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POLITICAL PARTICIPATION 2.0 IN MEXICO

LESSONS LEARNED FROM THE #YOSOY132 MOVEMENT

Luis Josué González Fuentes

Over recent years, leading political figures, candidates and parties in Mexico have begun to demonstrate a growing interest in the use of electronic media. The growth of this interest has corresponded with the narrowing of the digital divide, and even if so far the internet has not been a decisive factor in elections, it has nevertheless become an essential tool of political campaigning. This issue has come to the fore with the emergence of the #YoSoy132 movement, which played a significant role in influencing the results of the latest elections in Mexico.

In the 2012 elections, the internet – and particularly the social networks – became more important than ever before and took up an unprecedented amount of space in the media. In the days before the ballot, there were a surprisingly large number of articles and reports about the internet activities of parties and candidates. A candidate's tweets, the number of people who had viewed another candidate's YouTube video, the publication of statistics comparing the popularity of candidates in the social networks, and finally the publication of attempts to lure people away using spambots are just a few examples of internet hype on the part of politicians and the media. But despite this, the parties are still a long way from pursuing their policies online. They generally restrict themselves to having an internet presence that is particularly strong in the social media.

Since the middle of the last decade, Web 2.0 has become the new way of communicating¹ – particularly for the younger generation – and it has established itself as an increasingly popular and powerful element of social change. There is no doubt that the combination of young people and the internet is one of the main drivers of change in today’s societies, and it is likely to remain so. The role played by Web 2.0 in the 2012 elections in Mexico cannot be assessed without bringing the #YoSoy132 movement into the equation. This phenomenon brought together the two elements of “youth participation” and “Web 2.0 tools” to enliven the political debate during the election campaign.

The #YoSoy132 movement is not the only recent instance of links between Mexican youth and political participation, but it is certainly the most significant example of the use of new technologies as an integral part of political participation. Studying this movement provides an insight into how the Web 2.0 can contribute to the process of democracy, increase political participation and open up new channels for participation.

YOUNG MEXICANS AND POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Although young people have often been the instigators of social change, particularly since the 1960s, their role in official Mexican politics has till now been seriously underestimated. For many years, thousands of young people in Mexico and large swathes of Latin America felt their political participation was restricted to voting, filling campaign arenas and acting as political “shock troops” for parties and candidates. But over the last few years the role played by young people in politics has changed dramatically. The rise of the new media means that they are no longer mere observers but are now the initiators and catalysts of social change, not only in Mexico but all over the world. Today the youth of the world keep up with the latest events; they debate, organise and are much more involved in politics than in the past. The internet has made a significant contribution in this respect.

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1 | It is generally accepted that Web 2.0 was created in 2004 as a result of the Web 2.0 Summit organised by Tim O’Reilly in San Francisco.

In today's Mexico, young people are becoming both more interested and more critical of politics. No party, leader or institution is any longer exempt from criticism or examination. Now no-one is untouchable, and political freedoms are zealously guarded. Well-informed young people have developed an aversion to repression and censorship; they know their rights, value their freedoms and are using them in responsible ways.

FORCES FOR CHANGE AMONGST MEXICO'S YOUTH

Alongside the changes in Mexican society ushered in by Vicente Fox's election victory in 2000 – the country's first peaceful transfer of power, after 71 years of uninterrupted rule by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, PRI) –, a series of social, economic and demographic factors also explains why Mexico's youth began to demand greater political participation. From the very beginning, the #YoSoy132 movement nailed these demands to the mast.

Bridging the digital divide

Although the percentage of the population with internet access is still well below that of the industrialised nations, statistics show a sharp increase in both Mexico and the rest of Latin America. According to the World Bank,² the percentage of the population with internet access grew by 251 per cent between 2000 and 2010, but the average growth for Latin America stood at 871 per cent, with peak figures being achieved in Brazil (1,416 per cent) and Colombia (1,654 per cent). Even in Mexico, where the growth rate was relatively lower, it was still more than double that of the worldwide average (610 per cent) (see Table 1). Other sources confirm these figures. According to a report by ComScore, access to information has expanded rapidly in Latin America. In the twelve months between May 2009 and May 2010 alone, the number of internet users increased by 21 per cent, compared to eight per cent in Asia and eleven per cent in Europe.³

2 | Cf. World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/it.net.user.p2> und <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/it.net.user> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

3 | Cf. Ivan Marchant, "State of the Internet with a focus on Mexico and Latin America", *Reporte ComScore*, Aug 2010.

