

economic development is mostly ignored, as is the extent to which democracy's legitimacy depends on its ability to solve problems. Greater attention to crime is needed throughout the region; public officials need to think hard about how the surge in crime can be reversed.

It would be easier to proceed if we knew just why crime has risen in the last ten to fifteen years in Latin America. But there are competing explanations and no way to prove their relative merits. And, in any case, the prominent theories suggest Herculean projects: ending poverty or transforming the culture. The only viable short-run policy seems to be effective law enforcement. Citizens don't engage in crime for two reasons: (1) the coercive power of the state and (2) the moral authority of the state. The first has been weakened in Latin America by the transition from authoritarianism to democracy

and the second has yet to be established by the new democracies. Building the moral authority of the state is an ambitious and long-term endeavor. So the burden for now falls on making the coercive power more consistent, fair, and effective.

Given the sorry condition of many of the police forces and judicial systems in the region, this task cannot be accomplished just by adding to the ranks of the police; and it is dangerous to augment their ranks with personnel from the armed forces, as has been tried in Mexico and Brazil. Police forces have to be completely rebuilt and judicial systems overhauled—these are among the first reforms that democratic rulers must seek.

FORREST D. COLBURN's most recent book is *The Vogue of Revolution in Poor Countries*.

## Article 6

*Cultural Survival Quarterly*, Winter 1998

# Latin America

## *The Internet and Indigenous Texts*

by Guillermo Delgado-P. and Marc Becker

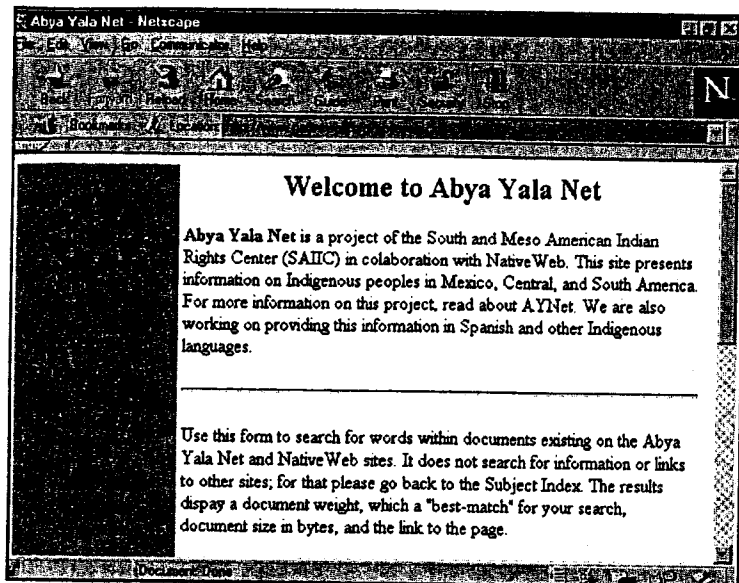
In an age of global communication and computer technology, indigenous peoples have slowly gained access to electronic communication. With all of the hype surrounding cyberspace and hyperspaces as we enter a new millennium, we need to examine how indigenous peoples use and are impacted by this technology. Is there still a possibility that marginalized indigenous territories within Latin America are successfully and effectively utilizing this technology to make their voices heard?

Anthropologists' fears that electronic communication would inevitably have a negative impact on indigenous peoples, who gained access to Western culture's consumer commodities, have been discredited. Our images of Western culture contaminating untouched and pristine indigenous cultures have been irremediably crushed. Globalization has caused the demise of whatever pristine elements or environments remained, as well as these naive images of indigenous peoples.

Native activists and scholars have observed that patterns of economic inequality which exist elsewhere have been repro-

duced in access to electronic media. A noticeable crevice based on the accumulation (or lack) of wealth reproduces Latin America's historical discrepancies found in the interaction between non-indigenous peoples and 'peoples without histories,' as indigenous societies have often been considered. Rather than creating a space for the democratization of society, electronic communication systems reinforce traditional hierarchical social structures. This dynamic reproduces a socio-economic interpretative approach that helps explain the manner in which wealth has been accumulated and distributed over the last five centuries, reproducing a hierarchy between 'core' or developed nations, and 'peripheral' or undeveloped nations. This paradigm also highlights how economic relations in Latin America isolate and discriminate against indigenous communities by placing them, geographically speaking, on the periphery.

