



INNOVATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL SOCIETIES

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- JOYCE: Today is Tuesday, January 27th, my name is Robert Joyce. I'm here with Dan Burbacell and Professor José Luis Mendez from the College of Mexico. Professor Mendez, thank you very much for talking to us today.
- MENDEZ: *On the contrary, thank you to you.*
- JOYCE: We were hoping to get started with just a brief description of your recent research on the Office of the Presidency in Mexico.
- MENDEZ: *Well, I have been doing research on this topic since 2005, more or less, when I came back here to Colegio de Mexico as a researcher after leaving the office of the presidency. I worked for President (Vicente) Fox from 2001 to 2005 at precisely the Office of the Presidency. Actually, my interest and my research on the topic started when I was at the presidency because that is when I started to re-read some materials that I had studied in my PhD, such as (Richard) Neustadt and some of the classics on the presidency that everybody knows. My first article on the subject appeared in a professional journal in Spanish in 2007, and then I've been publishing a couple of articles on the subject and a couple of book chapters too. That's more or less what I have been doing on that topic.*
- JOYCE: Could you tell us a little bit more about your responsibilities in President Fox's administration?
- MENDEZ: *Yes, I was the Head of the Unit of Analysis of the Presidency, which involved several tasks, but one was to do strategic analysis on several policy issues and the other one was to coordinate the elaboration of the writing of all the speeches of the President. Basically those were the two most important functions or tasks of that office of which I was the head.*
- "The chief" maybe doesn't translate well in English, but that is a literal translation.*
- JOYCE: [Laughing] I think it works just fine—you were the boss of the office.
- MENDEZ: *In Spanish it is jefe, which is chief.*
- JOYCE: Right, right.
- So the Office of the Presidency in Mexico has undergone some changes over the past couple of administrations. New presidents come in and restructure how they want the office to look. When would you say the Office of the Presidency recently became a leading force in coordinating policy for Mexican administrations?
- MENDEZ: *Probably with (Carlos) Salinas (de Gortari) [Indecipherable 3:38] I don't know, it's a long story. From the beginning of the governments of the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional - Institutional Revolutionary Party) in the '30s and the '40s up to now, the Office of the Presidency has had sometimes very important roles and some other times less important. So there has been some variation. But let's say in recent times, probably beginning with Salinas when the Office of the President really became much more important again. Then, in a way it remained so for the next decades as an important office, but with some limitations that I guess we are going to discuss as we progress in the interview.*
- JOYCE: How would you describe the changes President Salinas made to the Office of the Presidency?

- MENDEZ:** *Maybe the most important change is that he put in the office a chief of staff—a very powerful chief of staff who was José Cordoba (Montoya), and he (Salinas) delegated to him a good deal of the decisions and the process of negotiations in many issues. He was said to be very powerful, and he was. That is why I think the office became so important; that was the main change, giving to one person within that office the power to coordinate and to make decisions. That was the big change that I think Salinas did. So that would answer that question.*
- JOYCE:** And from Salinas to the following President in 1994, President (Ernesto) Zedillo takes office.
- MENDEZ:** *Right.*
- JOYCE:** What changes does he make to what Salinas had set up?
- MENDEZ:** *Well, I don't remember very, very well Zedillo, but he created two areas, two or three areas. You could not identify a figure or a person as powerful as was the case with Cordoba, and thus the office was not so powerful really. Probably there were more people involved in the discussions. That would be a big difference I think with the case of Salinas. They were two very different presidents in many other ways.*
- JOYCE:** Right.
- MENDEZ:** *As you may know, Salinas was a great reformer. He was the one who started the negotiations for NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) and several other important changes in many other areas. Probably that is one reason why the Office of the Presidency was more important perhaps.*
- JOYCE:** And following through, when President Fox comes in in 2000, it's a big break for Mexico, it is a big change to have a non-PRI presidency. How does President Fox restructure the office?
- MENDEZ:** *In this case he really made big changes. He tried to make the Office of the Presidency an office like the one in the US, which is much bigger, which has all these offices dealing with all these policy issues, which wasn't the case in Mexico before Fox, not even with Salinas.*
- What Fox then tried to do was to create an executive office in addition to the traditional areas of the Office of the Presidency, in addition to the office dealing with the agenda of the President. That had been a traditional office back since the '30s. The other traditional long-standing office had been the one for social communication. That is the office that deals with mass media basically. That had been in place for a long time. Then we have Estado Mayor, which is like the security, like the Secret Service in a way.*
- JOYCE:** They protect the President?
- MENDEZ:** *Yes, they protect the President. I guess it would be pretty similar. It is quite big, it is around 2000 people. I don't know how it is in the US, if it is that big or not. But 2000 is quite a bit. So that is the third office. Then the Office of the First Lady would be another traditional office.*
- Then besides those—and there is one in administration too, the one that administers all those offices, personnel and budget and all that. In addition to those basic offices, presidents had also had two, probably three, offices dealing*

with policy issues, usually divided in three, that is, economic, political and social issues. Sometimes there were only two, let's say economic and social on the one hand and political on the other one.