Table 1
Population with internet access (2000-2010)

Region	Number of internet users			Share of population with internet access in per cent		
	2000	2005	2010	2000	2005	2010
Worldwide	395,088,191.22	1,022,289,697.59	2,014,028,387.89	6.78	15.87	30.48
OECD members	320,179,465.17	646,440,862.85	862,838,674.26	27.77	54.11	69.80
Latin America and Caribbean	20,268,996.30	92,329,805.17	199,881,310.59	3.90	16.64	33.98
Argentina	2,599,435.57	6,854,529.69	14,548,455.36	7.04	17.72	36.00
Bolivia	119,853.95	478,149.07	1,985,969.80	1.44	5.23	20.00
Brazil	5,007,203.70	39,099,569.36	79,245,740.06	2.87	21.02	40.65
Chile	2,559,690.12	5,082,119.65	7,701,159.60	16.60	31.18	45.00
Colombia	877,807.08	4,737,587.80	16,897,616.97	2.21	11.01	36.50
Mexico	5,079,330.97	18,325,854.58	35,161,144.57	5.08	17.21	31.00
Venezuela	818,005.00	3,347,146.68	10,325,523.05	3.36	12.59	35.81

Source: World Bank, n. 2.

This ongoing narrowing of the digital divide, combined with certain demographic factors, explains the increasing importance of the internet in the lives of Latin Americans in general and Mexicans in particular. It also indicates the effect that this medium has on the way society functions and how it also impacts the political sphere.

The advent of Web 2.0

The year 2004 is generally considered to be the year when Web 2.0⁴ was created. Since then, its flagships, the social networks, have become hugely popular. It has been observed that the social networks' penetration rate in Latin

4 | It is not possible to give a precise "birthday" for the "Web 2.0 era" because it includes a wide range of platforms and technologies that were gradually developed without being able to pin them down as being "before 2.0" or "after 2.0". However, it is generally recognised that these technologies reached a critical mass in 2004, meaning that they were distinguishable from previous forms of internet use (known as Web 1.0).

The number of social network users in relation to the number of people with internet access is higher in Latin America than in countries such as the USA, Germany or the UK. One-in-four Latin Americans have a Facebook page.

America is comparatively higher than in North America or Europe, where the number of households with internet access is higher. The number of social network users in relation to the number of people with internet access is higher in Latin America than in countries such as the USA, Germany or the UK. This is particularly true of Facebook and Twitter, the most popular platforms in the region.⁵ One-in-four Latin Americans have a Facebook page.⁶ In this respect it is also interesting to note the speed with which Twitter is gaining new users, particularly in countries such as Brazil and Mexico, where the number of users has grown from 3.4 per cent or 1.7 million people in December 2010⁷ to 33 per cent or 11 million people in February 2012.⁸ At present Twitter has 465 million users worldwide.⁹

In addition, 6 of Facebook's 15 most important markets are in Latin America, where penetration rates in countries such as Chile (89.5 per cent), Argentina (88.3 per cent), Venezuela (87.8 per cent), Colombia (86.7 per cent), Peru (83.4 per cent) and Mexico (82.6 per cent)¹⁰ are much higher than the worldwide average of around 70 per cent.¹¹ A further technical aspect is the role played by smartphones in the constant growth in numbers of internet users. In 2010 there were 28.5 million internet users in Mexico,

5 | With the exception of the Orkut Google platform that competes with Facebook in the Brazilian market, Facebook and Twitter have no real competitors in the region.

