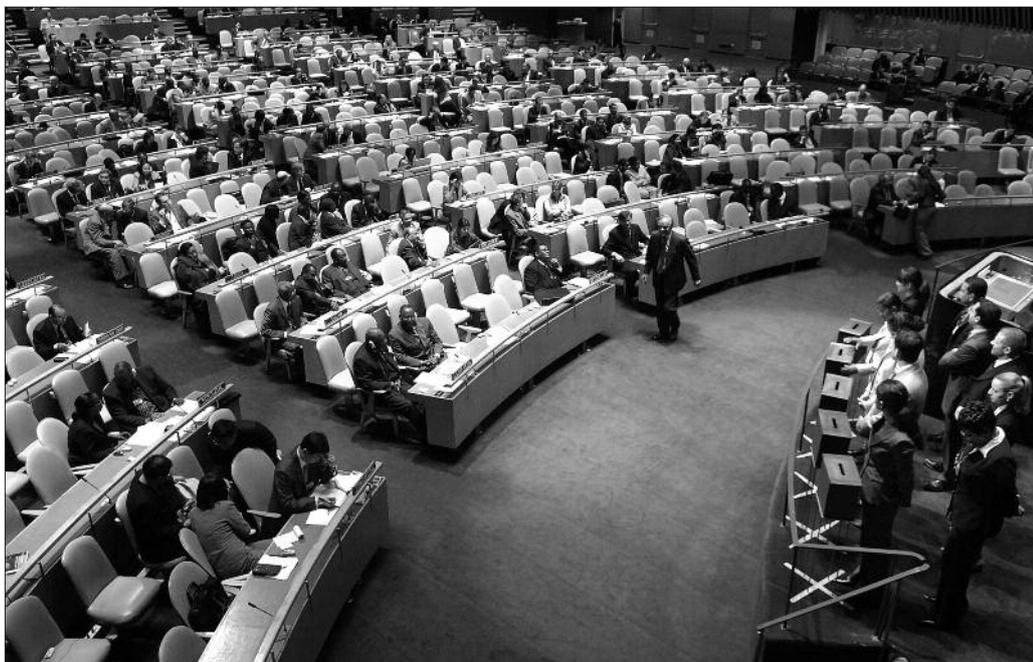


International Bodies, Governability And Mexico's Multilateral Policy

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There has been a lot of talk about the challenges of governability in countries where the creation of a democracy has sparked expectations and hopes but where this change in political regime did not translate into a notable improvement in security and well-being. Given this, some non-governmental and political organizations see in international bodies a possible incentive for achieving a better performing democracy.

While international bodies may foster democratic governability, they themselves face serious challenges in their own governability. Robert O. Keohane, one of the world's most outstanding internationalists, has been insist-

ing on the topic of international bodies' governability for several years now, but academia's steps forward have not been strongly reflected in these bodies' functioning.¹

In this article, I deal with the tension between representativeness and efficiency inside international bodies and propose some guidelines for action that Mexico could consider when it decides on possible actions in the United Nations (UN) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

REPRESENTATIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

The challenge for international bodies is very similar to those that domestic political institutions face: how to achieve a fair balance between rep-

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representativeness and efficiency.² By representativeness I understand the degree to which a political institution, whether domestic or international, faithfully reflects the diversity of interests of the individuals, groups or countries that it represents or which must express their points of view inside it.

I use the concept of efficiency in two senses: as the degree of difficulty with which a political institution (in this case, international bodies) can come to agreements and carry them out, and as the ease in identifying those responsible for coming to a decision or not and implementing it.

A challenge for institutional design is precisely how to resolve the trade-off between representativeness and efficiency: a very representative body in which all voices have a place and unanimity is needed to come to an agreement will be very representative but not very efficient. On the other hand, a body in which only a few make the decisions or a simple and not a two-thirds majority is needed for making agreements will be more efficient, but at the cost of representativeness.

Many international bodies are representative but there is no weighted voting and decisions are usually made by consensus or two-thirds majorities. Other bodies have weighted voting, which makes for greater efficiency but less representativeness.

The popular perception about international bodies ranges between these

poles: some, like the International Monetary Fund, are considered efficient, but not very representative, while others are seen as forums for deliberation of limited usefulness, such as perhaps the OAS during the Cold War and the UN General Assembly.

Some UN issues are more easily resolved when they leave the floor of the General Assembly and pass to the Security Council, but even there difficulties persist because each of its five permanent members has veto power. In this case we are faced with an anomaly that represents the worst of both worlds: it is simultaneously unrepresentative and inefficient.

Other very important bodies, like the World Trade Organization (WTO), are also formally representative, but have problems with efficiency. Each of its 149 member countries has only one vote and the decisions are often made by consensus, or, depending on the issue, by a two-thirds majority. This has meant that, as the number of members and consequently opposing interests have increased, the rounds of multilateral trade negotiations last longer and longer: six years for the Tokyo Round, eight years for the Uruguay Round, and the five years that we have been immersed in the Doha Program for Development, which was slated to end in January 2005.

