

Good Intentions?  
The Media-State Relationship Under Vicente Fox

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## Introduction

Few today would doubt the importance of the news media in the practice of democratic governance, least of all politicians. From the successful media management strategies of Ronald Reagan to the ultimately unsuccessful strong-armed tactics of Alberto Fujimori, politicians in new, old and crumbling democracies use diverse strategies in an attempt to make the media a reflector of their messages. At the same time, journalists and media owners across the hemisphere follow competing codes of conduct based upon self-interest, market calculations or a higher civic calling. Whether these two groups of actors cooperate or come into conflict depends upon their objectives, the rules of the game they follow, their structural setting and the issues of the moment.<sup>1</sup>

In Mexico, the media-government relationship began a profound transformation prior to the 1980s and accelerated in key junctures during the country's gradual democratic transition. The media splintered from a consolidated, authoritarian institution submissive to the state into separate populations of organizations following civic, market-based or inertial authoritarian approaches to journalism.<sup>2</sup> As of the victory of the PAN's presidential candidate in July 2000, the potential for consolidating a new media-government relationship became apparent to both sets of actors.<sup>3</sup>

I believe there are three options for the Fox government: a Reaganesque approach, where government media managers rule the day by playing to the market needs of the media for access, drama and in the case of television, image; a *Fujimoriano* approach, wherein the government utilizes holdover or new authoritarian controls to push its messages; or a third path guided by the liberal philosophy that broad public access to information helps create informed, participatory citizens. As one might expect, a mix of the three analytical models is emerging in Mexico. The question then becomes one of the balance and duration.

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<sup>1</sup> Lance W. Bennett, *News: The Politics of Illusion* (1996). Sallie Hughes, "Democratic Development from the Inside Out. The Transformation of Mexico's News Media, 1980-2001" (Dissertation, Tulane University, 2001). Chappell Lawson, *Building the Fourth Estate. Democratization and Media Opening in Mexico., 2002* (Berkeley: University of California Press) 2002. John H. McManus, *Market-Driven Journalism. Let the Citizen Beware?* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994). John Cussiánovich Salazar, "The Devils of the Peruvian Press," *Pulso del Periodismo*, (2000). Silvio Waisbord, *Watchdog Journalism in South America: News, Accountability and Democracy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Sallie Hughes, "Democratic Development From The Inside Out. The Transformation Of Mexico's News Media, 1980-2001." Ph.D. Dissertation. Stone Center for Latin American Studies, Tulane University. Forthcoming, 2001. The civic approach treats media users as citizens and the political mission of the media is to enable citizen participation by informing and educating. The market-based approach views media users as consumers and the mission of the media is not political, but uses politics to create audiences for products. The inertial authoritarian approach treats media users as subjects and its political role is to socialize the population in favor of passively accepting the status quo.

<sup>3</sup> It seems assured that the nation's predominant news media will continue to reside in the private sector despite domestic academic criticism of a predominately private ownership regime. Nor is moving state-owned news media down a BBC-styled public service path on top of the consensus agenda of the government actors negotiating new media legislation. Beyond the question of maintaining the predominately private sector based property regime, however, the political dynamics of the relationship between the government and the media is less certain.

In this talk I will analyze the media-state relationship during the Fox administration along two lines: first, the structural relationship that could change through the enactment of new laws and government regulations, and second, the cultural relationship established through the daily practice of producing political communication. This approach tackles the components of the media-state relationship in the two spheres that guaranteed media subservience to the *ancien regime* in Mexico – structural ties that allowed the state to reward or penalize media behavior, and the cultural norms of news making that helped determine the strength of media resistance to or collusion with the regime.

The structural potential for creating a media-state relationship that strengthens citizenship includes:

- guaranteeing access to government information, preferably through new legislation but also through administrative norms;
- increasing transparency in processes for granting broadcast concessions.

Elements of daily interaction that will help create a new culture of news production include:

- the new government's strategies for managing messages in the media, including access to information on a daily basis and methods for promoting the government's message in the media;
- and the conduct of journalists, media owners and their organizations.

The information in this talk comes from 22 formal and informal interviews with strategically placed federal government officials and journalists, as well as a survey of 42 journalists known for their critical profiles. All were conducted in the second half of July and first days of August. I also reviewed print and electronic coverage of the new president, but time did not permit a rigorous testing of hypotheses through content analysis.

