

## Electing Cuba's National Assembly Deputies: Proposals, Selections, Nominations, and Campaigns<sup>1</sup>

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Cuba's system of representative government, the Organs of People's Power (*Órganos del Poder Popular* or OPP), began during the Cuban institutionalization process in the early 1970s. It was preceded by a system called Local Power (*Poder Local*), which was hampered by lack of structure and authority. The Mantanzas Provincial Assembly was piloted in 1974. In 1976 the system was included in the new Constitution and inaugurated in the whole country. The Local Organs of People's Power (*Órganos Locales del Poder Popular* or OLPP) consists of 169 municipal assemblies and the nine provincial assemblies that oversee and monitor governmental, economic and social activities within their territories. Only the National Assembly (*Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular* or ANPP) has legislative powers.<sup>2</sup>

This article shows how the Cuban National Assembly electoral process works from nominations to campaigns, to elections.<sup>3</sup> The intent is not to advocate the superiority of this system over others, or to reject or favour a system that does not mirror the electoral system found, for example, in the United States, but rather to examine and evaluate Cuba's concept and practice of 'democracy' based on participation, consultation, consensus, and representation. According to Alexander Gray and Antoni Kapcia,

[...] *democracia* is, in common Cuban parlance, a wide definition of participation, involvement and representation, while 'democracy' tends increasingly, to the North, to mean pluralism, contested elections and, above all, a free market. Put simply, language is part of the ideological battleground over Cuba, part of the inherent difficulty in understanding alternative perspectives (p. 39).

In governmental elections in Cuba, money does not play a role in determining who will be the candidates or who will win the elections. Voting is voluntary and no penalties are placed on those who do not vote. Aside from the assembly officers and commission chairpersons, neither municipal and provincial assembly delegates nor ANPP deputies receive salaries. They keep their regular jobs. There are no perks involved for deputies and delegates, but extra work instead.

Elections for the municipal assembly delegates, who represent municipal wards (*circunscripciones*), are competitive and are held every two and a half years. By law there must be between two and eight candidates for each circunscripción. Candidates are chosen at neighbourhood meetings within the circunscripciones. A temporary president and secretary are elected by those present to conduct the meeting. Individuals, not parties or organizations, propose candidates, who are then selected by a show of hands. Thus the Cuban Communist Party (*Partido Comunista de Cuba* or PCC), by law and in practice, plays no formal role in municipal assembly candidate selection.<sup>4</sup> Municipal assembly delegates must reside within their

circunscripciones. Electoral campaigns consist mainly of posting candidates' biographies in neighbourhood offices and store windows. To be elected, a candidate must win a majority of the votes cast. If no candidate wins a majority, a runoff election is held between the top two. There are no term limits.<sup>5</sup>

The major changes introduced in the 1992 Constitution and Electoral Law included direct elections for ANPP deputies and provincial assembly delegates, and having municipal assembly delegates elect their leadership. Representatives from the PCC and Union of Young Communists (*Unión de Jóvenes Comunistas* or UJC) were excluded from the three levels of candidacy commissions, which select ANPP and provincial assembly pre-candidates.

For the 1993, 1998 and 2003 elections I was invited to attend neighbourhood as well as large campaign rallies held in the municipalities of Plaza, Playa, Diez de Octubre and Marianao, all within the City of Havana. I attended municipal candidacy commission meetings and interviewed commission presidents. I reviewed the 1992 National Assembly plenary session minutes where the new electoral law was discussed, and Plaza Municipal Assembly minutes for sessions where ratification of National Assembly deputy candidates was debated. I also interviewed National Assembly President Ricardo Alarcón as well as ANPP commission presidents, and numerous deputies and municipal assembly delegates.

The National Assembly is composed of 609 deputies. The term of office is five years. Similar to other aspects of how the ANPP operates, consultation and consensus underlie the process of candidate selection (Roman 2005). Candidates are proposed by plenary sessions of official mass organizations and unions held at the municipal, provincial and national levels. These include the Federation of Cuban Workers (*Central de Trabajadores Cubanos* or CTC), Committees for the Defence of the Revolution (*Comités para la Defensa de la Revolución* or CDR), Federation of Cuban Women (*Federación de Mujeres Cubanas* or FMC), National Association of Small Farmers (*Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños* or ANAP), Federation of University Students (*Federación de Estudiantes Universitarios* or FEU), and Federation of High School Students (*Federación de Estudiantes de Estudios Medios* or FEEM). From these proposals, candidacy commissions at the national, provincial and municipal levels composed of representatives chosen by these organizations and presided over by a CTC representative compile lists of candidates. Individual citizens cannot propose themselves or others, nor can non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the PCC or the UJC. Candidates representing each municipality must be ratified by the municipal assembly. Voters in each of the 169 municipalities elect a number of deputies depending on the population of the municipality (roughly one deputy per 20,000 inhabitants). The minimum number of deputies for small municipalities is two. Municipalities whose populations exceed 100,000 are divided into districts of 50,000 within which voters elect their deputies (Asamblea Nacional 1992, 53). To be elected, a candidate must get over fifty per cent of the votes.

Up to fifty per cent of the deputy candidates must also be municipal delegates in the municipalities they represent, and are called *de base*. The rest, called *directos*, do not have to live in the municipalities they represent. They encompass the country's leadership as well as those selected to insure representation from all sectors of society (women, youth, religious leaders, workers, doctors, farmers, teachers, etc.).

