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Transforming State-Society Relations in Mexico: The National Solidarity Strategy. by Wayne A. Cornelius; Ann L. Craig; Jonathan Fox

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*International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-)*, Vol. 70, No. 4 (Oct., 1994), p. 836

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) on behalf of the [Royal Institute of International Affairs](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2624657>

Accessed: 26/11/2011 21:44

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## *Book reviews*

restrictive laws carry convenient escape provisions; and much of the script for battles between the White House and Capitol Hill is choreographed. Still, one must ask whether it was not the disciplining effect of a dangerous and unforgiving external environment, rather than political convenience, that muted the conflict. Now, with every country feeling free to be more distinctly its own national self, the traditional struggle to set the locus of accountable authority for making US foreign policy decisions could be of profound consequence—however much the debates over constitutional provision and American’s rightful place in the world are muddied by narrow political considerations.

*Michael Brenner, University of Pittsburgh*

## **Latin America and Caribbean**

**Transforming state-society relations in Mexico: the National Solidarity strategy.** Edited by **Wayne A. Cornelius, Ann L. Craig and Jonathan Fox.** San Diego, CA: Center for US-Mexican Studies. 1994. 368pp. Pb.: ISBN 1 878367 14 5.

Mexico’s National Solidarity Programme (PRONASOL) is the brainchild of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and the cornerstone of his social policy. This book appears at the end of Salinas’ presidency, in an election year marked by an armed rebellion and the assassination of his chosen successor, the candidate of the Institutionalised Revolutionary Party (PRI). Such extraordinary events dramatically changed the context of the August 1994 elections, but anyone wanting to understand Mexico’s contemporary political landscape would do well to look beyond the immediacy of those events. This book offers an excellent guide to a central area of that landscape.

PRONASOL is Salinas’ attempt to offset the impact of economic liberalization on the country’s poor and to overcome the crisis of legitimacy surrounding his election as President in 1988. It is an anti-poverty programme which, according to Salinas, is also intended to create a new relationship between the Mexican people and the state, leading towards a more participatory democracy. For critics, however, the intention is quite the opposite: to reinforce centralized rule by promoting direct loyalty to the President. Whereas the PRI’s institutional basis is a sectoral one, PRONASOL redefines voters as consumers, organizing them geographically and offering them urban services or school bursaries rather than better wages and more jobs.

The shortest description reveals the complexity of a programme which now dominates social expenditure in Mexico, but this complexity is admirably contained in Cornelius, Craig and Fox’s edited volume. They have produced a balanced but intellectually rigorous analysis, with authors including a PRONASOL representative as well as Mexican and US-based academics. Contributors agree that the programme is at best a compensatory one which may alleviate poverty without being able (or intending) to tackle its structural causes. There is less agreement about PRONASOL’s political implications. None of the contributors deny that electoral considerations are involved, and one chapter shows that 1988 voting patterns were better predictors of PRONASOL spending than poverty indicators, but while for some political motivations are critical, for others they are unimportant or to be welcomed in the name of electoral responsiveness. The trouble with these more optimistic conclusions is that they assume continued ability and willingness to finance such expenditure. If, however, the PRI’s recovery in the 1991 mid-term elections, widely attributed to PRONASOL, is sustained, can there be any guarantee that even the limited gains the programme has brought to the poor will *also* be sustained?

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