This is, of course, a preliminary review. The Fox administration has not been in office yet a year, but certain tendencies are visible and worth pointing out.

## **The Structural Parameters**

### A. An access to information law

Vicente Fox came into office promising to promote a new balance between state and society that would deepen and consolidate Mexican democracy. Among his proposals was a law guaranteeing access to information so citizens could better monitor government activity.<sup>4</sup> The 1917 Mexican Constitution guarantees the right to freedom of

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<sup>4</sup> Gobierno de la República México, *Carpeta De Prensa. Instalación De La Comisión Intersectorial Para La Transparencia Y El Combate a La Corrupción* (Mexico City, 2001), Press Release.

expression and as of the 1970s, the government is charged with the responsibility of guaranteeing the right. Yet enforceable regulations guaranteeing access to government information have never been codified, despite attempts during the López Portillo and Zedillo administrations.<sup>5</sup>

The failure of previous attempts to legislate was as much due to the economic and political interests the regulations threatened as to the maximalist approach to legislation that combined the sensitive issues of broadcast concessions and defamation laws with access to information. The unwritten rules and calculations of the PRI regime also worked against the creation of a public concept of government information. Government information was considered as belonging to those in power rather than to the citizenry. Selective withholding and release of government information evolved into a potent political weapon. Rather than a tool to inform citizens, news coverage was used to build up one's career, attack rivals and as a general measure of the political strength of top office holders.<sup>6</sup>

In practice, there are no formal regulations for the release of government information in Mexico. The release of documents is entirely up to the discretion of the politician or the head of the press office. This limits the ability of critical journalists to pursue information without entering into friendship ties or other relationships that may compromise autonomy. In a survey of 100 journalists from critical newspapers conducted in 1999, for example, 86 percent said it was easier to get information through leaks than through official channels.<sup>7</sup> The shaky standing of journalists seeking government information has continued into the Fox administration, with only 2 of the 42 journalists I questioned saying they relied upon the release of documents as a primary technique for obtaining information from the federal government.<sup>8</sup>

President Fox discovered very early that redefining government information as public would be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it could strengthen government accountability and increase the legitimacy of his administration; on the other, it opened up the government to criticism from all sides and threatened short-term governability when combined with a failing media management strategy. "*Los perros que ladran*," the dogs that bark, as Fox put it after a series of critical stories in April, May and June, barked loudly even before the revelation of the enormous price the government paid for

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<sup>5</sup> Beatric Solís, "Cronología del Derecho a la Información en México." Mimeograph.

<sup>6</sup> Government information was so closely guarded that a tiring, circular ritual formed around the journalistic interview of government officials. Direct answers were not provided and useful information was rarely obtained. Alternatively, government officials strategically leaked information along with payoffs in exchange for passive coverage. Ilya Adler, "Press-Government Relations in Mexico: A Study of Freedom of the Mexican Press and Press Criticism of Government Institutions," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, no. 12 (1993). Roderic Ai Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 19, 179.

<sup>7</sup> Claudia Fernández, *Mas Allá De La Filtración* (San Antonio, Texas: *The Dallas Morning News*, 1999), Paper prepared for the annual conference of Socios en las Americas.

<sup>8</sup> Fifteen used personal interviews, eight relied upon leaks, five obtained information through press conferences and another five obtained information primarily through group interviews. Only one relied primarily upon press releases.

new towels in the president's residence created the administration's first real media scandal in June.<sup>9</sup>

Even if Fox was tempted to abandon his promise, support for an access law inside and outside of the administration was too strong for the new president to easily back away. Three different cabinet members began to announce (or leak) draft proposals in order to gain political capital from the popular idea even as criticism raged on other fronts. The first publicized proposal, from the Comptroller's Secretariat (Secodam), caused agitation because it was written in private and allowed the president wide discretion over what material would be exempted from public scrutiny. After the controversy irrupted, Fox ordered the initiatives brought together into a single coordinating committee in *Presidencia* although Secodam, the Interior Secretariat and the Economics Secretariat continue to work on the proposal.<sup>10</sup>

Initial deadlines suggested Fox would propose the legislation during this legislative session, Sept. 1 through December, but Comptroller Francisco Barrios said Aug. 24 that it will be two years before the law has been given sufficient hearing inside government and society to be revised, presented, approved and enacted.<sup>11</sup>

A common scenario for the scope of the law is that the proposal would cover the executive branch, with Congress expanding it to cover the legislative and judicial branches as well. Under Barrio's concept, the president would promote passage of similar state-level laws. State legislatures in Guanajuato, Nuevo Leon and elsewhere are already analyzing their own proposals.