The procedures for proposing, nominating and electing provincial assembly

delegates take place simultaneously. Thus, some examples cited concern provincial assembly delegates. Also, a person may be both a national assembly deputy and provincial assembly delegate. Elections for both are non-competitive. The number of candidates is equal to the number of positions to be filled. Voters are urged to vote for the entire slate for both sets of candidates, called the *voto unido*.<sup>6</sup>

### **Non-competitive Elections and the Voto Unido**

The theme of *voto unido* was discussed during the deputy election campaigns. In 2003 Alarcón argued, 'This strategy makes possible to have black people, young people, or unknown people as representatives on this country's legislative organ, with merits and capacity to occupy positions of such high responsibility' (*Trabajadores* 2003 [my translation]). In the press as well as the candidates' meetings with constituents, it was repeatedly stressed that the *voto unido* was a revolutionary strategy.<sup>7</sup> President Fidel Castro reasoned that it 'is what makes possible the election of many of those who constitute our most modest and humble candidates, those lesser known despite their merits. To win more than half of the valid votes, a difficult requirement, is what they need and expect' [my translation].<sup>8</sup> Cuban journalist María Julia Mayoral sums up the arguments:

Where but in Cuba can you find students, farmers, workers, municipal assembly delegates, and simple workers from the most diverse fields occupying a seat in parliament? To submit these persons to a direct popular election, in which they must obtain at least 20,000, 30,000 or more votes according to the number of constituents in the municipality or district, always creates a risk, because perhaps some people would be inclined not to support those they do not know or because they consider insignificant the biography of a young person who has not yet had the opportunity in his life to realize accomplishments comparable to other candidates [my translation].<sup>9</sup>

Alarcón pointed out during electoral campaign appearances that while he himself is an example of someone who is well known due to his position in the government, many candidates, like the *de base*, were not well known outside of their neighbourhoods or circunscripciones. Electing these highly qualified people to the ANPP is one of the democratic characteristics of the Cuban system. Without the *voto unido* and under highly competitive elections they might not get enough votes to be elected (Roman 2003, 134-38).

During the National Assembly debate in 1992 regarding the new constitution and electoral law allowing for the direct election of deputies and provincial delegates, non-competitive elections were seen as the way to keep the process from becoming dominated by politicking and division, where candidates fight one another, where elections become a popularity contest instead of being based on merit. However some deputies argued for competition but made no headway against the wishes expressed by the leadership (Roman 2003, 134-9).<sup>10</sup>

### ***De base* representation**

In the 1992 Constitution and Electoral Law the percentage of *de base* representation changed from *at least* fifty per cent to *up to* fifty per cent. The term of the pro-

vincial assembly delegates was extended from two and a half to five years (to coincide with the National Assembly deputies), but the municipal delegates' term was kept at two and a half years, despite vigorous debate in the National Assembly during which many de base deputies argued forcefully that their term should also be extended to five years (Roman 2004, 213-4). According to Cuban sociologist Jesús García Brigos, in consequence of this the percentage of de base deputies has been reduced during the second half of their term.

Even more important is the potential for further reduction of this percentage during the course of the provincial delegates' and national deputies' terms of office, which last five years. The municipal assembly delegates' term of office is two and one half years, after which time a delegate may cease to fill that office (because he or she decided not to run for re-election or was not re-nominated or re-elected) but would still keep the position of provincial delegate or deputy. Thus, the original percentage of municipal delegates among the provincial delegates and the National Assembly deputies is reduced for the remaining period of the five-year term, as has indeed occurred (García Brigos, 131-2).

For example, 278 of the 601 National Assembly deputies elected in 1998, or 46.26 per cent, were de base. However by the end of the term in 2002, 215 of the 578 remaining deputies, or 37.2 per cent, were de base. García Brigos (p. 136) cites the example of the City of Havana Provincial Assembly, which, following the 1993 elections, had 45.5 de base delegates. By the end of that term in 1997 the percentage fell to 27.7 per cent.

During the 13 September 1997 session of the Plaza Municipal Assembly, delegate Lázaro Bravo Durañona, noting the decreasing percentage of de base deputies, proposed that every two and a half years, following the municipal delegate elections, 'the corresponding percentage of "de base" deputies and provincial delegates who have not been re-elected be updated, since this would maintain the continuity and our presence in the provinces as well as in the nation, without interruptions in the general elections'. He called for modifying the Constitution and Electoral Law. During the same session, the report entitled 'Accountability of the Provincial Delegates and Deputies', approved by the municipal assembly, recommended analysis of the situation which results in the de base representation falling well below fifty per cent in the provincial assemblies and the National Assembly, due to the non re-election in municipal elections of de base deputies and provincial delegates half-way through their national and provincial term of office (Acta de la XIII Sesión Ordinaria 1997, 4-5). Bravo, during an interview in 2001, told me that neither he nor the leadership of the municipal assembly had followed up by requesting that the deputies representing Plaza bring this concern to the National Assembly. Another delegate added that it was not common practice to view the deputies elected by a municipality as transmitters of municipal assembly concerns: 'We don't use this means. I myself sent a letter regarding a matter to the National Assembly, but I did not utilize our deputies. I should have but I didn't'.

### **Candidacy Commissions**

According to Articles 67 and 68 of the 1992 Electoral Law, candidacy commissions at the municipal, provincial and national levels select the candidates for Na-

tional Assembly deputies and provincial assembly delegates, for nomination by the municipal assemblies. At each level the commissions are led by a CTC representative, and also include representatives from the CDR, the FMC, the ANAP, the FEU and FEEM. The commissions' members are designated by the national, provincial, and municipal leadership respectively of these organizations.<sup>11</sup> Members of the commissions cannot be proposed as candidates. Neither the PCC, nor the UJC has representatives on these commissions, although the representatives may be party members. My conclusions drawn from studying the OPP is that there is little to distinguish party members from non-members regarding performance of duties. The party does not tell commission members whom to choose (Roman 2003, 89-97).