Fox, in addition to all those offices, created—I don't remember now the exact number—but maybe around another eight offices to deal with indigenous peoples, to deal with public security, similarly to the US National Security Agency. So he created that one, then other office for social organizations, etcetera, etcetera. He created also one for government innovation, which meant like government modernization, and so on.

He increased the size of the Office of the Presidency quite a bit, perhaps in terms of personnel, but also in terms of the number of offices. He tried to deal directly with those offices or at least have a direct relationship with all of them, because all of them depended on him directly. So there was not such a thing as chief of staff.

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *But, in a way, some of the closest people to the President started to try to play that role, and in the end some of them succeeded in playing that role. The first two years, you had all these offices. So it was a different model. That was the big change at least in formal terms.*

JOYCE: So each of these several offices, the heads of those several offices would report to President Fox directly, that was the organization chart?

MENDEZ: *Right.*

JOYCE: Personnel-wise, could you maybe estimate how many people Fox's Office of the Presidency had?

MENDEZ: *I don't remember the exact number now, but it was around 1500 more or less.*

JOYCE: Wow.

MENDEZ: *But most of those people are operational people.*

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *Advisors or people doing policy analysis of some sort should have been around 200 out of those 1500. So you have a lot of people who did cleaning, etcetera, etcetera.*

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *In Mexico in general, you tend to have a lot of that type of people in the government.*

JOYCE: Right. Later on in the Fox administration, he shakes up the Office of the Presidency. He makes changes around 2004 I believe.

MENDEZ: *More or less, yes.*

JOYCE: What were those changes and what would you say brought them about?

MENDEZ: Basically, many of these offices started to disappear, either because they just disappeared, that could be one possibility. So several of those offices just disappeared. Some of the ones went to the ministries and some other ones were integrated within some of the existing presidential offices. So really the size of the Office of the Presidency got reduced. The number of offices was less. Why that happened? There could be several factors, several reasons, but perhaps it will be useful to talk about these two models of decision-making, which have been discussed in the literature, mainly based on the work of George—last name George—who basically talks about two models. One is competitive uncertainty and the other will be cooperative certainty.

For instance, it is said that the Office of the Presidency during (Franklin) Roosevelt was organized under the principal or the model of competitive uncertainty because there was no chief of staff. Roosevelt really paid attention to several people; several people were important people within the White House. He really was very interested and tried to get as many points of view as possible. He even promoted competition among all these people to see who of them would win in those fights between different arguments about each policy issue. So it was a model following this competitive uncertainty pattern.

Neustadt is one of the authors who argued that that is the best model, because under that model the President gets to get the most information on different issues. All the different positions in these fights try to present to the President the consequences, the negative consequences of the choice of the other people, right? So Neustadt argues that then the President gets to see all the negative consequences of all the different options. The negative and positive consequences of different options on the one hand; on the other hand, the President in that process wins something that is very valuable, Neustadt used to argue, which is time. Time to take a decision, to let the decision sort of develop itself and then take the best decision.

The other model, which was for instance used by (Dwight) Eisenhower, is the one of cooperative certainty where you have a chief of staff. There are clear lines of hierarchy. Under the competitive uncertainty model there are overlaps between topics. Nobody owns any topic. The President could give the analysis of one topic to two advisors. In the other model, there are clear lines of functions and topics, and each person for each office has a topic, and no other office can interfere with the analysis and the recommendations of that office to the President. Those analyses are passed to the chief of staff, and the chief of staff filters all the information and gives the President pretty much filtered information on what would be the best choices. Then the President only listens to one person who is the chief of staff. I'm exaggerating a little bit to clarify the models.

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: The advantages of that model are that it is faster, it is less difficult to manage, less chaotic.

By the way, some of course have criticized both models. In the case of competitive uncertainty, as I just said, it is criticized for being too disorganized, for not allowing the unified operation of the government, problems with implementation, problems with leaking of information because it is a much bigger staff and there are fights. So I previously mentioned the advantages, but these would be some of the disadvantages some others authors such as Rockman, for instance, had mentioned on the competitive uncertainty model.