Whether the law really makes government information a public good depends upon its scope and enforcement mechanisms. According to Barrio's overview, all government information would be public unless specifically exempted. Among the exemptions would be questions of national security, information that could cause upheaval in the financial system, and information about citizens' private lives such as the initial stages of criminal investigations. These general exemptions are vague, and we must wait for the proposal to be made public to get an idea of whether the exemptions will really be as minimal as the administration has promised. The idea of opening government meetings to the public is not under consideration because officials believe it would hinder deliberation, according to a Congressional source.

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<sup>9</sup> The story broke in the daily *Milenio* after a reporter discovered the prices in the government's three-year-old internet program Compranet, which lists purchasing prices of goods bought by the federal government. The program has been expanded under the Fox administration. See footnote 17 for more details.

<sup>10</sup> Alvaro Delgado and Marla Scherer Ibarra, "Con La Sociedad O No Sale: Ernesto Villanueva. El Proyecto De Ley De Información, a La Medida Del Gobierno," *Proceso*, 20 May 2001. Alvaro Delgado and María Scherer Ibarra, "El Proyecto Será El De Presidencia: Martha Sahagún. Rebatina Por La Ley De Acceso a La Información Pública," *Proceso*, 13 May 2001.

<sup>11</sup> Comptroller Francisco Barrio, speech before the seventh National Meeting of the State Public Administration Institutes, 24 Aug. 2001, Guanajuato, Guanajuato. Reported in Jorge Escalante, "Dilatan Dos Años Apertura Informativa," *Reforma*, 25 August 2001.

The law will be ineffective without workable enforcement procedures that allow citizens to press their demands for information without great obstacles. Two enforcement procedures are under consideration; both seem user friendly at the initial stages, but appeals may require greater financial resources. The first proposal would designate public information officers in federal offices to approve or deny requests for information inside each agency, and an internal agency committee to review appeals of denials. A new Access to Information Commission, made up of presidential appointees with Senate approval, would be created to hear appeals. The commission would have budgetary and operational independence. The last appeal would be to the courts. A second position eliminates the commission and moves appeals directly to the Mexican Supreme Court.<sup>12</sup>

The executive branch will not make decisions about what to include in the law and when to propose it in isolation. For the first time, the Mexican president is being pressured by two organized coalitions – one of legislators from all three major parties who have reached a consensus with the powerful owners of broadcast media outlets, and the other made up of independent newspapers and members of civil society including academics, human rights experts and jurists.

Representatives of three political parties in Congress, in talks with academics and The National Broadcast Media Owners Association, have agreed to pursue the following legislative agenda:

- Access to information.
- A “consciousness clause” for journalists so they don’t have to reveal their sources.
- Extending to journalists the right to form unions inside their media organizations.
- And a right to reply for persons who believe they were prejudiced in news stories.

A second legislative committee is working on a new federal telecommunications law. The committee could include a revision of the process for granting broadcast licenses and concessions, as well as strengthening the Federal Telecommunications Comision, Mexico’s FCC, to make it more autonomous.

The second group working on an access law includes 75 newspapers, university communications departments and law schools, human rights and civic organizations, and professional journalism associations. This is the first time Mexico's foremost newspapers – *El Universal*, *Reforma* and *La Jornada* -- have set aside commercial and journalistic rivalry, joined academic critics, and decided to lobby jointly for a law guaranteeing access to information. Previously, each side battled one another.

Group members are writing a joint legislative proposal and plan to lobby together for its inclusion in legislative discussions and ultimate passage by Congress. The document, called the Oaxaca Declaration, calls for:

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<sup>12</sup> Author interview with Sen. Javier Corral, 2 Aug. 2001, Mexico City. Jorge Reyes and Victor Fuentes, "Propone Cofemer Tres Vías Para Atender Una Solicitud. Analizan Procedimiento De Acceso a Información," *Reforma*, 12 May 2001.