The National Candidacy Commission has the final say in preparing the lists of deputy pre-candidates, and picks those with national stature. Provincial candidacy commissions prepare the lists of pre-candidates for provincial assembly delegates, and propose deputy candidates from the provincial leadership to the National Candidacy Commission.<sup>12</sup> Municipal candidacy commissions transmit their proposals for deputy candidates to the National Candidacy Commission, including directos of municipal importance, and all de base, and submit to municipal assemblies for ratification all deputy pre-candidates, equal to the number of seats for each municipality (and reserve lists to substitute for candidates not approved).<sup>13</sup>

## Consultations

From September to October 2002, during the first step in the selection of candidates for the January 2003 elections, proposals from ninety CTC, student and mass organization plenary sessions held at the provincial and national levels were sent to the provincial and national candidacy commissions respectively. At the municipal level these organizations met in almost 700 plenary sessions, which sent proposals to the municipal candidacy commissions, taken, in part, from more than 32,500 candidates nominated for the 20 October 2002 municipal assembly delegate elections, as possible de base deputy candidates. In total, more than 57,300 persons were proposed prior to the 2003 elections (Rodríguez Cruz; Mayoral; Roman 2003, 104-12).<sup>14</sup>

After consultation with Cuba's nineteen national unions, the National Council of the CTC initially proposed 435 names, but added 15 more at the insistence of those attending the CTC national plenary session.<sup>15</sup> Based on proposals made by students at meetings held at Cuba's 79 university campuses, the National Council of the FEU submitted 280 names. ANAP's national committee proposed 300 people, and the FEEM, 288.<sup>16</sup>

It is not always clear who actually attends plenary sessions, or what weight their proposals carry. Prior to the 1998 elections, a municipal delegate in Plaza Municipality who was president of his people's council<sup>17</sup> and also provincial assembly delegate was told by the CDR representative on his people's council that he had been proposed by the plenary session of the municipal CDR as a de base candidate for both the provincial assembly and National Assembly. However the CDR section head (*jefe de zona*) from the delegate's circunscripción, and several other 'jefes de zona', never attended this plenary session, did not know it had taken place, and were unaware that he had been proposed. He was not included on either list of candidates.

In an interview on 13 January 2003, Félix García Peñaver, president of the

Plaza Municipal Candidacy Commission, told me that the number of proposals received was three times the number of candidates to be submitted. The candidacy commissions must then reduce the number. One criterion used is how many groups propose an individual. If he or she is proposed by only one or two organizations, that person is usually eliminated. Another, for de base candidates, is the percentage of votes received in the municipal delegate election.

Article 87 of the Electoral Law calls on the provincial and national candidacy commissions to consult with 'pertinent' sectors of the population.<sup>18</sup> However, it is the municipal commissions that engage in consultations to seek approval for the pre-candidates considered for nomination, and to note opposition to individuals. They consult with municipal assembly delegates and people's councils, prospective candidates' unions, work places, neighbourhoods, and mass organizations. Between 1.5 and 2 million persons are consulted.<sup>19</sup>

Victor Céspedes, president of the Playa Municipal Candidacy Commission for the 1998 elections, described the commission's consultations in an interview on 13 December 2001:

Each mass organization at the municipal level proposed *compañeros* who could be deputies. Those made up the first, very large list, which also included municipal assembly and provincial assembly delegates. Our commission then began to consult the public. This was done in plenary sessions with these municipal mass organizations, where we asked for the reasons they had proposed certain candidates, and then interviewed the rank and file to verify what we had been told. We also went to the work centres and neighbourhoods of proposed candidates to discuss their candidacy. Since we had candidates of good quality, there were no negative opinions expressed by the population. In some places like Romerillo, a marginal neighbourhood (*barrio insalubre*), people asked that one of the deputies participate more in local activities, like cultural activities, that he be more connected to the population. This candidate responded that he had obligations in other areas of the district, which kept him from participating more. Nevertheless, the majority of the people in Romerillo voted by a show of hands to accept the candidate. We went to this meeting with a list of potential candidates, which, as a result of these meetings, we had to whittle down.

The groups consulted vary between municipalities and years. In the candidate selection process in Plaza Municipality prior to the 1998 elections, the municipal candidacy commission consulted with all the municipal assembly delegates and twice with each people's councils. In the process prior to the 2003 elections individual municipal delegates were consulted, but the people's councils were not, nor were the people's councils consulted in Playa prior to 1998 and 2003 elections. In Playa, at the end of the consultation process in 2002, the final lists of candidates and of reserves for the three districts were approved at meetings of the municipal assembly delegates from each district. In Plaza in 1997 most consultations took place in large work centres, and far less in neighbourhood CDR and small work places: those working in centres of scientific investigations, and university students were not consulted. In 2003, constituents in Centro Habana told me they were consulted about their neighbour's candidacy.

Sometimes candidates themselves were not consulted regarding their willingness to serve. An artist was nominated and elected as provincial delegate in the City of Havana in 1993. She never attended any assembly meetings. When asked

why, she responded that she had never been consulted and had no interest in being a delegate. She subsequently resigned. During the 13 September 1997 Plaza Municipal Assembly session, delegate Jesús García Brigos mentioned the problem of provincial delegates who did not attend meetings. As a result some of them quit and some improved (Acta de la XIII Sesión Ordinaria 1997, 2-3).

I came across instances where deputies, well known and respected within their people's council, were not re-nominated. One reason cited to me several times was the need for new blood. Daniel Morales, a Playa municipal assembly delegate and former president of the Santa Fe People's Council was elected as deputy from District One in Playa in 1993 but not re-nominated in 1998 (Roman 2003, 223-4). Céspedes offered the following reasons:

Danielito is well liked and very popular in Santa Fe. His name was proposed by the organizations and by the people of Santa Fe. To decide whether to include or exclude him we had to do a detailed study, because this case was very controversial. When we did the analysis of Daniel, he no longer lived in Santa Fe.<sup>20</sup> We looked at other factors regarding his work and his personality, and that he had been a deputy and we were looking for new blood. We also specified some difficulties, and thus decided to substitute another candidate (Zenaida) for Daniel. We met with constituents of District One, attended by representatives of the mass organizations. They approved of Zenaida and we explained why Danielito was not included, that we needed new candidates with as much prestige and moral authority as Daniel. We recognized that Daniel was considered to be the mayor of Santa Fe, but when we made a more detailed analysis and consulted constituents, they presented us with a group of factors that we considered to be very important in making our decision. Since we were still in the consultation phase, once we had the final list, each member of the municipal candidacy commission consulted different municipal assembly delegates, and then compared notes. The delegates we interviewed were satisfied with the list but also proposed adding other names. Some asked, 'Why isn't X here, who was a deputy?' and we explained why we decided not to include this person's name. We made no changes, because we had substantial criteria to defend the list.

