graduate students. It offers an array of points of departure for further study and inquiry, and I welcome those future explorations.

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Jonathan Schlefer, *Palace Politics: How the Ruling Party Brought Crisis to Mexico* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008), pp. x + 297, $60.00, $24.95 pb; £36.00, £13.99 pb.

Despite the voluminous literature on Mexican politics under the PRI, few studies penetrated the secrecy cloaking the system. Insider accounts were not only rare and considered a violation of a basic tenet of the system, but politicians, reminiscent of Cantinflas, perfected the language of dissimulation to hide the true inner workings of the system. But based on over a hundred detailed interviews with members of the ruling elite, including former presidents, Schlefer in Palace Politics peers into the mechanics of the historic system, offering intriguing insights that complement our understanding of the system and that in ways challenge some of the traditional views on its dynamics.

Palace Politics explores elite relations behind the struggle for presidential succession, highlighting in particular their economic impact. In a straightforward manner, Schlefer contends that 'cooperation' among competing political elites helped sustain the stable, growing economy of the 1950s and 1960s, but that after 1970 an 'all-or-nothing struggle' among *grupos* tore the political system apart and repeatedly erupted in economic crises (5–6). Chronicling competition among political grupos jockeying for position, Schlefer pinpoints the basic rule that ensured stability and the ability of the president to manage economic problems, the rule that maintained throughout the 1950s and 1960s, but that Echeverría violated in the 1970s: as long as grupos did not mobilise supporters and openly challenge the president, the president guaranteed their political survival. In marshalling evidence to support this thesis, Schlefer documents how economic policymaking constituted a 'feud among factions' (p. 161) and how 'the contest for power caused politically motivated spending' (p. 178). This occurred mainly in year five of the sexenio – not during the election – when elite competition over succession intensified and ministers used spending to marshal support among the elite, often hiding it from others, including the president.

Methodologically, Schlefer draws extensively on secondary readings and numerous interviews to provide this intimate perspective on elite politics in Mexico. His incorporation of secondary readings facilitates the revisionism in which he challenges previously accepted explanations of Mexican political change. Indeed much of the work meticulously dispels numerous accounts and explanations all in support of the central thesis that elite struggles lie at the heart of economic crisis in Mexico. Systematically, Schlefer discounts numerous economic theories positing protectionism, the exhaustion of the early phase of import substitution industrialisation, or the fiscal crisis of the state as the underlying cause of the system's unravelling. He shoots down the theory linking the 'populist' spending of Echeverría as the beginning of the system's end, noting that such spending had nothing to do with gaining popular support, but rather gaining elite support. The author similarly dismisses Newell and Rubio's contention linking crisis to a legitimacy deficit following Tlatelolco, noting instead that at the time the political elites actually supported the

president's decision. He also disagrees with Sylvia Maxfield's thesis that attributes the decades of economic stability to the independence of the Finance Ministry vis-à-vis the president, showing that the president really held the power over the ministry. He challenges even the seemingly orthodox view that emphasises the spike in interest rates and the plunge in oil prices to account for the crisis of the 1980s, contending instead that capital flight itself was triggered by the private sector's conclusion that chaos prevailed in the economic cabinet (p. 166).

Arguably the work's most important contribution is to offer a fresh look, based on personal accounts and a careful re-reading of data and materials, of previously accepted versions explaining the course of Mexican politics in the twentieth century. In this, the work is engaging, thought-provoking, and makes an important contribution to the literature. Still, there are some shortcomings. First, it was never entirely clear to me what constitutes a crisis: the study's primary dependent variable. Although Schlefer highlights the crises beginning in the 1970s when elite conflict prevailed, earlier economic troubles, such as the 1954 devaluation or the strikes and capital flight of 1958, are not characterised as real crises. Apparently the distinction lies in the president's ability to marshal the system's powerful responses to these crises, drawing, of course, on elite consensus. Although the author seems to argue that crisis involves macroeconomic mismanagement (overspending) and overvaluation of the peso that unleashes financial panic and capital flight, a strict definition or methodology seems to be lacking. Crisis is not defined by GDP growth or contraction, for instance, since the economy actually grew throughout the critical Echeverría sexenio.

