAN's 2006 presidential nomination.

The National Action Party In Crisis

Tania Hernández Vicencio*

Since Vicente Fox took office in 2000, the National Action Party (PAN) has faced a crisis rooted in the open struggle among its different factions for control of the party and in the wear and tear on it from occupying Mexico's presidency.

This article aims to broadly sketch the PAN's current situation and crisis. To do that, I will begin by saying that the

PAN still exhibits enormous tension between two dynamics: on the one hand, its highly centralized structure and decision making, and, on the other hand, the demand to open up to building an innovative party and government project.

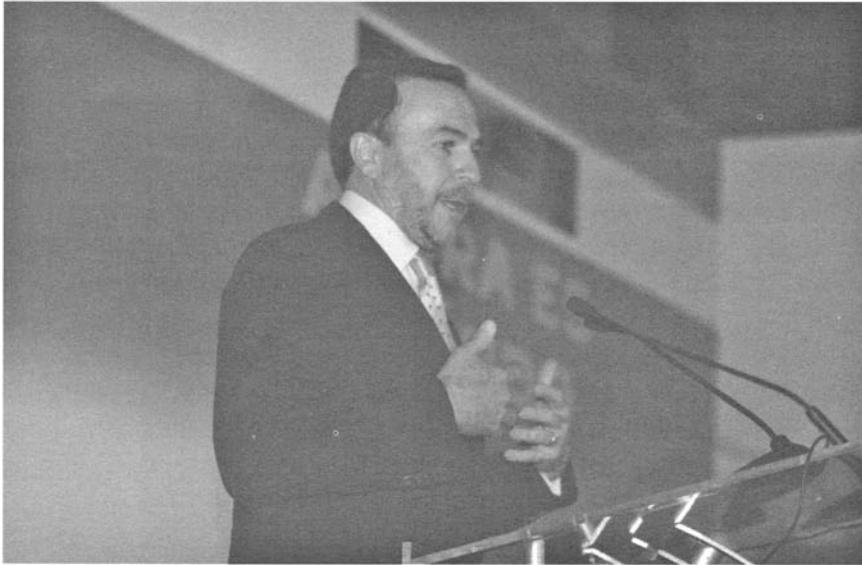
In that context, I maintain that PAN members have displayed their willingness to foster merely gradual change in their structure and internal life, but the lack of a long-term project that would make it possible to attack a series of problems derived from being in office.

Despite the almost 15 years that the PAN has been in office in some states, its members have been incapable of moving forward in the construction of an alternative model for party-government relations.

INTERNAL GRADUALISM

Although the PAN has grown and its structure modernized, the party has not developed institutionally. Its member-

* Professor and researcher at the Northern Border College.



Nelly Salas/Cuartoscuro

Carlos Medina Plascencia, the head of the PAN caucus in the Chamber of Deputies, is also in the race.

In the four years since Fox took office, the party has simply accompanied the administration. The PAN is the party in government, but without the government.

ship increased 23 percent between 2000 and 2001, and today it has 267,000 active members and 800,000 adherents; new internal secretariats have been created, and internal functioning has been overhauled. Nevertheless, the PAN lacks a project for long-term institutional development that in addition to dealing with its needs as a political organization would create the basis for facing the new challenges derived from occupying federal office. Several events show this.

For example, PAN members have been reforming their by-laws with an eye to immediacy, a reflection more than anything else of the sharp dispute over control of the party, candidacies and the definition of the new mechanisms for links between the party and the government. Suffice it to say that over 60 years the PAN amended its by-laws nine times, and since taking federal office, it has already had two

reforms of its basic documents, plus updating its principles and creating a code of ethics for its public officials, given that some have been involved in corruption scandals, influence peddling and even murders.

Among the 2001 changes in the by-laws, three deserve mention: a) An increase in the number of participants in the National Council to 300 council members. Of these, 150 (such as former national leaders, governors, founders) automatically become members; 15 are proposed by the National Executive Committee (NEC) and 135 are taken from those in the top places on the lists drawn up in each state. The other 150 are elected in the National Assembly from among the names on the state lists; b) The creation of municipal sub-committees made up of several electoral sections, that will carry out political activism territorially; c) Requiring aspirants to being recognized as active mil-

itants to spend a year and a half as adherents instead of three years as some conservative PAN members proposed.

However, a fundamental limit is that two substantial tasks have been added to the National Executive Committee's responsibilities: developing mechanisms to orient party action in the public administration, and fostering models of relations with society within the party's traditional framework.

With the March 2002 PAN leadership election, when Luis Felipe Bravo Mena was voted in again, an intense dispute between two visions was thrown into sharp relief. One vision centered on the functional modernization of internal bodies, the use of models for territorial development centered on the municipal sub-committees and a role for the PAN of simply accompanying its administration's actions, in what in Bravo Mena's words was the quest for a "democratic link."