- A Constitutional designation of government information as a good pertaining first to the citizen;
- The establishment of the citizens' right to access data, archives, registries and any type of information in the hands of the executive, legislative and judicial branches, as well as private businesses that receive public resources;
- The creation of sanctions for public servants who do not release such information, unless they show just cause;
- The identification of exceptions to the law, which should be minimal;
- And the creation of an independent enforcement agency.

The executive, legislative and civil society proposals appear to be moving in the same direction. The chances that journalists, as citizens, will have a legal right to obtain government information by the end of the Fox administration is strong and will change the balance of power between journalists and their sources in government. The question of exemptions, enforcement and further delays in the timetable for congressional debate and vote should be watched, however.

Finally, federal agencies do not have to wait for the new law to begin behaving differently. The Comptroller's Office has proposed internal administrative norms that would require press officers to respond promptly to petitions for information. The proposed norms are based on internal press office rules enacted by the Mexican Chamber of Deputies in 1998, which gained the respect of many journalists. The norms would not replace a codified right to information, but would give journalists more grounds to demand access to government records.

#### B. The broadcast concession process

Most work and public attention has focused on the access to information law. A side effect of the law could be the transparency of the process for granting broadcast concessions and licenses, as well as granting public access to their registry. Historically, radio and television concessions have been awarded in secret to political allies. The first concessions went to friends and acquaintances of President Miguel Alemán, whose family eventually became a business partner in the network that would become Televisa.<sup>13</sup> When the Carlos Salinas administration privatized state-owned channels that became the no. 2 network TV Azteca in 1993, the president's brother either made an investment in TV Azteca or made a loan to the network's founders, depending upon whose version of events is believed. The most recent granting of concessions occurred in November 2000, when Zedillo administration officials awarded additional cable concessions to Televisa and MVS days before the administration turned over its offices to

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<sup>13</sup> Karin Bohmann, *Medios De Comunicación Y Sistemas Informativos En México*, trans. Alejandro Zenker (México, D.F.: Alianza Editorial, 1989). Fátima Fernández Christlieb, *Los Medios De Difusión Masivos En México* (México, D.F.: Juan Pablos Editor, 1985). Claudia and Andrew Paxman Fernández, *El Tigre. Emilio Azcárraga Y Su Imperio Televisa* (Mexico, D.F.: Editorial Grijalbo, 2000).

the new Fox government. This furthered a process of ownership concentration that, according to one estimate, has placed 1400 radio and television frequencies in the hands of eight families and economic groups.<sup>14</sup> Getting access to the registry of concessions and concessionaires to verify the count is virtually impossible.

Creating an open, fair process for concessions and licenses is on the consensus legislative agenda for this fall's session, although not as high up as access to information and the question of how to create more diversity in ownership may not be addressed. Administration sources say privately they will not challenge the concessions that are already in place, but are in support of making future concessions part of a more open process. The decision to leave the past alone may have been the carrot that convinced traditional media barons not to oppose the changes as they did in the recent past, going so far as to ban legislators who were pushing for new regulations from their networks.

### **The Daily Relationship**

Managing government messages in the media traditionally involved cooptation and in more rare circumstances, repression. As a more autonomous and assertive media evolved during the last two decades, especially among press organizations, these mechanisms either no longer worked or the cost of using them became too great. The remnants of both persist in rural areas or states with traditionalist PRI governors, but they are now the exception to the rule.

In a small series of focus groups I held in 1999 with press officers from the PAN, PRI and PRD, the prominent strategies for getting press officers' message out involved offering ample or exclusive information to reporters. At times, a reporter was selected because he or she represented a news organization with an audience the press officer specifically wanted to reach. Other times, the initiative of the reporter counted for getting access to information. On the other hand, press officers reported that they prefer to centralize the information and control it as much as possible. This included offering reporters' exclusive interviews and tips. One of the biggest fears was that the reporter would look elsewhere for information or even invent information. Other strategies included going up the editorial ladder to reporters' bosses and media owners. This occurred when an issue was very important, news criticism was perceived as strong and unfair, or because the press officer's agency was not being covered.

The Fox administration combined several of these tactics in a first attempt at managing media-state relations that never consolidated into a successful media program. Most devices were of the Reaganesque type, though there were also complaints of strong-armed tactics when criticism in the press became severe.