Following this core-periphery paradigm, indigenous peoples who live in proximity to the core have been touched by its magic and consciously participate in world politics through their access to the web or the never-ending Internet information lists. Alternatively, those societies separated from the core suf-



fer the consequences of being 'delinked' despite their wish to enter into the dynamics of information exchanges in cyberspace. Unfortunately, a lack of money and computer technology stifles such desires.

Although personal computers (PCs) have reached indigenous peoples, the use and distribution of this technology reproduces a picture similar to what happened after Alexander Bell invented the telephone. In Latin America, during the Alliance for Progress program in the 1960s, a sociologist considered the phone to be an indicator of a person's class and social status in society. The assumption was that those individuals or family units connected to a phone line belonged to the middle class!

So far, indigenous peoples' experience with electronic communication has followed a similar dynamic. Despite early developments which indicated that computer networks might prove to be a democratizing influence, it now threatens to become another tool which the elite use to dominate society and exclude indigenous peoples from political discourse. Today, those with access to telephone lines and PCs are indeed experiencing certain privileges, and those without access are becoming increasingly marginalized. Unless there are broad structural changes, these networks may fail in their attempt to induce positive changes within society.

In this short article, we restrict our analysis to the use of interactive electronic conferencing via PCs, primarily as a means of enabling indigenous peoples, who live in remote areas and share common concerns, to exchange information regarding their similar problems of relating to nation-states. We will illustrate the relationship between computer ownership and economic disenfranchisement. Such comparisons allow us to analyze the use of PCs which have been implemented to educate the general public on human rights for indigenous peoples. Electronic bulletins presumably allow for a more democratic participation in society since it is the indigenous peoples who become subjects of their own electronic transmissions.

These bulletins allow a degree of equal access to the public unparalleled by any other medium. Although not all indigenous peoples are active participants on the Internet, leaders and their representatives (or non-indigenous co-workers acting in solidarity and in direct consultation with indigenous peoples), are at the center of this endeavor.

### North and South

While electronic communication has been in use since WWII, it was not until the late 1970s that a few universities established closed-circuit computer networks. The 1980s introduced the widespread use of PCs which led to a continual rise in computer access and a drop in associated costs. As a direct result of the uneven distribution of computers, electronic networks, and infrastructure, tribes and indigenous organizations in North America began to use PCs before their counterparts in the southern part of the Americas (or for that matter, throughout the rest of the world). This is largely due to the

active presence of native intellectuals at North American universities in academic centers that are devoted to the study, research, and promotion of indigenous cultures. This experience has not been repeated in Latin America, where, with few exceptions, indigenous peoples are not allowed to house research centers at national universities.

The expanded use of the Internet in universities, government offices, and businesses during the early 1990s helped indigenous organizations circulate an increasing amount of information regarding the relationships between nation-states and indigenous peoples. In the North, those messages generally dealt with news related to sovereignty issues and the interaction between indigenous representatives and the nation-state. Archiving retrievable information on specific problems, tribes, treatises, and cultural issues allowed for the emergence of a truly dynamic cyberspace. For the first time, indigenous peoples accessed information that enhanced their knowledge about the complexity of indigenous life. They could read messages and learn from one another through the system.

With greater use of the Internet by indigenous peoples, ethnic identities became much more important. People who did not formally belong to an indigenous group rediscovered their ethnic heritage and others claiming Indian heritage began populating the newsgroups and mailing lists. Many people used the Internet to raise questions concerning their personal and collective identities and to share their histories. Before the Internet, these histories were only accessible through restricted classified systems at university or public libraries. In other words, the information came home and in exchange, people started to share their own oral histories regarding their indigenous experiences.

Columbus' quincentennial initiated a reunion of indigenous peoples of the North and the South. This reunion symbolized an awareness of 'indigeness' and their shared colonial experiences. They were able to exchange information pertaining to a continental saga set within the framework of the nation-

