

From the Inside Out: How Institutional Entrepreneurs Transformed Mexico's Newsrooms

Sallie Hughes
shughes@miami.edu
University of Miami

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**By Sallie Hughes
Assistant Professor
The University of Miami
*shughes@miami.edu***

**Paper prepared for
The Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
Miami Beach, FL
8 August 2002**

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Introduction

Over the last two decades, the Mexican press changed the way it presented citizens and politicians. Newspapers transformed the image of Mexicans from people who passively petitioned for government favors, or were victimized by disasters and crime, into citizens who took an active role in shaping their lives. At the same time, the central figure of Mexican authoritarianism, the imperial presidency, became increasingly challenged in the news pages by opposition voices inside and outside of formal political institutions. In doing so, the press began to support the creation of an authentic “public sphere” in Mexico in which citizens have access to diverse political information that allows them to form reasoned political opinions and make successful demands upon their governors.¹

In Mexico and elsewhere in Latin America, where political participation and government accountability are low, a form of journalism with the potential to empower citizens should be called civic. The civic approach considers news and the journalists who produce it as facilitators of citizen participation in politics and, specifically, in holding their governments accountable. Journalists bring pressure to bear on governments by providing citizens with information in a form that encourages reasoned opinion and thoughtful participation. Focusing on the potential of journalism to enable democratic citizenship highlights the media’s role in consolidating newly democratic systems, which frequently suffer from a lack of accountability, selective citizenship rights, and low rates of participation. That makes it useful for analyzing news media in a wide range of evolving political systems, which often are lumped in the “democratic category,” but may demonstrate high levels of clientelism, corruption and state paternalism. Using the civic focus rather than labeling journalism “democratic,” as some journalists themselves have done in Latin America, helps distinguish between the variety of claims to the definition of democracy by centering the definition on broader participation and accountability. Democratization research until the mid-1990s was dominated by procedural approaches defining democracies only by the switch key of competitive elections as developing countries perfected the “hardware” of elections, but often neglected how to develop the “software” – the institutions – that create participatory citizens, accountable governments and effective governance. In the civic vision of participatory democracy, free and engaged media are in fact part of the definition of democracy, for without them, citizens could not govern through their representatives.

The theory and values guiding a loose movement of civic journalists who emerged in Mexico in the 1980s are similar to those of the more-formalized civic or public journalism movement that in the United States, which itself has roots in the public service theory of journalism in society. The context of the movement’s emergence in Mexico was different, however. Emergence in an authoritarian setting made the Mexican variant less cohesive as a movement and more oriented toward stimulating citizen participation rather than direct

¹ This information comes from an analysis of 822 news items presented on a random sample of front pages in four Mexico City newspapers from 1980 to 2000. For more information on the results and methodology, see Sallie Hughes, *Culture Clash in the Newsroom. Journalists, the Media and the Democratization of Mexico* (N.D., Tulane University, 2001). See the following for a concise definition and discussion of the “public sphere” concept. Jürgen Habermas, *Critical Theory and Society: A Reader*, ed. Stephen Eric Bronner and Douglas M. Kellner (New York: Routledge, 1989), 136-42.

participation of journalists in organizing tasks. While some U.S. journalists, in combination with intellectuals, experimented with ways to increase participation in elections and civic organizations in the United States, in Mexico, journalists' main objective was to make political participation meaningful. They did this by giving citizens the information they needed to form political parties and other civic organizations outside the reach of the single-party state and to demand that free and fair elections replace charade contests. To do this required a shift in the value structure of journalists from one supporting the status quo of a Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) regime to one that supported democratization.²

The civic path was not the only one followed by the Mexican media, however. An interaction between the creation of a new professional identity and societal-level transformation of politics and the economy dissolved a consolidated, authoritarian media institution and replaced it with a hybrid news system in which civic, market-driven and inertial authoritarian models of news production competed for hegemony. Some news organizations remained "frozen" in a traditional, authoritarian culture. Other organizations controlled by managers willing to trade newsroom autonomy for commercial gain followed a market-driven path. The authoritarian press concept, a form of which was institutionalized in Mexico from the 1940s to the 1980s, is subordinate to the regime, passively accepts information provided by the state, and presents only its views. As the authoritarian political system which ruled Mexico dissipated, two new, competing models of journalism emerged. In the civic-oriented model, practiced by a growing population of newspapers, journalists are autonomous from powerful actors, assertive in their search for the news, and diverse in their presentation of views of the regime. The rival of civic journalism in the newly democratic, market-based economy of the 1990s became a form of journalism that can be called market-driven. Market-driven journalism is not autonomous from powerful actors, and presents diverse views of the regime or assertively seeks news only when such behavior furthers commercial goals. The first two models best describe the struggle for hegemony occurring in the Mexican press, while the market-driven model is most apparent in Mexican television. Table one lays out these models, which are based upon the theoretical press systems literature and the mental models of journalism as expressed by more than 150 Mexican journalists in interviews or survey questionnaires from 1999 to 2002.

This paper examines one part of the transformation of Mexican journalism, how some newspapers shifted from an authoritarian approach toward a civic-oriented model of news production. It argues that the way to understand why and how civic journalism gained a foothold in Mexico is to look from inside the organization outward as an institutional theorist would rather than from the outside in as would a political economist. A researcher using the approach of theorists of organizations and institutions would consider the instrumental cues and political culture in the macro environment of news production, but center them in the news organization, its hierarchy and its particular culture.³

² For a review of the civic movement in the United States, see Tanni Haas, "What's "Public" About Public Journalism? Public Journalism and the Lack of a Coherent Public Philosophy," *Communication Theory* 9, no. 3 (1999). Peter Parisi, "Toward a Philosophy of Framing: News Narratives for Public Journalism," *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly* 74 (1998): 673 speaks of the values shift necessary for the creation of a public journalism movement in the United States.

³ This discussion is informed by a long literature on organizations and institutions from management theorists and organizational sociologists. For an application of this work to the mass media of the United States, see Timothy E. Cook, *Governing with the News. The News Media as a Political Institution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago

Table One: Competing News Models

	Autonomous	Assertive	Diverse
Civic	Yes	Yes	Yes
Authoritarian	No	No	No
Market-Driven	No	Instrumental	Instrumental

Communications researchers have long focused on news media as organizations for production, but less often as an institution.⁴ Researchers who focus on the theory of organizations and institutions have sought to explain stability and change in a wider range of institutions. They acknowledge distinct levels of institutions: the individual organization, a level of broad societal institutions and a mid-level institution, the organizational field.⁵ Institutional theorists focus not only on the effect of coercive rule systems and laws on institutional change, but also on the importance of perceived legitimacy, normative acceptability and orthodoxy that are socially constructed by the shared normative and cognitive frameworks of people acting within institutions. Coercive, formal rules in this case might not be what are guiding members of a particular institution, but rather unwritten, informal rules perceived as appropriate or the “normal way of doing things.”⁶

Institutions can be seen as regulative structures that impede social change, but also as shared frameworks that can empower and enable social action by conferring rights, responsibilities and duties. In the case of news media, the idea of being a citizen in a democracy conveys far different rights, responsibilities, and duties on journalists than subject identities in a semi-authoritarian, corporate state. Journalists who conceive of their role in the framework of citizenship would push against regulative structures that impeded their expression as citizen journalists.

What are institutions and how are they transformed? Institutions, including newspapers and the wider news media, are widely shared understandings of roles, values and behaviors that

Press, 1998). See also Peter A. Hall and Rosemary C.R. Taylor, "Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms," *Political Studies* XLIV (1996). Edgar H. Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1985). W. Richard Scott, *Institutions and Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1995). Peter M Senge, *The Fifth Discipline. The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency Doubleday, 1994).

⁴ Cook. Michael Schudson, "The Sociology of News Production," *Media, Culture and Society* 11 (1989)..

⁵ Institutions at the level of an organizational field are mid-level institutions that anchor organizations performing similar functions, such as newspapers, hospitals, unions or manufacturing plants. An organization itself can be an institution, but in this paper I refer to remaking the wider press institution made up of newspapers.

⁶ Richard W. Scott, *Institutions And Organizations* (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc., 1995) 33-55, 66-78.

guide social interaction. The creation and maintenance of institutions implies internalization of shared cognitive and normative frameworks that endure across time and space. The frameworks can be based upon instrumentality (I act this way because it benefits me), appropriateness (I act this way because I and those I admire think it is appropriate) or orthodoxy (I act this way because I always have, everyone else does, and it is normal).

While institutional frameworks are enduring by definition, they are not static. Changing environmental conditions, new role models, and contact with influential change agents promoting differing frameworks can stimulate the formation of new cultures and cognitive identities. The differing frameworks can coexist or compete in the organization or wider organizational field. Once the new frameworks become widely shared, they can be considered a new or reconstructed institution.⁷

Institutions can be maintained through rational readings of incentives in the institutional environment, but institutions can outlive supportive environmental conditions. Management theorists have noted, for example, that institutions created to maximize instrumental cues in the environment outlast their utility if institutionalized identities, values and behaviors become “frozen.” Likewise, empowered minorities share visions of normatively appropriate behavior or conceptual correctness that resist domination by a hegemonic group. Others with structural impediments to public displays of resistance, such as slaves or surfs, assert the “hidden transcripts” of an identity forged through coercion in surreptitious ways.⁸

In the case of Mexico, competing civic and authoritarian visions of journalists’ professional identities have spurred very different answers to the following questions: Why am I a journalist? What is my objective for doing what I do? How should I behave in order to reach those objectives? What do my peers think is acceptable behavior? Will I be punished in some way if I do this?

