

PART I

Prologue

## FOREWORD

### Toward a Continental Perspective

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EACH OF THE THREE MAJOR COUNTRIES on the North American continent—Mexico, Canada, and United States—held a national election in the year 2000, providing a rare opportunity to consider the possible emergence of a “continental perspective.” Such a perspective has been widely discussed since the 1994 enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). What were the commonalities and differences underlying the politics, cultures, and economies of the three great North American democracies? How might these patterns be revealed in the elections of 2000? What were their implications for the future of North Americans? These questions were posed to a group of interdisciplinary colleagues in all three countries, and this collection of essays represents some of their answers.

Anthony DePalma provides an introduction to these issues in his essay “Reluctant Trinity.” The elections of 2000 revealed the growth of common interests among Mexico, Canada, and the United States, and the prospects for greater cultural and economic integration. At the same time, the elections also revealed the

individuality of each political system, the rivalries among national leaders, and the limits of cooperative policies. The Mexican election had the largest impact on these continental relationships, partly because the election suggested that Mexican democracy was perhaps moving closer to that of its neighbors. Also intriguing is the prospect that Mexico will develop a “special relationship” with the United States, much like the “special relationship” that has long existed between Canada and the United States.

More importantly, each of these elections was about the legitimacy of the government. On the one hand, the Mexican election produced a historic change in power: the victory of Vicente Fox and the National Action Party (PAN) represented the first defeat for the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) since the establishment of the present Mexican government in 1929. This election was about the very nature of the Mexican regime.

On the other hand, the Canadian national election produced routine results: the sitting prime minister, Jean Chrétien, dissolved parliament at a propitious time and won a large victory to stay in power. This election was not primarily about the nature of the Canadian regime, but rather about the choice of leaders. The victory strengthened the Liberal Party’s hold on power and increased national unity in Canada.

The 2000 American election fell somewhere between the Mexican and Canadian elections, raising some questions about the legitimacy of the regime while changing the party in power. The unanticipated closeness of the election and the disputed ballots in Florida made the election of Republican George W. Bush highly suspect in the minds of many Americans, and yet the transition of power caused no disruption of the government.

Alejandro Moreno describes the “coalition for change” that elected Vicente Fox and allowed the first opposition party in modern Mexican history to occupy power. The “coalition for change” was surprisingly diverse, dominated by strong demands for democ-

ratization. Diverse coalitions were also a theme in the American election, dubbed “a contest of surprises” by Rick Farmer and John Green. In defiance of pre-election expectations, George Bush and Al Gore fought to a tie—one that was only broken by a controversial Supreme Court decision. In contrast, the Canadian election was a more typical affair. Lydia Miljan finds that the Canadian media distracted voters by emphasizing trivial rather than substantive issues in the campaign, while Brian Tanguay reports on the unexpected success of the Liberals in Quebec and its consequences for the sovereignty movement. This result may have further legitimized the Canadian regime.

Despite the different contexts, some common themes emerged. In all three elections, cultural factors played a prominent role, often to a greater extent than expected. For example, religion played an important role in all three campaigns. Economic issues were also a key feature in these elections, especially the role of government in maintaining prosperity. These common themes sketch the outlines for the development of a continental perspective in the future.

In terms of culture, Mary Kirtz and Carol Beran take an in-depth look at one aspect of this development: the presence of Canadian and Mexican culture in the United States. They find considerable evidence that American popular culture is deeply influenced by its neighbors through immigration and language. Steve Brooks describes a similar phenomenon: a convergence of the political style between Canada and the United States. Based on election rhetoric, Brooks argues a convergence of U.S.–Canadian values, a trend that may extend to Mexican leaders as well.

Mark Kasoff reviews the impact of economic factors on the politics of the three nations. He offers a detailed picture of the economic forces, especially trade, that are slowly and steadily integrating North American markets. However, he concludes that

such economic integration is unlikely to lead to political integration in the future. Isidro Morales provides a deeper exploration of these issues in post-2000 Mexico. He examines NAFTA and plans for its expansion, concluding that it may be difficult for the new administration to deliver on its promises, given the politicization of trade and new foreign policy initiatives.

Manuel Orozco offers an epilogue to this discussion with a reminder that North America includes more than the three largest democracies. In "Beyond Trinity," he explores elections and parties in Central America. Democratization is also underway in these nations, many with a history of authoritarian regimes. Within each national context, elected leaders seek to cope with the forces of cultural and economic integration.

Of course, this collective raises as many questions as it answers. For example, will democratization further expand or retard the development of a continental perspective? Or will the march of cultural and economic integration overcome the uniqueness of each of the North American democracies? And how are these two issues related? These essays are intended to provide the basis for future exploration of these crucial matters.