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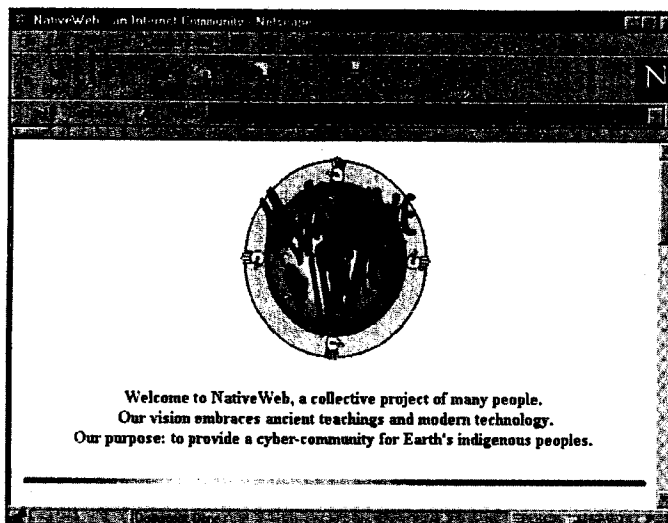
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state, globalization, and human rights. People started to build exchanges and organized meetings with the purpose of furthering decolonization. Indigenous collective entities continued to struggle for the preservation of their livelihoods and territories against the reckless incursion of transnational corporations. For indigenous peoples, the debate was, and still is the struggle over colonialism, neocolonialism, and liberation.

### PCs and Economic Inequality

Internet access has become a specialty; one must be trained before navigating the Internet and computers are not always openly available to indigenous peoples. Computer technology has been taught in a manner which makes indigenous peoples recall the way their languages work. Most of these languages work on an agglutinative principle; a root word provides the base and an infinite number of suffixes are added according to the situation. Computer technology, listservs, newsgroups, and websites work in this way as well.



After the electronic 'brouhaha' of the early 1990s, access to information has slowed and tends to be routine rather than sporadic, as participants regulate their contributions. Rapid PC technological change has provoked short circuits. Floppies, as well as early PC consoles quickly became outdated. Today, specialization emerges as participants look for their own 'cybertribes.' Mailing lists start to crisscross and overlapping purposes inundate users with unwanted information. To address this problem, specialized lists which focus on specific areas and themes have emerged as an alternative to an overwhelming amount of generic information on 'Indians.' Participants have started to build networks in order to more effectively manage their time on-line. The Internet has become so specialized that participants tend to stick together. Internet participants express their opinions freely which produces a sense of equality in the process of exchanging information. Several interesting cases will highlight the extent to which the Internet has allowed the flow of information.

### Cases in Latin America

In Guatemala, the Powers that Be brandished internal security arguments to curtail the use of the Internet. As indigenous organizations gained computer knowledge to press for their cultural rights, traditional sectors of the government tried to control this flow of information. Due to this tense situation, Maya on-line activists have been labeled 'hackers,' providing us with an important example of the limits and potential of communication technology in third world countries. Adaptation of computer technology to meet local needs, however, helps redefine cultural and national identities. Not only have computer technological issues been solved, but programs have been adapted to the specifics of indigenous reality.

The Maya project is one of the most serious attempts at creating a space on the Internet for the 22 indigenous cultures which still exist in Guatemala. The Maya are working to retrieve all the information that pertains to their culture starting with programs of linguistic restoration, as well as documents that may shed light on the legitimacy of their ancient territorial claims. The Maya of Guatemala constitute one of the best examples where Western computer technology, appropriately used by the Maya themselves, has been co-opted to promote their demands within the nation-state. Unless the military regains their Cold War dictatorial power as it often appears evident, the Guatemalan example could be one where PC technology mediates a true democratization process.

Although the Kuna nation of Panama is numerically small, it also has strong young organizations which make serious use of computer technology. Demonstrating ethnic assertiveness for many years, the Kuna, especially through their organization *Kunas Unidos de Napguana* or 'United Kunas of Napguana,' have served as the frame of reference regarding ethnic identity. The Internet has helped the Kuna become strong international advocates of environmental issues. Some of their members have been able to establish strong collaborative relationships with environmental organizations. Environmentalists have invited their leaders to serve as consultants for international agencies, to develop plans that defend the environment, and to work for human rights for indigenous peoples. Kuna representatives have become leading figures in debates concerning biodiversity, indigenous property rights, and DNA collection. The use of electronic media has been extremely important to them in defending their interests and questioning government decisions.

Radical changes in the way politics have worked under the PRI-dominated political system in Mexico have also opened space for a more active voice for indigenous peoples. Starting with the Zapatista Uprising of 1994, the use of computer technology and the Internet played an essential role in the diffusion of information. Although indigenous peoples themselves are rarely visible on the Internet, some indigenous individuals have been able to train themselves on the use of computer technology.