Mexico’s Authoritarian Press Institution

The roles, values and behaviors of the traditional, authoritarian Mexican media took shape under environmental conditions that helped preserve the post-Revolutionary political system, the most stable in Latin America. The development and entrenchment of the authoritarian Mexican press institution is a result in part of the long-term legitimacy and incentives of the political and economic system that created it, but its resistance to change is the result of institutional constraints on cognitive transformation.

Mexico’s political system and economic model enjoyed high legitimacy for five decades. Political stability prevailed as compared with the rest of Latin America and economic advancement, if uneven, was relatively constant for a majority of urban dwellers until 1982. According to interviews with journalists and government press officers, as well as discourse

⁷ Based on Scott, *Organizations and Institutions*, p. 86.

⁸ Doug McAdam, *Political Process and the Development of Black Insurgency, 1930-1970* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

Schein. James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance. Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1990).

from the time, journalists accepted their roles from that era as legitimate. Journalists considered themselves part of the system producing the Mexican “miracle” – growth with stability in one of the least-coercive regimes in Latin America.

Both environmental and cognitive factors supported the institutionalization of the traditional press system. Roberto Rock, editor of Mexico City’s oldest newspaper, *El Universal*, began working as a journalist at a traditional newspaper in the 1970s. As he explains them, traditional roles and underlying values became so ingrained that journalists accepted them as normal, the correct way of doing things.

They were transcribers, let’s say, of official information. But that’s because the newspapers were that way, too. There wasn’t any grave moral conflict. I don’t know about other countries, but in this country the Mexican state was a benefactor state. Let’s say an authoritarian state, but that didn’t matter to many people because their problems of survival and support were taken care of ... *It wasn’t even an issue of corruption, it was an issue of ideological conviction.* And you entered one of those newspapers, all of the previous generation, and *you assumed that the work was done that way.*

The old journalists assumed that supporting the government and eventually helping out some friends close to the newspaper companies or some business of the newspaper companies was what it was all about. And they felt important because of that. No one would take that away from them. But the issue of being critical, of being independent, the role of being a watchdog of the government, of public service, was very remote because the journalist assumed himself to be part of political life more than the social life of the country. So, he considered himself a companion at the table of the political elite.”⁹

The value orientation of journalists under this system was supportive of the status quo, since they considered themselves part of the governing system and helped defend it against attacks. Communication occurred among the elite, or traveled in a one-way direction from the ruler to the ruled. Reporting was passive, and included the stenographic transferal of information from press releases and speeches to the news pages.

Under this system, journalists’ roles were to send messages between elite groups within the government and ruling party, as well as help competing factions promote or obstruct career ascendance. Journalists also reproduced messages and symbols from the political elite in a one-way communication channel moving from rulers to their subjects. Messages and symbols transmitted through the media helped to:

- Legitimize single-party rule;
- Maintain the image of the omnipotent president;
- Create the image of a ruling party presidential candidate capable of curing the ills that developed in the previous administration;

⁹ Roberto Rock, personal interview by author, Mexico City, 19 March 1999. Translation by author. Emphasis Added.

- Provide a space for a façade of competitive elections to play out before a non-participating public;
- Label regime critics as outcasts and radicals.¹⁰

Under the authoritarian media institution, Mexican journalists took a passive, non-critical approach to reporting and forged subordinate relationships that would be considered conflicts of interest if the media were not in symbiosis with the state. Self-censorship was common not only because of latent threats, but because of internalized agreements on which subjects should be supported, and which vetoed. This supportive orientation is notable in speeches given by reporters covering the president's office during the administration of President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988), one of which is reproduced here.

Today, as you grant us the first press conference of your government, we wish to thank you for granting it to us and offer you testimony of *our support for your work*. We have been witnesses to your untiring labor and *we have tried to inform our readers, listeners and viewers of your work and the necessity of supporting it*. Do you wish, Señor Presidente, to *direct a message to the people of Mexico ...* and give us the answer to some question in particular that you would have wished that we ask?¹¹

Few journalists questioned publishing information just as it was supplied in government press releases or given in pack interviews with ruling party politicians because most reporters did not view their role as including the questioning of political authority. What journalists cared about was covering "lucrative" news beats where money was passed around generously. These were the same beats that brought reporters in close contact with top politicians, and brought in advertising from the press officers in the agencies they covered. Being associated with the politicians was often just as rewarding as the money it brought in.¹²

An "entire system" of relationships, understandings and incentives trained journalists to accept this passive and non-critical role. Almost everyone accepted the supportive, passive role as how things were supposed to be: reporters, editors, newspaper owners, press officers and politicians. Many of those who didn't left the profession, joined culture news sections where they were given more intellectual freedom, or conformed.¹³

¹⁰Based upon interviews, content analysis and the following publications: Ilya Adler, "The Mexican Case: The Media In The 1988 Presidential Election" in *Television, Politics, And The Transition To Democracy In Latin America*, Thomas E. Skidmore, ed. (Washington D.C.: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993) 158-162. Bailey, *Governing Mexico*, 24, 25. Raymundo Riva Palacio, "Mexican Press On The Take?" (Unpublished Paper, Cambridge, Mass. 1992).

¹¹ Statement from Angel Gómez Granados, reporter for *El Universal*, 1983. Quoted in Rafael Rodríguez Castañeda, *Prensa Vendida. Una Historia Del Periodismo Mexicano Y Su Vínculo Con El Poder*(México, D.F.: Grijalbo, 1993) 235-6. Translation by author. Emphasis added.

¹² Manuel Ponce, personal interview in Mexico City, 10 April 1999. The style of president's office reporters was descriptive and flowery. Press officers often helped reporter's write these long narratives, called "crónicas." I remember one detailed press release describing what President Carlos Salinas de Gortari ate for breakfast before his fifth State of the Nation Address in 1993. Interestingly, the private sector did not give payoffs to reporters in most cases, although businesses did provide reporters with gifts and trips to cover stories in exotic places.

¹³ Maria Elena Matadamas, personal interview with author, 6 April 1999.

When I was the press officer in the Senate, I had to explain to the reporters that the job of the press officer was to be more intelligent than the reporters. So, the reporters would tell me at 3 in the afternoon, ‘you haven’t let us work. I don’t have a story.’ I told them, ‘don’t worry. The radio boys are going to do it. They are already bringing in (a transcript of an interview with a politician), and I already sent it off to be photocopied so that you have a story.’ What happened because of all of this? ... Unfortunately, we converted journalists into people who sit and spin, into people who look for the most comfortable way of life. In fact, they no longer had to work. It was an entire system.¹⁴

A small cadre of journalists who acquired organizational power in their publications took apart this system gradually, driven by alternative values and mental models of journalism and society. Actors in a first wave of civic newspaper emergence from 1971 to 1986 began to change their organizations before political and economic liberalization in Mexico began to transform environmental costs and incentives in favor of operating independent, assertive newspapers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A second wave of civic newspapers (a dispersion stage after 1986) responded to changes in the environmental parameters in which they operated, as well as changing orientations among a larger group of journalists. In the second wave of newspaper transformation, successful civic newspapers opened new affiliates, or transitional newspapers mimicked the example set by civic-oriented newspapers, that had gained legitimacy and prestige in the liberalizing political and economic system. The year 1986 was chosen not as a benchmark year, but as a starting point in Mexico’s gradual liberalization of authoritarian politics and state-led economy.

The leadership of change agents within news organizations was key to the transformation of news coverage. These change agents were responding to alternative visions of the role of news and journalism in society. Their professional identities and normative frameworks were different from those of their traditional colleagues because of exposure to other journalism styles and value orientations that challenged the maintenance of Mexico’s one-party system.

Civic Newspaper Emergence, 1971-1986

During the period of civic newspaper emergence in the 1970s and 1980s, economic and political conditions were restrictive-to-hostile toward civic journalism.¹⁵ While the central government paid less attention to newspapers outside Mexico City, economic conditions made newspaper financial independence difficult all over the country, and local politicians in the

¹⁴ Carlos Ferreira, personal interview with the author, 24 May 1999.

¹⁵ The emergence period, or first wave, runs roughly from the transfer of leadership at *El Norte* to Alejandro Junco in 1971 through the implementation of ethics regulations increasing newspaper autonomy at *El Imparcial* in 1986. The year 1986 was also the year when competitive elections in Chihuahua and the intention to enter the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade signal the beginning of a gradual liberalization trend in politics and the economy. The environment during the first wave was characterized by a statist economy and political authoritarianism. The second wave, dispersion, begins with the decision to change the economic model and the initial push for political liberalization.

states sometimes attacked newspapers that published critical news.¹⁶ Table Two identifies the publications and the principle mechanisms for change. It is based on interviews with members of each newspaper, analysts of the Mexican press and the author's reading of the publications.