When I pointed out that Juan Carlos, the president of the Santa Fe's People's Council, told me he had proposed Daniel to the candidacy commission, Céspedes replied that other delegates had also proposed Daniel. At the meeting held with municipal assembly delegates, some proposed including Daniel, and others, Gala,<sup>21</sup> as deputy candidates. A vote by show of hands was taken for each candidate. While there were votes for candidates not on the commission's list, Céspedes claimed that about 90 per cent of the municipal assembly delegates were in agreement with the commission's selections. Daniel's name was placed on the reserve list. The delegates did not take their proposal for Gala or Daniel to the municipal assembly nominating session.

Personal jealousies, animosities or disputes have played a role in eliminating candidates. When I stayed with Daniel in 1996, rumours were floating around the neighbourhood that somehow he was receiving special privileges, which, as far as I could tell, were not true. This may account for some negative feedback. Another reason mentioned for not including Daniel was that he was no longer the president of the Santa Fe People's Council. Following the 1997 municipal assembly elections, Playa Municipal Assembly President Raúl García asked Daniel not to run for

this position, citing the need for new leadership. This request may have reflected feuding between García and Daniel, concerning the placement of a funeral home beside a public park, which García favoured and Daniel and the municipal assembly delegate for the affected circunscripción opposed (the funeral home was located elsewhere) (Roman 2003, 230-1).

In one case, infighting led to the elimination of the candidacy of a highly respected de base provincial delegate, president of his people's council. Prior to the 1998 election this delegate had served two terms as provincial delegate from the City of Havana Province. Even though he had been outspoken and, at times, in open conflict with then provincial assembly president Pedro Chávez, Chávez personally insisted that he be re-nominated in 1993. However, after the 1993 elections, Chávez was no longer the assembly president. Even though this delegate's re-election for 1998 was proposed by the municipal CDR, his name was not on the list of pre-candidates submitted to the municipal assembly. The president of the municipal candidacy commission told the delegate that another municipal delegate had accused him of conspiring to disrupt the workings of the municipal assembly. It was later revealed that this was a setup to get him out of the People's Power system, and that his accuser had been told to do so, perhaps because he was too outspoken. His accuser was subsequently removed as people's council president, not re-elected as municipal assembly delegate, and ended up in jail for theft. The delegate who had been falsely accused, informed the members of his people's council that he did not wish them to try and include him as a provincial assembly candidate, and he also declined to run again as municipal assembly delegate.

When I asked Céspedes about the role of the Communist Party in the Playa municipal candidacy commission's work in 1997, he responded, 'The party, as society's guide, is interested in how we work, but we do not consult with the party regarding the candidates'. I asked Félix García whether the Plaza municipal candidacy commission consulted the party in 2002 regarding the candidates, and if the party had a veto. He insisted that 'the party does not have a veto over any candidate. By law the PCC cannot and would not interfere. We on the commission would not accept it'.

I asked both García and Céspedes about the working relation with the national and provincial candidacy commissions. Garcia responded:

The National Candidacy Commission sends us documents to orient us in our work. It selects candidates at the national level, and the provincial commission selects candidates at the provincial level. The municipal commission chooses the de base candidates from its municipality and 'directo' candidates whose work is connected to the municipality. Before making their selections for candidates the national and provincial commissions discussed them with us. We had a meeting of all three levels to reach an agreement on all the candidates proposed for Plaza. Furthermore, people like Alarcón were proposed by the mass organizations' national commissions and also by their local plenary sessions in Plaza.

Céspedes gave the following response to the same question:

We met once a week with the provincial candidacy commission. We informed the members regarding our selection process: where we were having difficulties, where we needed help. We asked for help when facing difficult decisions,

such as technical problems. Every commission on each level has autonomy. But when there was a controversial problem the provincial commission helped us resolve the problem. Since our members came from distinct organizations, at times there were major controversies among us. The national commission gave us assistance regarding methodology and procedures. The national commission recommends national personalities to the provincial commissions, which in turn pass them on to the municipal commissions together with recommendations of provincial candidates. We consult with the population regarding the names they propose.

## **Nominations**

Prior to the 1992 Constitution and Electoral Law, municipal assemblies elected the provincial assembly delegates and National Assembly deputies from lists of candidates proposed by the candidacy commissions, presided over by PCC representatives. There had to be at least twenty-five per cent more candidates presented than seats to fill. At least fifty per cent of the candidates had to also be *de base*. The municipal assembly delegates could reject any of the candidates and propose replacements. The 1992 changes included having the municipal assemblies nominate the candidates from a closed list, who were then subjected to non-competitive direct elections by the electorate; and having the candidacy commission instead of municipal delegates propose replacement candidates for those they rejected by the municipal assembly (García Brigos 2001, 130-1).

The presidents of the municipal candidacy commissions present for nomination by the municipal assemblies the candidates for National Assembly deputies, equal to the number of positions to be filled. Each municipal assembly nominates the number of candidates equal to the number of deputies to be elected by the municipality.<sup>22</sup> Thus, acceptance by the municipal assembly has been tantamount to election. Prior to the vote the municipal delegates are given biographical information regarding the candidates. Each candidate for National Assembly deputy must receive at least fifty per cent of the vote in the municipal assembly.

Municipal assembly delegates may raise objections to a particular deputy candidate presented by the commission, and, if that candidate does not receive fifty per cent of the votes, then the first ranked substitute candidate from the reserve list is submitted. Delegates cannot propose substitutes for defeated candidates. Some delegates have complained that in order to be able to vote for a substitute it first becomes necessary to openly oppose someone on the primary list, which some feel uncomfortable doing. They favoured having the delegates propose substitute candidates.

In an interview with Plaza municipal assembly delegates on 10 November 2001, one delegate told me, 'There have been cases of candidates proposed by the people's council who did not subsequently appear in the list of candidates. It is very hard at the time of discussion in the municipal assembly session for a delegate to insist on his proposals, even though we all have the freedom to do so. If I want to have another candidate but the candidates presented by the commission are all capable, it is difficult to insist on my choice. It would be better if we could propose someone without necessarily excluding another'.