6 | Cf. Lucy Hodgson, "Facebook 2012 [Infographic]", *The Blog Herald*, 15 Feb 2012, <http://blogherald.com/2012/02/15/facebook-2012-infographic> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

7 | Cf. "40 Millones de Latinos en Twitter (Infografía)", *Ecualink-blog*, Dec 2010, <http://ecualinkblog.com/2010/12/40-millones-de-latinos-en-twitter.html> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

8 | Brazil is the country with the second-highest number of Twitter accounts worldwide; Mexico is in seventh place.

9 | Cf. Lucy Hodgson, "Twitter 2012 [Infographic]", *The Blog Herald*, 22 Feb 2012, <http://blogherald.com/2012/02/22/twitter-2012-infographic> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

10 | Celedonio von Wuthenau, "Internet y política en América Latina: hacia un ejercicio más democrático y republicano", *Revista Diálogo Político*, Año XXVIII, No. 2, Jun 2011, 72.

11 | Fernández, Carmen Beatriz (2011): "Partidos políticos 2.0: mandatos para la nueva acción política", in *Revista Diálogo Político*, Año XXVIII, No. 2, June, 39-60, here: 49.

growing to 34.9 million by June 2011¹² and reaching 40.6 million by the end of 2011.¹³

The population curve

In the case of Mexico, the average age of internet users is relatively low. Statistics from May 2010¹⁴ show that 45 per cent of all internet users in Mexico are in the 15-24 age group, in contrast to the figures for Argentina (28 per cent) and Chile (26 per cent) – countries that are considered highly-developed in regional terms. A possible explanation for the Mexican statistics is the fact that where internet access is relatively limited it is naturally concentrated on the younger section of the population, particularly when the spread of modern information technology coincides with people growing up who were born in the 1980s.¹⁵ This is doubly important in Mexico, where internet users are generally younger people who, as a population group, also make up the majority of the Mexican population. The average age of the industrialised nations is older, as in Japan (44.7 years) or Germany (44.3 years), whereas in Mexico it is only 26.6 years.¹⁶

Mexican internet users, particularly those in the 15-24 and 25-34 age groups also spend more time online than the Latin American and global average: 32.7 and 25.8 hours per month compared to 30.7 and 24.5 hours for Latin America as a whole and much higher than the global average of 24.1 and 22.6 hours.¹⁷ There is also a clear difference between the 15-24-year-olds who spend an average of 32.7 hours per month online compared to other age groups who average less than 26 hours per month.¹⁸ This demonstrates the intensity of internet use and how it has become the undisputed domain of the young.

12 | Cf. European Travel commission, New Media Trend Watch, "Latin America", <http://newmediatrendwatch.com/regional-overview/104-latin-america> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

13 | Cf. Mexican Internet Association (Asociación Mexicana de Internet, AMIPCI), *Reporte sobre los hábitos de los Usuarios de Internet en México*, 17 May 2012.

14 | Cf. Marchant, n. 3.

15 | Public internet access began in 1994.

16 | Cf. United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, *World Population Prospects: The 2010 Revision*, CD-ROM edition, 2011.

17 | Cf. ComScore, May 2010.

18 | Ibid.

COMMUNICATION IN THE WEB 2.0 AGE

The terms Web 1.0 and Web 2.0 relate to two different types of internet use. They can be considered as two different ways of communicating, each with their own attributes that appear when using specific platforms and technologies. In terms of online communication with others, Web 2.0 is much more significant than Web 1.0, particularly in the area of brochureware,¹⁹ which explains why Web 1.0 made little contribution towards new forms of political communication. This latter form was not significantly different from other mass media such as television, radio and the press as it only offered vertical communication between content creator and content user with very few opportunities for interaction. However, the development

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of Web 2.0 tools meant that formal politics had to rejuvenate itself,²⁰ as can be seen from various indicators. Firstly, Web 2.0 tools promote dialogue and political debate by providing an opportunity for greater interaction between governments and citizens. And by providing the opportunity to build networks, Web 2.0 also enables citizens to organise and mobilise much more rapidly and efficiently than ever before. Finally, Web 2.0 allows citizens to be heard, as they can easily air their views in various forums and open up the debate to a range of groups. Such communication was unimaginable in the past, but now anyone can react and have their say on such issues. The differences between Web 1.0 and 2.0 can therefore be viewed as a transformation in the role of the user, turning them from simple recipients of content to content creators and distributors.²¹

19 | Nigel A. Jackson and Darren G. Lilleker, "Building an architecture of participation? Political parties and Web 2.0 in Britain", *Journal of Information Technology & Politics*, 6, No. 3/4, Jun 2009, 232-250, here: 237. Jackson and Lilleker use the term brochureware in connection with party websites in the early days of the internet. These websites were infrequently updated and first and foremost acted as forms of printed media for the parties rather than making use of the possibilities offered by the internet in terms of publishing content that did not necessarily appear in other media (such as multi-media files).

