

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS IN MEXICO

Not too many years ago, many observers considered Mexico to be a model for LDCs (less developed countries) around the world. The “**Mexican miracle**” described a country with a rapidly increasing GNP in orderly transition from an authoritarian to a democratic government. Then, the economy soured after oil prices plummeted in the early 1980s, the peso took a nosedive, and debt mounted during the decade. Ethnic conflict erupted in the mid-1990s when the Zapatistas took over the capital of the southern state of Chiapas and refused to be subdued by the Mexican army. On the political front, the leading presidential candidate was assassinated, and top political officials were arrested for bribery, obstructing justice, and drug pedaling. Then under new leadership Mexico surprised the world by recovering some financial viability through paying back emergency money it borrowed from the United States. In 2000, under close scrutiny by western democracies, Mexico held an apparently honest, competitive presidential election, and confirmed the emergence of a competitive electoral system. Then, just as pundits were declaring Mexico’s path to capitalism and liberal democracy a successful one, the contentious presidential election of 2006 threatened to rock the government’s legitimacy to its core. Once again, Mexico survived the uproar, only to be hit hard by the global economic crisis in late 2008.

Despite its uncertain path, Mexico may be seen as a representative for the category of “newly industrializing countries.” Its purchasing power parity (\$14,200) is fairly high, and about 58% of its workers are employed in the service sector. This “developing” nation called Mexico is full of apparent contradictions that make its politics sometimes puzzling, but always interesting and dynamic. Mexico is generally described economically as a developing country and politically as a “transitional democracy.” In both cases it is at an “in-between” stage when compared with other countries globally, but the transition has had its surprises, and its successes and challenges may well serve as beacons for other nations to follow.

SOVEREIGNTY, AUTHORITY, AND POWER

Like many other Latin American countries, Mexico’s sources of public authority have fluctuated greatly over the centuries. From the time that the Spanish arrived in the early 16th century until independence was won in 1821, Mexico was ruled by a viceroy, or governor put in place by the Spanish king. The rule was centralized and authoritarian, and it allowed virtually no participation by the indigenous people. After Mexican independence, this ruling style continued, and all of Mexico’s presidents until the mid-20th century were military generals. The country was highly unstable in the early 20th century, and even though a constitution was put into place, Mexico’s presidents dictated policy until very recent years. Significant economic growth characterized the late 20th century, followed by democratization that is currently reshaping the political system.

LEGITIMACY

In general, Mexican citizens consider their government and its power legitimate. An important source of legitimacy is the **Revolution of 1910-1911**, and Mexicans deeply admire revolutionary leaders throughout their history, such as Miguel Hidalgo, Benito Juarez, Emilio Zapata, Pancho Villa, and Lazaro Cardenas. Revolutions have been accepted as a path to change, and charisma is highly valued as a leadership characteristic.

The revolution was legitimized by the formation of the **Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)** in 1929. The constitution that was written during that era created a democratic, three-branch government, but PRI was intended to stabilize political power in the hands of its leaders. PRI, then, served as an important source of government legitimacy until other political parties successfully challenged its monopoly during the late 20th century. After the election of 2000, PRI lost the presidency and one house of Congress, so that by 2006, the

party held only a minority of seats in both houses of the legislature. Then, in the 2009 mid-term election, PRI showed that it was still a viable party by capturing a plurality of seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Today, sources of public authority and political power appear to be changing rapidly. However, some characteristics carry through from one era to the next.

HISTORICAL TRADITIONS

Mexico's historical tradition may be divided into three stages of its political development – colonialism, the chaos of the 19th and early 20th century, and the emphasis on economic development during its recent history.

- **Authoritarianism** – Both from the colonial structure set up by Spain and from strong-arm tactics by military-political leaders such as Porfirio Diaz, Mexico has a tradition of authoritarian rule. Currently, the president still holds a great deal of political power, although presidential authority has been questioned in the past few years.
- **Populism** – The democratic revolutions of 1810 and 1910 both had significant peasant bases led by charismatic figures that cried out for more rights for ordinary Mexicans, particularly Amerindians. The modern Zapatista movement is a reflection of this historical tradition, which is particularly strong in the southern part of the country.
- **Power plays/divisions within the elite** – The elites who led dissenters during the Revolutions of 1810 and 1910, the warlords/caudillos of the early 20th century, and the *politicos vs. tecnicos* of the late 20th century are all examples of competitive splits among the elite. Current party leaders are often at odds, as displayed during the election crisis of 2006. Presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's challenge of the election results threatened to destroy fragile democratic structures, although the crisis appeared to have passed by 2007.
- **Instability and legitimacy issues** – Mexico's political history is full of chaos, conflict, bloodshed, and violent resolution to political disagreements. As recently as 1994, a major presidential candidate was assassinated. Even though most Mexicans believe that the government is legitimate, the current regime still leans toward instability.

POLITICAL CULTURE

SENSE OF NATIONAL IDENTITY

Mexicans share a strong sense of national identification based on a common history, as well as a dominant religion and language.

- **The importance of religion** – Until the 1920s, the Catholic Church actively participated in politics, and priests were often leaders of populist movements. During the revolutionary era of the early 20th century, the government developed an anti-cleric position, and today the political influence of the church has declined significantly. However, a large percentage of Mexicans are devout Catholics, and their beliefs strongly influence their political values and actions.
- **Patron-clientelism** – This system of cliques based on personal connections and charismatic leadership has served as the glue that has held an agrarian Mexico together through practicing “you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours.” The network of **camarillas** (patron-client networks) extends from the political elites to vote-mobilizing organizations throughout the country. Corruption is one by-product of patron-clientelism. Democratization and industrialization have put pressure on this system,

and it is questionable as to whether or not modern Mexico can continue to rely on patron-clientelism to organize its government and politics. The defeats of PRI for the presidency in 2000 and 2006 are indications that clientelism may be on the decline, but corporatism still plays a big role in policymaking.

- **Economic dependency** – Whether as a Spanish colony or a southern neighbor of the United States, Mexico has almost always been under the shadow of a more powerful country. In recent years Mexico has struggled to gain more economic independence.

GEOGRAPHIC INFLUENCE

Mexico is one of the most geographically diverse countries in the world, including high mountains, coastal plains, high plateaus, fertile valleys, rain forests, and deserts within an area about three times the size of France.

Some geographical features that have influenced the political development of Mexico are:

- **Mountains and deserts** – Because large mountain ranges and vast deserts separate regions, communication and transportation across the country. Rugged terrain also limits areas where productive agriculture is possible. Regionalism, then, is a major characteristic of the political system.
- **Varied climates** – Partly because of the terrain, but also because of its great distance north to south, Mexico has a wide variety of climates – from cold, dry mountains to tropical rain forests.
- **Natural resources** – Mexico has an abundance of oil, silver, and other natural resources, but has always struggled to manage them wisely. These resources undoubtedly have enriched the country (and the United States), but they have not brought general prosperity to the Mexican people.
- **A long (2000-mile-long) border with the United States** – Contacts – including conflicts and migration and dependency issues – between the two countries are inevitable, and Mexico has often been overshadowed by its powerful neighbor to the north.
- **111 million people** – Mexico is the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, and among the ten most populous of all. Population growth has slowed significantly to about 1.1%, but population is still increasing.
- **Urban population** – Mexico has urbanized rapidly, as people have moved to cities from rural areas. Today about 3/4 of the population lives in cities of the interior or along the coasts. Mexico City is one of the largest cities in the world, with about 18 million inhabitants living in or close to it. The shift from rural to urban population during the late 20th century disrupted traditional Mexican politics, including the patron-client system.

POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC CHANGE

Mexican history dates back to its independence in 1821, but many influences on its political system developed much earlier. Over time, Mexico has experienced authoritarian governments first under the colonial control of Spain, and then under military dictatorships during the 19th century. The 19th century also saw populist movements influenced by democratic impulses, accompanied by violence, bloodshed, and demagoguery. The first decades of the 20th century saw an intensification of violence as the country sank into chaos, and the political system was characterized by serious instability and rapid turnover of political authority. Stability

was regained by resorting to authoritarian tactics that remained in place until the latter part of the century. In recent years, Mexico has shown clear signs of moving away from authoritarianism toward democracy.

Economic changes in Mexico have been no less dramatic. For most of its history, Mexico's economy was based on agriculture, along with other primary sector activities such as mining. However, Mexico was strongly influenced by the industrialization of its northern neighbor, the United States, starting in the late 1800s. Under the dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz, U.S. business interests were encouraged to develop in Mexico, and a strong dependency on the U.S. economy was put in place. Mexican nationalists have reacted against U.S. participation in the Mexican economy at various times since those days, so that anti-U.S. sentiments have become one dynamic of political and economic interactions. During the late 20th century, Mexico industrialized rapidly, with its rich natural resource of oil serving as the wind that drove the economic expansion. Mexico has struggled since then to break its dependency on one product, especially after the sudden drop in oil prices during the early 1980s sent the Mexican economy into a tailspin. Today Mexico has moved rapidly from an agricultural society to an industrial one, and even in some ways toward post-industrialism.