The first Fox media strategy involved centralizing information in a single presidential spokesperson, Martha Sahagún. Presumably guided by weekly surveys and focus groups conducted by the president's image maker, former Televisa marketing

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<sup>14</sup> Author interview with Roberto Rock, 25 July 2001, Mexico City.



director Francisco Ortiz, Sahagún followed a Reaganesque playbook by emailing cabinet secretaries the “line of the day” to be used with the media and holding almost daily press conferences. She also concentrated important announcements inside her office instead of allowing cabinet secretaries to make them.

The strategy ran into trouble for several reasons. First, many cabinet members would not follow the rules. They made public statements and often leaked information about disagreements inside the cabinet.<sup>15</sup> Second, the spokeswoman or the president himself made statements that later had to be contradicted, economic forecasts and negotiations with the Zapatistas are two examples. And third, the concentration of information in Los Pinos meant that specialized reporters covering lower-profile but important agencies such education or health did not get access to new information in a timely fashion and the amount and quality of news about government programs suffered.

When Reaganesque tactics failed, the presidential press office sometimes complained to media publishers and owners when coverage was negative. In especially tense moments, such as when the newspaper *Milenio* reported the cost of the Los Pinos refurbishing or when *Reforma* published polls showing Fox’ popularity declining, Sahagún complained to the directors of these newspapers. Only in the case of *Milenio* did the editor, Raymundo Rivapalacio, say Sahagún threatened his job. According to my interviews, the government has not used the carrot or stick of advertising revenues to quiet the press, perhaps because what little money there is has been dedicated to the broadcast media. Journalists speculate that ad contracts have more impact on coverage in the electronic media, although they are not being traded *quid pro quo* for news.<sup>16</sup>

The new government’s first media program ended when Sahagún resigned July 2 to marry President Fox. Their surprise wedding dominated television coverage on the night of the one-year anniversary of a Fox victory. Some journalists believe it was the ultimate media management coup. The wedding kiss “beamed around the world,” as Sahagún described it, displaced domestic critiques at Fox’s one-year mark. The president’s wedding ended a chain of negative news about rifts in the cabinet, extensive foreign travel, a perceived break with the PAN, contradictions on economic performance goals, and the exorbitant cost of refurbishing presidential living quarters.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> In the case of the interior secretary, he wanted to negotiate with the Zapatistas and political parties in a press blackout, but reporters say the spokeswoman answered questions about negotiations that threatened to end them. A similar situation occurred with the finance secretary, when economic figures were divulged by the spokeswoman before the finance secretary had reviewed them. Other cabinet members wanted to pursue their own public agendas, especially the secretary of foreign relations and the coordinator for national security. The most famous case of contradictions involved Foreign Secretary Castañeda’s description of Cuban officials as “ardidos,” or hot under the collar, which the press spokesman later said was not diplomatic. The president then defended the foreign secretary.

<sup>16</sup> A single executive branch press officer tried to influence *El Universal*’s coverage by offering advertising, an offer which was refused and attributed to the press officer’s inexperience.

<sup>17</sup> Prior to the “las toallas” scandal, criticism of President Fox was mostly of a political nature. Disputes among cabinet members were obtuse, and most interested the elite. Alternatively, the revelation that under-aged workers toiled on a Fox family ranch reflected a morally questionable but nevertheless pragmatically accepted Mexican reality. However, the disclosure that a government promoting a tax increase on food and medicine spent \$450 for a single towel, \$4,285 for a set of bed sheets, and \$960 for a tablecloth was

A second media strategy began to take shape by the end of July when Ortiz became the head of media relations and ended the weekly press conferences. Former PAN Party Spokesman Juan Ignacio Zavala became press director. Ortiz plots the medium-term message, while Zavala follows daily dynamics. The idea is to set an agenda, rather than be reactive. The program brings in cabinet secretaries and makes Fox follow a script in public. “Rats ate my tongue,” he told the Los Pinos press corps soon after the switch was made. The line of the day remains, but it is adjusted by sectors, such as the economy, social development, etc.

The strategy also stratifies media messages to reach different target audiences. The goal on television (and to a lesser extent for radio) is to focus on specific issues with clear messages and, when possible, vibrant images. The presidential address on Saturday provides examples of the strategy. The president repeated “*México sí tiene proyecto*”<sup>18</sup> three times in five paragraphs of his address after making the sound bite-grabbing statement – “Mi gobierno avanza con el rumbo claro.”<sup>19</sup> The image of the day, according to the photographers at the event, was Fox dancing a waltz with a *quinciñera* prior to the speech.