It has been the common practice of the municipal assembly delegates to accept the proposals of the candidacy commissions, but I found recent examples where candidates have been rejected or at least questioned, clearly showing that municipi-

pal delegates have exercised their right of opposition. It occurred in at least four municipal assemblies in 1997 (A. August 1999, 314).

In the municipality Santo Domingo in Villa Clara Province in 1997, the municipal assembly delegates wanted a particular individual who was not on the candidacy commission's list to be nominated as National Assembly deputy. The delegates rejected the candidates and the substitutes presented by the candidacy commission until the candidate they wanted was presented and approved.

A few days prior to the 27 September 1997 nominating session in Plaza, a group of delegates noticed that the biography of municipal assembly secretary, María Rollok, had not been among those distributed for candidates for provincial assembly delegate. They informed the candidacy commission that they were going to stop the assembly session if she was not included on the candidate list. The next day she was included and her biography distributed.

At the same session there were objections raised to the candidacy of Antonio Esquivel Yedra, an official of the Ministry of Tourism, proposed for provincial assembly delegate, even though one people's council had strongly indicated to the commission that, because of citizens complaints, Esquivel was unacceptable. If the construction of a state building causes damages to nearby houses, the responsible agency is obliged to repair them. Esquivel had promised residents of a housing complex of wooden shacks (*ciudadela*) to fix a roof damaged by the nearby construction of a TRANSTUR (Office of Tourist Transport) building, and then did not comply, nor did he meet with the residents, who were furious and complained to their municipal delegate.

During the assembly session, municipal delegate Domingo Bravo stated that Esquivel had not manifested sufficient respect to the affected residents and their municipal delegate, explaining that his failure to comply with promises demonstrated his lack of communication and sensibility. Therefore Bravo opposed his candidacy, since a provincial assembly delegate should be a 'man of the people'. Delegate Alicia Céspedes, vice president of the affected people's council, said she found out about the problem from a neighbour. Esquivel's candidacy was considered twice within her people's council and rejected both times. Also, the prestige of the Ministry of Tourism was at stake, and therefore she considered that the candidacy commission was in error when they proposed him.

President of the municipal candidacy commission Iluminado Pérez admitted that after being consulted, the people's council had requested more information on Esquivel. Commission members met with the municipal delegate from the affected site, and reviewed relevant documents and letters. Pérez maintained that the problem with the roof had existed prior to Esquivel having promised to get it repaired, and that while there were excessive delays in repairs and other human errors, 'the commission considered that it would not be just to reject Esquivel, who has had a splendid career, and who should not be turned down for one incident'.

Delegate Bertha María Valdés said that this discussion was disagreeable, since the people's council had twice expressed its opposition to Esquivel's candidacy. The problem consisted of the promises made, and how they were going to present this compañero as a candidate for provincial assembly delegate to the population. If he was going to be the representative of the people, the people should respect him. To be a representative one should be sensitive to the people's needs (*sensibilizarse con el pueblo*).

Esquivel then spoke, claiming that the housing complex of wooden shacks was

an old problem, that he took on the responsibility without being able to count on anyone's help and that he had not had the necessary agility to resolve the problem. The materials for the repairs had been acquired and the work was scheduled to begin on 1 December 1997. He had not been able to attend meetings with the population because he was sick in the hospital. He emphasized that for him it would be a very high honour to be a provincial delegate and that wherever he has been he has represented his people.

The municipal assembly delegates then voted to reject Esquivel's candidacy. The candidacy commission proposed another candidate to replace him, who was approved (*Acta de la Primera Sesión Extraordinaria 1997, 2-3*). At a meeting of the Plaza Communist Party shortly after the session, President Fidel Castro criticized the candidacy commission for having failed to follow the advice of the people's council regarding Esquivel.

The debate at the 1 December 2002 Plaza Municipal Assembly's nominating session demonstrates how the rules stifle the municipal delegates' opportunities to make changes and present alternative candidates. While there was strong support expressed for Sagrado Armado, a municipal delegate, to be a de base deputy candidate (he was on the list for provincial delegate), for some proposing a change was distasteful, since, if Sagrado were presented as a deputy candidate, one of the de base deputy candidates on the commission's list would first have to be rejected by the municipal delegates.

Candidacy commission president García presented the eleven provincial assembly delegate candidates. Delegate Tamara García Moya complained that Sagrado should instead be nominated for National Assembly deputy, due to his excellent work as the municipal assembly delegate on behalf of the Príncipe neighbourhood, especially with regard to popular culture, which was not reflected in the biography distributed. 'He dedicated all his energy in spite of his poor health which at one point was critical'. She stated that she had previously informed the candidacy commission of her proposal.

Municipal delegate Xiomara Leyva Romero said that when the candidacy commission first consulted the municipal assembly delegates, they proposed a group of *compañeros*, including Sagrado, to be National Assembly deputy candidates. By the time of the second consultation with delegates, all of these had been switched to provincial assembly delegate candidates. She and others argued that because of excellent work as municipal delegate, Sagrado should be a deputy candidate.

Delegate José Mayo pointed out that even though Sagrado had more than enough exceptional merits to be a deputy, delegates cannot propose substitute candidates. They can only object to those proposed by the candidacy commissions. Therefore they were not empowered to propose Sagrado as a deputy candidate. Assembly president Mayra Lasalle Noval reiterated that to include Sagrado as a deputy candidate, one of the proposed candidates must be eliminated. Delegate Juan Ajete Pita asked if they were proposing the elimination of Sagrado as a provincial delegate candidate, which would be necessary if he were subsequently to be proposed by the commission as deputy candidate. The commission president Félix García responded that if Sagrado were eliminated as a provincial delegate candidate, it would then be necessary to eliminate one of the de base deputy candidates if the commission were to be able to propose Sagrado, since Sagrado, as a municipal delegate, would be de base. Furthermore, the commission would not be obliged

then to submit Sagrado's name as the substitute deputy candidate, which concerned delegate Ana Hilda Buenos.