The other view was Carlos Medina Plascencia's, who defended the need for a profound transformation based on opening up to citizen participation, the consolidation of social networks to support PAN administrations, taking party work out to electoral sections, neighborhoods and communities and strengthening the relationship between party and government; for this, he put forward the idea of fostering a much-needed "shared management."

In addition, with the April 2004 changes in the by-laws, it became clear that the point of greatest conflict was Article 37, dealing with procedures for nominating the candidate for the presidency. The winning proposal, backed by the NEC, left the decision in the hands of active militants and adherents. The proposal backed by Minister of the Interior Santiago Creel would have

opened up the decision to the citizenry, or, in other words, including PAN sympathizers. The 2001 changes, but above all the 2004 changes, were marked by the defense of a process of “opening, but with identity,” a phrase coined by Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, one of the main leaders of the doctrinaire faction, a member of the so-called “custodian families” and an aspirant to the 2006 PAN presidential nomination.

The PAN has fostered gradual changes in its internal life, but has also left to one side central questions like, for example, those related to making its highly centralized structure more flexible and to developing really new mechanisms for linking the party and society, which would permit the construction of larger and more permanent alliances and support for its government proposal.

One of the issues that PAN members do not dare openly recognize is the fact that the party’s formal structure has been overrun on different occasions, since the so-called “neo-PANistas” began to design their own electoral campaigns. Just to mention two cases, we should remember that the candidacies of Ernesto Ruffo and Manuel Clouthier were supported by candidate campaign committees independent from the party-designated committee.¹ Perhaps the most patent case of the structure’s crisis was shown by the functioning of the parallel structure called Friends of Fox, an organization that contributed decisively to the PAN candidate’s victory, but whose members did not make significant commitments to the party. We could even think that given the structural limits, the leaderships have had to create different options for carrying out political proselytism. This is the case of the organization called Mexico 2020, headed by Carlos Me-



President Fox forced Minister of Energy Felipe Calderón to resign because he openly announced his intention to run.

Karla García/Cuartaescena

The PAN lacks a project for long-term institutional development that would create the basis for facing new challenges.

dina Plascencia and the Fundación Vamos México (Let’s Go Mexico Foundation) that backs the political work done by first lady Martha Sahagún.

NO ALTERNATIVE MODEL FOR THE PARTY-GOVERNMENT RELATIONSHIP

For almost 15 years, the PAN has occupied the governor’s mansion in several states nationwide and one of the main problems has been the relationship between party and administration. For four years now, the party has headed up the federal government, and it does not seem to be willing to move forward to solve this underlying problem.

The PAN is the party in government, but without the government. The PAN has had little capacity to have an impact on three issues fundamental for any party in office: the construction of political accords between the executive

branch and its congressional caucus, the creation of public policies and the designation of a governing team. With regard to the last point, we should remember that since Vicente Fox appointed his governing team, a sector of the PAN expressed its unhappiness with the nominations and even requested the substitution of people not identified with the party. This led to a further breakdown of the already weak link between President Fox and his party.

The relationship between the PAN and Vicente Fox throughout these almost four years has been based on the formula called the “democratic link,” whereby the party decided to simply accompany the administration. This concept has been more a diffuse attempt at innovation vis-à-vis the traditional subordination of the party to the government than a real alternative proposal. In practice, it has contributed to generating the image of a rudderless government

without its natural support, an administration that cannot find counterparts for dialogue inside or outside the PAN.

It should be mentioned that by August 2001, the Liaison Committee for setting up the mechanisms for coordination between the PAN and the executive branch had been created. The agreement was to hold periodic meetings that would try to make party and government actions jibe. However, this commission was never sufficiently effective and the initial objectives were never met. Thus, until now, Mexico has been witness to multiple examples of non-cooperation, in which the lack of polit-

forgot that an opposition that has the will to become the government and stay in office has to give appropriate importance to its function as an intermediary between society, legislators and those in government. Its lack of skill in positively integrating the experience accumulated on a regional level has shown that it basically is still acting as a party seeking greater spaces in the electoral and party system, without a precise idea of why it wants to be in office.

If a strategy for cooperation between party and government had been sought, in the last leadership election, some obligatory questions would have been:

To the problematic relationship between the PAN and Vicente Fox were added the conflicts created by First Lady Martha Sahagún's proselytizing.

ical acumen on the part of the National Action Party leadership has been the central characteristic.