Well Fox, not necessarily purposely or in a conscious way, but I think he tried to develop this first model, the competitive uncertainty, during the first three years. Why he did that, before going to the factors for the change? Again several factors could be mentioned, but I think one important one is that he conceived of himself and his government as a democratic transition government, not as a PAN (Partido Acción Nacional – National Action Party) government. PAN, as you know was his political party. At the beginning he saw his administration not so much as a partisan government, but as a pluralist government whose main responsibility was to consolidate the Mexican transition to democracy. So he put in play, in the cabinet, ministers who were both important because they sort of expressed some sort of plurality in some cases or some technical expertise.

My main hypothesis has been that since this was a cabinet [that was] somewhat distant, he felt the need to find ways to control that cabinet. Which is pretty much what I think happens in the US where the President has Secretaries who he, or perhaps soon she, doesn't feel [as] really close. So the Office of the President then functions as a way of controlling and guiding the ministers. Given this democratic transition, he appointed such type of cabinet which then expresses or had some effects on the type of Office of the Presidency. That's one reason.

Another reason was that once he had followed that logic to appoint the members of the cabinet, he had some people who he couldn't appoint—his people who he couldn't appoint in the cabinet and he had to put them somewhere. So he created these offices and in a way he achieved two objectives, right? On the one hand, he had an important position for the people that had been with him since he was a governor, and on the other hand he found, he felt, a secure way of trying to control all these ministers that were not “his” ministers.

Now, as time passed, he got to know the ministers better. He felt less of a need to control them because he started to have a more direct relationship with each of them, so there was a transition to the opposite of the first model.

On the other hand, the political situation came to be more difficult. This leftist candidate—which is (Andres Manuel) Lopez Obrador, if you have heard of him, who then was the head of the government of Mexico City—began to be an important candidate for the presidency. A fight developed between both of them. So this idea of pluralistic, nonpartisan government started to weaken, and the administration became more partisan. So the circle started to close.

JOYCE: Right. That means the Office of the Presidency was smaller?

MENDEZ: *Smaller, with less people. He started to delegate, to some extent, to people in the Office of the Presidency a little bit more. Another reason that I heard when I was there—I don't know if this is more formal or not, but it was that President Fox wanted some of these offices to endure, to last and the idea was that if he would leave them at the Office of the Presidency, then they would have been seen by the next government as projects, personal projects, like pet projects.*

JOYCE: Of President Fox.

MENDEZ: *Of President Fox and then they would be eliminated.*

JOYCE: Rather than Mexican priorities.

MENDEZ: *Right. Then if those offices went to the ministers they would be more institutional and less personal, and probably they would have a better chance to stay as*

projects, like the ones with the indigenous people and some other ones. So those were reasons both why President Fox created such an office to begin with, but which, if you see them on the opposite side, has just the same reasons for the office to become smaller.

JOYCE: You mentioned—you brought up a lot of important topics right now but the urge to move these offices to ministries in order to allow them to continue through to the next administration—are there any permanent civil servants in the Office of the Presidency that enjoy protection under civil service law?

MENDEZ: *Good that you mentioned that. No, they are not protected by any such law; for some time what is called the legal counsel office was protected by such a law when this was passed, but then that stopped.*

JOYCE: To this day? There are still not—?

MENDEZ: *In Mexico, we didn't have a civil service up to 2003 in the federal government. In the whole country, we had never had a civil service. That had been a topic which had been discussed for a long time, back to the '50s and '60s. But the PRI never had wanted to develop a civil service because it was a clientelistic government and a clientelistic party and this type of spoils system really fit such a clientelistic type of regime.*

When President Fox arrived in December 2000, one of the promises that he had campaigned on was the civil service, starting or developing a civil service. I, myself, had been a main advocate of a civil service in Mexico. So when he came to the presidency, since that had been a campaign offer, it started a discussion on the issue. But one thing is to make a promise and another thing is to keep it. Many people said, "No, no, we shouldn't do it because it was nice that we promised that, but that was the campaign, and now we've got the government."

And some other people like me, on the other hand, supported the idea.

JOYCE: So there was the urge to fill it with PAN people?

MENDEZ: *Right. Well actually, the ministries were, to some extent, filled with PAN people, but not that many people, because Fox didn't have such a big number of personal followers. So yes, a lot of PAN people went, but a lot of PRI people stayed because the government is very big. We are talking about around, let's say in round numbers, 100,000 civil servants, policy-related, not cleaning, etcetera, etcetera. Fox couldn't fill all those positions with PAN people.*

On the other hand, he didn't want to because a lot of people there knew their functions and changing a lot of people in the government could involve risks in terms of delivering the services and the promises.

