

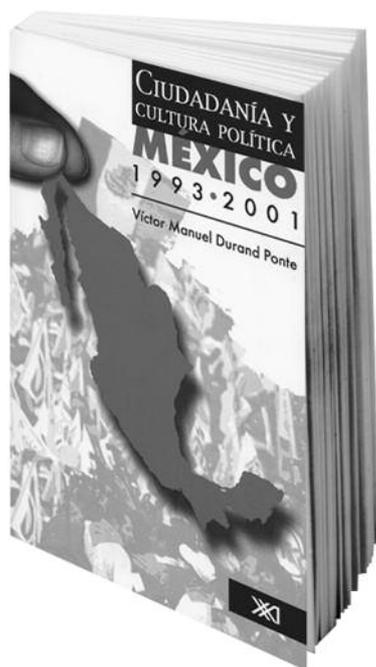
**Ciudadanía y cultura política
México, 1993-2001**

(Citizenship and Political Culture
Mexico, 1993-2001)

Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte

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The transition to democracy in Mexico has been fundamentally a process of institutional change. We have gone from the era of the hegemonic party to a multipartisan system; from manipulated, disputed elections to transparency; from mistrust to trust in electoral institutions; and from presidentialism to a limited presidency in the

framework of a real system of checks and balances. However, Mexican society has not completely made the transition from the authoritarian culture to one of democracy. This transition is decisive for consolidating democracy in Mexico and, based on a fully democratic citizenry, for avoiding any risk of a return to authoritarianism.

This concern is one of the reasons that led Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte to carry out the research he presents in his book *Ciudadanía y cultura política. México, 1993-2001* (Citizenship and Political Culture. Mexico, 1993-2001). Durand Ponte received his doctorate in sociology from the National Autonomous University of Mexico's School of Political and Social Sciences. He has published numerous articles and several books about politics, social movements and political culture in Mexico.

Of his two previous books, his *Etnia y cultura política. Los mexicanos en Estados Unidos* (Ethnic Groups and Political Culture. Mexicans in the United States), published in 2000, is very timely given the framework of the debate launched recently by Samuel Huntington about the "Hispanic challenge." Durand Ponte concludes in his study that, "U.S. residents of Mexican origin...integrate slowly and in a contradictory way. The characteristics of the population include aspects that make participation and cultural change difficult, not only because of the legal status that marginalizes an important sector, but also because of the predominance of young people still not old enough to exercise full civic rights. Some of those born in the United States, socialized in school with American values, and in the family and neighborhood with Mexican values, suffer from bi-culturalism that slows down their inte-

gration. The arrival of new immigrants reinforces the values of the place of origin in the community and strengthens community and neighborhood identity, but limits the move of individuals into the new system. And discrimination by Anglos reinforces the community's isolation."¹

Citizenship and Political Culture. Mexico, 1993-2001 demonstrates Durand Ponte's broad experience in empirical research and is based on a solid theoretical and historical framework. The aim of the work is to deal with "the transformations that political culture went through between 1993 and 2001. The period is defined by two surveys on the issue by the author in October 1993 and January-February 2000, plus a third carried out by the Ministry of the Interior in June 2001."² The study was part of a research project about culture and political transition to democracy in five Latin American countries: Chile, Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico and Venezuela.

The research hypothesis is that "political culture would change more slowly than the regimen. This was due to its being the product of a long period of time and that citizens need a process of re-elaboration, reflection, critique and comparison of the old system with the new to be able to process cultural changes and change their beliefs, their values, their attitudes, their ideology."³

Durand Ponte proves his working hypothesis by analyzing three central aspects of political culture in Mexico: a) values, attitudes and ideology; b) an evaluation of the political regimen, government and political institutions; c) political participation of the citizenry. In all three categories there were insufficient changes toward democracy. Durand Ponte's diagnosis of the three aspects—to each of which he dedicates a chapter—coincides with studies by other authors who also observed important deficiencies in the democratic profile of Mexico's citizenry.⁴

In his conclusions, Durand Ponte says, "We have shown that Mexicans have a very bad opinion of political institutions. They do not trust them. Also, they are not effective as citizens: they do not think they are competent to be heard, to communicate their demands, to be attended to and influence in government decisions. There is a clear separation

between individuals and the institutional system, and that clear separation is precisely the lack of full citizenship, which is part of the legacy of authoritarianism."⁵

Given this disheartening panorama, Durand Ponte offers a ray of hope by recognizing the existence of "an increasing number of citizens with democratic political values, who defend democracy, trust in others, are tolerant of those politically opposed to them, believe they can be competent citizens and participate; the only thing is that they are still a minority."⁶ Certainly, this minority of citizens makes it possible to envision a more democratic future for Mexico, as long as democratic institutions are not undermined by a lack of agreements between the executive and legislative branches, insufficiently satisfied demands for goods and services by the public, a self-interested use of the legal system by those in power and other factors that weaken the governability of our budding democratic system.

The effort Durand Ponte put into his book is praiseworthy and should continue to be part of academia's valuable contribution to politics, the rigorous and systematic studies of our public life which allow political actors, including the citizenry, to see themselves in a full-length mirror, as well as objectively value the advances and challenges of democracy in Mexico.

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NOTES

¹ Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte, *Etnia y cultura política. Los mexicanos en Estados Unidos* (Mexico City: Miguel Ángel Porrúa/UNAM, 2000), p. 113.

² Víctor Manuel Durand Ponte, *Ciudadanía y cultura política. México, 1993-2001* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI Editores, 2004), pp. 10-11

³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁴ Héctor Aguilar Camín, *México: la ceniza y la semilla* (Mexico City: Cal y Arena, 2001); Mauricio Merino, *La transición votada. Crítica a la interpretación del cambio político en México* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003).

⁵ Durand Ponte, *op. cit.*, p. 273.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 274.