20 | Rachel K. Gibson, "New Media and the Revitalisation of Politics", *Representation*, 45, Mar 2009, 289-299, here: 289.

21 | Cf. Terry Flew, "Cuadro comparativo entre Web 1.0 y Web 2.0", <http://terryflew.blogspot.com/2008/08/web-30.html> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

Web 2.0 has also transformed the work of the political parties in a highly-sensitive area – how they communicate and the role played by information within their party structures. Today, their main challenge lies in grasping how the Web 2.0 is opening up new forms of communication and participation that necessitate a certain type of horizontal communication and the presence of certain conditions in order to create a dialogue of equals. The more parties understand this and adapt their strategies accordingly, the more effective they appear to voters who are no longer happy to simply be given information but prefer to receive information in an interactive way. At a time when media massification is combining with voters' dwindling sense of identification with political parties and when the number of floating voters is increasing at each election, the parties run the risk of losing supporters and allowing people to gain the impression that there is a lack of opportunity to participate in the political process. Over time, this can lead to a political crisis and have a major impact on society as a whole.

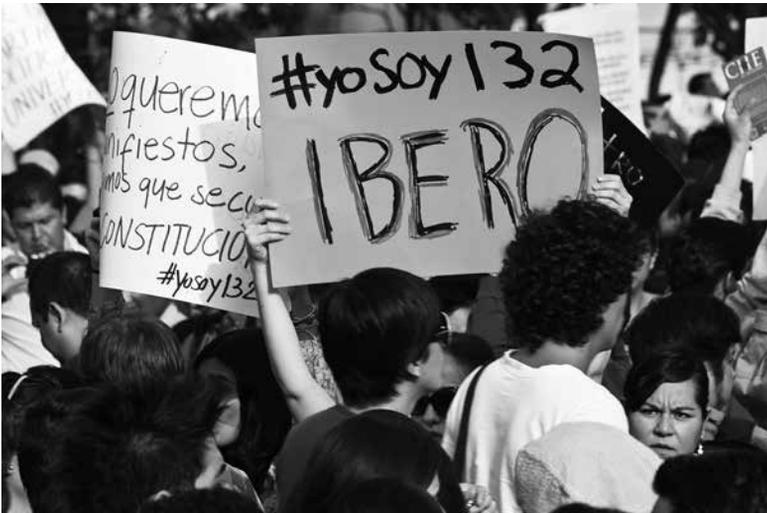
THE #YOSOY132 MOVEMENT

A series of events were set in motion by the visit of a presidential candidate to the Iberian-American University in Mexico City in May this year. It is still too early to evaluate their impact, but some conclusions can be drawn regarding the ability of young Mexicans to organise themselves, what they have to say about politics, and the future of their country. The #YoSoy132 movement was triggered by the visit to the university in Mexico City by Enrique Peña Nieto, who according to the polls was the leading PRI presidential candidate. In the weeks leading up to his visit, student groups began mobilising and preparing to receive him.

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When he arrived on Thursday 11 May, students who were for and against the candidate began chanting noisily. The event was similar to all other visits by campaigning politicians to Mexican universities, with young supporters cheering the candidate and young opponents chanting slogans and waving banners. But it was his final statement that inflamed the students. It related to his role as governor of

the State of Mexico when he called in the police to break up a protest in San Salvador Atenco in 2006. During this incident, 207 people were arrested, two young protesters were killed and there were allegations of abuse of office, police brutality and the rape of women in custody – none of which were fully investigated. The presidential candidate answered that he assumed full responsibility for the actions taken during the protests, that he had acted lawfully in the interests of maintaining public order and that the authorities had not committed any offences. The students were vociferous in their protest.