Until the late 1980s, the government was a major player in the economy and newspapers relied heavily on advertising from government agencies and state-owned companies. As a private industry that was protected and promoted by the state, publications received subsidies for newsprint and imported inputs. The federal government also looked the other way, if necessary, when newspapers missed payments on taxes or workers' social security quotas.¹⁷

If the government was a key player in the economy, it was the only player in politics. In politics, the ruling PRI was the only real actor at the federal, state and local levels, and had been since 1940. Opposition voices were considered radical and "anti-Mexico."¹⁸ The personality cult of the president in office remained powerful, and his use of "meta-constitutional" powers was contested only in narrow spheres.¹⁹ As Mexican magazine publisher Héctor Aguilar Camín stated in 1991, "In this republic, you don't say no to the president... presidentialism is like a habit of our soul."²⁰

Elite political organization, based on secretive, competing patron-client networks called *camarillas*, extended informally to high-powered journalists. The bureaucrat-politician leading a *camarilla* distributed and collected favors based on patron-client ties, which emphasized loyalty and reciprocity. Among those favors was access to information. *Camarillas* turned information about politics and government into prized weaponry. Information was used to further personal careers and those of friends who operated in cliques, as well as to attack opponents. Loyalty glued clique relationships. The "friendship" that clique membership produced was based on career ascendance and material rewards. The president headed the network of cliques, but other top politicians led overlapping, competing groups at multiple levels.²¹

Journalists fit nicely into this organizational scheme. Much of the criticism that was produced by the media in those days, especially in political columns, was the result of the use of journalists to attempt to harm the public image of rival political cliques. This competition was

¹⁶ One case was the closure of *ABC* in Tijuana in 1979. State Governor Roberto de Lamadrid promoted a labor strike that eventually caused the dismissal of Editor Jesús Blancornelas and 26 reporters from the newspaper. De Lamadrid offered Blancornelas his job back if he fired critical columnist Héctor Félix. Blancornelas refused. *A.M.*'s publisher reported that business owners boycotted his newspaper in 1982 because they did not like its coverage. Rafael Rodríguez Castañeda, *Prensa vendida. Una historia del periodismo mexicano y su vínculo con el poder* (México: Grijalbo, 1993), 198. Enrique Gómez, written questionnaire, April 1999.

¹⁷ Riva Palacio, 3-5.

¹⁸ Bailey, 24, 25.

¹⁹ Wayne Cornelius, "Mexican Politics in Transition: The Breakdown of a One-Party-Dominant Regime," Monograph Series. 41 (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies, University of California, 1994) 33-35.

²⁰ Quoted in Denise Dresser, "Bringing The Poor Back In: National Solidarity As A Strategy Of Regime Legitimation." In *Transforming State-Society Relations In Mexico. The National Solidarity Strategy*, Wayne A. Cornelius, Ann L. Craig and Jonathan Fox, eds. (La Jolla: Center for U.S.-Mexico Studies, University of California, 1994), 160.

²¹ Roderic A. Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico*, Latin American Monographs, No. 65 (Institute of Latin American Studies, The University of Texas at Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 18, 19, 178, 179.

particularly strong during the secretive campaign to win the president's favor and become his successor. The succession was a lucrative time for columnists and others who sold their services to praise or prejudice clique leaders with information that was leaked or even invented.²²

Table Two: Change Processes In Civic Newspapers

Newspaper	Date Change Initiated	Mechanisms
<i>El Norte</i>	1971	Young publisher takes over, international exposure, hiring non-journalists, extensive training, ethics code
<i>A.M.</i>	1980	Young publisher takes over, international exposure, training, ethics code, influenced by <i>El Norte</i>
<i>Zeta</i>	1980	International exposure, personnel network links with defunct independent newspaper (<i>ABC</i>)
<i>El Financiero</i>	1981	Hiring non-journalists, personnel network links to defunct civic newspapers (<i>Unomásuno</i> , <i>Excelsi3r</i>)
<i>El Diario de Yucat3n</i>		Catholic, conservative ownership always had oppositional stance; professional links to <i>The Dallas Morning News</i> and other first wave newspapers, such as <i>El Imparcial</i> .
<i>La Jornada</i>	1984	Personnel network links to defunct civic newspapers (<i>Unomásuno</i> and <i>Excelsi3r</i>), diversified ownership, foreign influence
<i>El Imparcial</i>	1986	Young publisher takes over, international exposure, training, ethics code, network links to <i>El Norte</i>
<i>El Sur</i>	1992	Network links to <i>La Jornada</i> ; diversified ownership
<i>Reforma</i>	1993	Ownership and network links to <i>El Norte</i> , hiring non-journalists, training
<i>El Diario de Ju3rez</i>	1996	Young publisher, personnel replacement, links to <i>The Dallas Morning News</i> , U.S. educational institutions and U.S. professional associations
<i>P3blico</i>	1997	Hiring non-journalists, foreign training
<i>El Universal</i>	1995, 1999	Foreign training, ethics code, personnel network links to <i>El Financiero</i> , <i>Reforma</i> and <i>La Jornada</i>
<i>Palabra</i>	1997	Ownership and personnel network links to <i>El Norte</i> and <i>Reforma</i> , hiring non-journalists, training.
<i>Mural</i>	1998	Ownership and personnel network links to <i>El Norte</i> and <i>Reforma</i> , hiring non-journalists, training.
<i>Frontera</i>	1999	Ownership and network links to <i>El Imparcial</i> , ongoing training, personnel network links to <i>El Norte</i> .
<i>Milenio Diario</i>	2000	Personnel network links to <i>El Financiero</i> , <i>Reforma</i> , <i>P3blico</i> , <i>Milenio</i> and <i>Proceso</i> magazines

The Mexican legal framework encouraged even independent journalists to enter into compromising "friendships" in order to receive information. While a right to information was

²² Ibid., 179. Personal communication from several journalists during 18 months of working at *El Financiero*, 1993-1994. Camp doesn't make the link between *camarillas* and journalists, but notes their use by politicians.

included in the Mexican Constitution, the enacting legislation never made it through Congress because of worries about censorship and the veto of powerful media owners who benefit from the status quo.²³

In addition to the absence of alternative paradigms in politics, most journalists had little access to competing visions of press-state relations. Press models emphasizing autonomy from government and assertiveness in seeking out news, such as those from the United States, Europe and other parts of Latin America, were less known in Mexico than they are today.²⁴ The lack of wider references for press behavior helped keep publications within traditional Mexican parameters. Moreover, for many of those decades, state ideology and patriotic rhetoric interpreted ideals of the Mexican Revolution, and some from abroad, as support of the single-party system.²⁵ Finally, the closed economic model also reinforced an internal intellectual orientation by making importation of cultural material more expensive and by de-legitimizing and lessening the availability of information that conflicted with the needs of the state.

State promotion and protection for news companies, a weak private sector, the hegemony of the PRI-government and the lack of alternative press models were important to restricting the parameters in which journalists operated. But if those conditions didn't weld journalists into a supportive role, additional inducements usually did. The president, ruling party and most government agencies made direct payments to supportive reporters and newspaper owners. Moreover, reporters received percentages of the revenue from advertisements they sold to their sources.²⁶

Rather than repression or direct censorship, self-censorship and internalized agreements on which issues and actors would be covered explain docile news coverage in most of the Mexican press.²⁷ The traditional Mexican press institution was successful in turning autonomy and assertiveness in news coverage – virtues of the civic press institution – into deviant conduct. When the government decided to crack down on a civic newspaper, other publications

²³ The Mexican congress passed a first-ever right to information law and enabling legislation earlier this year. It will go into effect in 2003. Claudia Fernández, “Más allá de la filtración.” Paper presented at the Third Summit Of Partners In The Americas, San Antonio, Texas, 11-13 August 1999. Available on-line at www.sociosamericas.com. Accessed 1 December 1999. Journalists seeking concrete information must sit through interminable interviews where circular responses and detailed histories are used to lull the journalist into what can only be described as a stupor. In the process, the question is often forgotten. Vicente Leñero in his book *Los periodistas* and Roderic Camp, a long-time interviewer of Mexican politicians, describe similar experiences. Camp, *Intellectuals*, 19. Vicente Leñero, *Los periodistas* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1978) 82. Reporters and editors discussed the importance of friendship ties in order to get information during two focus group discussions on 23 and 30 July 1999, Mexico City.

²⁴ This statement is based on informants' reporting of education abroad, contact with foreign reporters, participation in exchange programs, knowledge of foreign newspapers on the Internet and new international journalism associations that include reporters and mid-level editors. The long-standing Inter-American Press Association was largely limited to publishers and editors in chief.

²⁵ Camp, *Politics in Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

²⁶ Julio Scherrer's *El poder: historias de familia* provides a detailed description of payments given to top publishers, reporters and columnists during the administration of President José López Portillo (1976-1982). It is based upon original documents provided by the head of the rural development bank, Banrural, through which the payments were channeled. Julio Scherrer, *El poder: historias de familia* (México D.F.: Grijalbo, 1990).