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *Anyway so there was no civil service, and to make a long story short, after many discussions both within the presidency and with Congress, a civil service was approved in April 2003. For many years, the fact that there was no civil service was one structural reason explaining the fact that the Office of the Presidency in Mexico has been so small compared to the US. It is still small. Perhaps the only exception to that rule was Fox's first two or three years, when he grew it so much before the civil service law was approved in 2003.*

But really it [the civil service] just started. I left then—I didn't mention that before because there was no time, but I left the Office of the Presidency in May 2003, to lead the office of the civil service, to establish the civil service in Mexico. I stayed there one year because I was somebody sent by the presidency, and I was not part of that ministry. That was the idea, to send somebody to start—I mean, well I don't want to go into that too much, but the issue is that there was a personnel office within the the Finance Ministry. All that office had to go to a new ministry, which was created from another ministry. The President didn't want the Finance Ministry to feel defeated by the other ministry, so they sent me, who didn't belong either to finance or the other ministry which was to start the civil service office.

Once I started the office and coordinated the elaboration of the civil service statute, I came back to the presidency, and then the Ministry of the Public Function put somebody of that ministry in that position. But the point is that we didn't have civil service up to 2003, and even then it was very weak and still is very weak.

JOYCE: So in 2006 and now again, two years ago in 2012, when a new President comes in, he can fire everyone in the Office of the Presidency and hire everyone new?

MENDEZ: *In the Office of the Presidency, yes. For some time there was one exception, because there is another office which I didn't mention, which is the legal office.*

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *The law of 2003 established that that office had to be under the rules and the norms of the civil service. I don't know exactly what happened, but I think that some years later that office was taken out from the civil service regulations or the civil service system. Now the President can name anybody he wants in all the offices of the Office of the Presidency. Although some of the people who I brought to the unit of analysis are still there. They survived the transition to (Felipe) Calderon.*

For instance, some of the speechwriters that I brought are still there. I guess it is difficult to explain, but at least part of the explanation is that they know how to write speeches. So if they write good speeches, they stay, right?

JOYCE: But really, from one presidency to the next, it's overwhelming turnover.

MENDEZ: *Yes, overwhelming turnover. In the Office of the Presidency, to some extent in the cabinet with Calderon, and a lot with (Enrique) Peña (Nieto) in the cabinet, not only the Office of the Presidency.*

JOYCE: The cabinet as well.

MENDEZ: *Despite the civil service.*

JOYCE: Earlier you brought up that political considerations are made when structuring the Office of the Presidency [Indecipherable 00:40:31] and you mentioned that Fox wanted to put in different people as ministers but he had certain close confidants, so he needed to put them into the Office of the Presidency.

It seems like there is a tension between an organizing challenge, how you're going to organize the presidency, if it is going to be the two models that you just described or am I going to put my political people in place. Do you think that that

is a challenge that just about every President of Mexico faces when they're structuring their office?

MENDEZ: *I am not sure if they will be contradictory or not. It would be one or the other because you can create competitive uncertainty with your own people or you can create cooperative certainty with your own people too.*

That would be regarding the Office of the Presidency, but regarding the cabinet really—I mean Fox was the only one—Zedillo a little bit too, but Fox really was the only one who tried to put technical people as ministers. Calderon came and put a cabinet mostly composed of his friends, people he knew, and Peña of course too, both in the Office of the Presidency and in the cabinet. That is why also the Office of the Presidency stays so small, because the President knows his ministers very well; it is not like the US. In the US you have distant ministers. You need the big White House to try to control the ministers.

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *In Mexico, you are close to your ministers or the ministers are very close to you. You don't need a big White House, because you don't need to control them. You, yourself, control them.*

JOYCE: So how would you compare Calderon's Office of the Presidency to Fox's?

MENDEZ: *Okay, then let's tell you the story about Calderon's Office of the Presidency. You know what—we are building an annex to the library and now they started the excavation. [lots of noise] I don't know if you want to move to someplace, if you think it's going to be a problem?*

JOYCE: If there is somewhere convenient.

MENDEZ: *Maybe we can go to another place, let me think which one.*

JOYCE: So we were talking about a comparison between President Fox's Office of the Presidency and President Calderon's.