Delegate Félix Leyva said that there was a strong consensus favouring Sagrado, but once removed as provincial delegate candidate, then an evaluation would have to be made as to whether he should be inserted as deputy candidate. Delegate Jorge Rodríguez stated that as a new delegate he did not know Sagrado, and therefore believed the decision should be left to the candidacy commission. He did not feel capable to decide on excluding Sagrado as provincial delegate, or excluding another deputy candidate. Delegate Pablo Bacallao complained that the commission presented insufficient information for the delegates to make judgments. Several delegates, including president Lasalle, supported the candidacy commission, emphasizing that candidates submitted by the commission had the necessary qualifications to be provincial delegates or deputies.

Tamara García Moya stuck to her proposal to nominate Sagrado as deputy, since Sagrado had more merits than another proposed candidate. Jesús Ramos, secretary of the provincial assembly, clarified that a person could be provincial delegate and deputy at the same time. Thus, since Tamara had not proposed excluding Sagrado from the list of provincial delegate candidates, but rather adding him as a deputy candidate, the vote on the list of provincial candidates submitted by the commission could proceed, and would not exclude the possibility of substituting Sagrado in place of another deputy candidate. All the provincial assembly delegate candidates, including Sagrado, were approved.

Next on the agenda was the approval of the eight National Assembly deputy candidates. Tamara García proposed having Sagrado replace Jorge Alfonso García, one of the de base candidates for deputy. She claimed that the municipal delegates are most familiar with the work done by delegates like Sagrado, and, while understanding that the commission proposes substitutes if a candidate is voted down, they had conveyed their support for Sagrado to the commission. Those who have dedicated most time and effort to the People's Power should be rewarded. Alfonso had not distinguished himself as a municipal delegate in comparison with other compañeros.

Delegate Vicente Rodríguez proposed excluding Martha Beatriz D'Alvaré Gonzalez from the deputies' list, since she had refused when she was previously proposed as municipal assembly president. Rodríguez also proposed that Cuban poet Pastor Felipe be eliminated because he did not live in Plaza, and while not making him ineligible, he would prefer someone who resided in Plaza.

Delegate Alina Mourelle Soto responded to Tamara claiming that delegates should not criticize the work of other municipal delegates when they propose excluding candidates, because no official commission rates each delegate as good, bad or average. Xiomara Leyva emphasized that Alfonso was a responsible, hard working compañero and should not be compared with other candidates. Delegate Mayra Marrero and others said both Alfonso and D'Alvaré were outstanding delegates. One explained that the reason D'Alvaré had turned down the assembly presidency was that, at the time, her mother was dying of cancer. Delegate Odalys Martínez publicly criticized Vicente Rodríguez for not having first spoken to D'Alvaré and not having investigated his charges. Sagrado then spoke. The candidacy commission consulted all delegates and reached a consensus. He called for a vote of confidence for the commission, and stated, 'For me it is a privilege to have been selected as provincial assembly delegate'. He also praised Pastor Felipe.

Delegate Carmen Rosa San Juan called for a vote of confidence for the commission and for keeping the list of deputy candidates as presented. She also noted that delegates were surprised that assembly secretary Rollok had not been re-nominated as provincial delegate candidate. Rollok responded that others should be given a chance to serve. Delegate José Mayo referred to negative comments made about Alfonso, reasoning that if he had not performed well as a municipal delegate he would not have been re-elected. In the vote by show of hands that followed, all the deputy candidates proposed by the commission were accepted. D'Alvaré got 100 per cent, Alfonso got 99 per cent, and Pastor Felipe, 99 per cent (Acta de la Sesión Extraordinaria 2002 [my translation]).

### **Election campaigns**

In the next stage of the electoral process the National Assembly deputy and provincial assembly delegate candidates from a municipality, or a district within a municipality, meet with constituents. These encounters take place with residents on street corners and in courtyards, with students in schools, with workers at work places, and with local chapters of mass organizations and other groups in community centres. The purpose is to introduce the candidates to the constituents, urge voters to vote for the entire slate, and allow them to ask the candidates questions. There are no appeals for votes for an individual candidate or negative campaigning against anyone.

In 1998 I attended campaign meetings in Playa's District One. In 2003 I made the rounds with candidates from Plaza's District Three, including Alarcón, to neighbourhood gatherings, a group of family doctors, local FMC leaders, workers at the Hotel Nacional and a radio station, and junior high school students.

Commission president García introduced the candidates, and several candidates made short speeches, stressing the quality of all the candidates and the desirability of the voto unido. No campaign promises were made. The mood of the public attending was enthusiastic and respectful. Most questions concerned the voto unido, post-election contact, and solving local problems. Alarcón's speech closed the meetings. People then gathered around Alarcón to relate personal problems. Security guards did not surround Alarcón or other candidates to isolate them from constituents.

On 23 December 2002, the candidates met with municipal leaders of the mass associations in Plaza. Questions from the audience concerned difficulties with public transportation, the five Cuban prisoners held in the United States, and how the situation in Venezuela affected Cuba. At a meeting in early January 2003 with workers from the newspaper *Granma*, members of the audience asked about repairing potholes in the streets and leaking water tanks, the high price of food, traffic signals and road signs, lack of repairs to clinics and hospitals, and participation of the population in making these repairs. Some demanded that deputies and provincial delegates follow up and meet with the population after the elections, to assure that promised repairs had been done. One person asked if the voto unido was democratic.

At a meeting on 10 January 2003 with workers at the Cuban Institute for Friendship with the Nations (*Instituto Cubano de Amistad con los Pueblos* or ICAP) one person asked why there were not more women and young people as candidates. Other comments concerned the desirability of more constituent meetings with the candidates, and the need for street repairs. One person asked about

the role of deputies in solving neighbourhood problems. The response was that deputies do not represent circunscripciones.

At a meeting in the Príncipe neighbourhood in Plaza on 13 January 2003, neighbours presented a folklore show. During the question period a local CDR official wanted to know why the provincial assembly delegates rarely visited the neighbourhood after the elections to help solve the problems. The president of Plaza Municipal Assembly, also a deputy candidate, responded by promising that more attention would be paid. Afterwards, Alarcón was surrounded by constituents.