Indigenous peoples in Mexico continue to live under a system of profound poverty which leaves organizing and gaining access to computer systems in the hands of the non-indigenous majority. A few positive beginnings have failed, such as the

mation of the International Office of the Indigenous Press (IPI) in 1992. This was one of the first organizations of indigenous journalists, based in Latin America, Europe, and U.S., that tried to coordinate an international network. Unfortunately, they did not have strong economic support. The office received outside financial aid, but was unable to become a functional unit. IPI accumulated exorbitant phone bills and was eventually forced to sell their computers in order to pay off debts. Although this idea was essentially a good one, the lack of expertise defeated the cause and by 1997, IPI became a one-person struggle.

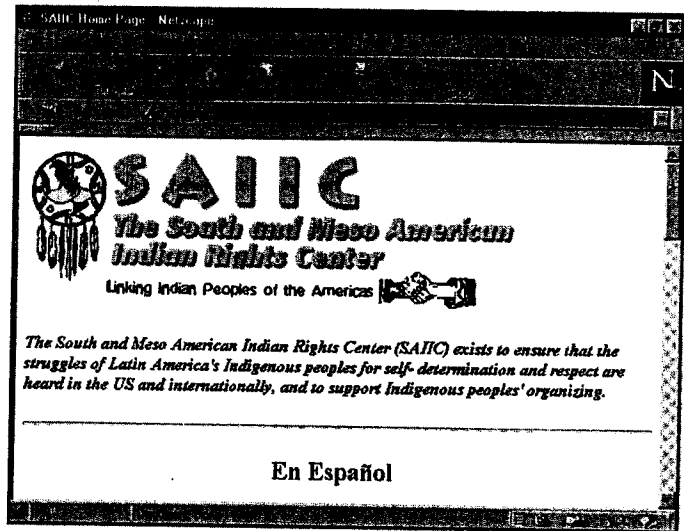
The Mapuche in Chile working with the Council of All Peoples, the Aymara in Bolivia and Peru, the pan-Indian CONAIE coalition in Ecuador, and occasionally, the ONIC in Colombia, sporadically participate in building computer networks. As one heads south, access to satellites, computers, and phone lines becomes an important issue for indigenous peoples. If sociologists previously thought that possession of telephone lines entitled individuals or families to qualify for middle-class status, this theory can now be applied to the economically disenfranchised indigenous peoples of the Andean region and the Amazon basin. In these areas, indigenous peoples are often dependent as their ability to use computer technology remains limited. It is difficult for economically viable indigenous groups to acquire a personal computer. Those organizations with computers do not actively send information concerning their situations or contribute their own perspectives on important issues.

### Obstacles to the Internet

In the Amazon and the Andes, indigenous peoples exist in a state of dependency, domination, and control. Until this situation is reversed, demands cannot be clearly heard on the Internet. In the Andean area has traditionally trusted the short wave radio as the primary means of communication between indigenous peoples. Since the short wave radio is still an important and economically accessible system of communication, they have been less interested in current computer technology which continues to be very expensive.

In the Amazon basin, the CPI (Comissão Pro-Índio) of São Paulo has functioned as a hub which coordinates the reception and transmission of indigenous news. CIMI (the Conselho Indigenista Missionário or Indianist Missionary Council) supports indigenous efforts but retains an outsiders' perspective, non-indigenous in Brazil, that views indigenous peoples as child-like. There are few indigenous individuals who have entered journalism and even fewer who have the economic power to communicate their ideas through the Internet. Although indigenous peoples occasionally utilize written forms of journalism, it has been difficult to move from this form to the electronic media. Indigenous persons (often anthropologists or missionaries) continue to mediate these systems which produce an image of an absentee indigenous voice that is reduced to a level of dependency without agency.