Second, although the author builds a convincing case for the presence of elite conflict and the violation of a basic rule of the game, it is not entirely convincing that elite struggle – the violation of the norm that competing elites will be accommodated – can withstand the weight of explanation that Schlefer attributes to it. At times, he seems to dismiss the impact of other factors on economic crisis, as noted, while at other times he acknowledges that other factors have had some impact whilst urging that elite struggle was still present and thus a contributing factor to the extent of the crisis and the regime's inability to manage the crisis.

A third shortcoming centres on an omission that, to be fair, lies beyond the scope of what Schlefer seeks to accomplish here. Given that the study's primary focus is on the impact of elite consensus, Schlefer never explains the underlying causes behind this critical variable. Although he clearly dates this to the administration of Echeverría, the argument seems to load rather heavily and simply on the failures of Echeverría and the president's political decisions ('a firebrand who attacked the unwritten rules', p. 224). Sometimes it seems as if too much is blamed on Echeverría, who, because of his Machiavellian efforts to concentrate power, marginalise opponents and entrench ideological and personal allies in power, 'loosed elite struggle, massive public spending, and economic crisis' (p. 48), triggering a chain reaction that made it impossible to restore elite consensus: 'The more winning grupos exiled opponents, the more everyone believed that winning required exiling opponents', (p. 181). Elite relations thus took on a zero-sum dimension, eventually bringing down the system. But even accepting that elite consensus is an important ingredient in understanding the remarkable stability of the PRI-led regime and that its erosion helps account for the system's slow dismantling, this still begs the question of the broader factors that determine elite cooperation. Elite relations do not occur within a vacuum. And although Schlefer points to such factors as the ideological divisions

during the Echeverría period or the global economic situation under de Madrid and Salinas as contributing to their treatment of competing elites, the broader, underlying understanding of what drives elite politics remains a bit of a mystery.

Finally, the study seems to strike a rather ambiguous tone with respect to the impact of elite consensus on democracy. Since most aspects of democracy – political parties, elections, social movements and so forth – are beyond the scope of Palace Politics and brought into the argument only to demonstrate their weak explanatory power, Schlefer nonetheless ends by noting that Mexico became democratic after 'political elites, by tearing that consensus to shreds, destroyed the old authoritarian regime' (p. 225). Not only is the causal relationship and the dynamic linking the breakdown of the elite consensus and democratisation largely unspecified here, but the erosion of the consensus that began under Echeverría also occurred many years before the breakthrough to democracy. The author then leaves the reader with the question of whether democracy is capable of re-forging a new elite consensus and whether elite consensus is a necessary ingredient in the consolidation and deepening of democracy. By a political scientist specialising in Mexican politics, Palace Politics provides an engaging and insightful journey tackling old and familiar works, questions, and mysteries surrounding Mexico's unique authoritarian system.

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Harvey F. Kline, *Chronicle of a Failure Foretold: The Peace Process of Colombian President Andrés Pastrana* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. xi + 229, $39.95, $19.95 pb.

In the beginning of 1999 the Colombian president Andrés Pastrana was convinced peace was within reach. In a speech on 7 January 1999, he stated that he did not believe guerrilla forces were winning the war, but that they wanted to search for a new stage in democratic life. 'May we wake up in peace in 2000,' he concluded. It was only a few hours later, during the first talks between Pastrana as a president and the guerrilla movement FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia), that the sound of optimism faded. The leader of the then 15,000-strong FARC, Pedro Antonio Marín (also known as Marulanda or Tirofijo), failed to show up. The first talks did not go well. In his book Chronicle of a Failure Foretold (the title refers to García Márquez' Crónica de una Muerte Anunciada), Harvey F. Kline argues that the peace process of President Pastrana was doomed from the beginning. Pastrana became interested in a peace process when he campaigned for the second round of the presidential elections. The peace process began as a tactic to win the election and Pastrana was not well prepared. But a more fundamental reason for its failure, as Kline states, is that Colombia is made up of political archipelagos: an assortment of regional political systems with a variety of disorganised organisations including the guerrilla groups, paramilitary squads and the national government itself. In many regions the government is not the strongest actor. The variety of groups is manifested even within the guerrilla movement FARC, whose decentralised fronts operate more or less independently within a broad framework of action decided by the central Secretariat.

In the first part of the book Kline sets the context for the peace process under the Pastrana government. It provides a concise introduction to the Colombian