Demonstration by the movement #YoSoy132 on 23 May 2012 in Mexico City: Protest against Peña Nieto and Televisa. | Source: Javier Armas / flickr (CC BY).

The students' anger escalated still more the following day, when various local and national newspapers published reports on the candidate's successful visit to the "Ibero", despite a boycott being staged against him, containing comments by PRI supporters claiming that groups from outside the university had been hired to attack the candidate and that they therefore did not represent the views of the students.

These allegations, combined with what many considered to be biased reporting on the part of some elements of the media, led to an almost immediate response by those

students who had attended the event on 11 May. Over the course of this weekend they organised a Facebook campaign they called the “truth video” where students who attended the event were encouraged to send in video clips showing they were students and giving their student ID number in order to prove that the protesters were not agitators brought in by the Left.

By the end of the campaign, 131 students had sent in their video clips, and many more arrived over the next few days. That same weekend, these 131 videos were posted on YouTube under the title “131 ‘Ibero’ students respond” (131 Alumnos de la Ibero Responden²²). From this point on the 131 students went viral on the internet and became a global trending topic on Twitter within just a few hours.

In light of their growing popularity, on 18 May the students organised a march on the headquarters of the TV network Televisa to call for transparency and neutrality in the media. The general perception was that the major media companies in Mexico were biased towards the PRI during the election campaign, something that the protesters believed was a breach of democracy. Groups of students from other universities joined the march, leading to the creation of the #YoSoy132 movement.²³

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From this point onwards, more and more organisations joined in marches and protests around the country. On 30 May, the movement organised the “Primer Asamblea General de Universidades y Sociedad Civil #YoSoy132” (First General Assembly of the Universities and Civil Society #YoSoy132) on the campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). According to the event’s organisers,²⁴ 54 public and private universities took part, along with 20 NGOs and around 90 representatives of the

22 | Cf. “131 Alumnos de la Ibero Responden”, YouTube, 14 May 2012, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=P7XbocXsFkI> (accessed 22 Oct 2012). The video has been posted many times after the original appeared on YouTube. The latter had been viewed 1,168,000 times as at 29 May 2012.

23 | For more information about the origins of the movement, see: http://vice.com/es_mx/la-guia-vice-para-las-elecciones/lgvple-131-ms-uno (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

24 | Can be viewed at: <http://guadalupeloaeza.typepad.com/files/relatoria-oficial.pdf> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

local, national and international media, totalling more than 6,000 participants. After more than seven hours of discussion, the following points were agreed:

- The movement should be non-partisan and non-violent
- It should protest against media bias in favour of a particular candidate
- It should reject the neo-liberal economic model
- It should protest against the biased reporting of certain media sources and work for clean elections
- The movement publicly rejected the candidate Enrique Peña Nieto and his party because of its belief that he stood for the old, repressive, corrupt regime and for control of the presidency by interest groups

Protests against Peña Nieto and Televisa and about other local issues were organised in cities such as Guadalajara, Monterrey, Morelia and even Colima and Saltillo.

In the days that followed, the movement organised more events, gained new supporters from universities and citizens' groups and extended its activities to other cities in

Mexico. Protests against Peña Nieto and Televisa and about other local issues were organised in cities such as Guadalajara, Monterrey, Morelia and even Colima and Saltillo, where there were reports of violence by PRI supporters who were trying to break up the peaceful demonstrations.

The fight to accelerate political debate and voter awareness came to a head when the movement organised a third debate between the presidential candidates. All the candidates participated, apart from PRI figurehead Peña Nieto, who announced that it would not be a fair debate as the movement had already spoken out against his candidacy. Unlike in previous debates organised by the Mexican electoral authorities, the candidates could not steer the debate. It was much more dynamic and the moderators ensured that the candidates talked more about the "how" than the "what". In addition, the discussions were divided into three sections so that internet users could ask questions in real time. This had never happened before.

