Our Voice

These days the predominant note in the international situation is disaster. The natural disasters caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Stan are testing governments' ability to deal with the consequences. Katrina and the devastation it caused in the southern United States have brought into question the strategy of contention that Washington so fervently boasted of having prepared and the effectiveness of the states in implementing it to deal with natural disasters.

Secondly, this questions states' political determination to establish a strategy of this type. Thirdly, it forces doubt to the surface about governments' —mainly the U.S. government— real willingness to take cognizance of global warming, linked to the Kyoto Protocol, which Washington has repeatedly refused to sign over the years. Lastly, given the Homeland Security Department's failure to respond to the human, economic and social disaster that Katrina represented for the poorest inhabitants of New Orleans, the question arises about whether the very conception of security should not change radically and whether it should not be understood in an integral way, as both a factor in and a means for achieving national sustainability.

The Bush administration is in serious difficulties: it invaded Iraq against international public opinion without having achieved beforehand the successes proposed domestically; it has failed in its attempt to combat terrorism with the invasion, not to mention the military failure that this adventure has been.

To top it all off, Hurricane Katrina has dealt a harsh blow to the administration's credibility: it did not know how to and did not even want to deal with this crisis. Not only did it not predict it, but it underestimated it on its list of priorities, favoring the military action in the Middle East. It sacrificed, then, social consensus even more than it already had done in the name of a concept of security that was empty, dogmatic and highly militarist, which in the end failed in the face of nature's fury.

The policy crisis in political systems, particularly when it is also shaking the Republican Party in Congress because of the accusations of corruption against House majority leader Tom DeLay, is causing serious disruption and, given the absence of consensuses, threatens to become a serious problem of state: the administration is suffering from a crisis caused by a natural disaster, but is not dealing with its origins. It is also not taking responsibility for this dangerous dynamic that, with time, points to a break in the basic key equilibriums in both the domestic democratic order and the international order.

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Mexico's 2006 presidential electoral process began officially on October 1. The campaigns for party nominations are in full swing and the hopefuls are launching their last proposals. This is one of the world's longest electoral processes, and also one of the most expensive.

The press and the media are concentrated on following any and all activity by the actors they think are key: the parties themselves, the front-runners and electoral institutions. And they are putting analysis about what is undoubtedly the main protagonist of the process itself, the citizenry, on the back burner. *Voices of Mexico* has dedicated this issue's "Politics" section precisely to the thinking about public participation in Mexico, looking at the different kinds of political activity: electoral and in social movements and civic organizations. We begin with the second part of former member of the Federal Electoral Institute's General Council Mauricio Merino's thoughts about political transition in Mexico, in which he deals above all with the challenges for solidly consolidating democracy. Merino examines three: the solution of the problem of governability and even the relevance of maintaining the presidentialist system; the much-needed adjustment of political and

government institutions to the new democratic pluralism; and the most long term effort, the transformation of political culture above all through education. Sociologist Roberto Gutiérrez analyzes the depth of the causes of growing abstentionism, which paradoxically has increased in this democratic period. Among its causes, he emphasizes the increasing distance between the citizenry and the political elites created, among other things, by the public's disillusionment in parties and politicians because of their continued priority on special interests and short term problems instead of the population's more structural interests. Tracing the genealogy of abstentionism is of capital importance today for the course of our transition. Equally, we cannot defer the need to understand the social and political reasons for an increase in other kinds of political participation that parallels the jump in abstentionism. Political scientist María Fernanda Somuano deals with the issue pointing out the paradox that even though abstentionism has rocketed, non-conventional political participation is on the rise, sometimes even extra-legal and violent. The risk for democracy in this kind of participation is not in healthy citizens' mobilization in protests or community activities, but in the growing perception that the more extreme a movement, the more it disregards the rules and the rule of law, the greater the possibility that it will be taken into account. Finally, analyst Carlos González contributes an illustrative article about trends in women's and young people's electoral participation: while women have increased their interest in politics, young people seem to be in frank retreat. New paradoxes of our young democracy are emerging: greater women's participation is not yet matched by a proportional number of women in public decision-making and government posts, and the new forms of doing politics has not only not appealed more to young citizens, but seems to have even increased their mistrust of public institutions. All these are just a few of the challenges to the democratic transition in its current phase of consolidation which faces the dilemma of perhaps irremediably distancing itself from the electorate if it does not seriously undertake the changes that its institutions require.