²⁷ Raymundo Riva Palacio, “Mexican Press,” 5.

sometimes joined the lynch mob and roundly criticized their civic-minded colleagues.²⁸ As recently as 1993, traditionally oriented journalists ostracized or ridiculed those who did not accept payments from sources. This happened even in some newspapers that generally produced independent coverage, as journalists driven by civic and traditional orientations clashed within the same newsroom. Then a young reporter at *El Financiero*, Claudia Fernández was laughed at by her editor when she didn't accept a VCR that was given to her as a Christmas present by a source. This anecdote shows that the designation of *El Financiero* as an independent, autonomous newspaper does not mean that all of its journalists acted as such, but that its coverage generally fits a civic orientation. Again, the degree of the civic orientation varied by time in the transition and by newspaper. Receiving such gifts was not expressly prohibited at *El Financiero*, while it was in others.²⁹

To survive in the hostile environment, journalists of first-wave civic publications learned quickly that they needed to be able to operate without financial support from the state.³⁰ Those that survived intact, such as *El Norte* in Monterrey, came to prize financial autonomy. Other newspapers, such as *Excelsiór* in 1976 and *ABC* in 1979, couldn't make it without government support. *ABC* closed outright while *Excelsiór* lost its civic orientation. Their legacy, cadres of civic journalists, lived on to influence other publications, however. The *Excelsiór* and *ABC* heritage is found in two first-wave civic newspapers, *La Jornada* and *Zeta*.

The answer to why a civic newspaper style emerged in such an unfriendly environment lies in the changing self-perceptions and purposeful actions of journalists who became

²⁸ This happened during both the ouster of editor Julio Scherrer from *Excelsiór* in 1976 and the government-promoted strike that shut down *ABC* in Tijuana in 1979. Levy and Székely, *Mexico: Paradoxes of Stability and Change* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 99, 102.

²⁹ A Chi Square test of coded coverage of the military in 1994 found that *La Jornada*, *Reforma/El Norte*, and *El Financiero* all produced critical and assertive coverage of alleged military human rights abuses, while other Mexico City newspapers published critical information during the Zapatista rebellion, but were not assertive in newsgathering. Coverage of the Zapatista uprising in 1994 is atypical of coverage of the military because of the degree of negative coverage that was produced. The assertiveness in newsgathering – interviewing Zapatista leaders in the jungle and verifying reports of human right abuses – differentiated *El Financiero*, *La Jornada* and *Reforma/El Norte* civic newspapers from the rest of the pack.

³⁰ For example, President Luis Echeverría (1970-1976) cut *El Norte*'s state-subsidized paper supply by 83 percent and used public money to help an *El Norte* competitor publish in 1974 because he did not like the newspaper's coverage of the kidnapping of Monterrey businessman Eugenio Garza Sada in 1973. This happened again in 1979 under President José López Portillo. The move forced young Publisher Alejandro Junco to find alternate supplies and cut his dependence on government subsidies. President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-1988) cut government advertising in *El Financiero* because he did not like the way the newspaper covered debt negotiations in the mid-1980s. The newspaper survived on private sector advertising and the ad ban was later lifted. Also disgruntled, President Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) limited reporters' access on presidential excursions. The government has had to turn to more Byzantine measures to oust famous editors, such as Julio Scherrer, from *Excelsiór* in 1976, Jesús Blancornelas from *ABC* in 1979 and Manuel Becerra Acosta from *Unomásuno* in 1989. Scherrer had to face an advertising boycott and a revolt by members of the newspaper's cooperative of owners. He and his followers left the newspaper and gave birth to the newsmagazines *Proceso* and *Unomásuno*, and later *La Jornada*. Jesús Blancornelas faced a government-inspired labor strike at *ABC* in 1979, eventually closing the newspaper and reopening as *Zeta*. Murray Fromson, "Mexico's Struggle For A Free Press." In *Communication In Latin America: Journalism, Mass Media and Society* (Wilmington, Delaware: Jaguar Books On Latin America, No. 14), 131. Levy and Székely. Raymundo Riva Palacio, "Mexican Press on the Take?" (Cambridge, MA: Unpublished Paper, 1991), 9. Francisco Javier Torres A., *El Periodismo Mexicano. Ardua Lucha Por Su Integridad*. (México, D.F.:Ediciones Coyoacán, 1997), 131, 134.

committed, first, to changing their publications and, later, to influencing their wider profession. Change agents, such as publishers, editors and groups of reporters, responded to a value orientation that opposed the continuation of one-party rule or the policies it produced, and were influenced by ideas in foreign press models that offered an alternative paradigm separating the press from the state.³¹

Civic-oriented journalists used several methods to transform their newsrooms, including direct re-training; cross-fertilization with established civic newspapers and publications, formal and informal associations where common values and concerns were discussed and the implementation of regulations guiding journalists' relationships with sources and advertisers. There were three routes of transformation during the emergence phase. Owners pushed change from above, new cohorts of journalists pushed from below, or change moved horizontally as staffs deserted publications when faced with dilemmas brought on by a clash of values or government intervention.³²

A split in the staff of the newspaper *Uno Más Uno*, which had been heir to *Excelsior's* civic style and some of its personnel, led to the creation of *La Jornada*. The news publication's journalists – which included former historians, sociologists and academics, as well as reporters following a leftist political orientation – cited the *Uno Más Uno's* “moral, financial and political” crisis as the reason for their departure.³³ *Zeta's* staff in Tijuana was made up of journalists who left *ABC* in protest of an “illegal” strike fostered by the Baja California state government, which could not tolerate the newspaper's criticism. That publication was also thought to lean to the left.³⁴ By the late 1980s, *El Financiero's* owners hired economists, academics and financial experts with new ideas and practices, creating what one editor called a practical classroom in civic-oriented journalism.³⁵

While the previous examples explore horizontal and bottom-up change, many young publishers also transformed their publications in top-down fashion. In the North, publishers at *El Imparcial* in Hermosillo and *El Norte* in Monterrey experimented with ways to instill their staffs with new values and skills. U.S. journalism models and conservative values heavily influenced these efforts.

³¹ The opposition to both regime outcomes and the one-party state itself came from both the ideological left (*La Jornada*, *Zeta*) and right (*El Norte* and *El Imparcial*). Foreign models came primarily from the United States and Spain. Healy's chief aid, Ricardo Moreno, says the publisher was influenced by a conservative Catholic orientation and U.S. press models. Both Healy and Gómez reported they were “very unsatisfied” with the functioning of democracy in Mexico. At *La Jornada*, journalists looked to *El País* because of its role in convoking Spaniards to fight Franquismo. Manuel Meneses, personal interview with author, 13 March 2000, by telephone, Mexico City/San Diego.

³² Alejandro Junco, Martha Treviño and Lazaro Ríos, personal interviews by author, Mexico City, 2 June, 18 August and 24 August 1999; Enrique Gómez, written questionnaire, April 1999; José Santiago Healy, written questionnaire, April 1999; Carmen Lira, “Poder y periodismo,” *La Jornada*, 20 September 1999. Internet Edition. Available at <http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada/>. Carlos Payán, “Credibilidad, nuestro capital.” *La Jornada*, 20 September 1999. Internet Edition. Available at <http://serpiente.dgsca.unam.mx/jornada/>. Personal interviews by author in Mexico City with former staff writers at *El Financiero*, *La Jornada*, *Uno Más Uno*, and *Excelsior*, March-November 1999.

³³ Rafael Rodríguez Castañeda, *Prensa Vendida*, 236.

³⁴ *Zeta* Editor Francis Javier Ortíz Franco, written questionnaire, June 1999. Levy and Székely, 99.

³⁵ Samuel García, personal interview with the author, 19 August 1999, Mexico City. Finance section editor, name withheld by request, personal interview with author, 1999, Mexico City.

El Imparcial publisher José Santiago Healy of Hermosillo, Sonora, studied journalism at the Jesuit *Universidad Iberoamericana* in Mexico City, the Navarra University in Spain and Northwestern University in Chicago. His Catholic and free market values, which were at odds with the regime, made him question Mexico's brand of subordinate journalism. Healy reported that his father, who was also a publisher, influence him, as did civic-minded publishers like Julio Scherrer and Alejandro Junco. Junco, in turn, appears influenced by his University of Texas education, the free-market environment in Monterrey and the time he spent living in South Texas and reading newspapers there. *A.M.* publisher Enrique Gómez, of León, Guanajuato, did not report a conservative political orientation, but did say he is "very dissatisfied" with Mexican democracy. Gómez credits Junco's example in his decision to make his newspaper more independent and assertive. Gómez is a civil engineer by training and has foreign exposure. He is a member of the American Newspaper Publishers Association and took seminars at the Poynter Institute in St. Petersburg, Florida.³⁶

In Monterrey, the industrial capital of the border state of Nuevo León, Publisher Junco set up a training institute with his former University of Texas at Austin professor based on U.S. practices. It sought to change journalists' value orientations and professional identities, as well as heighten their skills.

In July 1970, we started a summer institute with Professor Mary A. Gardner of Michigan State University. It was a summer school in *El Norte*. At that time, *El Norte* had a lot of shortcomings, but it was known for being outspoken. We had more maneuvering room in the provinces. A lot of people came because it was one of the few newspapers that told things as they were. People came and said they wanted to work there to exercise their freedom of expression. We told them that "Rather than work for a newspaper so you can exercise your freedom of expression, we're going to teach you something more important. You are going to be a depository of the reader's right to know and that is a right superior to your personal freedom of expression." We started to shift the paradigm of what freedom of expression is and is used for.³⁷

La Jornada's experience was different. Influenced by the ideals of *El País* of Madrid when it convoked the Spanish citizenry to fight against Franco dictatorship, the tabloid was created by journalists and non-journalists, including artists, academics and some political figures who openly resisted the authoritarian regime.³⁸ They identified with the Mexican left and were not afraid to show it, according to newspaper editor Carmen Lira.³⁹

³⁶ José Santiago Healy, Enrique Gómez, written questionnaires, March and April 1999. Alejandro Junco, personal interview with the author, Mexico City, 2 June 1999. Healy facts checked with Ricardo Moreno, personal interview, 10 March 2000, by telephone, Tijuana/San Diego.