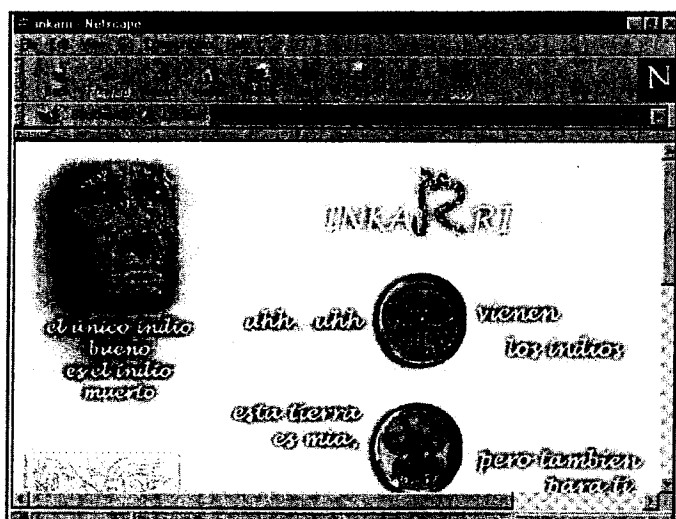
In the U.S. and Canada, indigenous networks have received extensive technical support from universities and others who have helped as a way of collaborating with indigenous peoples. Examples include the establishment of GLAIN (Great Lakes



American Indian Network), NativeNet (under the direction of Gary Trujillo in Boston), NativeWeb (which universities in Kansas and New York hosted before acquiring its own domain), and SAIC-L (hosted as saic.indio on 'PeaceNet' in San Francisco). In Latin America, however, such collaboration is rare and often does not work.

The general public is more informed about indigenous issues in areas where PCs are a household item, such as in the U.S. or Europe, than in the areas where most indigenous peoples live. One reason is that some indigenous organizations in Latin America orient the information they disseminate to English speakers (often with the help of volunteer translators) hoping that in return, people in developed countries will financially contribute to indigenous causes. A second reason is the establishment of computer networks by indigenous peoples who live outside their traditional areas. This is the case with 'Inkarri,' an Information Center on Indigenous Issues sponsored by the Basque county of Vitoria-Gasteiz (northern Spain) and under the direction of an indigenous journalist. Inkarri's mission is to achieve a high level of professional journalism. Inkarri is probably the first website that emerged as a result of a constant exchange of information between Internet participants in the Andean region of South America, the U.S., and Europe. A similar Internet site has been functioning in Geneva, Switzerland under the name of 'Pueblo Indio.' As in the case of Inkarri, a team of indigenous peoples, as well as non-indigenous volunteers, concentrate their efforts on Andean issues and are in charge of this project. Whereas Pueblo Indio broadcasts in Spanish, Inkarri uses Spanish, Euzkera, and English.

The availability of information on the Internet has not resulted in a large or significant indigenous participation. Collaborative efforts between indigenous peoples and non-indigenous volunteers generate forms of 'cyberbrokerage' and solution-search strategies. These collaborative efforts often advocate for the reformation of policies at higher levels of decision making (for example, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund) when such policies affect indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have gained access to resources



which Western technology provides, but concrete progress in their quality of life continues to lag behind.

Needless to say, while the periphery remains a producer of information despite its 'hackers,' the availability of information remains paramount. Decisions that affect indigenous peoples continue to be made at institutions where power is a game. The idea that messages and urgent actions need to be translated into English so that they can have concrete repercussions is also a problem. For example, a section of the NativeWeb site called 'Abya Yala Net' focuses on indigenous issues in Latin America. The site is mostly in English and functions primarily as a research and information tool for activists in the North rather than as an organizing tool for indigenous organizations in the South.

### Representing Indigenous Women

While indigenous men are often content with their ability to participate in cyberspace, the same is not true for indigenous women. Indigenous websites have, for the most part, failed to include indigenous women. While women have gained stronger representation in indigenous organizations, their opportunities to work with electronic equipment have been circumscribed. Thus, women's voices on the Internet are very limited and access to resources that would facilitate their training continue to be scarce. Although indigenous women have successfully adopted the electronic calculator as a tool in the Andean marketplace and have learned to produce short-wave radio programs, indigenous women have not come close to mastering computer technology. Several indigenous women talk about restoring full use of indigenous languages, writing new grammar books and dictionaries, compiling information on medicinal plants, circulating health information, talking about gender relations, upbringing, family, and denouncing the nation-state's historical disregard for their problems. The Internet could play an important role in achieving all these goals.