A democracy presupposes not only equal political rights and clear, trustworthy electoral rules. It also demands equal opportunities and treatment for each and every one of its citizens, be they men or women. Our "Society" section is dedicated to the shameful problem of discrimination in Mexico. José Luis Gutiérrez Espíndola describes the situation of a nation in which exclusionary practices are widespread daily experiences despite official and party discourses and rhetoric. Discrimination is exercised against all the traditionally marginalized groups: women, senior citizens, foreigners, the differently abled, the socially and economically disadvantaged, etc., and particularly ferociously against AIDS patients, members of minority religions and non-heterosexuals. These actions are founded on very deeply-rooted social attitudes, which means that once again a radical transformation of our civic culture is needed to eradicate them. Without that, Mexican democracy will not be able to finally consolidate.

The "Economy" section presents a contribution by Eliézer Tijerina, an important critic of Mexican economic policies for the last 25 years, about the impact of the Washington Consensus on the design of our country's economic policy. Tijerina maintains that the extreme orthodoxy with which neo-liberal principles designed for Latin American economic development more than 15 years ago have produced the opposite effect from their original aim: the economy has stagnated and the population's well-being has plummeted. Of the 10 points included in the 1989 accord, practically none has been sufficiently flexible to adapt to special circumstances, and in some instances there has even been notorious incapacity in their implementation.

"North American Issues" is dedicated to an examination of Mexico's industrial policies in the context of the first 10 years of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Researcher Monica Gambrill shows us how industrial policy implemented since 1994 not only has not allowed the country to utilize its comparative advantages as a NAFTA member, but that, quite to the contrary, its effects have been prejudicial in many ways, leading the Mexican manufacturing sector to limit itself to assembling imported parts as though it were the maquiladora industry, instead of producing them. The general result of this trend is that far from NAFTA having an equalizing effect among

the countries of the region, for example in industrial wages and technology production, what has happened is actually an increase in disparities.

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Once again in this issue we have dedicated our cultural space to the state of Chiapas, with its seemingly inexhaustible bounty. "Art and Culture" opens with the work of Kayum Ma'ax, a Lacandón painter alien to global painting trends and currents, who paints legends in order to preserve the traditions of his people. And speaking of traditions, Kazuyasu Ochiai takes us to San Andrés Larráinzar in the Chiapas Highlands to see the ancient *kompánya* ritual, a ceremony involving the patron saints of neighboring villages who visit each other on festival days, and asks himself about the changes that the emergence of the Zapatista Army may have brought about in these customs. Angélica Altuzar tells us about the struggle of the "prayers of Santa Tierra" to preserve their tradition of praying to the hills so that the gods living there will help safeguard the harvest, the land and good relations in the community from the onslaught from established religions and modernity. Lastly, Luis Vargas reveals the pre-Hispanic origin of some of our favorite foods like popcorn and special Chiapas instant drinks.

"The Splendor of Mexico" stops off first at Chiapa de Corzo. María del Carmen Valverde explains this city's importance and the secrets it holds, secrets that go beyond its famous *Mudéjar* fountain and being the port of entry for the Sumidero Canyon. For his part, Tomás Pérez Suárez goes to the Soconusco region to reveal its vast Mixe-Zoque pre-Hispanic legacy, a large part of which is assembled at the Soconusco Archaeological Museum. The section closes with a photo portfolio that follows some of the many roads to be traveled in Chiapas.

"Museums" presents our readers with the Belisario Domínguez House Museum, in honor of a man for whom freedom of expression and love of homeland were more valuable than his own life, located in the beautiful city of Comitán. "Ecology" introduces us to the world of organic coffee, produced combining care and protection for consumers' health and the environment, and that is the hope of thousands of small producers for whom it is their only source of income. Mexico is the world's foremost producer of organic coffee, and most of it comes from Chiapas.

The "Literature" section presents a sample of the work of outstanding Chiapas-born poet Efraín Bartolomé, whose metaphors and expressive force puts us in touch with the spirit of Chiapas even without going there. Prestigious critic Juan Domingo Argüelles explains the importance of this renowned Mexican author. We also include a fragment of the novel *Las posibilidades del odio* (The Possibilities of Hatred) by María Luisa Puga, without a doubt one of the most important women's voices in twentieth-century Mexican literature. Literary researcher Carlos Urrutia offers us an extraordinary sketch of the life and work of this recently deceased author to whom we pay homage in this issue.

Our "In Memoriam" section is dedicated to the exceptional woman and outstanding researcher, Beatriz Ramírez de la Fuente, probably one of the most prestigious scholars and publicists of pre-Hispanic art in our country, who has been remembered by friends, disciples and colleagues from many fora as a pioneer in a study of history with a humanist focus. María Teresa Uriarte, Diana Magaloni, Leticia Staines and Alfonso Arellano, each from a different standpoint, write about her innumerable, invaluable contributions to our national culture and historical research.

José Luis Valdés-Ugalde