MENDEZ: *When Calderon came to the presidency, he developed a cooperative certainty model clearly. He named a chief of his staff, whose name was Juan Camilio Mourifio, who was his closest collaborator. Mourifio was as powerful as Cordoba was with Salinas, that powerful guy that I mentioned. He was a sort of prime minister from the Office of the Presidency in a way. He really controlled many of the policies, and many of the ministers had to obey his orders.*

So he was chief of staff, controlling all those offices, and I mean all of them. Calderon created an Office of the Presidency, within which you had the mass media office and the agenda's office and all the offices under the control of Mourifio. That lasted for about two years more or less. Then, in January 2008, Mourifio was appointed as Minister of the Interior, which actually he was in fact. But there were some fights between him and the actual minister. So maybe that's why Calderon appointed him. It seems that he didn't want to become Minister because he had all the power without the responsibility in the Office of the Presidency, but he had to go there.

Then the Office of the Presidency was fragmented, divided up—I mean the agenda office went out of the Office of the Presidency in a strict sense. The mass media also went out. I think those two. I don't know if there was another one. He,

the head of the Office of the Presidency, was no longer chief of staff because he didn't control the agenda, and all the ministries again reported directly to the President. But, in a way, [he] was still powerful because the rest of the offices were still within that Office of the Presidency.

Then, later on this new guy in the Office of the President was named Secretary of Economy. A lady came, Patricia Flores (Elizondo), as the head of the Office of the Presidency, and she tried to be like Mouriño, she tried to control everything, control more the ministers. She got into many fights with the ministers, and she lasted like maybe one year and a half, trying to come back to the cooperative certainty model, the clear cooperative certainty chief of staff model, but because of all these conflicts and some other reasons, she had to go out.

Then, the guy who had been named Secretary of the Economy was brought back to the Office of the Presidency again and then there he remained until the end. So more or less that was the story of the Office of the Presidency with Calderon. With some variations we could see mostly as a cooperative certainty type, while Fox was first competitive uncertainty for the first three years and a sort of flexible or soft version of cooperative certainty in the second half with Fox.

JOYCE: Could you tell us a little bit about the Cabinet Coordination Office under Calderon's Office of the Presidency and maybe the strategic planning and goals setting, and how those two offices or initiatives compared to previous examples?

MENDEZ: *Well I don't know so much really specifically about the cabinet office. They have what we call the cabinets which are the economic cabinet, the social cabinet, and the political cabinet.*

JOYCE: That sort of structure has existed since before Calderon?

MENDEZ: *Yes, since before, maybe since Salinas probably. Those cabinets are composed of the ministers dealing with the issues related to those big issues: economic, social, and politics. There is one small office like a secretariat for each of these cabinets, which belongs to the presidency, in most cases to the Office of the Presidency in a strict sense, not to the mass media, not to the agenda, but to the Office of the Presidency within the Office of the Presidency. So this has not varied much.*

I attended some of the meetings of some of the cabinets when I was at the presidency. It looked to me very formal. I mean important issues were discussed, but these cabinets were so big and so formal with all these people that it is difficult to take decisions on issues.

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *I mean this decision or that project was discussed, what problems were involved with the implementation. The Secretary of the Office of that Cabinet took notes and then reported to the President. Sometimes, very few times, the President was present, basically when some important issues were discussed.*

JOYCE: This was under President Fox?

MENDEZ: *Under President Fox. But probably with the other ones would function similarly, I would think. During Fox, the presidency of each cabinet rotated among the ministers. The office of the secretariat of each of these cabinets is not too big, must be around three or four people in an office. They would have some*

information on each of these topics, and the policies taking place during each of the governments.

During Calderon there was one which was especially important, which was the security cabinet, that was another cabinet different from the political. During Calderon that was very important. The spokesperson for security was very important. Later on, this person became the Minister of the Interior. No I'm sorry, this was from before Calderon. In fact, Fox separated security policy from the Ministry of the Interior and created a Security Ministry.

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *Which until today exists. That security cabinet was very important because of Calderon's war against drugs. So probably in that case that cabinet was much more influential, and a working cabinet really compared to the other ones in my view.*

You questioned me on the planning process and all that. Well, I don't know what you were talking about exactly, but in Mexico every government has to develop a national plan. The cabinets had something to do with that, but it is mostly the Office of the Presidency which elaborates the plan. The plan has to be presented I think it is by June of the next year after the President takes power. Then after that, you have what we call Sectorial Plans in which the cabinets are much more involved, dealing with economic, social policies, etcetera, etcetera.

Then the cabinets follow through the implementation of those plans. That is one of their functions I think. But that is more on the formal side of planning. In terms of more specific strategic plans, those could be developed but would be more confidential, less known to the public.