We will divide our study of historical influences into three parts:

- **Colonialism**
- **Independence until the Revolution of 1910**
- **The 20th century after the revolution**

COLONIALISM

From 1519 to 1821 Spain controlled the area that is now Mexico. The Spanish placed their subjects in an elaborate social status hierarchy, with Spanish born in Spain on top and the native Amerindians on the bottom. Colonialism left several enduring influences:

- **Cultural heterogeneity** – When the Spanish arrived in 1519 the area was well populated with natives, many of whom were controlled by the Aztecs. When the conquistador Hernan Cortés captured the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, the Spanish effectively took control of the entire area. Even though status differences between native and Spanish were clearly drawn, the populations soon mixed, particularly since Spanish soldiers were not allowed to bring their families from Spain to the New World. Today about 60% of all Mexicans are **mestizo** (a blend of the two peoples), but areas far away from Mexico City – particularly to the south – remained primarily Amerindian.
- **Catholicism** – Most Spaniards remained in or near Mexico City after their arrival, but Spanish Catholic priests settled far and wide as they converted the population to Christianity. Priests set up missions that became population centers, and despite the differences in status, they often developed great attachments to the people that they led.
- **Economic dependency** – The area was controlled by Spain, and served the mother country as a colony, although the territory was so vast that the Spanish never realized the extent of Mexico's natural resources.

INDEPENDENCE/NEW COUNTRY (1810-1911)

As part of a wave of revolutions that swept across Latin America in the early 1800s, a Mexican parish priest named Miguel Hidalgo led a popular rebellion against Spanish rule in 1810. After eleven years of turmoil (and Father Hidalgo's death), Spain finally recognized Mexico's independence in 1821. Father Hidalgo,

though of Spanish origins, was seen as a champion of the indigenous people of Mexico. He still symbolizes the political rights of the peasantry, and statues in his memory stand in public squares all over the country. However, stability and order did not follow independence, with a total of thirty-six presidents serving between 1833 and 1855.

THE NEW COUNTRY

Important influences during this period were:

- **Instability and legitimacy issues** – When the Spanish left, they took their hierarchy with them, and reorganizing the government was a difficult task.
- **Rise of the military** – The instability invited military control, most famously exercised by Santa Anna, a military general and president of Mexico.
- **Domination by the United States** – The U.S. quickly picked up on the fact that its neighbor to the south was in disarray, and chose to challenge Mexican land claims. By 1855, Mexico had lost half of its territory to the U.S. What is now Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Utah, and part of Colorado fell under U.S. control after the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo was signed in 1848.
- **Liberal vs. conservative struggle** – The impulses of the 1810 revolution toward democracy came to clash with the military's attempt to establish authoritarianism (as in colonial days). The Constitution of 1857 was set up on democratic principles, and a liberal president, **Benito Juarez**, is one of Mexico's greatest heroes. Like Father Hidalgo, Juarez was very popular with ordinary Mexican citizens, but unlike Hidalgo, he was a military general with a base of support among elites as well. Conservatism was reflected in the joint French, Spanish, and English takeover of Mexico under Maximilian (1864-1867). His execution brought Juarez back to power, but brought no peace to Mexico.

“THE PORFIRIATO” (1876-1911)

Porfirio Diaz – one of Juarez's generals – staged a military coup in 1876 and instituted himself as the president of Mexico with a promise that he would not serve more than one term of office. He ignored that pledge and ruled Mexico with an iron hand for 34 years. He brought with him the *cientificos*, a group of young advisors that believed in bringing scientific and economic progress to Mexico. Influences of the “Porfiriato” are:

- **Stability** – With Diaz the years of chaos came to an end, and his dictatorship brought a stable government to Mexico.
- **Authoritarianism** – This dictatorship allowed no sharing of political power beyond the small, closed elite.
- **Foreign investment and economic growth** – The *cientificos* encouraged entrepreneurship and foreign investment – primarily from the United States – resulting in a growth of business and industry.
- **Growing gap between the rich and the poor** – As often happens in developing countries, the introduction of wealth did not insure that all would benefit. Many of the elite became quite wealthy and led lavish life styles, but most people in Mexico remained poor.

Eventually even other elites became increasingly sensitive to the greed of the Porfirians and their own lack of opportunities, and so Diaz's regime ended with a coup from within the elite, sparking the Revolution of 1910.

1910 - PRESENT

The Revolution of 1910 marked the end of the “Porfiriato” and another round of instability and disorder, followed by many years of attempts to regain stability.

THE CHAOS OF THE EARLY 20TH CENTURY

In 1910 conflict broke out as reformers sought to end the Diaz dictatorship. When Diaz tried to block a presidential election, support for another general, Francisco Madero – a landowner from the northern state of Coahuila – swelled to the point that Diaz was forced to abdicate in 1911. So the Revolution of 1910 began with a movement by other elites to remove Diaz from office. In their success, they set off a period of warlordism and popular uprisings that lasted until 1934.

The influence of this era include:

- **Patron-client system** – In their efforts to unseat Diaz, **caudillos** – political/military strongmen from different areas of the country – rose to challenge one another for power. Two popular leaders – **Emiliano Zapata** and **Pancho Villa** – emerged to lead peasant armies and establish another dimension to the rebellion. Around each leader a **patron-client** system emerged that encompassed large numbers of citizens. Many caudillos (including Zapata and Villa) were assassinated, and many followers were violently killed in the competition among the leaders.
- **Constitution of 1917** – Although it represents the end of the revolution, the Constitution did not bring an end to the violence. It set up a structure for democratic government – complete with three branches and competitive elections – but political assassinations continued into the 1920s. It also sought to limit foreigners’ rights to exploit natural resources by declaring that all subsoil rights are the property of the nation.
- **Conflict with the Catholic Church** – The **Cristero Rebellion** broke out in the 1920s as one of the bloodiest conflicts in Mexican history, with hundreds of thousands of people killed, including many priests. Liberals saw the church as a bastion of conservatism and put laws in place that forbid priests to vote, put federal restrictions on church-affiliated schools, and suspended religious services. Priests around the country led a rebellion against the new rules that contributed greatly to the chaos of the era.
- **The establishment of PRI** – Finally, after years of conflict and numerous presidential assassinations, President Calles brought caudillos together for an agreement in 1929. His plan – to bring all caudillos under one big political party – was intended to bring stability through agreement to “pass around” the power from one leader to the next as the presidency changed hands. Each president could only have one six-year term (**sexenio**), and then must let another leader have his term. Meanwhile, other leaders would be given major positions in the government to establish their influence. This giant umbrella party – **PRI** (Institutional Revolutionary Party) – “institutionalized” the revolution by stabilizing conflict between leaders. Other parties were allowed to run candidates for office, but the umbrella agreement precluded them from winning.

**COMPARATIVE REVOLUTIONS
EARLY 20TH CENTURY**

Country	Motivations	Characteristics	Outcomes
Russia (1917)	Defeat authoritarian government; carry forward Marxist ideology	Led by V.I. Lenin, Bolsheviks; violent, sudden change; carried out in middle of World War I	Four years of civil war; triumph of Marxism-Leninism; one-party state
China (1911)	Drive out “foreign devils”; defeat authoritarian, weak government; assert nationalism	Regional warlordism, violent, sudden change; chaotic, competing forces	Years of chaos; two competing forces; triumph of Maoism; one-party state
Mexico (1910)	Defeat authoritarian government; break dependency on foreign governments; elite power struggle	Began as a conflict among elites; joined by populist forces; sudden, violent change; chaotic competing forces	Years of violence, instability; elites “umbrellaed” under PRI for stability; one-party state

Origins of one-party states. Although the early 20th century revolutions of Russia, China, and Mexico had some very different motivations, characteristics, and outcomes, they had a few things in common, including the outcome of a one-party state.

THE CARDENAS UPHEAVAL – 1934-1940

When Calles’s term as president was up, **Lazaro Cardenas** began a remarkable sexenio that both stabilized and radicalized Mexican politics. Cardenas (sometimes called “the Roosevelt of Mexico” by U.S. scholars) gave voice to the peasant demands from the Revolution of 1910, and through his tremendous charisma, brought about many changes:

- **Redistribution of land** – Land was taken away from big landlords and foreigners and redistributed as *ejidos* – collective land grants – to be worked by the peasants.
- **Nationalization of industry** – Foreign business owners who had been welcomed since the time of Diaz were kicked out of the country, and much industry was put under the control of the state. For example, **PEMEX** – a giant government-controlled oil company – was created.
- **Investments in public works** – The government built roads, provided electricity, and created public services that modernized Mexico.

- **Encouragement of peasant and union organizations** – Cardenas welcomed the input of these groups into his government, and they formed their own *camarillas* with leaders that represented peasants and workers on the president's cabinet.
- **Concentration of power in the presidency** – Cardenas stabilized the presidency, and when his *sexenio* was up, he peacefully let go of his power, allowing another *caudillo* to have the reins of power.

The strategy of state-led development that Cardenas followed is called **import substitution industrialization**. ISI employs high tariffs to protect locally produced goods from foreign competition, government ownership of key industries, and government subsidies to domestic industries. Since there was relatively little money in private hands to finance industrialization, the government took the lead in promoting industrialization. Although including peasant and union organizations in the policymaking process is a populist touch, the Cardenas government is still an example of **state corporatism**, with the president determining who represents different groups to the government.