³⁷ Alejandro Junco, personal interview.

³⁸ Manuel Meneses, personal interview by the author, 13 March 2000. By telephone, Mexico City/San Diego. Meneses said *El País* inspired the journalists at *La Jornada* to urge Mexico's civic society to fight against the country's own particular brand of authoritarianism.

³⁹ *La Jornada's* distinct style opened it to allegations of partiality in favor of the center-left PRD prior to 2000, but on other issues, the newspaper certainly meets the criteria of news autonomy and assertiveness that defines civic-oriented newspapers. *Reforma*, on the other hand, has been criticized as being partial toward the conservative PAN. Again, the civic definition of autonomy and assertiveness in news coverage is flexible enough to encompass

While Junco refers to the public as “readers,” Lira refers directly to citizens.

La Jornada is produced daily by citizens who are worried about their country, about their newspaper, about their time and about their surroundings... *La Jornada* has believed – and has never stopped believing – in the possibility of a just and more civic country, in the right-responsibility of the citizens to reclaim it and to initiate it, and, because of that, in the possibility of change for our country.”⁴⁰

Civic-oriented newspapers vary in their degree of autonomy and assertiveness depending on the issue at hand, their ideological leaning and the skill level of their staffs. While *La Jornada* publishes more articles about the leftist opposition, northern newspapers are viewed as more supportive of the Catholic Church. Moreover, the strictness of autonomy also varies. *El Norte*, *El Imparcial* and *A.M.*, for example, have long prohibited the sale of ads disguised as news items, called gacetillas, while *La Jornada* and *El Financiero* publish them to this day with only a discrete identifier. Within *El Financiero*, some journalists were more committed to a civic style than others, producing the friction Fernández described.

Despite these differences, the general tendency was that all of these *first-wave* civic newspapers became known for critical and assertive reporting, as compared to other Mexican media. They were a vanguard, setting the standard and pushing the boundaries for others.

Dispersion of the Civic Orientation

As first-wave civic newspapers trained their own staffs and survived in harsh conditions, economic and political liberalization began to transform environmental costs and incentives in favor of practicing their innovative brand of journalism. Environmental changes after 1985 supported the expansion of networks of civic-minded journalists and increased the financial success and prestige of civic-oriented newspapers, leading to the dispersion of the civic model in a second wave of civic newspaper formation.

Beginning in earnest in 1986, and deepening after 1988, the government sold off hundreds of companies and deregulated other industries, such as telecommunications and banking. Revenues from private sector advertising soared, weakening an important source of state patronage and control. At *El Financiero*, for example, the privatization of banks ended a government-advertising boycott that began during the administration of President Miguel De La Madrid and continued under Carlos Salinas. Privately owned banks wanted to advertise in the nation’s leading financial daily.⁴¹

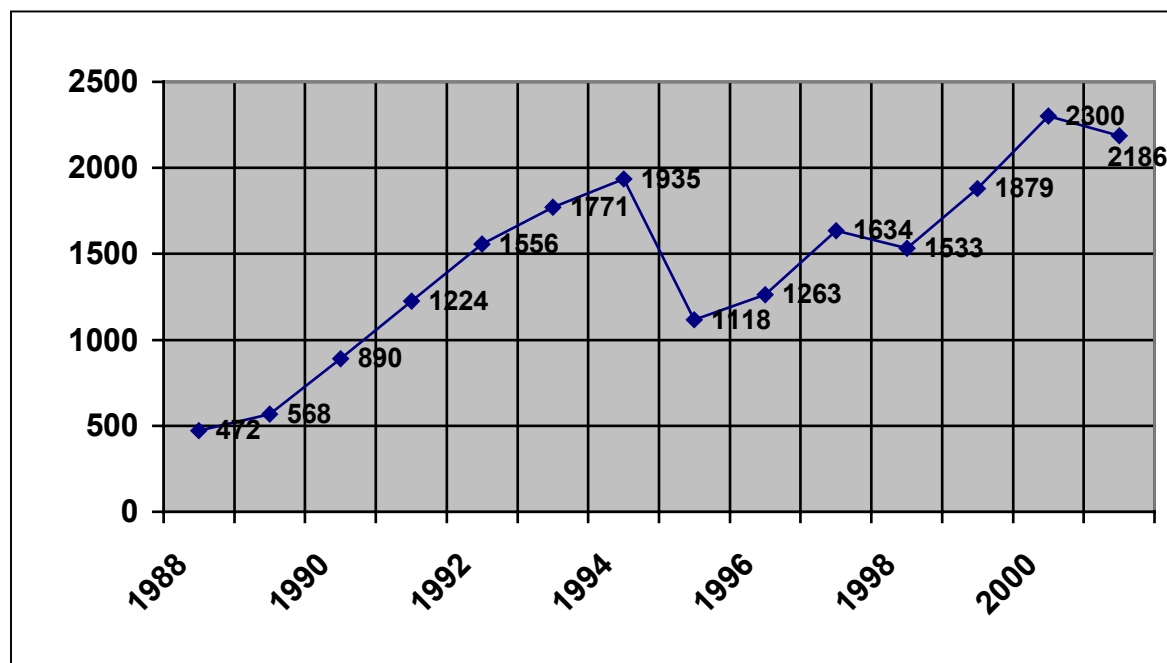
distinctive ideological orientations. Both newspapers have published articles criticizing the political parties or politicians that hold views similar to theirs, including *La Jornada*’s criticism of fraudulent PRD internal elections in 1999 and *Reforma*’s coverage of controversial comments that then-PAN presidential candidate Vicente Fox made about the Catholic Church.

⁴⁰ Carmen Lira, “Periodismo y poder,” translation by author.

⁴¹ Financial editor, personal interview with author, name withheld by request, 1999, Mexico City.

Meanwhile, repeated economic crises forced cuts in communications areas and created an atmosphere in which government information was considered untrustworthy. The lack of credibility on economic issues and the increasing availability of information from the private sector and foreign sources drove some reporters to diversify their sources of information. This weakened the government's monopoly on information.⁴²

**Graph 1:
Growth In Private Sector Advertising Investment,
In Millions of Dollars⁴³**



As the state withdrew from the economy and suffered repeated crises, the political opposition gained on the ruling PRI at the state and local level. In 1989, the government acknowledged the PRI's first loss of a governor's post to the conservative PAN in Baja California. By 1999, candidates emanating from both the PAN and center-left PRD held 11 of the 32 state governors' chairs, the mayor's post in the Federal District, a majority block in Congress and dozens of important city governments.

⁴² Samuel García, personal interview. Interview with financial editor, name withheld by request, 1999, Mexico City. Government budget cuts discussed in a focus group with press officers from the PRI and the federal government, 2 Dec. 1999, Mexico City. Cutting payments discussed in author interviews with reporters covering the Bank of Mexico, the Finance Secretariat and the President's Office at various points during the transition, April-November 1999.

⁴³ Mexican Association Of Advertising Agencies (AMAP), Computer Print Out, November 1999. Mexican Radio And Television Industry Chamber (CIRT), www.cirt.com.mx.

The alternation of parties in local and state government, as well as in the lower house of Congress, meant reporters covering those beats had to turn to opposition parties and the candidates emanating from them for information. In the process, they offered more plural news coverage, whether they wanted to or not. The arrival of the opposition to power also accelerated a nascent shift, first seen in the federal government's financially oriented secretariats. Those agencies had moved toward using the quality of information to push government messages, rather than relying on payoffs, advertising or perks for reporters. First-time opposition governments and the now plural Chamber of Deputies accelerated the change, doing away with the traditional payments and perks for reporters, although they still tried to cultivate friendship ties.⁴⁴

As electoral politics liberalized, readers became more demanding. During the important events of the 1980s and 1990s, readers were attracted to independent coverage in civic newspapers, which contrasted sharply with the bulk of coverage in the traditional press. The history of *La Jornada*'s circulation increases is suggestive of how civic coverage acted as a foil to traditional news and attracted readers who were increasingly disgruntled with the system. The newspaper's coverage of student protests in 1986, and the campaign that almost carried Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas to the presidency in 1988, stood out from traditional coverage that ignored Cárdenas and labeled a huge student protest the work of "lesbians, homosexuals and seamstresses," wrote *La Jornada*'s first editor-in-chief, Carlos Payán. Circulation increased 25 percent to 40,000 during the protests in 1986 and more than doubled to almost 100,000 in the 1988 campaign year. *La Jornada*'s extensive coverage of the Zapatista uprising in January 1994, and a special edition the day of the assassination of ruling party presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio in March, took the newspaper to a one-day circulation high of 240,000 before the 1995 economic crisis hit.⁴⁵

Something similar happened in Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city. The newspaper *Siglo 21*'s small starting circulation of 4,000 copies went to 30,000 in April 1992, the most its press could handle, within 10 days of a deadly gas explosion that ripped through eight kilometers of Guadalajara. The newspaper's series of exclusives started when reporter Alejandra Xanic Von Bertrab warned in front-page headlines of a potential gas explosion the very day the drainage pipes blew. Von Bertrab had not believed local officials' story that gas fumes smelled by residents had been dispersed because, after the official press conference, she stuck her head into the pipes and saw the frightened faces of the firemen in charge of releasing the fumes. She interviewed fire fighters as they came and went. After correctly predicting not only the explosion, but also its route, the newspaper's investigation found incriminating evidence that led to the state-owned oil company, Pemex.