There is also an office coordinating all those secretariats of all the cabinets. That was the case with Calderon. I don't know with Fox. With Fox I don't remember. I think Calderon created that.

JOYCE: Created that office—.

MENDEZ: *To coordinate the secretariats of the cabinets. Yes, I think so.*

JOYCE: So [that's] under Calderon, and then how has it worked previously? Mexico has developed these five-year national plans for years. Who keeps the ministries and the ministers accountable to following through on those plans?

MENDEZ: *The Office of the Presidency. And supposedly, the Congress, but there are no sanctions for not achieving the goals. Congress really doesn't pay much attention, because Congress knows that if a goal is not fulfilled, nothing happens on the one hand. On the other hand the goals, in many cases, not all cases, but in many cases, are drafted in such a way to be easily accomplished or to be not so clearly accountable in terms of results. So it is useful to some extent, to clarify the goal, etcetera, etcetera, but in terms of accountability, it really is not important. Nothing happens.*

JOYCE: From your perspective, what sort of obstacles did Calderon encounter in trying to coordinate his ministries to meet the goals he wanted to meet?

MENDEZ: *There I would say two things. I haven't studied that topic specifically, but I would say two things. First, politics is like a universal law in all countries. Even if in*

Mexico the President appoints a Secretary close to him, to some extent or the other, the Secretary is going to play his own game. Many of them will try to be candidates for the presidency later on. So the bureaucratic politics are there. The President always will have problems trying to control and trying to get the ministers to do what he wants. That would be the first part.

The second part is that in the case of Calderon, he was very tight. I mean he tightly controlled—he not only appointed people very close to him as ministers, but also the deputy ministers and also the general directors. Actually, he didn't follow the civil service closely. Even though it was a law passed by a government of his own party, he did put many PAN people in the government.

JOYCE: Right.

MENDEZ: *The Office of the Presidency, beginning with Mouriño or even later really, was quite powerful in terms of controlling the ministers. For instance, just to mention one or two specific points, the ministers were not allowed to make any important announcements. What they were going to say in any public conference or press conference, had to first be approved by the mass media communication office of the presidency. Calderon centralized a lot of the operation of the government.*

Calderon was very tough with his ministers, he really was very rude with his ministers. I saw that several times. In public he scolded them and he even ridiculed them sometimes. Because sometimes the ministers, for one reason or the other, didn't do what he wanted them to do. I don't know if that was because the ministers didn't want to say no to the President, because when Calderon didn't hear a positive answer to any of his claims he got very angry. I don't want to get into that too much because that is another topic but Calderon, and everybody agrees on this, he has a extremely —to put it softly--, extremely strong personality. He didn't admit a no to whatever he wanted.

So many ministers said when he asked for something, he said yes, and then they tried to do as much as they could. And then they couldn't do what he wanted, and at some point he realized that and then he scolded them. But the ministers were really afraid of Calderon. They really were afraid of him, of being scolded in public or privately. I mean Calderon used to bang the table in the meetings, quite often.

Several people at the presidency I had interviewed told me how they sometimes went very scared to the meetings with the President because at any moment he could explode. So those two are very general answers to your question. He had obstacles, as any other President, because the Secretaries either couldn't do what he wanted them to do or wanted to do something different [than] what he wanted them to do. Whatever the case, he had problems controlling and coordinating, as it happens in any government. Even in Mexico, when the President appoints such close ministers, and then appoints also the people below them.

JOYCE: Did he have any special obstacles because of the centralized way he ran the office?

MENDEZ: *Probably. I'm thinking out loud here. One, which is very evident, is that resentment grew. Because he scolded his ministers in public, and these guys were ministers, not just anybody. So I felt a resentment increasingly growing as the years passed. An indicator of that is how he began to lose the control of the Party. As he tried to control in such a hasty way the ministers, he tried to control*

the Party too; he scolded many members of the Party too. And he paid for that later. He lost the control of the Party.

Recently, I don't know if you knew, his wife tried to first be a candidate for a representative post in the chamber of representatives, and the leader of the PAN said no. Then she tried to be a candidate for the Presidency of the Party, and the Party said no. Now, today I read in the news a prominent figure of PAN saying, "Well, Calderon is saying that he is going to leave the Party. Just leave then, we don't care."

I don't know if that is what you expected to hear, but that way of trying to control so strongly and in such ways his government really was counterproductive in some instances. People sometimes were not so motivated, other than by fear. Sometimes they felt depressed, some of them end up in the hospital, because of the pressure and because of the treatment.