THE EMERGENCE OF THE *TECNICOS* AND THE PENDULUM THEORY

Six years after Cardenas left office, Miguel Aleman became president, setting in place the **Pendulum Theory**. Aleman rejected many of Cardenas' socialist reforms and set Mexico on a path of economic development through economic liberalization, again encouraging entrepreneurship and foreign investment. He in turn was followed by a president who shifted the emphasis back to Cardenas-style reform, setting off a back-and-forth effect – socialist reform to free-market economic development and back again. As Mexico reached the 1970s the pendulum appeared to stop, and a new generation of *tecnicos* – educated, business-oriented leaders – appeared to take control of the government and the PRI with a moderate, free-market approach to politics. In many ways, the pendulum was swinging between modernization and dependency theories (see pp. 189-190), with the government eventually settling on modernization theory. By the 1980s, Mexico had settled into **neoliberalism**, a strategy that calls for free markets, balanced budgets, privatization, free trade, and limited government intervention in the economy.

By the 1950s, Mexico was welcoming foreign investment, and the country's GNP began a spectacular growth that continued until the early 1980s. This "**Mexican Miracle**" – based largely on huge supplies of natural gas and oil – became a model for less developed countries everywhere. With the "oil bust" of the early 1980s, the plummeting price of oil sank the Mexican economy and greatly inflated the value of the peso. Within PRI, the division between the "*politicos*" – the old style *caciques* who headed *camarillas* – and the *tecnicos* began to grow wider, as demands for political liberalization grew in intensity.

CITIZENS, SOCIETY, AND THE STATE

For many years Mexican citizens have interacted with their government through an informal web of relationships defined by patron-clientelism. Because the *camarillas* are so interwoven into the fabric of Mexican politics, most people have had at least some contact with the government during their lifetimes. However, interactions between citizens and government through clientelism generally have meant that the government has had the upper hand through its ability to determine which interests to respond to and which to ignore. The role of citizens in the Mexican political system is changing as political parties have become competitive and democracy seems to be taking root, yet the old habits of favor-swapping are engrained in the political culture.

CLEAVAGES

Cleavages that have the most direct impact on the political system are social class, urban v. rural, mestizo v. Amerindian, and north v. south. These cleavages are often **crosscutting**, with different divisions emerging

as the issues change, but in recent years they have often **coincided** (see p. 23) as urban, middle-class mestizos from the north have found themselves at odds with rural, poor Amerindians from the south.

- **Urban v. rural** – Mexico's political structure was put into place in the early 20th century – a time when most of the population lived in rural areas. PRI and the patron-client system were intended to control largely illiterate peasants who provided political support in exchange for small favors from the *politicos*. Today Mexico is more than 75% urban, and the literacy rate is about 90%. Urban voters are less inclined to support PRI, and they have often been receptive to political and economic reform.
- **Social class** – Mexico's Gini coefficient is .46 (2008 estimate), which means that economic inequality is high. In 2002 the poorest 10% of the population earned about 1.6% of Mexico's income while the wealthiest 10 percent earned 35.6%. This economic divide translates into higher infant mortality rates, lower levels of education, and shorter life expectancies among the poor. In very recent years Mexico's middle class has been growing, even in poorer sections of the country. Some are from the informal economy (businesses not registered with the government), and others from new industries or service businesses. Middle and upper class people are more likely to support PAN, and are more likely to vote than the poor, especially as PRI-style patron-client ties unwind.
- **Mestizo v. Amerindian** – The main ethnic cleavage in Mexico is between mestizo (a blend of European and Amerindian) and Amerindian. Only about 10% of Mexicans actually speak an indigenous language, but as many as 30% think of themselves as Amerindian. Amerindians are more likely to live in marginalized rural areas and to live in poverty. This cleavage tends to define social class, with most of Mexico's wealth in the hands of mestizos.
- **North v. south** – In many ways, northern Mexico is almost a different country than the area south of Mexico City. The north is very dry and mountainous, but its population is much more prosperous, partly because many are involved in trade with the United States. The north has a substantial middle class with relatively high levels of education. Not surprisingly, they are generally more supportive of a market-based economy. The south is largely subtropical, and its people are generally less influenced by urban areas and the United States. Larger numbers are Amerindian, with less European ethnicity, and their average incomes are lower than those in the north. A typical adult in the south has only six years of schooling, as compared to 8.1 years on average in the north. Although their rural base may influence them to support PRI, some southerners think of the central government as repressive. The southernmost state of Chiapas is the source of the Zapatista Movement, which values the Amerindian heritage and seeks more rights for natives.

One recent change worth noting is that the incomes of the poorest half of the population are growing faster than the average. Poverty levels as defined by the government have fallen, and income distribution is becoming less unequal. For example, Mexico's Gini coefficient has dropped from more than .54 in 2002 to .46 in 2008. If significant numbers of the poor begin making enough money to move them into the middle class, cleavages that define political behavior will certainly be affected. Likewise, if job opportunities in the formal sector (businesses recognized by the government) spread into new regions of the country as the economy grows, regional and ethnic divisions may also change.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation in Mexico has been characterized by revolution and protest, but until recently, Mexican citizens were generally subjects under authoritarian rule by the political elite. Citizens sometimes benefited

from the elaborate patronage system, but legitimate channels to policymakers were few. Today, citizens participate through increasingly legitimate, regular elections.

THE PATRON-CLIENT SYSTEM

Traditionally, Mexican citizens have participated in their government through the informal and personal mechanisms of the **patron-client system**. Since the formation of PRI in 1929, the political system has emphasized compromise among contending elites, behind-the-scenes conflict resolution, and distribution of political rewards to those willing to play by the informal and formal rules of the game.

The patron-client system keeps control in the hands of the government elite, since they have the upper hand in deciding who gets favors and who doesn't. Only in recent years have citizens and elites begun to participate through competitive elections, campaigns, and interest group lobbying.

Patron-clientelism has its roots in warlordism and loyalty to the early 19th century **caudillos**. Each leader had his supporters that he – in return for their loyalty – granted favors to. Each group formed a **camarilla**, a hierarchical network through which offices and other benefits were exchanged. Until the election of 2000, within PRI most positions on the president's cabinet were filled either by supporters or by heads of other camarillas that the president wanted to appease. Peasants in a camarilla received jobs, financial assistance, family advice, and sometimes even food and shelter in exchange for votes for the PRI.

Despite trends toward a modern society, the patron-client system is still very important in determining the nature of political participation. Modernization tends to break up the patron-client system, as networks blur in large population centers, and more formal forms of participation are instituted. However, vestiges of the old patron-client system were at work in the controversy surrounding the 2006 presidential election, with the losing candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador accusing the winning candidate's PAN party of election fraud. Polls indicate that between a quarter and a third of voters believed Obrador, since decades of one-party rule had sustained fraudulence under the patron-client system. As a result, many Mexicans still deeply distrust government officials and institutions.

PROTESTS

When citizen demands have gotten out of hand, the government has generally responded by not only accommodating their demands, but by including them in the political process through **co-optation**. For example, after the 1968 student protests in Mexico City ended in government troops killing an estimated two hundred people in **Tlatelolco Plaza**, the next president recruited large numbers of student activists into his administration. He also dramatically increased spending on social services, putting many of the young people to work in expanded antipoverty programs in the countryside and in urban slums.

Social conditions in Mexico lie at the heart of the Chiapas rebellion that began in 1994. This poor southern Mexican state sponsored the **Zapatista uprising**, representing Amerindians that felt disaffected from the more prosperous mestizo populations of cities in the center of the country. The Chiapas rebellion reminded Mexicans that some people live in appalling conditions with little hope for the future. President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) made some efforts to incorporate the Zapatistas into the political system, but the group still has not formally called off its rebellion. However, the federal government currently supplies electricity and water to the villages the Zapatistas still control, a measure that may have helped to quiet the movement.

A major protest erupted in 2006 in Oaxaca, a neighboring state to Chiapas in the south. The unrest began as a teachers' strike in the state capital, but when local police tried to break it up, other activists joined in, the police lost control, and the demonstrations went on for months. The protests focused on Ulises Ruiz, the governor of Oaxaca State, one of the few PRI candidates to win gubernatorial elections in 2004. Activist

groups demanded his resignation, claiming that his election was fraudulent and criticizing Ruiz for ruling with an iron hand. Eventually President Vicente Fox sent a national police force to Oaxaca to shut down the demonstrations, but activists vowed to continue their struggle to remove Ruiz from office. Since Fox' action took place during his last month in office, he left it to his successor, Felipe Calderón, to deal with the unruly state.

VOTER BEHAVIOR

Before the political changes of the 1990s, PRI controlled elections on the local, state, and national levels. Voting rates were very high because the patron-client system required political support in exchange for political and economic favors. Election day was generally very festive, with the party rounding up voters and bringing them to the polls. Voting was accompanied by celebrations, with free food and entertainment for those that supported the party. Corruption abounded, and challengers to the system were easily defeated with "tacos," or stuffed ballot boxes.