The most difficult decisions for recognizing and facing this inherent tension between representativeness and efficiency

have not been made, and therefore, the functioning of many international bodies leaves much to be desired.

It may seem fair that every country has one vote in the WTO, but it could also be argued that it is extremely unfair. Why should the decisions of China, with its 1.3 billion people, or the United States, the world's largest trade power, have the same weight as those of the Marshall Islands (60,000 inhabitants) or St. Kitts and Nevis (40,000 inhabitants)? Without a doubt, the actions of China and the United States have a greater effect on international trade than those of the Marshall Islands and St. Kitts and Nevis, and more Americans and Chinese are affected by developments in international trade than the 100,000 inhabitants of the two island countries.

On a national level, usually the lower chamber is proportionately representative of the population, which would be the equivalent of a weighted vote if we take into account the number of legislators from each state. The upper chamber is representative of the states or provinces, which usually means that each one has the same number of votes, regardless of their population. There are also different types of majorities, depending on the issue under discussion, but seldom is consensus or unanimity required to come to a decision. That would usually lead to paralysis.

Internationally, *de jure* representativeness is not always respected in practice. It is not unusual for powerful countries to exert political pressure and coercion on weaker ones to try to force them to vote a certain way.

The five permanent members of the UN Security Council were chosen at the end of World War II. We should ask ourselves whether, even taking into

account the need to achieve a minimum of efficiency in this very representative institution, it is fair that the international balance of forces has remained frozen for half a century so that the United Kingdom and France are permanent members of the council, but two economic powers like Japan and Germany, the two great losers of World War II, are not.

Despite several attempts to reform the UN and the Security Council in particular, very little headway has been made and problems of both representativeness and efficiency persist. In the case of the OAS, recent efforts have focused more on rediscovering its *raison d'être* in the post-Cold War period than on dealing directly with the challenges it faces regarding its governability.

The WTO, for its part, may be greatly weakened if a way is not found to make it more efficient and it continues to be expected to resolve the conflicts of interests of so many countries with its current design. What is not achieved in negotiations will be channeled through the institution's conflict resolution mechanism, creating an overload of conflicts and the impossibility of resolving them appropriately.

Beyond efficiency and representativeness, clear, adequate accountability of international officials and government representatives to different bodies is also not the norm. This complicates efforts to improve international bodies, but it is the reality Mexico must deal with and act within.

Internally, Mexico seems to have passed from efficiency with low representativeness during the golden age of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to inefficiency with low representativeness during recent decades. Today we are suffering from inefficient rep-

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resentativeness. If the debate about national institutions is complex, like in the case of Mexico, it may be even more so in the international sphere.

What can be done given this panorama? It would be healthy to begin with three things. In the first place, we should recognize that there is a tension between representativeness and efficiency and that it is very difficult to achieve both at the same time. It is a good idea to situate from this viewpoint the strengths and weaknesses of the body you are going to act in, whether to propose changes to it or to find the best way to foster Mexico's interests without changing the rules.

In the second place, fortunately, leadership is important. It is true that the secretaries-general of the UN and the OAS are mainly administrators and not at all the heads of the member states. These are not supranational bodies, but inter-governmental ones. But leadership has an enormous importance that must not be underestimated: the secretaries-general can try to establish clear priorities, a discussion agenda and the particular focus for looking at problems. They can favor the establishment of certain alliances and coalitions in order to foster specific actions.

Leadership, legitimacy, moral authority and persuasion are key in this sense. It is a matter of the capability for political action of those who head these important institutions. Leadership is

necessary, but insufficient to improve the UN and the OAS's efficiency and representativeness.

Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary-General since January 2007, will face the great challenge of furthering its operational agenda, and he will not be able to concentrate only on the substantive issues. José Miguel Insulza, who heads up the OAS, enjoys great prestige and moral authority both personally, as a political exile who defended democracy in his country, and professionally, due to his outstanding work at the head of different ministries in Chile. If he so desires, he could foster improvements in OAS functioning, which would result in advances in priority substantive tasks like democratic governability in Latin America.

In the third place, it must be recognized that problems of democratic governability are often more rooted in the internal than the external sphere, and it is easier to deal with them in that way instead of blaming the functioning of international bodies for what are really internal deficiencies. In this sense, it is important to ask ourselves if the legislative branch has the power to veto the nomination of government representatives to international bodies and to supervise their performance, and whether those representatives are clearly accountable to the executive and the legislature. If these abilities exist but are not exercised appropriately, then an important facet of the problem of

representativeness resides in the national sphere.

MEXICO IN THE UN AND THE OAS

Regardless of the intrinsic difficulties of acting in inefficient international bodies, one limit on Mexico's effective action is the lack of a committed majority on a domestic level. Without a politically backed agreement on key issues of security, democracy and development dealt with in the UN and the OAS, it will be difficult for Mexico to have a presence in accordance with its economic, demographic and political weight.