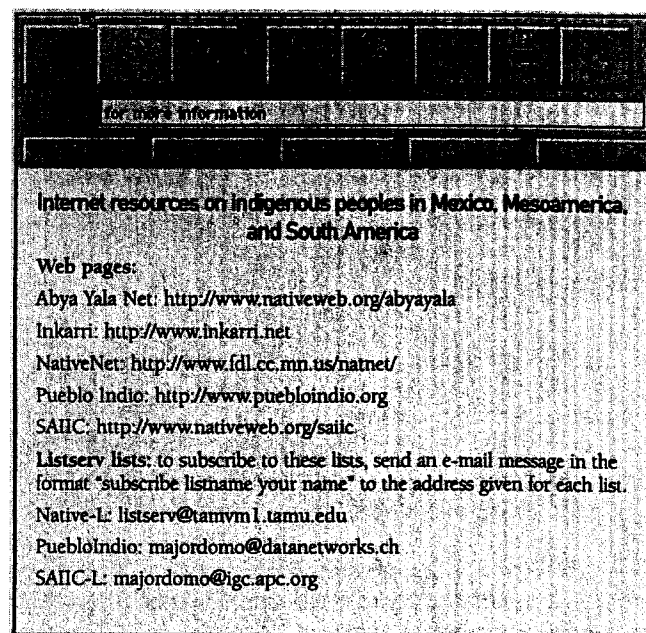
Female participation in indigenous organizations has increased and we hope that their future level of participation on the Internet will match that of men's. Compared to the North,

where indigenous women's agencies have attained a visible presence, the South needs more opportunities where women become active participants in the decision-making processes in their communities. Most international aid continues to fall into male hands and indigenous women suffer a high level of discrimination due to their gender, economic poverty, and ethnicity, often called the 'triple burden.'

### Activism on the Internet

Finally, consciousness-raising activities have been promoted through the use of electronic bulletins where indigenous, as well as non-indigenous advocates and activists, merge together to defend vanishing cultures, disappearing languages, receding ecosystems, and a world view that contributes to the restoration of human peace. Because this technology is interactive, access to, and retrieval of information from the Internet can be used to trigger, support, and encourage continuous democratic social change that benefits the last echelon of Latin America's marginalized indigenous peoples.

The sporadic and careful introduction of solar panels and computer access in some communities has encouraged better systems of wealth redistribution within nation-states. The same could be true for wealthier communities which have learned to share with those in need. Rather than being placed in a position to react to on-line information, indigenous peoples can establish interactive relations focused on solving problems. The solution does not remain only in the dissemination of information, but in the interactive resolution of concrete problems. Gender, language, and better monitoring systems could provide high returns for indigenous, as well as non-indigenous peoples. Through broader structural changes, computer networks can lessen exploitative and oppressive conditions and lead to a more democratic and empowered situation for indigenous peoples.



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Article 7

The Futurist, October 1999

# What's Next for Mexico: Potential Surprises from a U.S. Neighbor

Mexico's future could reflect a **flourishing democracy** or an **ungovernable slide into chaos**. A noted scholar assesses five scenarios for the near-term future.

By Michael J. Mazarr

The aim of this article is not to forecast the future, but to furnish a sense of the range of outcomes that could develop as Mexico undergoes the transition to a knowledge era. The five detailed scenarios examined here are intended to help government and business planners consider the implications of Mexico's possible futures, even if we may not be able to specify a single likely outcome. Individuals and organizations with a stake in Mexico's future are invited to use these snapshots of hypothetical futures to keep track of events, judge their character, understand their likely course, and plan accordingly.

### Scenario One: Democratic Mexico

Mexico's democratic transition accelerates robust economic growth and expands the middle class; these developments have positive effects on other trends.

This scenario is significant for its differences in kind rather than degree from the status quo. It assumes that democratization and liberalization accelerate, economic growth improves, a vibrant small and medium-sized business sector emerges, and Mexicans continue to thrive at the intersection of global-local

trends, where the citizens of so many other countries feel bewildered and alienated. The indispensability of a good economic performance to this scenario means that (in contrast to the next three scenarios) it can be understood as a fast-growth scenario.

Another way of putting it is that the "Democratic Mexico" scenario represents the achievement of virtuous cycles and the avoidance of vicious ones.

For this scenario to take hold, millions of new job seekers over the next decade will have to find meaningful employment, expanding the tax-paying, savings-enhancing middle class. Mexican institutions will gain increasing control over society, allowing for more economic progress, more faith in government, and in turn ever more effective institutions. Greater access to information will allow people to counteract, rather than succumb to, the sensationalistic impulses of the media. Mexico's service sector will be strengthened, in both the domestic and the export arenas.

In the broadest sense, then, this scenario represents a world in which Mexico's democratic transition works to alleviate social ills—in the way that advocates of democracy hope—rather

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