The new strategy also worked very well the Monday after the weekend address, which was directly viewed by only 20 percent of Mexicans. On Monday evening’s *El Noticiero Con Joaquín López Doriga*, for example, the president was the focus of four of the six news stories appearing before the first commercial break, and his finance secretary was the focus of the fifth. Fox was placed in a poor light in only in one story, which cited the opposition’s response to the address, and that news story was followed up after a commercial break with an almost 15-minute interview with the president. Thus, the administration was largely able to control the television spin after Fox’s first Presidential Address.

The administration’s vision of the press is different. It expects to be contradicted and criticized. Newspaper readers include the politically active and better-educated population. Administration press officers want their position represented in the elite political debate. Press strategies include seeking out intellectuals that write opinion articles, as well as keeping Fox’s public statements on message and better coordinating statements from cabinet members.

So far, I’ve reviewed the administration’s view of the daily media relationship. How do reporters and top editors at critical publications and professional organizations view the relationship?<sup>20</sup> First, they feel little has changed and many are disheartened by it. Asked whether they thought it was “easier,” “the same” or “more difficult” to obtain

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something that every Mexican could relate to personally. This scandal moved from the press into the electronic media, and was forceful enough that it caused government reaction. A close presidential aide resigned. Fox first spun the incident as proof of the openness in his administration, then told a foreign reporter that the purchases were a media fabrication. From June through the resignation of his media spokeswoman, criticism reigned in the press and television picked up its broader points.

<sup>18</sup> Translation: “Mexico does have a national project.”

<sup>19</sup> “My government advances down a clear path.”

<sup>20</sup> Most of the responses referred to journalists’ experiences in during the first Fox media program.

information in the Fox government, 59 percent said the same, 23 percent said more difficult, and 18 percent said easier. Of 11 top editors who responded, 49 percent said getting information from the Fox administration was as tricky as obtaining information from the Zedillo administration, while 23 percent thought it was more difficult. The top editors of three of Mexico's most important newspapers reflect the tone. "The relationship is similar. They don't provide information," said *Reforma* Editor-in-Chief Lazaro Rios. "It is as complicated as other times, no more, no less," said *El Universal* Editor-In-Chief Roberto Rock. "This the worst press relationship that I have seen in my life," said *Milenio* Editor-in-Chief Raymundo Rivapalacio.

Second, the amount of access to information varies by secretariat and the amount of openness depends upon the agency secretary. The comptroller's office was especially lauded for being more open. Previously, for example, reporters could not even enter the building. Foreign Relations was also considered a more open secretariat.

Finally, most of the journalists I spoke to still are willing to give the news administration the benefit of the doubt. A few commented, and I agree, it is too early to make definitive statements about the media-state relationship under Fox. It seems that the Reaganesque style of media management will prevail, with the government attempting to manage media message through strategic communication tactics rather than strong-armed tactics. Passage of a sound access to information law would move the media-state relationship in a more civic direction, however, at least in the case of the more assertive press.

As for the ultimate balance, time will tell. Good intentions ... well, you know the saying.

SUMMARY  
Fox Survey Results, July-August 2000

**1. The majority of respondents come from the print media.<sup>21</sup>**

- Breakdown of participants by media type and media name (where given)

Radio	5	11.9
Newspaper	25	59.5
Newsmagazine	6	14.3
Internet news service	3	7.1
Wire Service	2	4.8
Union	1	2.4
Total	42	100.0

- Most frequent media outlets in sample<sup>22</sup>

	Respondents	Percent
Milenio Diario	6	14.3
La Jornada	5	11.9
El Universal	5	11.9
Expansion	3	7.1
Reforma	3	7.1
Sub-Total	22	52.4
Others (1 each)	19	47.6
Total	42	100.0

**2. Respondents sought information in many government entities.**

Entity	People Who Requested Information	Percent of Total
Presidencia	22	15.4
PGR	15	10.6
Interior	11	7.7
Comptroller	9	6.3
Defense	7	4.9

<sup>21</sup> Thirty respondents answered a small survey sent to the Mexican journalist organization *Periodistas de Investigación*, which was selected because of its critical, assertive profile. Twelve additional respondents were interviewed by the author. The author sincerely thanks *Periodistas* Director Pedro Armendares and Coordinator Angélica Pineda Bojórquez for their assistance.