⁴⁴ A finding from discussions in three mini-focus groups by press officers from the PRD, PAN and PRD, as well as their affiliated governments, 1, 2 December 1999, Mexico City. Opposition parties were also notorious for the lack of amenities they provided on campaign trips. I visited all of the campaigns in 1994. The Luis Donaldo Colosio campaign swing through Durango was in chartered buses and Suburban vehicles. We stayed at a new convention center hotel. The Ernesto Zedillo campaign stop I attended brought reporters to Merida and Cancun on a chartered airplane and put them up in a five-star, surfside hotel. Newspapers were supposed to repay the expenses, the first time they had been asked. The reporters covering a Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas campaign swing through Michoacán rode behind the candidate in a smoke-filled old party bus. The PAN's bus was somewhat nicer, but also an old party vehicle. Reporters paid their hotel and food bills as they went.

⁴⁵ Payán, "Credibilidad."

In the days after the explosion, while *Siglo 21* carried 15 to 20 pages of coverage, other newspapers downplayed the event. One local publisher even wrote a front-page editorial about the new post-Soviet states. *Siglo 21* was able to continue its investigation even after the interior secretary told editor Jorge Zepeda to stop publishing. Zepeda said that foreign reporters who highlighted the newspaper's work in their international coverage gave the newspaper the protection it needed to defy the government.⁴⁶ *Siglo 21*, which became *Público* following a staff dispute with *Siglo 21*'s owner, eventually became Guadalajara's third-largest newspaper, trailing only *El Informador* and a sports tabloid, *Esto*.⁴⁷ The explosion and its cover-up were major issues in the 1995 election bringing the conservative opposition to power at the state and local level for the first time.

Civic newspaper circulation growth shook up the Mexican newspaper market in the 1990s. By 1997, the majority of Mexico City readers turned to one of three newspapers known for practicing a civic style of journalism (*Reforma*, *La Jornada* and *El Financiero*). Another publication, market leader *El Universal*, desperately sought to implement a civic news style in order to hold its number one position as circulation dropped. *El Universal* was sustained by its large classified section long enough for it to implement a wide-ranging project of internal transformation. A similar struggle between traditional and civic newspapers was waged in Guadalajara between *Público* and *Mural* against *El Informador*, as well as in Tijuana where *El Imparcial* opened a sister newspaper, *Frontera*, in July 1999. *Frontera* trails only *El Mexicano* in circulation, and leads it among preferences of upper-income readers.⁴⁸

The circulation shift was not lost on private sector advertisers, who began to rationalize their purchases on purely market-based criteria in Mexico City in the late 1990s. *Reforma*, *El Universal*, *El Financiero* and *La Jornada* were the beneficiaries.⁴⁹ Vanguard publications producing critical news coverage are gaining the upper hand in an environment of freer competition and more political pluralism. Table Three shows the change in newspaper readership in the 1990s, based on independent surveys assessing newspaper readership. Since data prior to 1996 are not methodologically compatible with later studies, only the readership ranking is given.

As economic and political liberalization changed the environment in which newspapers operated, the growing prestige and financial success of the first wave of civic publications increased. Not only did they gain circulation, but also their national and international prestige impressed other journalists, and the generations of civic journalists they helped create spread out to other newspapers. In these later cases, widening networks of civic journalists, influence from abroad and living through systemic crises, explain the transformation of journalists' orientations.

⁴⁶ Jorge Zepeda, personal interviews with author, 19-20 October 1999.

⁴⁷ Diego Peterson, personal interview with author, 20 September 1999, Guadalajara.

⁴⁸ Ricardo Moreno, personal interviews, October 2000 and November 2001, Tijuana.

⁴⁹ Personal interview with Sergio López, managing director of the Mexican Advertising Agency Association, 26 November 1999, Mexico City.

Dispersion from the vanguard of civic publications to a wider number of newspapers occurred primarily because civic newspapers became profitable enough in the new environment to open sister publications in other cities under the same civic frameworks, as observed in Table Three. In the case of *Siglo 21* (later *Público*), non-journalists who looked for guidance from *El País* in Spain sought to fill a gap in the coverage of traditional newspapers in Guadalajara.⁵⁰ The “contagion” of civic journalism, once it became politically prestigious and economically successful, is evident only in the transformation of *El Universal*. However, other traditionally oriented newspapers, such as *El Informador* in Guadalajara, *Vanguardia* in Saltillo and *Zócolo* in Piedras Negras, have expressed interest in transforming their newspapers.⁵¹

Table Three: Transformation Of Newspaper Readership Rankings In Greater Mexico City⁵²

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1997	1999
<i>El Universal</i>	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
<i>La Jornada</i>	5	5	5	2	2	2	2
<i>Reforma</i>	--	--	--	5	4	3	3
<i>El Financiero</i>	8	8	6	6 ^E	7	4	5
<i>Ovaciones</i>	3	3	3	6 ^E	5	5	4
<i>Excelsiór</i>	2	2	2	3	3	6	7
<i>Novedades</i>	4	4	4	4	5	7	6

Note: Rankings for *El Financiero* and *Ovaciones* in 1994 were estimated based on 1993 and 1995 positions.

Today’s civic journalists developed as they worked under civic-minded bosses and journalists who taught in universities, or they were influenced by the prestige of now-famous

⁵⁰ Jorge Zepeda, personal interviews with author, 19-20 October 1999.

⁵¹ Informal query at the Third Summit of Partner’s In the Americas, San Antonio, Texas, 11-13 August 1999.

⁵² The crime and sports tabloids *La Prensa* and *Esto* were not included in these rankings. 1991 -- *El Universal* Estudio Enero-Febrero 1991. Reprinted in Media Data. Informaciones básicas apéndice complementario, 1992. (Mexico D.F. Asociación Mexicana de Agencias de Publicidad, 1992) 72. 1992 -- Moctezuma y Asociados, Press Measurement Report. Reprinted in Media Data. Informaciones básicas apéndice complementario 1992. (Mexico D.F. Asociación Mexicana de Agencias de Publicidad, 1992) 73. 1993 – Moctezuma y Asociados, October 1993. Reprinted in Media Data México ’94 (Mexico D.F. Asociación Mexicana de Agencias de Publicidad, 1994) 71. 1994 – Wilbert Sierra y Asociados, S.A. Mimeograph sheet provided by Luis Felipe Enríquez Torres, market research coordinator, *El Universal*. April 1999. 1995 – Figures come from comparing two studies. Moctezuma y Asociados, “Mediaflash.” Mimeograph sheet provided by Luis Felipe Enríquez Torres, market research coordinator, *El Universal*. April 1999. Wilbert Sierra y Asociados, S.A. Mimeograph sheet provided by Luis Felipe Enríquez Torres, market research coordinator, *El Universal*. April 1999. 1997 – Nexus/Gallup de México, “Estudio media max 1997 y sus resultados definitivos.” Mimeograph sheet provided by Luis Felipe Enríquez Torres, market research coordinator, *El Universal*. April 1999. 1999 – Media Max 99, Gallup de México.

civic pioneers.⁵³ Julio Scherrer, the editor of *Excelsi3r* until 1976 and, later, editor of the critical newsmagazine *Proceso*, was, by far, the most influential, according to the author's survey. Gabriel Garc3a Marquez, the Colombian novelist and journalist who now coordinates his own journalism-training institute, was second. Junco of *El Norte* influenced other publishers, while Jes3s Blancornelas of *Zeta* was mentioned by several of his staff members. Other included *Diario De Yucatan* owner Carlos Men3ndez, television and radio journalist Ricardo Rocha, and editor and columnist Raymundo Riva Palacio, all three known for their independent, critical styles. Table Four presents these findings.

Table Four: Journalists' Role Models

Who Do You Admire Professionally?		
	Count	Percent
Julio Scherrer	11	17.7
Gabriel Garc3a Marqu3ez	6	9.76
Jesus Blancornelas	4	6.45
Manuel Buend3a	3	4.84
Alejandro Junco	2	3.23
Miguel Angel Granados Chapa	2	3.23
Carlos Men3ndez	2	3.23
Ricardo Rocha	2	3.23
Raymundo Riva Palacio	2	3.23
Others National (1 each)	20	1.61
Others International (1 each)	8	1.61
Total Mentions ⁵⁴	62	
n = 50		

Civic journalism dispersed beyond founding newspapers through several mechanisms. Civic newsrooms themselves were the principle paths. They became virtual schools in civic journalism for rising reporters. These newsrooms then exported their product – a new generation – to other newspapers. This occurred either because first- and second-wave civic newspapers were corporately linked, or because the journalists were hired away by other newspapers trying to initiate the civic style.