JOYCE: That is sort of my next question. By what criteria would you judge a successful Office of the Presidency?

MENDEZ: *Well, that is a question that will lead to some other issues. For me, the success of the Office of the Presidency has to do with controlling the government but it is not the most important criteria for me. The most important criterion for me is the capacity of the Office of the Presidency to help the President to make good decisions, to think and act strategically. That is for me the main function of an Office of the Presidency.*

For that, I have argued that what you need is [a] sort of balance between the competitive uncertainty model and the cooperative certainty model; a balance between the two. I say a balance because you've got to lean towards one of those. Leaning towards one of those will depend mostly on the personality and the capacities and the competencies of the President. The personality is key—I mean Eisenhower, a military man, what would you expect? He was accustomed and he knew how to manage [a] cooperative certainty model. Roosevelt was a skillful politician; he knew how to manage a competitive uncertainty model. But you wouldn't put Eisenhower to try to manage a competitive uncertainty [model] because it would be a mess.

Nixon for instance couldn't, or in Mexico Miguel de la Madrid. Some Presidents just cannot manage a competitive model, they'd go crazy. Some other ones can manage that. In those cases it could be a good and functioning model. But anyway, I think the President has to feel relatively comfortable, of course, with the model of his office of the presidency. But when I say balanced, I mean that if you develop a competitive uncertainty model, you have to try to avoid its disadvantages. For instance, you have to take a decision at some point on something. You cannot keep discussing a subject, which the competitive uncertainty model leads you to do. You have got to limit that model.

In the case of the cooperative certainty, where you have a chief of staff, he or she is going to filter the information to you as President, but for instance you could have channels with other people from the private sector to try to balance that. I think that when you balance those two models, then you can get enough information to develop strategic decisions on the agenda—what are the main projects you are going to follow—and then on the content of those projects and then in the implementation process. Also, a good Office of the Presidency is

capable of helping the President to go back. When what appeared to be a good decision at some point is really a bad decision.

For instance, in the case of Calderon, I have argued in several articles that this extreme case of cooperative certainty and chief of staff model, especially with Mourinho, led to some bad decisions, like the decision to launch the war on drugs in such a way, to put the war on drugs as the main and almost sole issue of the agenda, and to thus put all the eggs in that box. That was a mistake, a big mistake.

Another big mistake was the almost exclusively military strategy to fight the drug traffic, the narco traffic. There was nobody there to tell the President, "President, no, I think this is a bad idea" because this is a hierarchical type of Office of the Presidency where nobody says no to the President.

So Calderon first made mistakes, and then under this model, he was unable to really correct the mistakes. In the case of Fox, the first cabinet was also extreme, because there were too many generals. So there was much dispersion, the government didn't act in a unified way. So it was the other extreme. In my view, none of the recent presidents have been able to reach that balance. I thought that Peña at the beginning maybe was reaching a balance—I get we don't have too much time to get into Peña—but he established more like a sort of cooperative certainty rather because there is a powerful guy there, (Aurelio) Nuño (Mayer), although he is not the only one supposedly; I am studying that, I still don't know exactly.

At the beginning I thought it wasn't hierarchical, but I'm increasingly coming to believe that it has been. For instance, some big decisions, bad decisions have been made, like the video by his wife defending the purchase of her house. I cannot understand how nobody at the presidency told the President, "This video cannot go out." Producing that video was much worse, as the First Lady began to be mocked all over at the web. I mean really it was a very bad decision. The popularity of Peña went down like twelve points in one month. In part, because of Ayotzinapa, which was another mistake. How come nobody at the presidency told the President, "You cannot leave this to the state; you've got to grab it immediately and solve it, try to solve it as quickly as possible." Because the government waited like one week, and in that week many of the evidence disappeared, some of the guilty ones escaped, etcetera. They caught them later on, but that was a big mistake.

So several mistakes have been made, although on the Peña administration I guess the jury is still out.

JOYCE: I think Dan may have a question for you on that.

BERBECEL: In terms of the 2012 transition, what was the dynamic in terms of how the Peña Nieto administration prepared to take power and how the Calderon administration helped the transition team?