<sup>22</sup> Respondents answered personally, not as representatives of their media outlet. The names of the media outlets are included to give an indication of the quality and range of the journalists in the sample.

Foreign Relations	6	4.2
Treasury	6	4.2
Economy	6	4.2
Education	5	3.5
Environment	5	3.5
Agriculture	5	3.5
Migration	4	2.8
Social Development	4	2.8
Less Than 3 <sup>23</sup>	103	--
Total	142	100

### 3. Most respondents believe the Fox and Zedillo administrations differ little regarding access to information.

- Do you note a lot, some or no difference in the release of information that you have received from federal government offices during the Fox administration as compared to the Zedillo administration?<sup>24</sup>

	N	Mucha	Algo	Nada
All respondents	40	9.5	46.3	41.5
Decision makers	11	9.1	54.5	36.4

- Would you say that it is easier, the same or more difficult to obtain information in this administration as compared to the Zedillo administration?<sup>25</sup>

	N	Easier	The Same	More difficult
All Responses	109	18.4	58.7	22.9
First Response Only	41	24.4	56.1	19.5

#### Decision Makers (n=11)<sup>26</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Entities where less than four people requested information: Agrarian Reform Secretariat, Agriculture Attorney General's Office, Bank of Mexico, Customs, Communication and Transportation Secretariat, Environmental Attorney General's Office, Family Development (DIF), Federal Preventative Police, National Culture and Arts Commission, Energy Secretariat, Health Secretariat, Housing Authority (Infonavit), Investigation and National Security Center (Cisen), Labor Secretariat, National Finance Development Bank, National Human Rights Commission, National Security Coordinator's Office, National Statistics and Geography Institute, National Trade Bank (Bancomext), Pemex, Post Office, Public Safety Secretariat, Rural Development Bank.

<sup>24</sup> ¿Notas mucha, algo o nada de diferencia en la entrega de información que has recibido de las oficinas federales en el gobierno de Fox comparado con el gobierno de Zedillo?

<sup>25</sup> ¿Dirías que es más fácil, igual o más difícil conseguir información en este gobierno comparado con el gobierno de Zedillo?

<sup>26</sup> Top Editors

	N	Easier	The Same	More difficult
All Responses	41	17.1	48.8	34.1
First Response Only	11	18.2	36.4	45.5

Representative Comments:

- “Tienen buenas intenciones de atender a la prensa, pero me parece que no saben la mejor manera de hacerlo. Mas que negativas de dar información, es un problema de la inexperiencia.” – reporter
- “En terminos generales, es igual. En ciertos casos, hay mas acceso a funcionarios, a entrevistas. Depende en gran medida de los contactos personales que uno tenga. Hay, sí, mas amabilidad en ocasiones y más disposición a escuchar peticiones, pero los cambios no han sido de fondo. Digo que las modificaciones estan en la superficie.” – coordinador general de información
- “La relación es parecida (con otros gobierno). No te dan información. Puede mejorar mucho.” – director general
- “Hay poca diferencia. Si se refiere a la calidad de la información, hay una mejoría, pero no la que el periodista desea.” – jefe de información política
- “Está complicado como siempre. No más que en otras veces. Al principio habían signos de apertura, pero muchos jefes de prensa vienen de gobiernos anteriores.” – director general
- “La información pública sigue siendo patrimonio de los burócratas en turno, que la difunden segun su conveniencia. Es la misma practica del regimen anterior.” - reporter
- “La verdad es que depende de la oficina la que se acerque uno y del momento en que lo haga.” – editor

**4. Most respondents feel there is no formal or informal process for obtaining information.**

- Is there a formal or informal process for obtaining government documents in the secretariats or federal offices where you have sought information?<sup>27</sup>

	Response	Percent
No	22	64.7

<sup>27</sup> ¿Hay un procedimiento formal u oficial para conseguir documentos del gobierno en las Secretarías o oficinas federales en las que has buscado información? (¿Cuál es?)