At the meeting on 14 January 2003, which I attended in Plaza with family doctors, a deputy candidate stated that after studying the PCC's informal opinion polls (*estado de opinión*<sup>23</sup>), he determined that many were not convinced regarding the *voto unido*, and that others wrongly thought that deputies should solve their everyday problems. That evening in a local school building, the candidates met with an overflowing crowd of people from the neighbourhood. A woman asked for an explanation of the *voto unido*. Another expressed disappointment that the five Cuban prisoners held in the United States had not been proposed as candidates. Among those who approached Alarcón afterwards to relate problems was a woman who said her building, which housed twenty families, was sinking. Alarcón told his aide to get the women's name and address and to look into the problem.

At a neighbourhood encounter I attended on 15 January 2003, one question related to government programmes concerning drug trafficking and drug use. Alarcón, in his lengthy response, explained the origins and reasons for the problems, including the growth of tourism. However, he did not discuss how the government, or more specifically, the National Assembly, would deal with the problems. Another constituent inquired about the Cuban economic situation. Another candidate responded with platitudes and assurances that socialism is the only solution. A priest, who was the local municipal delegate, asked about the situation in Venezuela and its effects on Cuba, and a woman asked about the reactions of constituents during other campaign meetings and what questions were asked.

At an encounter on 15 January 2003 in the working class municipality of San Miguel del Padrón in the City of Havana Province, the candidates were asked what they planned to do to help the citizens of San Miguel. Deputy candidate Leonardo Martínez, president of the National Assembly Commission on Productive Affairs, responded that the policies of the Cuban socialist government are designed to benefit all sectors and all parts of Cuba equally:

We are national deputies and we respond to the needs of the nation, and what we do is not just for San Miguel, but for everyone. If twenty per cent of the budget goes for education, it is not just for Havana, but for the whole country, and not just for Guantánamo or Baracoa. They ask what are you going to do about the severe housing problem in San Miguel, about roads, water. The people of San Miguel can rest assured that no law passed by the Assembly will be against the people of San Miguel. The benefits of the Revolution are for all.

Other questions asked in San Miguel included the inquiries about the functioning of a deputy and of the ANPP commissions, when would there be another encounter with deputies, and what laws had the ANPP passed. One person wanted to know more about the candidates. Another complemented Martínez for having discussed the recently passed law on agricultural cooperatives with the farmers in the area (Roman 2005, 37-56).

On 16 January 2003 I attended a street meeting in the La Timba section of Plaza, a 'barrio insalubre'. Alarcón was not present. The main speaker was the deputy candidate who was also the head of the PCC in Plaza. He said that some believe erroneously that deputies can solve their problems, but only socialism can solve society's problems. The attendance was sparse and there were no questions asked.

Alarcón's speech was invariably the highlight of the meetings I attended. When he was not present, the quality of the meetings declined. His basic speech, little changed from the ones he gave at campaign stops in 1993 and 1998 (Roman 2003, 139-44) dealt with an explanation of the electoral process. He described how candidates were chosen, including consultations and nominations by municipal assemblies, which he pointed out, were at times contested. He gave a lengthy rationale for non-competitive elections and explained why people should cast a *voto unido*, but made it clear that the secret ballot gave everyone the right to vote for all, for some, one or none, and that not voting for the whole slate did not make a person less revolutionary.

Besides the campaigning during the election period, there was little contact between the deputies and their constituents. In urban areas, and where deputies did not reside in the municipalities, many were not familiar with their National Assembly deputies. Of course, *de base* deputies have constant encounters with their constituents in their circunscripciones (Roman 2003, 72-81). Within the municipalities they represent, some 'directo' deputies attend assembly sessions and biannual neighbourhood accountability sessions held by municipal delegates (Roman 2003, 151-210; 2004, 213). When relevant, deputies also consult constituents regarding pending legislation, such as occurred in rural areas in 2001-2002 during the formulation of the bill on agricultural cooperatives (Roman 2005, 44-54).

## Conclusion

For Cuban sociologist Juan Valdés Paz, the liberal concept views participation in electoral terms; the socialist concept includes participation in government and governing (*gestión*).<sup>24</sup> Nominations and elections for Cuba's National Assembly deputies differ from the liberal definition of democracy, since they are not based on open candidacies or competitive elections, but rather on consultation and consensus in candidate selection, and representation from all sectors of society, including the humblest.

Alarcón's main rationale for non-competitive elections and the *voto unido* is that they make possible achieving the goal of pluralistic representation, electing 'directo' representatives from all sectors of society, no matter how little known candidates may be outside their neighbourhoods and workplaces, as well as *de base* deputies, also not well-known outside their circunscripciones. Alarcón stresses the democratic character of the large percentage of *de base* deputies, usually from humble backgrounds, strengthened by their constituent base plus close ties to their constituents, thus possessing unique abilities, compared to other parliamentary systems, to feel the pulse of the people. This was illustrated to me during the meetings with deputies held in each province to propose changes to the bill on agricultural cooperatives. The *de base* delegates seemed to be the most outspoken advocates for the farmers on the contentious issues like housing, road maintenance, and profit sharing (Roman 2005).<sup>25</sup>

The selection of national and provincial candidates differs from systems where political parties choose candidates, and where money is important. In Cuba the PCC and UJC play no formal role in deputy candidate selection, which does not necessarily mean that they lack influence. As with most political practice in Cuba, nominations result from consultation with constituents and consensus.

All systems have their drawbacks. Some of the limitations of the Cuban system may be inherent in non-competitive elections. They also are influenced by decades of hostility, aggression and blockade by the U.S. The Cubans do not want to leave an opening where candidates supported by U.S. money can gain entry.