Despite PRI's control of electoral politics, competing parties have existed since the 1930s, and once they began pulling support away from PRI, some distinct voting patterns emerged. Voter turnout was probably at its height in 1994, when about 78% of all eligible citizens actually voted. This is up from 49% in 1988, although any comparisons before 1988 have to be considered in light of corruption, either through fraudulent voting or simply the announcement from PRI of inflated voter participation rates. Voter rates have declined since 1994, but a respectable 64% of those eligible actually voted in the election of 2000, and 60% in the election of 2006.

Some factors that appeared to influence voter behavior in the presidential election of 2006 were:

- **Region** – Regional differences were quite dramatic, with 47% of the voters in the north choosing PAN candidate Felipe Calderón, 27% choosing PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo, and 24% selecting Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. In contrast, 40% of voters in the south selected Obrador, 29% chose Calderón, and 27% chose Madrazo. Obrador also picked up many votes (44%) in the central part of the country around Mexico City, where he served as mayor before running for president.
- **Education** – The higher the amount of education, the more likely voters were to vote for the PAN candidate Felipe Calderón, with about 42% of all voters with college educations voting for Calderón. However, PRD on the left had significant support, with Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador garnering 38%. In contrast, only 14% of those with university educations voted for Roberto Madrazo (the PRI candidate).
- **Income** – Income also made a difference, with 50% of upper income voters choosing PAN's Calderón, compared to 30% for Obrador, and 14% for Madrazo.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Despite the fact that PRI formed an umbrella party over elites in the years that it ruled, Mexico has always had a surprising number of groups who have refused to cooperate. These groups have formed the basis for a lively civil society in Mexico, which also has provided an atmosphere where public protests have been acceptable. PRI practiced **state corporatism**, with the state mediating among different groups to ensure that no one group successfully challenged the government. PRI formally divided interest groups into three sectors: labor, peasants, and the middle class ("popular"), with each dominated by PRI-controlled groups. However, The Confederation of Employers of the Mexican Republic (a labor group) was an autonomous group that vocally and publicly criticized the government.

PRI's downfall started in civil society with discontented businessmen who were not incorporated into the government's system. This group was behind the formation of PAN in 1939, and though the party did not successfully challenge PRI for many years, PAN's 2000 presidential candidate – Vicente Fox – emerged to successfully challenge PRI partly because he had the backing of powerful business interests. With the narrow PAN victory in 2006, business interests again benefitted, so PRI's old state corporatism clearly has been broken up. What will emerge in its place is now the question – state corporatism, neo-corporatism (where interests, not the government controls), or pluralism (independent interests have input, but don't control).

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS

Mexico appears to be a country in economic and political transition. As a result, it is difficult to categorize its regime type. For many years its government was highly authoritarian, with the president serving virtually as a dictator for a six-year term. Mexico's economy has also been underdeveloped and quite dependent on the economies of stronger nations, particularly that of the United States. However, in recent years Mexico has shown strong signs of economic development, accompanied by public policy supportive of a free market economy. Also, the country's political parties are becoming more competitive, and the dictatorial control of PRI has been soundly broken by elections since 1997. Although the political structures themselves remain the same as they were before, significant political and economic reforms have greatly altered the ways that government officials operate.

REGIME TYPE

Traditionally, Mexico has had a **state corporatist structure** – central, authoritarian rule that allows input from interest groups outside of government. Through the camarilla system, leaders of important groups, including business elites, workers, and peasants, actually served in high government offices. Today political and economic liberalization appears to be leading toward a more open structure, but corporatism is still characteristic of policymaking. Is the modern Mexican government authoritarian or democratic? Is the economy centrally controlled, or does it operate under free market principles? The answers are far from clear, but the direction of the transition is toward both economic and political liberalization.

“DEVELOPED,” “DEVELOPING,” OR “LESS DEVELOPED”?

Categorizing the economic development of countries can be a tricky business, with at least four different ways to measure it:

- **GNP per capita** – This figure is an estimate of a country's total economic output divided by its total population, converted to a single currency, usually the U.S. dollar. This measure is often criticized because it does not take into account what goods and services people can actually buy with their local currencies.
- **PPP (Purchasing Power Parity)** – This measure takes into account the actual cost of living in a particular country by figuring what it costs to buy the same bundle of goods in different countries. Mexico's figure is \$14,200 per year.
- **HDI (Human Development Index)** – The United Nations has put together this measure based on a formula that takes into account the three factors of longevity (life expectancy at birth), knowledge (literacy and average years of schooling), and income (according to PPP). Mexico's literacy rate is 92.4% for men, and 89.6% for women, and life expectancy is 73.25 for men and 79 for women.

- **Economic dependency** – A less developed country is often dependent on developed countries for economic support and trade. Generally speaking, economic trade that is balanced between nations is considered to be good. A country is said to be “developing” when it begins relying less on a stronger country to keep it afloat financially.
- **Economic inequality** – The economies of developing countries usually benefit the rich first, so characteristically the gap between the rich and poor widens. This trend is evident in Mexico with its high Gini coefficient of .46.

No matter which way you figure it, Mexico comes out somewhere in the middle, with some countries more developed and some less. Since these indices in general are moving upward over time for Mexico, it is said to be “developing.”

A TRANSITIONAL DEMOCRACY

Politically, Mexico is said to be in transition between an authoritarian style government and a democratic one. From this view (modernization theory), democracy is assumed to be a “modern” government type, and authoritarianism more old-fashioned. Governments, then, may be categorized according to the degree of democracy they have. How is democracy measured? Usually by these characteristics:

- **Political accountability** – In a democracy, political leaders are held accountable to the people of a country. The key criterion is usually the existence of regular, free, and fair elections.
- **Political competition** – Political parties must be free to organize, present candidates, and express their ideas. The losing party must allow the winning party to take office peacefully.
- **Political freedom** – The air to democracy’s fire is political freedom – assembly, organization, and political expression, including the right to criticize the government.
- **Political equality** – Signs of democracy include equal access to political participation, equal rights as citizens, and equal weighting of citizens’ votes.

Mexico – especially in recent years – has developed some democratic characteristics, but still has many vestiges of its authoritarian past, as we have seen. Another often used standard for considering a country a democracy is the longevity of democratic practices. If a nation shows *consistent* democratic practices for a period of 40 years or so (a somewhat arbitrary number), then it may be declared a stable democracy. Mexico does not fit this description.

LINKAGE INSTITUTIONS

Before the trend toward democratization took hold during the late 20th century, Mexico’s political parties, interest groups, and mass media all worked to link Mexican citizens to their government in significant ways. This linkage took place under the umbrella of PRI elite rulers so that a true, independent civil society did not exist. However as democratization began and civil society began to develop, the structures were already in place, so that activating democracy was easier than it would have been otherwise.

POLITICAL PARTIES

For most of the 20th century, Mexico was virtually a one-party state. Until 2000 all presidents belonged to PRI, as did most governors, representatives, senators, and other government officials. Over the past twenty years or so other parties have gained power, so that today competitive elections are a reality, at least in many parts of Mexico.

The three largest parties in Mexico today are:

1) **PRI** – The *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* was in power continuously from 1920 until 2000, when an opposition candidate finally won the presidency. PRI was founded as a coalition of elites who agreed to work out their conflicts through compromise rather than violence. By forming a political party that encompassed all political elites, they could agree to trade favors and pass power around from one cacique to another. The party is characterized by:

- **A corporatist structure** – Interest groups are woven into the structure of the party. The party has the ultimate authority, but other voices are heard by bringing interest groups under the broad umbrella of the party. This structure is not democratic, but it allowed input into the government from party-selected groups whose leaders often held cabinet positions when Mexico was a one-party state. Particularly since the Cardenas sexenio (1934-1940), peasant and labor organizations have been represented in the party and hold positions of responsibility, but these groups are carefully selected and controlled by the party.
- **Patron-client system** – The party traditionally gets its support from rural areas where the patron-client system is still in control. As long as Mexico remained rural-based, PRI had a solid, thorough organization that managed to garner overwhelming support. Until the election of 1988, there was no question that the PRI candidate would be elected president, with 85-90% victories being normal.

PRI lost the presidency in 2000 to The National Action Party's Vicente Fox, and it trailed the other two major parties in the election of 2006. However, in the mid-term election of 2009, it picked up major support in the legislature and currently – by forming a coalition with a minor party – holds a majority of seats in the lower house of the legislature.

2) **PAN** – The National Action Party, or PAN, was founded in 1939, making it one of the oldest opposition parties. Although PAN provided little competition for PRI for many years, it began winning some gubernatorial elections in the north in the 1990s. It was created to represent business interests opposed to centralization and anti-clericism (PRI's practice of keeping the church out of politics.) PAN is strongest in the north, where the tradition of resisting direction from Mexico City is the strongest. PAN's platform includes:

- Regional autonomy
- Less government intervention in the economy
- Clean and fair elections
- Good rapport with the Catholic Church
- Support for private and religious education

PAN is usually considered to be PRI's opposition to the right. PAN's candidates won the presidency in 2000 and 2006, and between the 2006 and 2009 (mid-term) elections it has more deputies and senators in the legislature than any other party. Although Felipe Calderon remains popular as president, the party experienced a major setback when it lost more than 60 seats in the lower house of the legislature in 2009.