El Norte's training school not only influenced that newspaper's journalists, but others who later went on to work at *El Imparcial* and elsewhere. Although the school no longer functions, new journalists received the same type of training when Junco founded *Reforma* in 1993, *Palabra* of Saltillo in 1997 and *Mural* in Guadalajara in 1998. "The significance of the

⁵³Of the 95 journalists who responded, 37.9 percent said they were influenced professionally by their bosses and 17.9 percent mentioned professors. Relatives, who were sometimes journalists, were cited by another 28.4 percent.

⁵⁴Some journalists mentioned more than one figure.

experiment is that it formed a number of Mexican journalists. Over the years, we brought people to our model of journalism,” Junco said of the school.⁵⁵

While *La Jornada* never set up formal training schools like *El Norte*, former *La Jornada* reporters and editors say the experience there influenced them. They can be found in key positions at several second-wave civic newspapers. Those include *Reforma* (Assistant Managing Editor René Delgado, News Editor Roberto Zamarripa, National Editor Alejandro Caballero and City Editor Hector Zamarrón), *El Universal* (news editor/reporter Ismael Romero, political columnist Ricardo Alemán and investigative reporter Marco Lara Klahr) and *El Sur* in Acapulco. *El Sur* was founded when *La Jornada* editor Juan Angulo and others left amicably to open a newspaper in Acapulco. It entered a formal association with *La Jornada* in 1998.

At *El Financiero*, economists and financial experts, such as Enrique Quintana and Clemente Ruíz Durán, who came from an academic background, initially pushed change. They became journalists and brought different values and standards to their work. They influenced young journalists who worked under them and trained a new cadre of journalists to be more thorough, questioning and independent.⁵⁶ *El Financiero* also put together a group of independent political journalists, including Raymundo Riva Palacio, Sergio Sarmiento, Carlos Ramírez and Oscar Hinojosa.⁵⁷

El Financiero's newsroom became another school for civic journalists, who learned on the job as well as in university studies in the United States and Spain. A financial editor in Mexico City, who requested anonymity, said his family's values made him an honest person, but his professional orientation came from his work at *El Financiero*: “It came from my bosses at *El Financiero*. Basically, it was a culture there. It was a way of being that I progressively assimilated, by learning and listening.”

The newspaper also sent its legacy of civic journalists to newer civic newspapers. Those include: *Reforma* (Investigations Editor Rossana Fuentes and Managing Editor For Business News Samuel García), *El Universal* (Investigations Editor Oscar Hinojosa, Assistant Managing Editor Ignacio Catalán and Political Supplement Editor Salvador Frausto) and *Milenio* (Editor Raymundo Riva Palacio, Managing Editor Ciro Gómez and Business Editor Gabriela Aguilar). *Milenio* Magazine Editor Ignacio Rodríguez Reyna is also a product of *El Financiero*.

As networks widened, the traditional, supportive orientation of Mexican journalism lost legitimacy. Repeated systemic shocks signaled the decay, if not destruction, of the old regime. Mexico's restrictive political system suffered through a series of political and economic crises in the 1980s and 1990s as its old institutions weakened. Journalists had front-row seats for the government's slow response to the Mexico City earthquake in 1985, electoral fraud beginning

⁵⁵ Alejandro Junco, personal interview with author, 2 June 1999, Mexico City.

⁵⁶ Three financial editors in Mexico City stated this. Samuel García, now assistant managing editor at *Reforma* and the head of the company's business news information company, *Infosel*. Written questionnaire and interviews by author, 6 and 30 September 1999, Mexico City. *El Universal*'s assistant finance editor, Pedro Mentado, and another financial editor who requested anonymity, both named Quintana as a big influence on their careers. Mentado, personal interview with author, 4 May 1999.

⁵⁷ These positions are all of 2000.

in 1986, the indigenous uprising in January 1994, the assassination of PRI presidential candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio two months later, the 1995 recession and the \$65 billion bank bailout in 1999.

Journalists' direct exposure to the widening cracks in the one-party regime caused them to question their role in maintaining the system. In my survey of journalists from eight civic newspapers and four newspapers initiating change in 1999, 48 of the 56 people who answered an optional survey question said an experience on the job changed their professional orientations. The experiences that most influenced reporters were covering the Zapatista uprising and the Colosio assassination.

Chiapas was important. I was 24 years old. It was a lesson that we have forgotten a little about poverty, about the indigenous people's suffering, about their abandonment and the selfishness of the majority of the society. The movement woke up a great part of society, including journalists. The slap at my conscious was very important. I think that is the reason I am more critical now.⁵⁸

For what I do, the multiple economic crises in this country, as well as the Colosio assassination, have had a much greater impact because they are frequent, constant, jarring, transcendent. And they keep happening. The Fobaproa bank bailout, for example, has tripled the internal debt and is a huge scandal. It is a huge call to us to do our jobs well. Enough already.⁵⁹ How much longer can this country survive errors, such as the toll highway bailout, the frauds like in Conasupo,⁶⁰ like the mismanagement of the bank rescue,⁶¹ like the scoundrels that commit fraud and are freed on bond and there is no law that punishes them? ... (Interviewer: This reinforces your convictions or pushes you toward being a more critical journalist?) Yes, definitely. The economic crisis reinforces me and reminds me every day.

Table Five categorizes the experiences journalists identified as transformative.

While repeated crises made journalists question their supportive role in maintaining the system, alternative paradigms gave them ideas about what their new role should become. Journalists also reported the importance of studying or reporting abroad on forging their professional orientations. The U.S. and Canadian governments, as well as private foundations, sponsored exchanges between Mexican, Canadian and U.S. newsrooms. Foreign journalism education took on prestige for younger journalists able to pursue master's degrees or professional certificates in journalism at the University of Madrid (sponsored by *El País*) and the University of Southern California (run by former U.S. journalist Murray Fromson) since

⁵⁸ Alejandro Paez, personal interview with author, 3 August 1999, Mexico City.

⁵⁹ He used the words "basta ya," the cry of the Zapatista rebellion.

⁶⁰ A food program for the poor. Millions of dollars were siphoned from the program during the Carlos Salinas administration. The president's brother, Raúl, convicted of planning the assassination of another top PRI member in 1999, was a top manager there. He has never been charged with the Conasupo fraud, though many Mexicans think he was responsible.

⁶¹ The bank rescue, under the Fobaproa program, is expected to cost the taxpayers \$65 billion. An outside auditor found billions of dollars in questionable transactions, but the federal government has refused to release the names on bank secrecy grounds.

1986. *Reforma* Investigations Editor Rossana Fuentes, a USC graduate, credits Fromson with forming at least 100 Latin American journalists and having “a huge impact” on the creation of a new style of journalism in Mexico: “He is the man who has probably most influenced the press in Latin America.”⁶² For editors, Harvard’s Neiman Fellowships became prestigious. Raymundo Riva Palacio was a Neiman fellow in 1992. Others have applied.

At the same time that political crises rocked Mexico, trade opening increased the influence and proximity of foreign media styles, especially those from the United States, Spain and Canada. Twenty-four percent of the journalists in this survey had lived out of the country and 75 percent had worked or studied alongside foreign journalists.⁶³ Of those, 79 percent said they were influenced somewhat (40 percent) or a great deal (39 percent) by those contacts.⁶⁴ Journalists aged 30 to 49 were most likely to have had contact with foreign reporters, precisely those who would have held important reporting or editing positions in the 1990s.

Table Five: Transformative Experiences⁶⁵

EXPERIENCE	COUNT	PERCENT
Covering Jarring Events	23	41
Exposure To Foreign Press Models	7	13
Newspaper Training, Mentors	6	11
Covering Presidential Campaign	4	7
Covering Opposition Wins Or Fraud In Elections	4	7
Perceived Censorship At Newspaper	3	5
Being A Journalist	2	4
Covering Central American Wars	2	4
Working For Government	2	4
Other	3	4
TOTAL	56	100

The proposal of a free trade agreement with the United States and Canada brought more U.S. and Canadian journalists to Mexico, where they worked alongside Mexican colleagues and sometimes within their newsrooms. Latin American journalists from Argentina and Chile also made their way to Mexico, influencing the reporters they directed.

Foreign journalists, such as Uruguayan Ricardo Trotti and Warren Watson of the United States at *El Universal* (1999) and Argentine Tomás Eloy Martínez at *Siglo 21* (1991), were

⁶² Personal interview with author, 3 September 1999, Mexico City.

⁶³ n = 126

⁶⁴ n = 107

⁶⁵ n = 56 Yes = 48 respondents. No = 6 respondents. Some respondents listed more than one experience.

hired to give training sessions in newsrooms where management promoted a civic style of Mexican journalism. Mexican journalism groups forged ties to foreign journalism associations, such as the Investigative Reporters and Editors branch in Mexico, *Periodistas de Investigación*, which opened in 1997 and has about 150 members. The Partners In The Americas, started in 1996, fosters educational exchanges between about 15 Mexican newspapers and *The Dallas Morning News*. The Asociación de Periodistas, with ties to the New York-based Committee To Protect Journalists, was formed in response to a series of killings and attacks on journalists in 1997 and 1998. The U.S. National Association Of Hispanic Journalists held its western regional meeting in Mexico City in March 2000, where Hispanic journalists from the U.S. mixed with Mexican colleagues.