Those opposing socialism are not nominated in Cuba, just as those opposing capitalism do not usually sit in the U.S. Congress. However, in Cuba candidate selection makes unlikely the nomination of those advocating alternative policies (I also found instances where outspoken deputies have not been re-nominated). National policy alternatives are not discussed with constituents in campaigns. The emphasis, rather, is on the quality of all the candidates, and on socialism as the solution for all problems. National policies have been widely discussed such as 'The Call' in 1990 prior to the Fourth Party Congress (Roman 2003, 161), and the Workers' Parliaments in 1994 (Roman 2003, 249-63), and widespread consultation regarding pending legislation (Roman 2004, 216-18; Roman 2005, 43-54).

During campaign stops, constituents frequently asked questions about the *voto unido*, perhaps indicating a lack of understanding or support. Voters' lack of familiarity with individual candidates (*directos* have no residency requirement) could partly explain why most vote for the entire slate. Constituents also complain that they have little contact with deputies after the elections.

There is merit in Cuban leaders' justification of non-competitive elections to ensure the election of unknown, but worthy, *de base* and '*directo*' candidates, shifting the 'democratic' characteristics to consultations in choosing candidates. It is not clear otherwise how you could reach this representational goal. This rationale is less convincing when applied to deputy nominations by municipal assemblies, who are similarly confronted with a closed list. As is demonstrated in the assembly debates cited above, municipal assembly delegates personally know the *de base* candidates, who are their colleagues, and also many of the local *directos*. They can and have, though not frequently, blocked candidates, but cannot propose substitutes. The confusion and frustration surrounding the attempt to switch Sagrado Armado from provincial delegate to National Assembly deputy, is illustrative.

In summary, giving credence to the Cuban concept of democracy, taking into account the unique characteristics of the Cuban candidate selection and composition of the Cuban National Assembly, non-competitive elections and a one party system do not necessarily translate into an undemocratic electoral process. The electoral process for municipal assembly delegates shows that open nominations and competitive elections are not incompatible with Cuban socialism. Analysing the electoral process for ANPP deputies must take into account Cuba's goals of participation, involvement and representation.

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## Notes

1. Research for this article was supported by grants from the City University of New York PSC-CUNY Research Foundation. This paper was originally presented at the Latin American Studies Association 2006 Congress, San Juan, Puerto Rico, 16 March 2006.
2. For an overview of the OPP, with emphasis on the municipal assemblies, see Roman (2003); for a discussion of how the ANPP operates, see Roman (2004, 206-222); for an analysis of the legislative process see Roman (2005, 37-56).
3. There is very little detailed literature on the ANPP and the election process in Cuba. Arnold August (1999) presents an uncritical study. Carolee Bengelsdorf (1994) analyses the development of the OPP and the ANPP debates. In literature by Cuban authors, Fernando Alvarez Tabio (1985) wrote the definitive commentary on the 1976 Cuban Constitution; Domingo García (1986) presents an overall description of the OPP; the changes introduced in the 1992 Constitution and Electoral Law are analysed by Hugo Ascuy (1995), Luis Suárez Salazar (1995a, 1995b), and Martha Prieto Valdés (2000). Jesús García Brigos (2001) discusses the election of *de base* deputies. Critical assessments of the ANPP were made by Haroldo Dilla (1995) and Juan Valdés Paz (2001).
4. The role of the PCC is often misunderstood. While Article 5 of the Cuban Constitution identifies it as 'the highest leading force of the society and the state', this does not mean that it engages in routine government and political functions. For example, the PCC is not authorized to and does not propose legislation to the ANPP, choose candidates for People's Power assemblies, or preside over People's Power assembly sessions. It rather is oriented to set, implement and control broader political and societal goals, and oversee political practice. See *Constitution of the Republic of Cuba* (1992, 5), and Roman (2003, 89-95).
5. For a detailed analysis of nominations and elections of municipal assembly delegates see Roman (2003, 103-25).
6. For a discussion of the *voto unido* see Roman (2003, 134-43).
7. María Julia Mayoral, 'El voto unido no es una consigna, es una estrategia revolucionaria', see bibliography.
8. María Julia Mayoral, 'El voto unido no es una consigna, es una estrategia revolucionaria', see bibliography.
9. María Julia Mayoral, 'El voto unido no es una consigna, es una estrategia revolucionaria', see bibliography.
10. María Julia Mayoral, 'El voto unido no es una consigna, es una estrategia revolucionaria'; and María Julia Mayoral, 'Igualdad de oportunidades para todos los candidatos'; see bibliography.
11. Ley Electoral, Articles 67 and 68, 57, Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular.
12. Ley Electoral, Article 75, 58, Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular.
13. Ley Electoral, Article 77, 58, Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular.
14. Francisco Rodríguez Cruz, '¿Cómo nace un candidato?'; Roman (2003, 104-12); María Julia Mayoral, 'Sociedad civil y el proceso electoral en Cuba', see bibliography.
15. Iliama Hautrive, 'Miles de candidatos', see bibliography.
16. Lourdes Pérez, Juan Antonio Borrego and Juvenal Batán, 'Elegir candidatas a diputados a la ANAP, la FEU y la FEEM', see bibliography.
17. People's councils are groups of approximately 10 municipal delegates from contiguous *circunscripciones* together with representatives of the main economic entities in the area. See Roman (2003, 211-241).
18. Ley Electoral, Article 87, 59, Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular.

19. María Julia Mayoral, 'El voto unido no es una consigna, es una estrategia revolucionaria'; Ernest Freire Casañas, president of the National Candidacy Commission, cited in Arnold August (1999, 311-12).
20. Daniel temporarily moved his family out of his parents' overcrowded house in Santa Fe. When another house became available he moved back to Santa Fe.
21. Gala had been proposed by the candidacy commission as a candidate to continue as a *de base* provincial assembly delegate, but some municipal assembly delegates in Playa wanted him to be a candidate for National Assembly deputy instead. The commission argued that Gala should remain as a provincial delegate because he could help solve many of the problems of the province.
22. Ley Electoral, Article 92, 59, Asamblea Nacional del Poder Popular.
23. For an explanation of the *estado de opinión* see Roman (2003, 155).
24. Juan Valdés Paz, 'Notas sobre la participación política en Cuba', unpublished manuscript.
25. Regarding *de base* deputies in ANPP debates, see Bengelsdorf 1994, 119-29).

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