3) **PRD** – The Democratic Revolutionary Party, or PRD, is generally thought of as PRI's opposition on the left. Its presidential candidate in 1988 and 1994 was **Cuauhtemoc Cardenas**, the son of Mexico's famous and revered president Lazaro Cardenas. He was ejected from PRI for demanding reform that emphasized social justice and populism, and he responded by switching parties. In 1988

Cardenas won 31.1% of the official vote, and PRD captured 139 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (out of 500). Many observers believe that if the election of 1988 had been honest, Cardenas actually would have won.

PRD has been plagued by a number of problems that have weakened it since 1988. It has had trouble defining a left of center alternative to the market-oriented policies established by PRI. Their leaders have also been divided on issues, and have sometimes publicly quarreled. The party has been criticized for poor organization, and Cardenas is not generally believed to have the same degree of charisma as did his famous father. PRD's new standard-bearer is **Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador**, the popular mayor of Mexico City that barely lost the presidential election in 2006 to PAN candidate Felipe Calderón. However, Obrador's refusal to accept the results of the election split PRD once again into factions – those that support Obrador and those that oppose him. The party made significant gains in the legislative elections of 2006, but the disarray since then caused it to lose more than half its seats in the lower house in 2009.

ELECTIONS

Citizens of Mexico directly elect their president, Chamber of Deputy representatives, and senators, as well as a host of state and local officials. Although the parties have overlapping constituencies, typical voter profiles are:

- PRI – small town or rural, less educated, older, poorer
- PAN – from the north, middle-class professional or business, urban, better educated (at least high school, some college), religious (or those less strict about separation of church and state)

COMPARATIVE PARTY SYSTEMS

	BRITAIN	RUSSIA	MEXICO
Type of system	multi-party system	multi-party system	multi-party system
relationship to the legislature	2 parties dominate the legislature	1 party dominates the legislature	3 parties well-represented in the legislature
relationship to the executive	1 party dominates the executive	1 party dominates the executive	unclear pattern, appears competitive
Types of parties	parties on the left, center, and right; regional parties relatively strong	parties of power common; party in the previous one-party system is still competitive.	parties on left and right; party in the previous one-party system is still competitive.

- PRD – younger, politically active, from the central states, some education, small town or urban; drew some middle-class and older voters in 2006

Elections in Mexico today tend to be most competitive in urban areas, but more competition in rural areas could be seen in both the presidential and legislative elections of 2006. Under PRI control, elections were typically fraudulent, with the patron-client system encouraging bribery and favor swapping. Since 1988, Mexico has been under pressure to have fairer elections. Part of the demands have come from a more urban, educated population, and some have come from international sources as Mexico has become more and more a part of world business, communication, and trade.

The elections of 2000 brought the PAN candidate, **Vicente Fox**, into the presidency. PAN captured 208 of the 500 deputies in the lower house (Chamber of Deputies), but PRI edged them out with 209 members. 46 of the 128 senators elected were from PAN, as opposed to 60 for PRI. The newly created competitive electoral system has encouraged coalitions to form to the left and right of PRI, and the split in votes may be encouraging gridlock, a phenomenon unknown to Mexico under the old PRI-controlled governments.

The Elections of 2006

When the votes were counted in the presidential election on July 2, 2006, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón and PRD candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador were virtually tied for the lead, with PRI candidate Roberto Madrazo trailing far behind. The official vote tally put Calderón ahead by about 230,000 votes, out of 41.5 million votes cast, about a half percentage point difference. Obrador challenged the results as fraudulent and demanded a recount. The election tribunal investigated his allegations, and for more than two months the election was held in the balance until the tribunal gave its report. In early August the tribunal ordered recounts on only about 9% of the precincts, not the full recount demanded by Obrador. In early September, the tribunal announced that the recount did not change the outcome, despite some errors in math and some cases of fraud. During the entire process Obrador held rallies for supporters, and he refused to accept the tribunal's decision, claiming that the election was "stolen" by a broad conspiracy between business leaders and the government. He encouraged his supporters to protest, and he claimed to be the legitimate president. Obrador's challenge drew strength from well established traditions from the political culture – populism and dissent among the elites – but by 2007 the crisis appeared to have passed.

The legislative elections of 2006 changed the power balance as PRI lost heavily in both houses, PAN received modest gains in the Chamber of Deputies, and PRD gained many seats in both houses.

The Mid-term Election of 2009

The mid-term election in 2009 brought some sweeping legislative changes that have important implications for the policymaking process in Mexico. When PAN's Felipe Calderón won the presidency in 2006, PAN also won more seats in the Chamber of Deputies than any other party. Yet it did not hold a majority of the seats. In the mid-term election of 2009, both PAN and PRD lost a significant number of seats, and surprisingly – since its presidential candidate came in a poor third in the presidential race of 2006 – PRI almost doubled the number of seats it held in the Chamber. PRI also won five of the six state governorships in play and many important mayoralities. Although Calderón reminded the voters of PRI's corruption, PRI successfully countered with a slogan of "proven experience, new attitude." The party almost certainly was helped by the factional splits in PRD that made Obrador's leadership of that party controversial. The results of this election meant that Calderón would govern for the last three years of his presidency with a legislature dominated by PRI, a situation that almost certainly will make it more difficult to get his initiatives passed into law.

Electoral System

The president is elected through the “**first-past-the-post**” (plurality) system with no run-off elections required. As a result, the current Mexican president, Felipe Calderón, was elected with only a little more than a third of the total popular votes. Members of congress are elected through a dual system of “first-past-the-post” and **proportional representation**. Proportional representation was increased in a major reform law in 1986, a change that gave power to political parties that have challenged PRI’s control. Each of Mexico’s 31 states elects three senators. Two of them are determined by majority vote, and the third is determined by whichever party receives the second highest number of votes. Also, thirty-two Senate seats are determined nationally through a system of proportional representation that divides the seats according to the number of votes cast for each party. In the lower house (the Chamber of Deputies), 300 seats are determined by plurality within single-member districts, and 200 seats are chosen by proportional representation.

INTEREST GROUPS AND POPULAR MOVEMENTS

The Mexican government’s corporatist structure generally responds pragmatically to the demands of interest groups through accommodation and **co-optation**. As a result, political tensions among major interests have rarely escalated into the kinds of serious conflict that can threaten stability. Where open conflict has occurred, it has generally been met with efforts to find a solution. Because private organizations have been linked for so long to the government, Mexico’s development of a separate civil society has been slow.

In the past 30 years or so, business interests have networked with political leaders to protect the growth of commerce, finance, industry and agriculture. Under **state corporatism**, these business elites have become quite wealthy, but they were never incorporated into PRI. However, political leaders have listened to and responded to their demands. Labor has been similarly accommodated within the system. Wage levels for unionized workers grew fairly consistently between 1940 and 1982, when the economic crisis prompted by lower oil prices caused wages to drop. The power of union bosses is declining, partly because unions are weaker than in the past, and partly because union members are more independent. Today with PAN in control of the presidency business interests may exhibit more characteristics of **neo-corporatism**, but PAN does not control the legislature, and there is no clear evidence that businesses are controlling the government.

One powerful interest group is the Educational Workers’ Union, Latin America’s largest trade union. It has long had the power to negotiate salaries for teachers each year, and many see it as a neo-corporatist group that has a great deal of power over government decisions in education.

In rural areas, peasant organizations have been encouraged by PRI, particularly through the *ejido* system that grants land from the Mexican government to the organizations themselves. Since the 1980s these groups have often demanded greater independence from the government, and have supported movements for better prices for crops and access to markets and credit. They have joined with other groups to promote better education, health services, and environmental protections.

Urban popular movements also abound in Mexico, with organizations concerned about social welfare spending, city services, neighborhood improvements, economic development, feminism, and professional identity. As these groups have strengthened and become more independent, the political system has had to negotiate and bargain with them, transforming the political culture and increasing the depth of civil society.

THE MEDIA

As long as PRI monopolized government and politics in Mexico, the media had little power to criticize the government or to influence public opinion. The government rewarded newspapers, magazines, radio, and television stations that supported them with special favors, such as access to newsprint or airwaves. The

government also subsidized the salaries of reporters, writers, and media personalities that strongly supported PRI initiatives. A considerable amount of revenue came from government-placed advertisements, so few media outlets could afford to openly criticize the government.

The media began to become more independent starting in the 1980s at the same time that PRI began losing its hold in other areas. Today there are several major television networks in the country, and many people have access to international newspapers and networks, such as CNN and BBC. Several news magazines now offer opinions of government initiatives, just as similar magazines do in the United States. One indication of freedom of the press came early in the Fox administration when the media publicized "Toallagate," a scandal involving the purchase of some significantly overpriced towels for the president's mansion. The Mexican press also criticized President Fox for his "*Comes y te vas*" (eat and leave) instructions to Fidel Castro after a United Nations gathering, so as not to offend U.S. President George W. Bush with Castro's presence. So, for better or for worse, Mexican citizens now have access to a much broader range of political opinions than they ever have had before.

GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS

Mexico is a federal republic, though the state and local governments have little independent power and few resources. Historically, the executive branch with its strong presidency has had all the power, while the legislature and judiciary followed the executive's lead, rubber-stamping executive decisions. Though Mexico is democratic in name, traditionally the country has been authoritarian and corporatist. Since the 1980s, the government and its citizens have made significant changes, so that – more and more – Mexico is practicing democracy and federalism. An important consequence of growing party competition has been that state governors have become more willing to exercise their formal powers.

According to the Constitution of 1917, Mexican political institutions resemble those of the U.S. The three branches of government theoretically check and balance one another, and many public officials – including the president, both houses of the legislature, and governors – are directly elected by the people. In practice, however, the Mexican system is very different from that of the United States. The Mexican constitution is very long and easily amended, and the government can best be described as a strong presidential system.

THE EXECUTIVE

A remarkable thing happened in the presidential election of 2000. The PRI candidate did not win. Instead, Vicente Fox, candidate for the combined PAN/PRD parties won with almost 43 percent of the vote. He edged out Francisco Labastida, the PRI candidate, who garnered not quite 36 percent. This election has far-reaching implications, since the structure of the government is built around the certainty that the PRI candidate will win. This election may mark the end of patron-clientelism and the beginning of a true democratic state. The election of Felipe Calderón in 2006 secured PAN's control of the presidency, but since he only received about 36% of the vote – only .5% more than PRD's Obrador – he has had to build a coalition cabinet.

Since the formation of PRI, policymaking in Mexico had centered on the presidency. The president – through the patron-client system – was virtually a dictator for his **sexenio**, a non-renewable six-year term. The incumbent always selected his successor, appointed officials to all positions of power in the government and PRI, and named PRI candidates for governors, senators, deputies, and local officials. Until the mid 1970s, Mexican presidents were considered above criticism, and people revered them as symbols of national progress and well-being. As head of PRI, the president managed a huge patronage system and controlled a rubber-stamp Congress. The president almost always was a member of the preceding president's cabinet. Despite recent changes, the Mexican president remains very powerful.

During his sexenio, Vicente Fox had to manage Mexico without the supporting patron-client system of PRI behind him. His predecessor, Ernesto Zedillo, had responded to pressure to democratize by relinquishing a number of the traditional powers of the presidency. For example, Zedillo announced that he would not name his PRI successor (the candidate in 2000), but that the party would make the decision. Even so, President Fox inherited a job that most people still saw as all-powerful, and they often blamed him for failing to enact many of his promised programs, despite the fact that he did not have a strong party in Congress or many experienced people in government.

THE BUREAUCRACY

Almost 1 1/2 million people work in the federal bureaucracy, most of them in Mexico City. More government employees staff the schools, state-owned industries, and semi-autonomous agencies of government, and hundreds of thousands of bureaucrats fill positions in state and local governments.

Officials are generally paid very little, but those at high and middle levels have a great deal of power. Under PRI control, all were tied to the patron-client system and often accepted bribes and used insider information to promote private business deals.

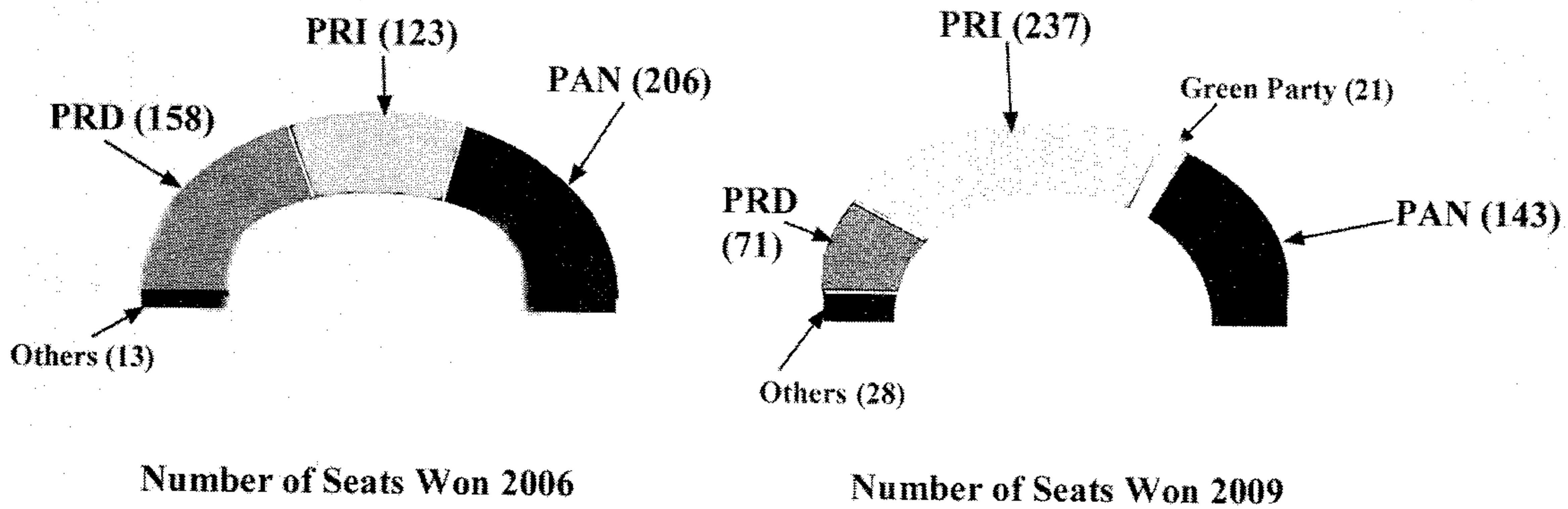
Under PRI, the **para-statal** sector – composed of semiautonomous or autonomous government agencies – was huge. These companies often produce goods and services that in other countries are carried out by private individuals, and the Mexican government owned many of them. The best-known para-statal is PEMEX, the giant state-owned petroleum company. After the oil bust of the early 1980s, reforms trimmed the number of para-statals, and the number has continued to dwindle, so that many of them are now privately owned. President Fox pushed for privatization of PEMEX, but did not succeed.

LEGISLATURE

The Mexican legislature is bicameral, with a 500-member **Chamber of Deputies** and a 128-member **Senate**. All legislators are directly elected: deputies have three-year terms and senators have six-year terms. Like the Russian Duma until 2007, the Chamber of Deputies includes some deputies (300) who are elected from **single-member districts**, and others (200) who are elected by **proportional representation**. Unlike the Russian upper house – the Federation Council, which is filled with appointed representatives – the Mexican Senate is also directly elected by a combination of the electoral methods: three senators are elected from each of 31 states and the federal district (Mexico City), with the remaining senators selected by proportional representation. Although legislative procedures look very similar to those of the United States, until the 1980s the legislature remained under the president's strict control.

PRI's grip on the legislature slipped earlier than it did on the presidency. The growing strength of opposition parties, combined with legislation that provided for greater representation of minority parties (proportional representation) in Congress, led to the election of 240 opposition deputies in 1988. After that, presidential programs were no longer rubber-stamped, but were open to real debate for the first time. President Salinas' reform programs, then, were slowed down, and for the first time, the Mexican government experienced some gridlock. In 1997 PRI lost a majority in the Chamber of Deputies when 261 deputies were elected from opposition parties. The election of 2000 gave PRI a bare plurality – but far from a majority – in both houses. In the election of 2003, the pattern held, with voters selecting 224 PRI deputies, to 149 for PAN and 97 for PRD. In the election of 2006, PRI's support slipped in both houses, PAN gained some seats in the Chamber of Deputies, and PRD made big gains in both houses. In the 2009 mid-term elections – with only deputies up for election – PRI again gained control of the lower house, but only could muster a majority by forming a coalition with the minority Green Party.