The Case Of El Universal

El Universal's experience is important enough to detail here because it illustrates the pressures brought to bare on Mexican newspapers in the 1990s and because of the steps that were necessary to change the course of the newspaper. They include almost all of the tactics used by change agents to transform the organizational cultures of their newsrooms and exemplify a universal procedure of newspaper transformation among the 16 newspapers reviewed for this paper.

As the first edition of the “new” *El Universal* rolled off the presses in September 1999, editors of Mexico City’s independent newspapers doubted that the 83-year-old publication could ever change its lap-dog approach to journalism. After all, even *El Universal's* editor-in-chief admitted in private that the paper had been raised in a “culture of submission.”⁶⁶ Yet the change in the content of the newspaper, above and beyond the addition of color photographs, was immediately noticeable. From a publication that focused on stories and columns devoted to insider gossip for the political elite, *El Universal*, as of early 2000, produced regular investigative reports on topics such as drug trafficking, insurance fraud and the peddling of used clothes to the poor. It explained difficult issues to readers in simple boxes and graphics, beefed up its metropolitan coverage and carried a weekly column on personal finance directed at the middle-class city dweller. The quality varied from day to day, but the change in focus toward serving a wider public was notable.⁶⁷

The transformation of *El Universal*, Mexico City’s oldest newspaper, did not come about by chance. Purposeful steps were taken to transform the newspaper in an environment of increasing competition and political crisis. Management began direct retraining to teach long-time *El Universal* staff not only new writing and reporting skills, but also to think differently about who they wrote for and what kind of information was credible. At the same time, editors took advantage of widening networks of civic journalists.

Leading Mexican and foreign journalists, such as Ricardo Trotti of the Inter-American Press Association, Pedro Armendárez and Claudia Fernández of *Periodistas de Investigación* (an affiliate of Investigative Reporters and Editors in the United States) and Warren Wilson of The American Press Institute, instructed *El Universal* journalists at repeated workshops. Their

⁶⁶ Roberto Rock, interview by author, 19 March 1999, Mexico City.

⁶⁷ This is based on daily reading of *El Universal* from February to December 11, 1999.

message was to write more clearly and with context so that a wider audience would understand the information, be more aggressive when interviewing politicians and business leaders, and go beyond official government sources of information. A top U.S. consultant, American Press Institute President Bill Winters, instructed editors on the latest newspaper personnel management techniques from Spain and the United States. Phil Nesbitt, another American Press Institute consultant, oversaw the entire project. He put together a team of editors and graphic designers to work on a prototype edition and told them they would be the ones to lead the change in their colleagues. He has overseen transformations in dozens of newspapers around the world.

After a new editor-in-chief, Roberto Rock, took over in 1996, the newspaper retrained current staff and began hiring away top reporters and editors from competitors who had long practiced more independent journalism. Rock hired columnists Carlos Ramírez of *El Financiero* and Ricardo Alemán from *La Jornada*, and added Claudia Fernández and Miguel Badillo from *El Financiero* to the investigations team. Former *El Universal* reporter Ismael Romero, a political reporter at *La Jornada*, came back to *El Universal* to be the national editor.

The process accelerated in 1999 with the hiring of editors from *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, *El Financiero* and *Público* in Guadalajara. The new hires included Assistant Managing Editor For News Jorge Zepeda, the founding editor of *Siglo 21* and *Público* in Guadalajara; Deputy Managing Editor for Graphics Marco Román, formerly the number two designer at *Reforma*, and Finance Editor Alejandro Paez, ex-finance editor at *Reforma* and a former correspondent for *The Dallas Morning News*. Assistant Managing Editor For Production Ignacio Catalán, formerly of *Reforma* and *El Financiero*, was promoted. Assistant Managing Oscar Hinojosa, formerly of *El Financiero* and *Proceso*, became the head of the investigations team. All of the managing editors for “hard” news – investigations, news and production – now had experience in previously established civic newspapers.⁶⁸ Also in 1999, *El Universal* published its first ethics code regulating journalists’ relationships with their sources to foster more autonomy. It specifically prohibited accepting money and gifts from sources for the first time in the newspaper’s history. By then, however, most journalists viewed accepting payoffs or “gifts” from sources as aberrant behavior.

By changing the culture of its newsroom, *El Universal* became the latest newspaper to enter the ranks of publications following a “civic” notion of journalism that is the basis for independent, plural and often critical coverage of powerful societal actors. Many doubted that *El Universal* owner Juan Francisco Ealy would carry the change to its ultimate conclusions because he grew up and prospered as a media owner within the traditional system. Yet Ealy broke formally with the last president of the PRI regime in 1995. His decision to remake *El Universal* came during a dispute with the Zedillo administration over the newspaper’s coverage of the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio. That dispute led to 99 tax audits and Ealy’s

⁶⁸ While she has spent all of her career at *El Universal*, City Editor Martha Ramos ran a small edition of *El Universal* in the state of Puebla that she says was very aggressive in newsgathering. She cites a series of stories they produced, about fraud in a local election that ultimately helped bring an opposition party candidate to power, as an experience that changed her professional vision. Her distance from the central office afforded the newspaper the opportunity to assert its autonomy and aggressively seek out news. Martha Ramos, personal interview with author, 29 March 1999, Mexico City.

eventual arrest on tax evasion charges, all but eventually one thrown out in court. The arrest came during a major recession and as commercial competition from *Reforma* in Mexico City grew fierce. Ealy decided to take big steps. He empowered a young editor with ideas influenced by ideas of U.S. style Watchdog journalism to take over the renovation of his newspaper. He backed Rock's decision to try to change the newspaper's organizational culture at a key junction when other newspaper managers opposed more than a graphic design makeover. He sold his sports tabloid to finance a \$2 million renovation of the newsroom and an expensive team of outside training consultants. Newer reporters were brought in at higher salaries.⁶⁹

The transformation of *El Universal* illustrates a universal process in civic newspaper creation. Expanding networks of civic journalists, the success and expansion of first-wave civic newspapers, and the changing cues in the macro-environment all pointed in the same direction in the 1990s, toward adopting a more assertive, autonomous brand of journalism. Alternative paradigms gave journalists an idea of what a new style of journalism might be like. Change agents in newsrooms and training rooms showed them how to make the switch. Table Six lists the mechanisms identified in the process of civic media transformation.

Conclusion

An analysis of the process of civic newspaper transformation in Mexico highlighted the importance of change agents and the transformation of organizational cultures and professional identities in the creation of a more democratic institution within a liberalizing regime. A civic news model enabling citizen participation and government accountability appeared inside a core of newspapers prior to economic liberalization and democratization, and then percolated out to a wider number of Mexican news organizations once liberalization began. As Mexico began its period of democratic consolidation, civic newspapers dominated the market in most of Mexico's major cities. For the politically active, they had become obligatory points of reference.

Other newspapers, local television and the country's largest television networks resisted civic transformation. An analysis of inertial newsrooms such as Mexico City's *Excelsior* found that a lack of turnover in leadership positions "froze" newsroom cultures despite societal transformation, while a new generation of managers dedicated to commercializing the news in the country's largest television network, Televisa, created a new, market-driven style of news production in television newsrooms. In local television, owners dedicated to public service, market-driven news, particular partisan ties or local oligarchies fit the news to their particular perceptions of its purpose.⁷⁰ In radio, more independent-minded journalists eventually bought their own news production companies and were able to practice a more autonomous style of journalism, although state control of licenses and commercial pressures has meant that assertiveness in news reporting and criticism of powerful actors has been more limited than in the civic press.

⁶⁹ Ealy has not given me an interview, despite requests.

⁷⁰ Hughes, *Culture Clash In The Newsroom*. On local television, see Sallie Hughes and Chappell Lawson, "Businessmen, Partisans and Oligarchs. Explaining Persistent Partisan Bias In Local Mexican Television News." Forthcoming.

Table Six: Change Mechanisms

Stage One: Emergence

- Journalists hold values in opposition to the continuation of the one-party state.
- They learn of other journalism models separating the press from the state.
- They come to control newsroom resources.
- They become change agents who train new cohorts of journalists (youths or journalists originally trained in other professions, such as economics or academia).

Stage Two: Dispersion

- Economic liberalization increases need to respond to market mechanisms and decreases role of state in supporting media financially.
- Political liberalization at the state and local level puts some government resources and information in opposition hands.
- Systemic shocks de-legitimize maintenance of one-party state for wider number of journalists.
- Civic newspapers' legitimacy increase with their financial, political and international success.
- Networks of civic journalists expand beyond original civic newspapers.
- New newspapers open in the civic style or traditional newspapers undertake transformation projects.

In all three types – inertial, market-driven or civic – control of the newsroom, organizational culture, and professional identities determined whether news production would be predicated on continued support for authoritarian politics, commercialism, or citizenship. The survival of civic-oriented journalism in Mexico will depend upon the ability of journalists to keep control of their newsrooms and anchor professional identities in a concept of journalism as an enabler of citizenship. This will be difficult as commercial pressures increase and political change stagnates. However, Mexican journalists' conceptualizations of their profession and society were forged during a period of intense political change that may cement mental models of journalism and their own civic identities into place for at least the next generation.

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