For example, in Mexico's recent presidential campaign, the candidate of the Coalition for the Good of All, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, stated that the best foreign policy was a good domestic policy, and that the country should sustain very cautious, measured activity on the international stage. For others—myself included—the best foreign policy is foreign policy: one that exercises leadership, does not let itself get trapped by local, short-term interests and which puts forward and develops a long-term strategic vision. This undoubtedly also implies running certain risks.

While the ideal is to achieve broad consensus and “state policies” on issues like international relations, in democracies it is only natural for there to be different points of view. If consensus cannot be reached, action must be based on what the majority decides.

The impression exists that Mexico is divided, but on some issues there are pluralities (though small) and majorities that offer spaces and can orient Mexico's action in the UN and the OAS.

For example, Mexico does not participate in peacekeeping operations. How-

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ever, a part of the population is in favor of it doing so: in 2006, more Mexicans supported our country's participation in peacekeeping operations than those who opposed it (49 percent versus 43 percent).³

From my perspective, Mexico's participation in peacekeeping operations could lend greater weight to Mexican positions in the debates about UN reform. Brazil has done its homework in this sense: it participates in peacekeeping operations and is a hefty player in the UN. Mexico is also, but it would be even heftier if it participated in peacekeeping operations and not only through its financial contributions.

There are also those who think that the fight against terrorism is of interest only to the United States, but 71 percent of Mexicans think that the Security Council should authorize the use of force to prevent any country from supporting terrorists, and 71 percent of Mexico's elites strongly or moderately agree that Mexico should once again seek a seat as a non-permanent member of the Security Council.⁴

Another key issue both in the UN and the OAS is alliances. Mexico's participation in the OAS could be much improved, both regarding the hemispheric rules of the game and substantive issues, if it handled its alliances carefully and intelligently.

Latin America's geo-political situation offers interesting opportunities:

it is wrong to read the current situation as a dichotomy, with governments of the left and the right. There are many “lefts” and they are extremely varied, as is the possibility of interests coinciding and Mexico carrying out concerted actions with other Latin American countries.

Mexico's relations with Chile's “Conciliation” administrations were very good, but in 2005 they were unnecessarily damaged precisely because of the fight to head up the OAS. They have improved in recent months, but similar episodes should be avoided. Chile is economically and politically stable, a trustworthy partner; and Mexico should take extreme care in this relationship.

The Mercosur is redefining itself with the entry of Venezuela and the serious conflicts between Argentina and Uruguay about the establishment of two paper processing plants on the Uruguayan side of the Uruguay River. In addition, Brazil's policy toward Latin America has been severely limited, above all regarding energy cooperation with Bolivia, which nationalized important Petrobras investments, and, in my opinion, Venezuela's entry into the Mercosur, which will be more costly than beneficial for Brazil in the medium and long term.

Lula's new government could favor an ideology-driven, merely reactive policy toward Mexico and ally with cer-

tain “left-wing” countries,⁵ or adopt a new pragmatism that would make closer relations with Mexico possible. The conditions exist in Mexico, at least amongst the public, for this to happen: 59 percent of Mexicans prefer for Mexico to participate with other Latin American countries in resolving the region’s problems without trying to be the leader compared to 22 percent who think Mexico should try to be the leader of Latin America and 13 percent who think it should stay out of Latin American efforts and problems altogether.⁶

In the same vein, while 83 percent of Mexicans see Brazil as a friend or partner, only 69 percent put Venezuela in the same category, and 14 percent of those surveyed think Venezuela is an

economic rival or threat for Mexico, while only 4 percent see Brazil in this way.⁷

Concerted action by Brazil and Mexico in the UN, the OAS and the WTO would greatly increase what each one could do alone since together they make up more than half of Latin America’s economy and population.

When common action and negotiation are achieved, efficiency sometimes comes about *de facto* with the action of global or regional powers and without changing the formal rules. Without that concerted action, Mexico would have great difficulty in advancing in the substantive issues or favoring democratic governability in international bodies. ■■■

NOTES

- ¹ Robert O. Keohane, “International Institutions: Can Interdependence Work?” *Foreign Policy* 110 (spring 1998), pp. 82-96.
- ² See Mathew S. Shugart and John M. Carey, *Presidents and Assemblies: Constitutional Design and Electoral Dynamics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).
- ³ The survey *México y el mundo 2006: opinión pública y política exterior en México* (Mexico City: CIDE-Comexi, 2006).
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ This foreign policy orientation for Brazil is well represented in Samuel Pinheiro Guimarães, *Desafíos Brasileiros na era dos Gigantes* (Rio de Janeiro: Contraponto Editores, 2006).
- ⁶ *México y el mundo 2006: opinión pública y política exterior en México* (Mexico City: CIDE-Comexi, 2006).
- ⁷ Ibid.



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