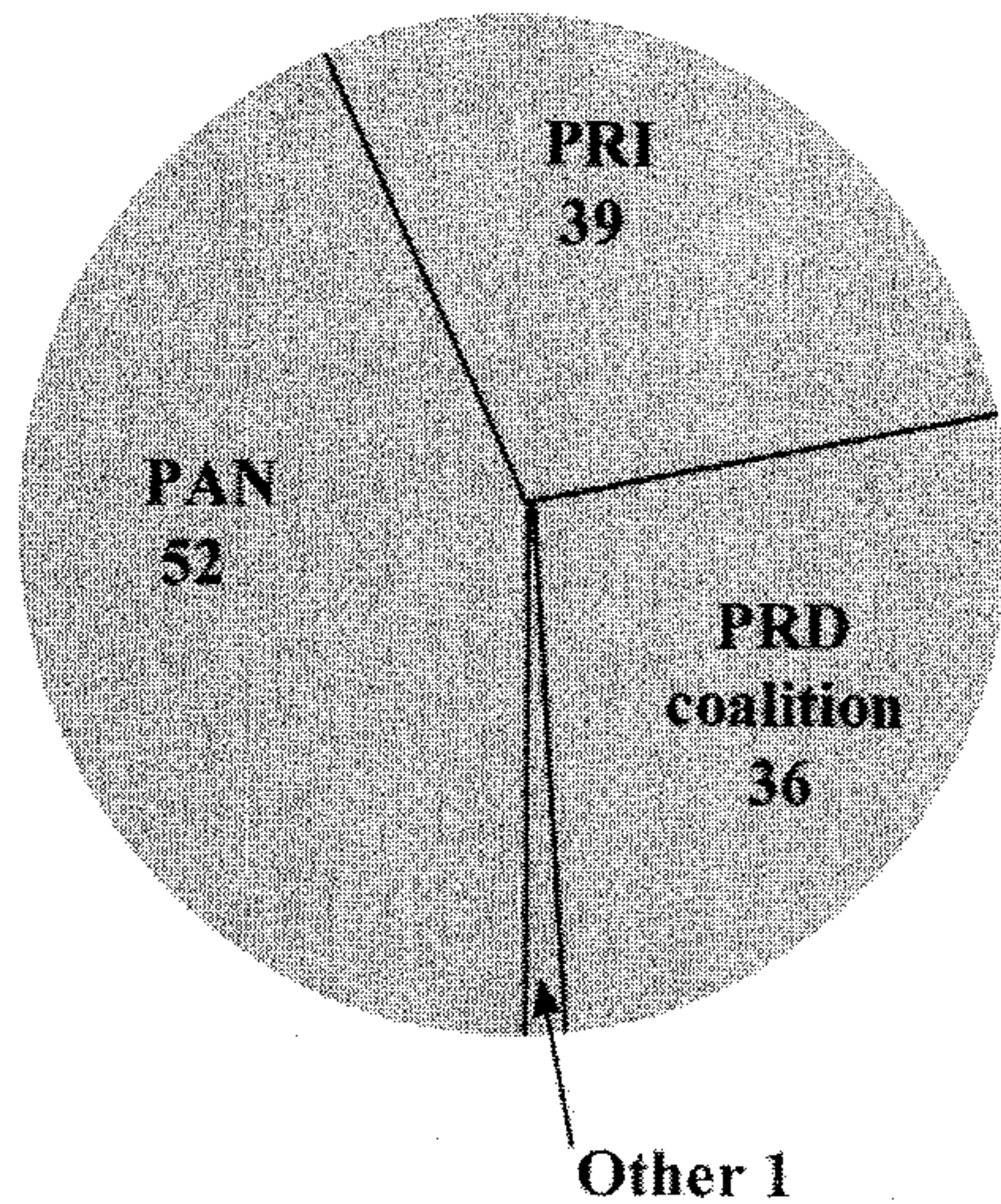
2006 AND 2009 ELECTION RESULT IN THE CHAMBER OF DEPUTIES



500 SEATS TOTAL

Mexican Legislative (Lower House) Elections in 2006 and 2009. PAN and PRD both lost significant numbers of seats in the election of 2009, and PRI picked up enough seats that in coalition with the Green Party, it held the majority in the Chamber of Deputies.

MEXICAN SENATE ELECTION 2006



The Mexican Senate. Senators are elected every six years, so unlike the Chamber of Deputies after the 2009 mid-term elections, the Senate is still dominated by PAN, although PAN has less than a majority.

The number of women in both houses of the legislature has risen significantly in recent years to 113 of 500 (22.6%) deputies and 22 of 128 (17.2%) senators. The main reason for this change is the implementation of a 1996 election law that required political parties to sponsor women candidates. Parties must run at least 30% women for both lists for the proportional representation election, as well as candidates for the single-member districts/states. In an effort to regain some of its lost clout, PRI has exceeded the requirements by instituting a 50% quota for its candidates. So far, no major party has fielded a female candidate for the presidency, although a minor party – Social-Democratic and Farmers – ran Patricia Mercado in 2006.

As a competitive multiparty system begins to emerge, the Mexican Congress has become a more important forum for various points of view. Competitive elections are the rule in many locales, and the number of "safe seats" is declining. The legislature challenged Fox on a number of occasions, but whether or not a true system of checks and balances is developing is still unclear.

JUDICIARY

A strong judicial branch is essential if a country is to be ruled by law, not by the whim of a dictator. Mexico does not yet have an independent judiciary, nor does it have a system of judicial review. Like most other non-English speaking countries, it follows code law, not common law (see p. 14). Even though the Constitution of 1917 is still in effect, it is easily amended and does not have the same level of legitimacy as the U.S. Constitution does.

Mexico has both federal and state courts, but because most laws are federal, state courts have played a subordinate role. If states continue to become more independent from the central government, the state courts almost certainly will come to play a larger role.

The **Supreme Court** is the highest federal court, and on paper it has judicial review, but in reality, it almost never overrules an important government action or policy. Historically, then, the courts have been controlled by the executive branch, most specifically the president. As in the United States, judges are officially appointed for life. In practice, judges resign at the beginning of each sexenio, allowing the incoming president to place his loyalists on the bench as well as in the state houses, bureaucratic offices, and party headquarters.

But change is in the wind. The administration of **Ernesto Zedillo** (1994-2000) tried to strengthen the courts by emphasizing the rule of law. Increasing interest in human rights issues by citizens' groups and the media has put pressure on the courts to play a stronger role in protecting basic freedoms. Citizens and the government are increasingly resorting to the courts as a primary weapon against corruption, drugs, and police abuse. President Zedillo often refused to interfere with the courts' judgments, and Vicente Fox promised to work for an independent judiciary, although the results were disappointing to many people. The strength of the judiciary is limited by the general perception that judges are corrupt, especially at the local level, where many decisions are made.

MILITARY

Military generals dominated Mexican politics throughout the 19th century and into the early 20th century. The military presided over the chaos, violence, and bloodshed of the era following the Revolution of 1910, and it was the competitiveness of its generals that caused PRI to dramatically cut back its political power. Although all presidents of Mexico were generals until the 1940s, they still acted to separate the military from politics. Even critics of PRI admit that gaining government control of the military is one of the party's most important accomplishments. Over the past fifty years, the military has developed into a relatively disciplined force with a professional officer corps.

Much credit for de-politicizing the military belongs to Plutarco Calles and Lazaro Cardenas, who introduced the idea of rotating the generals' regional commands. By moving generals from one part of the country to another, the government kept them from building regional bases of power. And true to the old patron-client system, presidents traded favors with military officers – such as business opportunities – so that generals could enjoy economic, if not political power.

The tendency to dole out favors to the military almost certainly has led to the existence of strong ties between military officers and the drug trade. In recent years, the military has been heavily involved in efforts to combat drug trafficking, and rumors abound about deals struck between military officials and drug barons. Such fears were confirmed when General Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo, the head of the anti-drug task force, was arrested in February 1997 on accusations of protecting a drug lord.

POLICIES AND ISSUES

Mexican government and politics has changed dramatically since the 1980s. Today Mexico has taken serious steps toward becoming a democracy, but the economy that had shown signs of improvement since the collapse of 1982 took a nosedive after the global economic crisis in 2008. The country is trying to move from regional vulnerability to global reliability, but those connections to other parts of the world made the Mexican economy responsive to the contraction of the U.S. economy. Stubborn problems remain, both economic and political. PRI has been entangled with the government so long that creating branches that operate independently is a huge task. The gap between the rich and poor is still wide in Mexico, despite the growth of the middle class in the north. And Calderón faces a big challenge in shaping Mexico's relationship with the United States and in controlling the escalating violence associated with the drug trade. How does Mexico retain the benefits of trade and cooperation with its neighbor to the north, and yet steer its own independent course?

THE ECONOMY

Mexico's economic development has had a significant impact on social conditions in the country. Overall, despite the economic downturn of 2008, the standard of living has improved greatly since the 1940s. Rates of infant mortality, literacy, and life expectancy have steadily improved. Health and education services have expanded, despite severe cutbacks after the economic crisis of 1982.

"THE MEXICAN MIRACLE"

Between 1940 and 1960 Mexico's economy grew as a whole by more than 6% a year. Industrial production rose even faster, averaging nearly 9% for most of the 1960s. Agriculture's share of total production dropped from 25% to 11%, while that of manufacturing rose from 25% to 34%. All this growth occurred without much of the inflation that has plagued many other Latin American economies.

Problems

- **A growing gap between the rich and the poor** was a major consequence of rapid economic growth. Relatively little attention was paid to the issues of equality and social justice that had led to the revolutions in the first place. Social services programs were limited at best. From 1940 to 1980 Mexico's income distribution was among the most unequal of all the LDCs, with the bottom 40% of the population never earning more than 11% of total wages. Today inequality has lessened slightly, but it is still an important issue.
- **Rapid and unplanned urbanization** accompanied the growth. The Federal District, Guadalajara, and other major cities became urban nightmares, with millions of people living in huge shantytowns with no electricity, running water, or sewers. Poor highway planning and no mass transit meant that traffic congestion was among the worst in the world. Pollution from cars and factories make Mexico City's air so dirty that it is unsafe to breathe.

The Crisis

In its effort to industrialize, the Mexican government borrowed heavily against expectations that oil prices would remain high forever. Much of the rapid growth was based on oil, especially since Mexico's production began increasing just as that of OPEC countries was decreasing during the early 1970s. When the price of oil plummeted in 1982, so did Mexico's economy. By 1987, Mexico's debt was over \$107 billion, making it one of the most heavily indebted countries in the world. The debt represented 70% of Mexico's entire GNP.

REFORM

President Miguel de la Madrid began his sexenio in 1982 with all of these economic problems before him. He began a dramatic reform program that reflected the values of the new *tecnico* leaders. This program continued through the presidencies of Salinas and Zedillo, and it has brought about one of the most dramatic economic turnarounds in modern history.

