

FROM

MARTYRDOM

TO

POWER

The Partido Acción Nacional
in Mexico

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A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

In 1989, when Ernesto Ruffo won the governorship of the northern state of Baja California, I became convinced that a great political transformation was under way in Mexico. This was the first opposition victory at the state level since the PRI was created in 1929. Although the PAN had scored important victories at the municipal level since 1983 in various other states, the victory at the state level was an important qualitative step forward in the path toward democracy. I knew that the transition to democracy in Mexico, unlike most transitions in other Latin American countries, would take a “federalist” path, moving from the local to the state level and then, eventually, to the presidential level. I also understood that political parties would play a major part in this transition.

In 1991 and 1992, as the PAN won the states of Guanajuato and Chihuahua, my conviction increased. Many of my colleagues and friends at the time thought that I was too optimistic, that these were isolated political events and that the PRI still had a secure hold on power. After the presidential elections of 1994, when the PRI won the elections by a comfortable margin, it seemed as if my colleagues’ predictions were true. However, soon after these elections, more and more states fell into the hands of the opposition, both the PAN and the PRD. When Vicente Fox announced his intention to seek the PAN’s nomination for the 2000 presidential elections, I began to imagine a possible PAN victory at the presidential level. After doing research in the state of Guanajuato, where Vicente Fox was governor, and witnessing the dynamism and commitment of his cabinet, I thought that he was perhaps the only candidate capable of provoking a critical electoral realignment and defeating the PRI. I was proven right.

My interest in the PAN was sparked in the early 1990s. At that time, with few notable exceptions, the PAN did not attract many scholars. Most studies about the PAN had been conducted during the 1960s, and they were historical in nature. Although the absence of scholarly work on the PAN seemed a great disadvantage at first, for I had to generate my own data, in the end this intellectual void proved extremely beneficial for my research. PAN officials, militants, and candidates were eager to talk and share their stories with me. They found it quite exciting to find a U.S.-trained scholar interested in their party and writing a serious academic study about it. Moreover, having no partisan connection to them whatsoever and coming from a Jewish Mexican background, a background totally unfamiliar to them (starting with my uncommon name), they felt free to express themselves openly and were wonderful interview subjects.

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