THE MOVEMENT'S CAMPAIGNS USING THE WEB 2.0

One of the main distinguishing features of the #YoSoy132 movement is its use of Web 2.0 tools. Although it is impossible to quantify all its internet activity, it is worth looking

at a few specific cases that serve as an example of how the Web 2.0 has played a key role in the spread of the movement and opened up new avenues for political participation.



Demonstrators of the movement #YoSoy132 criticise the PRI because of alleged election fraud and were especially opposing Peña Nieto. | Source: Javier Armas / flickr (CC BY).

The role of the Web 2.0 in spreading information

Right from the start, the movement used Twitter and Facebook to spread all kinds of multi-media information thanks to their ease of use. On Facebook there are a plethora of pages with titles such as #YoSoy132, #YoSoy132mx, #YoSoy132 Mundial, along with groups such as #YoSoy132enelextranjero, YoSoy132 Morelia, YoSoy132 Durango, and even apps that link Facebook with further social networks such as Google+ and other websites in order to facilitate the exchange of information. On Twitter there are also a mass of user profiles with the name YoSoy132 or similar. The hashtags have also made it possible to group information into particular categories, such as #GranMarcha132, making it possible for people to find information about the protest held on 2 July, or #ClaseCiudadana for information about civil society.

One of the main advantages of these tools is that they may be linked to other platforms. For example, links can be posted to other pages; videos, audio files and photos can be integrated in order to make the content more varied and attractive; and users can be encouraged to interact. Finally, it is worth mentioning the role played by websites such as YouTube and Vimeo. These platforms have allowed the widespread dissemination of “tutorial” videos that teach supporters about particular issues, such as how to behave during a non-violent demonstration or how to be an election observer on polling day.²⁵

Web 2.0 tools for organisation, mobilisation and debate

The movement has continued to use Web 2.0 tools, particularly for organising and mobilising its supporters, and both Facebook and Twitter have become essential elements for organising protests and demonstrations across the country.

As we have seen, the movement had its roots in the social networks, beginning with a post on Facebook calling for people to reject the claim that the protests had been the work of “paid agitators” rather than students. Since then, the movement has continued to use

Web 2.0 tools, particularly for organising and mobilising its supporters. Both Facebook and Twitter have become essential elements for organising protests and demonstrations across the country. In addition to these well-known examples, the organisation of the third debate between the presidential candidates also stands out. This has probably been the movement’s most ambitious act so far because of the challenges it presented. Despite all the technical difficulties that the organising committee had to overcome, the movement’s supporters demonstrated great skill in dealing with the technology involved. Their familiarity with this technology was little different to that found in more industrialised nations, apart perhaps from the fact that it was more creative and more intensive in light of Mexico’s prevailing social and political circumstances.

The size of the movement meant the debate could be directed solely at its members, making it possible for students to ask questions via Skype and for the audience’s most frequently-asked questions to be selected by Google Moderator. The debate received only very limited coverage

25 | Cf. “Observadores electorales Yo Soy 132”, YouTube, 28 May 2012, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=k8HruT1yEcw> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

from the large media corporations, which is why particular emphasis was placed on streaming it live on the internet and online radio stations. Although there were some technical glitches during the broadcast and the debate had to be interrupted more than once because the bandwidth was overloaded, the organisers estimated that 112,000 people followed the debate. We can draw at least three major conclusions from this. First, the fact that a youth movement could organise a political debate, despite all the technical difficulties and the costs of production and airing, is a success in itself. Second, attracting audience figures of 112,000 is a tremendous achievement in light of the transmission problems and the low levels of coverage by the major media players. Third, we should applaud the fact that such a debate could be organised, produced and transmitted using the basic space and equipment provided and using volunteer production staff, particularly when compared to the cost of the officially-organised first debate which ran to 4.1 million pesos (around 290,000 U.S. dollars).

Web 2.0 tools for pillorying and protection

During the whole election campaign, supporters of the movement reported being subjected to harassment by the authorities, to physical attacks by followers of other parties and to threats in the street and on the internet. The movement made use of Web 2.0 tools to protect their members and publicise such incidents.