It is true that 70 years of subordination of a party to the president force a reformulation of the relationship between two autonomous—though not independent—spaces in the responsibility for the exercise of government.² However, PAN members do not yet have a clear proposal that distinguishes the difference between that relationship with a traditionally opposition party and one in office. Seemingly, they have been incapable of understanding the heavy responsibility of an administration that has emerged from the opposition, in the context of sharp electoral and political competition, where one of the necessary principles is creating institutional agreements.

The constant clashes make it possible to say that the National Action Party

What type of leadership would guarantee a more fluid, politically productive relationship for a government facing difficulties in implementing its central proposals? Who could foster greater consensus inside the PAN legislative caucus and at the same time support the relationship between PAN deputies and the executive? What type of leadership could head up the process of transformation the PAN needs to give a broader, more solid social base to its governments?

Perhaps an external element that could additionally help understand the difficulty the Fox administration is having in coming to long-term agreements is the fact that while PAN members make up a new political elite, this elite has not managed to totally reconcile its interests with those of Mexico's political class. This limits its possibilities for coming to fundamental agree-

ments such as the structural reforms on which President Fox has centered his administration's agenda.

To the problematic relationship between the PAN and Vicente Fox were added the conflicts created by First Lady Martha Sahagún's proselytizing. By early 2004, Sahagún had aspired to being a member of her party's NEC, although after gauging her colleagues' reactions, the first lady ended up by halting her drive to become a member of the PAN's most important decision-making body. Evidently, by seeking an NEC seat, she put the idea before the public that she would seek her party's nomination in 2006 from inside the PAN.

Although Martha Sahagún understood that she had taken the wrong road, and sent the media a letter in which she seemed to renounce her aspirations to the presidency, as well as withdrawing momentarily from party activity, the truth is that until now, she maintains a double discourse in which the only clear point is that she has not completely abandoned the idea of a possible nomination.

The conflicts around Mrs. Sahagún's intentions unified the PAN's main political factions. This was clear at a meeting held at the presidential residence, Los Pinos, with representatives of the four most important factions: Diego Fernández de Cevallos and Juan José Rodríguez Prats, from the pragmatic faction; Felipe Calderón Hinojosa and Germán Martínez Cázares, from the doctrinaire faction; the extreme right-wing faction, headed up by Luis Felipe Bravo Mena and Manuel Espino; and Ramón Muñoz and Ramón Martínez Huerta, who have defended the interests of the Fox faction, known as the "Guanajuato group." All of them agreed on the need for the first lady to

be more discrete, in exchange for a more moderate position from the party leadership with regard to the Fox administration.

FINAL COMMENTS

Evidently, PAN members have once again decided to postpone a real discussion that would clarify the specificities of its crisis as a party in office. Caught in the dispute for control over the party, candidacies and public posts, they continue to leave for another time the profound transformation that would allow the party to deal with its new challenges and build a really different proposal in its relationship with the government.

The party structure is not resolving the problems related to the creation of larger alliances and the identification of demands and proposals in a more

permanent way, or working on the creation of an alternative proposal for the party-government relationship. The situation the PAN has faced since it took office is the last reflection of a dilemma that it still has not resolved: how can it continue to govern based on an institutional structure that still has important limits on its process of change? This situation has become a dilemma for the party that can be formulated as "transformation vs. continuity" and is a choice for its governments centered on the importance of external vs. internal alliances.

As if this were not enough, once again electoral and political calendars are superceding the solution of long-term institutional problems, which would surely contribute to the PAN recovering important spaces that it has lost in recent elections and even to its advancing in others, in addition to being able to


more clearly visualize the road it should take forward to reach its new objectives.

Statements by former Energy Minister Felipe Calderón Hinojosa, Senator Carlos Medina Plascencia and PAN congressional caucus leader Francisco Barrio about the possibility of making bids for the PAN presidential nomination in 2006, and Minister of the Interior Santiago Creel's clear desire to do the same, have once again focused the discussion basically on the elections, shunting to one side the fundamental problems. **MM**

NOTES

¹ These two candidates ran for the governor's seat in Baja California in 1989 and the presidency in 1988, respectively. [Editor's Note.]

² The author is referring to the 70 years in which the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) was in office. [Editor's Note.]




**UNIVERSIDAD NACIONAL
AUTÓNOMA DE MÉXICO**

Colección Lecturas Jurídicas

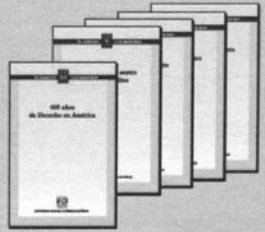
Serie: Manuales Jurídicos
Incluye 21 títulos.




Serie: Estudios Jurídicos
Incluye 16 títulos.



**Serie: El Derecho y sus
Maestros**
Incluye 10 títulos.





FACULTAD DE DERECHO

De venta en la Facultad de Derecho y librerías de la UNAM