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**Latin America
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Mexico: Dwindling Prospects for the Right

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**Latin America
Review (U)**

Articles


**Mexico: Dwindling Prospects
for the Right** 

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The campaigns of two opposition parties to the right of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party are losing ground as the national election approaches, and the potential for significant electoral gains is slight.¹ The National Action Party (PAN) and the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM) have failed to galvanize their essentially regionally based strength into nationwide constituencies during their campaigns. Because of continued erosion of support in both parties, the right's political influence is likely to be seriously weakened after the election. 



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PAN--No Longer the Only Alternative

The National Action Party's political appeal has declined since the latest regional elections in 1986 despite sustained party membership and the nomination of an engaging and poised presidential candidate. Voters previously attracted to the National Action Party as the only viable alternative to the ruling party are being increasingly siphoned away by the candidacy of the center-left's Cuauhtemoc Cardenas.² 

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 previous electoral majorities in northern border areas--such as Chihuahua State where the PAN following is traditionally strong--were more a result of disaffection with and opposition to the ruling party than a commitment to the PAN's political platform. 

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Clouthier Exaggerating His Popularity



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The initial success of the government's anti-inflation program is contributing to the PAN's woes by undermining the right's traditional ability to score political points through its attacks on government economic mismanagement. Available statistics indicate the inflation rate has dropped from a monthly rate of more than 15 percent at the beginning of the year to less than 2 percent in May. The PAN still maintains that the plan is doomed to failure. As a result, the PAN's continued public criticism of the program and skepticism that the government can maintain its momentum are undermining the party's credibility.

[Redacted]

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Moreover, the PAN has not been able to generate support for demonstrations against government electoral fraud and corruption. In a recent protest over alleged vote fraud in Coahuila State, the PAN could draw no more than half the number of activists that the ruling party drew to counter the protest, according to press reports. Failure to demonstrate grassroots enthusiasm continues to undermine the PAN's credibility as the chief architect of opposition resistance to government fraud and, in our judgment, has further spurred the erosion of the party's support base. [Redacted]

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In addition to its problems appealing to the electorate on political issues, the emergence of a faction within PAN advocating stronger protest tactics has split the party's

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leadership and damaged its ability to mount a unified campaign. Under Manuel Clouthier, the PAN has opted for more confrontational but nonviolent campaign tactics. A more moderate element within PAN, however, retains much of its previous strength and has limited support for Clouthier's tactics.

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This split appears to have prevented party moderates, who resented the nomination of Clouthier from the outset, from making wholehearted efforts in some important states such as Jalisco.

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PDM--A Church-Oriented Message

The Mexican Democratic Party has relied almost exclusively on its appeal to conservative Catholics and has been unable to broaden its narrow constituency. The PDM grew out of the Catholic Synarchist movement of the 1930s and was formally organized in 1972 to counter what it perceived as anticlerical attitudes prevailing in the ruling party.

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the PDM has been able to attract significant strength only in a few isolated regions. It has not increased its official registration--despite the party's clever marketing of its symbol, a red rooster--during this campaign, and it faces declining popularity even in its strongholds of Jalisco and Guanajuato States. Finally, the party's uncharismatic presidential candidate, Gumersindo Magana, has been unable to capture more than 1 percent of voters sampled in recent national polls, according to press reports.

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the PDM has no more than 10,000 followers nationally and relies on a core of only 1,000 activists.

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The PDM's main campaign theme has been criticism of corruption in the government, and its limited platform is not likely to produce a serious electoral threat to the ruling party. the PDM's platform has recurrent but amorphous themes of protection of the family, greater respect for private education, and support of free enterprise. While many of the PDM's tenets are closely aligned with conservative values exploited by the PAN, the two are unlikely to merge because of the divergence in the social and economic backgrounds of their key constituencies; the

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PAN attracts mostly educated middle and upper class followers while the PDM appears to be distinctly lower middle class.

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Outlook

Because the right perceives it is not likely to improve its political position before the July election, it plans to concentrate on monitoring electoral procedures to counter fraud by the ruling party. The PAN has vowed to provide poll watchers for every polling booth, but, given its declining ability to turn out activists, it is unlikely to achieve this goal. The right is more likely to join with other opposition parties in their poll-watching if it believes that its own civil disobedience campaign is faltering.

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Nevertheless, the PAN and the PDM so far have not demonstrated the ability to mobilize their constituents, and their political influence probably will continue to decline. Moreover, if the populist candidacy of Cardenas succeeds in drawing away most of the protest vote, the actual vote count almost certainly will place PAN third in the presidential race. Because of the right's failure to expand its membership in rural areas and the nomination of some lackluster local candidates, its legislative seats also are likely to decline in this election. Despite the government's concern over the rising popularity of Cardenas, which may prompt it to artificially throw part of the opposition vote to the right, the PAN and PDM are likely to emerge from the election seriously weakened.

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