Yes	12	35.3
Total	34	100.0

Representative Comments:

- “No, responder a una petición depende de la voluntad del Director de Comunicación Social.” – reportero
- “La clásica solicitud por escrito, pero siguen pesando las relaciones personales más que las profesionales. Si eres cuate del personal de comunicación ya la hiciste sino te la hacen cansada. Es cuestión de picar piedra.” – editor adjunto
- “En la Defensa debes enviar una petición por escrito para obtener, a veces, tan sólo una declaración de prensa. No conozco los procedimientos oficiales para acceder a información en otras instancias de gobierno.” -- reportera

##### **5. Because of lack of access to government records, reporting techniques for the more assertive journalists in the sample revolve around the personal interview.**

How have you most often obtained information from the Fox administration? (First response only.)<sup>28</sup>

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Release of requested document	2	5.6	5.6
Personal interview	15	41.7	47.2
Group interview	5	13.9	61.1
Leak	8	22.2	83.3
Press Conference	5	13.9	97.2
Press Release	1	2.8	100.0
Total	36	100.0	

Relevant Comments:

- “Solicitud directa ante quien corresponde: al área de comunicación social o directamente al funcionario. La respuesta es la misma que con los priístas.” – jefe del área política.

<sup>28</sup> ¿Cuál es la forma más común que has usado para conseguir información en el gobierno de Fox? (Filtración, entrevista personal o en grupo, conferencia de prensa, boletín o entrega de documentación pedida.)

- “Buscar funcionarios por dependencia, area. En entrevistas. Platicas *off the record*. Entrevista personales. Usualmente, las entrevista son de una sola tema o *off the record*.” – reportero
- “Como nada ha cambiado en cuanto a la apertura informativa, recorro con frecuencia a las filtraciones y, cuando se puede, a las entrevistas personales.” – reportera
- “Lo que ha hecho este gobierno -y con ello pretende hacer creer que existe apertura informativa- es ofrecer más ruedas de prensa... El acceso a documentos todavía no es una práctica extendida, pero se da en caso en que el periodista lograr tener una buena relación en sus fuentes, y cuando hablo de ‘buena relación’, quiero decir relación profesional.” – jefe de información política
- “Ojalá que los medios dejaran a un lado sus intereses económicos o la necesidad de acomodarse con el nuevo gobierno e impulsaran, de manera conjunta, la apertura de la información en todos los niveles. Sería más provechoso que continuar en la misma cobertura, publicando hasta el cansancio las gracejadas de la Primera Dama o incluso el pretender abrir puertas o quemar a la nueva administración a través del viejo y priísta método de exagerar sus errores y minimizar los aciertos.” -- reportero

## 6. Responses indicate that the government’s media management strategies don’t focus on the press.

How do sources from the federal offices where you have sought information try to influence the content of your articles? (For example, access to ample, partial or incomplete information; lack of information; leaks with or without names attached, friendship ties, money, etc.)<sup>29</sup>

	Responses	Percent
Nothing	12	31.6
Lack of information	10	26.3
Friendship Ties	6	15.8
Complaints To Editor	4	10.5
Ample Information	2	5.3
Leaks to friendly reporters	2	5.3
Offer to trade news for ads	1	2.6
More serious and reserved	1	2.6
	38	100

<sup>29</sup> ¿Qué hacen las fuentes de las oficinas federales donde has buscado información para tratar de influir en el contenido de tus notas? (Por ejemplo acceso a información amplia, parcial o incompleta; falta de acceso a la información; filtraciones identificadas o anónimas, amiguismo; dinero; etcétera)



Representative Comments:

- “En ningún momento he percibido interés por influir en el manejo de la información.” -- reportero
- “Normalmente, dependiendo del tipo de información te hacen más accesible la misma o un poco más complicada su obtención, y las filtraciones que hacen los funcionarios normalmente van dirigidas a personas y periódicos en específico previamente elegidos.” - reportera
- “Otro hecho al que hay que ponerle atención, es la fuerte presencia de los funcionarios gubernamentales en los medios electrónicos, radio y televisión. Las filtraciones han disminuido, con relación al anterior sexenio, pero hay más oportunidad, en contrapartida, de acceder a encuentros *off de record* con muchas de las personas cercanas al presidente.” – jefe de información política
- “Absolutamente nada. Están convencidos de que la opinión del periodista no va más allá de una molestia menor.” - articulista
- “Se ha llegado a recibir llamadas de la presidencia para tratar de influir en la publicación de una nota.” – coordinador general de información
- “En seis meses, cuatro veces pidieron mi renuncia ... (y) mis textos sobre Fox no son nada.” – director general

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