The widespread use of smartphones meant that the movement's followers could record attacks and violations using audio and video and transmit them via Facebook or Twitter almost simultaneously. Videos were aired showing the arbitrary arrest of the movement's supporters,²⁶ provocation by PRI followers²⁷ and attempts to disrupt peaceful demonstrations.²⁸ It is also remarkable how people used

26 | "#yosoy132 - Agresión a integrantes de #yosoy132 Toluca 24/06/12", YouTube, 25 Jun 2012, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=qkSG1M5n7Uc> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

27 | "El PRI de Peña Nieto. Represión en Saltillo. The PRI of Peña Nieto. Today Saltillo Repression.", YouTube, 13 May 2012, http://youtube.com/watch?v=_ZWD8lpRjWs (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

28 | "Visita de EPN a Colima: lo que no verás en los medios televisivos.", YouTube, 13 May 2012, <http://youtube.com/watch?v=r35XiULXdG8> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

the social media to organise themselves when necessary, such as on 15 June, when the alarm bells rang on Twitter as reports emerged of the disappearance of two supporters. The students reappeared later on: they had been arrested by police for distributing leaflets in public and then released without charge.

Safeguarding the elections

Since May, #YoSoy132 members had been running a viral campaign that included a series of video tutorials encouraging young people to register as election observers with the aim of monitoring as many polling stations as possible on election day. They also set up a web portal,²⁹ where citizens could register as volunteer helpers and select a polling station to monitor. On this portal, every polling station in the country could be selected and observers' details registered to make it easier for observers working in the same area to link up. 48 hours before the polls opened, the website had more than 3,500 registered volunteers to monitor the same number of polling stations. Although this was still only a small proportion of the country's 144,217 polling stations (just 2.4 per cent), it is remarkable how this operation was organised solely via the internet and the social networks.

CONCLUSION: WHAT THE PARTIES NEED TO LEARN

It is clear that Mexico's young people are playing an increasingly important role in the country's politics, not only because of their potential to create social change, but also because of the sheer size of this age group and the methods they use to get involved and interact. Every day, more and more young people are reaching voting age, and the internet is the best way of reaching out to them. Of the 84.6 million registered voters in Mexico, 40.3 per cent are under 34 years of age and 13.6 million young people (16.1 per cent of the electoral roll) will be voting in a presidential election for the first time.³⁰ For this online generation,

29 | Observación Ciudadana, <http://observacionciudadana.org> (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

30 | Instituto Federal Electoral, "Distribución de Ciudadanos por Grupos de Edad" (Verteilung der Bürger nach Altersgruppen), cf. http://listanominal.ife.org.mx/ubicamodulo/PHP/est_ge.php (accessed 22 Oct 2012).

the internet provides the link to politics and will doubtless remain so in the future.

But political parties have problems with horizontal structures. This is not necessarily due to a lack of will, but to the difficulties experienced by largely hierarchical organisations when it comes to making decisions on an egalitarian basis. And anyone who is familiar with the internal mechanisms of political parties will know how many practical problems are caused by horizontal structures: the amount of time needed to create consensus and make decisions, the difficulties of negotiating and reaching agreements without a leader, followed by the never-ending need for more consensus-building. However, this does not mean that the parties cannot create channels that are more horizontal in nature that allow better interaction with their members and supporters.

The new ways of communicating that have arisen as a result of the Web 2.0 have not only changed the form of online communication but also penetrated into the real world. They exist in a form that is being used by forces in societies all over the world to organise and structure themselves. Citizens are well-informed, increasingly well-educated, they have opinions and ideas and need an arena where their voices can be heard. A great deal of the success of the #YoSoy132 movement is due to the lack of official channels for political participation and the lack of enthusiasm on the part of politicians to improve what channels do exist.

The narrowing of the digital divide, the growing numbers of young people of voting age and the upheavals in politics caused by movements such as #YoSoy132 are forcing the parties to adapt their structures to the needs and expectations of the public. The question is not whether or not this transition will happen; rather, the question is when it will happen, and which parties have truly grasped this change and will benefit from it the most in order to transform themselves into modern, interactive, 2.0 parties.

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