MENDEZ: *I don't know so much about that really, but what I was able to see, mainly in the newspapers, was that Calderon was very cooperative. He helped—as far as I know, the Office of the Presidency-- helped Peña to have a good beginning and to arrive at the presidency. He was instrumental from policy issues to personal and family issues. I know that Calderon and his Office of the Presidency helped Peña to rebuild, to some extent, Los Pinos to better accommodate the much bigger Peña family.*

This is another story but when Fox arrived, or rather before Fox arrived in Los Pinos, there were several residences. One of those is a big house; by big house I mean, I don't know, twenty rooms more or less, plus several dining rooms. That house, that was where the Presidents lived. There were some other houses, residences, where there were different offices. When Fox arrived, he rebuilt that big house, leaving the former presidential residence as offices, and moved to two little houses with his family.

When Peña arrived, since they had so many children, his children and her children, they said that they needed to live in what was the original house of the President. So Calderon's office helped Peña to rebuild again that house so that when Peña arrived to the presidency in December 1st everything was ready for them to move to live on the big house.

JOYCE: Which is Los Pinos?

MENDEZ: Los Pinos is all the houses. Within Los Pinos you have the house where the president lives with his family but also you have seven or eight additional buildings or houses, which are mainly used as offices.

JOYCE: It is like a compound, campus.

MENDEZ: Yes, it is like a compound. It is composed of several houses and buildings. One of those big houses, probably the biggest, was the house where the Presidents lived. That was the one Fox didn't want to live in. [It was] also like a symbol: "I don't want any privileges." This house—I don't know how the White House is exactly but I've seen many pictures, many movies. This house at some point had a bowling alley, had a private cinema. Many fancy facilities, very luxurious. Then Fox took everything out and made that house [into] offices. When Peña moved back there, I know Calderon helped him to do that. In addition to the help on all the policy issues—I really didn't hear of any conflicts among them in this regard. There were conflicts more between Fox and Calderon than between Calderon and Peña.

JOYCE: Right, which was ironic because they [Fox and Calderon] were the same party.

BERBECEL: Speaking of that can you talk a little bit about the transition from Fox to Calderon? I heard from some place that it went less smoothly than the one from Calderon to Peña.

MENDEZ: Yes, that is what I was saying, it was less smooth.

BERBECEL: What changed between the two transitions? Was it just the personalities of the different presidents or were there any structural factors that contributed?

MENDEZ: There were several factors. I don't know if you know but Calderon was not Fox's candidate. Calderon had to fight his way through. Actually Calderon was probably the only minister actually Fox scolded in public. This was because in 2003 Calderon --despite the fact that the electoral process was to start until October 2005, so two years in advance — Calderon, while being Minister of Energy, accepted that one of his followers organized the electoral opening of the campaign of his campaign and this made Fox mad.

JOYCE: The start of the campaign?

- MENDEZ: Yes, so they made an event where Calderon said I want to be President and I want to be the candidate of my Party.*
- JOYCE: Right.*
- MENDEZ: That was like one year and a half, two years before the electoral period started. Fox couldn't tolerate that. I don't remember exactly what he said, but he made a statement at a public event about that, saying that it was bad, etcetera, etcetera. Calderon, with his character, quit. He said that he was not going to be scolded by anybody. So he quit and he started his campaign. Fox supported the then Minister of the Interior (Santiago) Creel. Fox wanted him to be the candidate, not Calderon.*
- Once Calderon won the candidacy, Fox had to accept that and support him, and he supported him, and he [Calderon] won to a great extent thanks to Fox's support. But still—now he was the President. So he was [the same] as Fox—and of course he thought he was better than Fox. The formalities happened and Calderon also lived in those two houses. But there were frictions between both of them; it was not a smooth transition.*
- In the case of Calderon and Peña, I mean Peña was the candidate of another Party. It was funny because at the end, because of his [Calderon's] failures, the Party which Calderon fought against during two decades won the presidency. But Calderon is very pragmatic, so he said "Well".*
- JOYCE: Right.*
- MENDEZ: Calderon wanted somebody else to be the candidate of the PAN, but he could not impose it. So the candidate of the PAN, Josefina Vazquez, was not his candidate. He said that he supported her but really he did not support her because it was not his candidate.*
- JOYCE: Who was his candidate?*
- MENDEZ: He [Cordero] is now a Senator. Ernesto Cordero was his candidate. But the PAN—the PAN is a special Party and when they see that the President tries to impose somebody on them they react, and it is counterproductive as both cases, Fox and Calderon, show.*
- BERBECEL: I'm still wondering, could you talk a little bit about the transition team of Peña and in particular how he managed to balance—I read that there were two forces and there was the old guard PRI and newer, younger technocrats who didn't have that much political experience? Can you talk about that a little bit?*
- MENDEZ: I really don't know much about that. I'm not so sure who are the new ones. [laughing] Maybe we should stop.*