- **Sharp cuts in government spending** – According to agreements with the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the U.S. government, and private banks, Mexico began an austerity plan that greatly reduced government spending. Hundreds of thousands of jobs were cut, subsidies to government agencies were slashed, and hundreds of public enterprises were eliminated.
- **Debt reduction** – Mexico's debt still continues to plague her, although the U.S. spearheaded a multinational plan to reduce interest rates on loans and allow more generous terms for their repayment. Mexico still pays an average of about \$10 billion a year in interest payments.
- **Privatization** – In order to allow market forces to drive the Mexican economy, Madrid's government decided to give up much of its economic power. Most importantly, the government privatized many public enterprises, especially those that were costing public money. President Salinas returned the banks to the private sector in 1990. By the late 1980s a "mini silicon valley" was emerging in Guadalajara where IBM, Hewlett-Packard, Wang, and other tech firms set up factories and headquarters. Special laws – like duty-free importing of components – and cheap labor encouraged U.S. companies to invest in Mexican plants.

Today, Mexico's economy has diversified significantly, and is not as dependent on oil production. Still, the problems persist today, particularly those of income inequality, urban planning, and pollution. As a businessman, Vicente Fox made a campaign promise to oversee a 7% annual growth in the Mexican economy during his sexenio, but his hopes fell short. Between 2001 and 2003, Mexico's economic slowdown can be partially explained by the U.S. recession after the September 11 attacks. In 2004, the economy grew by 4.1%, but an estimated 40% of the Mexican population was still below the poverty line, despite some new initiatives by the government to provide benefits and pensions for those not covered by jobs in the formal economy.

ENERGY REFORM AND THE ECONOMIC CRISIS OF 2008

When Felipe Calderón became president in 2006, oil production in Mexico was falling off, largely because little exploration for new oil fields had taken place for decades. PEMEX was a large, inefficient para-statal that provided almost 40% of the budget, but its technical capabilities had atrophied. President Fox had tried to privatize PEMEX, but had met with too much resistance, so Calderón tried another approach. In early 2008 he announced a reform to give PEMEX greater budgetary autonomy and strengthen government regulations on the oil industry. However, his plan also enabled private contracting of refining, and would allow PEMEX to hire private contractors for the distribution and storage of refined products. The reform included

a large bond issue to raise money for two new refineries. His plan met opposition in the legislature, especially from PRD, whose leaders accused Calderón of privatizing PEMEX. However, the president's plans were foiled by an even deeper problem: the effects of the global economic crisis of 2008.

By early 2009, the Mexican economy was shrinking quickly, with experts estimating the rate at 5.9% reduction during the first quarter of 2009, four times the predicted fall in Latin America as a whole. The main cause was the nation's close integration with the United States, since exports across the Rio Grande River are equivalent to a fifth of Mexico's GDP. These exports fell by 36% in 2008 as demand from the U.S. dried up. U.S. investors also froze their operations in Mexico as they tried to resuscitate their businesses at home, which in turn caused a depreciation of the Mexican peso. The situation was made much worse by the outbreak of the swine flu virus in May 2009, which caused Mexico's tourism industry to falter. Once again, the Mexican has found that events to the north dictate the country's economic development, keeping it from charting the independent course so necessary for its prosperity.

FOREIGN POLICY

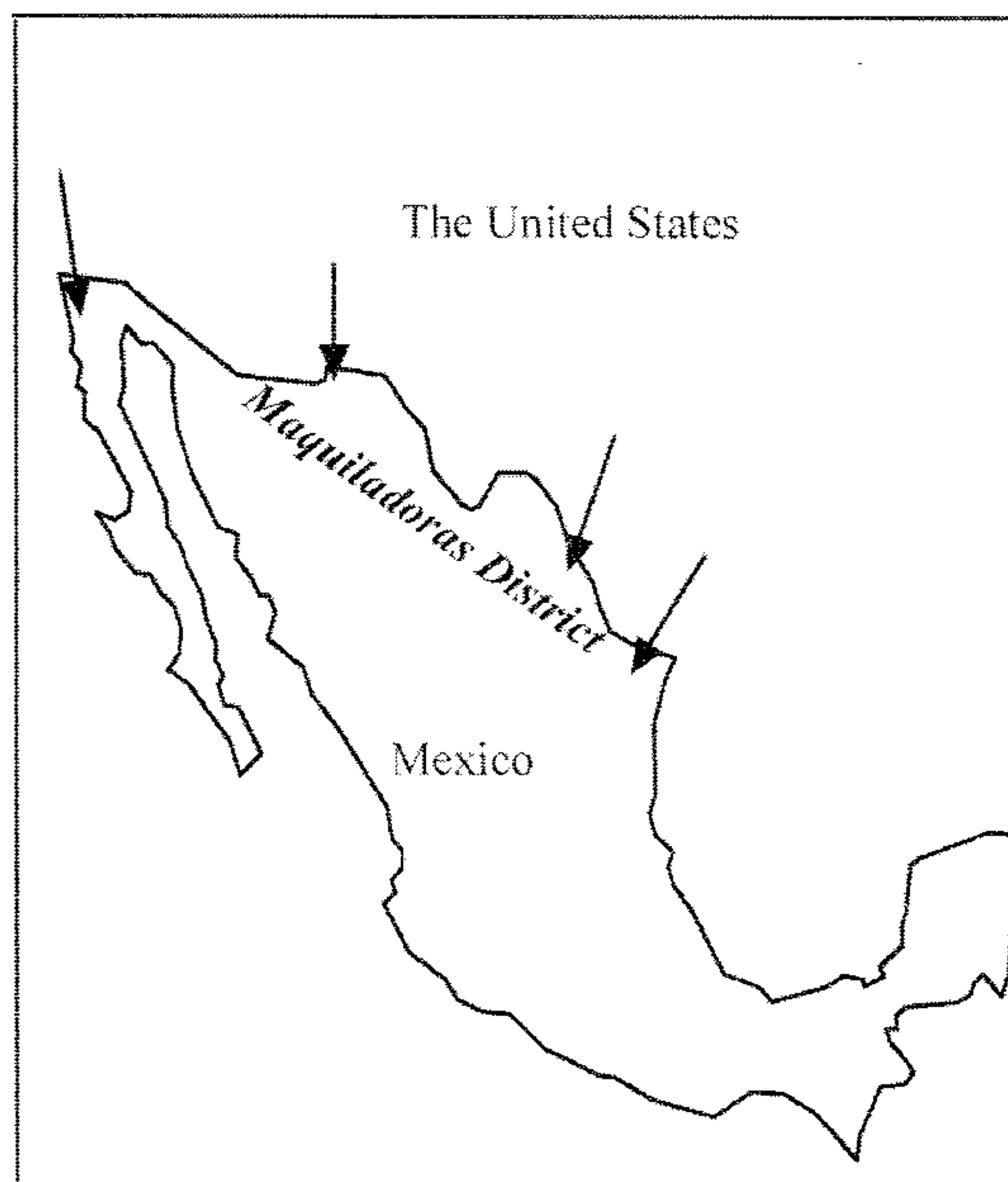
The crisis that began in 1982 clearly indicated that a policy of encouraging more Mexican exports and opening markets to foreign goods was essential. In the years after 1982 the government relaxed restrictions on foreign ownership of property and reduced and eliminated tariffs. The government courted foreign investment and encouraged Mexican private industry to produce goods for export. Mexico's foreign policy is still more concerned with the United States than with any other country, but in recent years Mexican leaders have asserted themselves in international forums, such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization.

MAQUILADORA AND NAFTA

A manufacturing zone was created in the 1960s in northern Mexico just south of the border with the United States. Workers in this *maquiladora* district have produced goods primarily for consumers in the U.S., and a number of U.S. companies have established plants in the zone to transform imported, duty-free components or raw materials into finished industrial products. Industrialization of the zone was promoted by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), a treaty signed in 1995 by Mexico, the United States, and Canada, that eliminated barriers to free trade among the three countries. Today hundreds of thousands of workers are employed in the *maquiladora* district, accounting for over 20% of Mexico's entire industrial labor force. U.S. companies have been criticized for avoiding employment and environmental regulations imposed within the borders of the U.S., hiring young women for low pay and no benefits who work in buildings that are environmentally questionable.

Since the mid-1980s, Mexico has entered into many trade agreements and organizations in order to globalize its economy and pay its way out of debt:

- **GATT/WTO** – In 1986, Mexico joined the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), a multilateral agreement that attempts to promote freer trade among countries. The World Trade Organization was created from this agreement, and Mexico has been an active member of the WTO. Under WTO agreements, Mexico has expanded the diversity of its exports beyond oil, and has developed new trade relationships with countries other than the United States.



The *Maquiladoras District*. This industrial zone exists right along the Mexican border with the United States.

- **NAFTA** – The North American Free Trade Agreement was signed by Mexico, Canada, and the United States. Its goal is to more closely integrate the economies by eliminating tariffs and reducing restrictions so that companies can expand into all countries freely. Mexico hopes to stimulate its overall growth, enrich its big business community, and supply jobs for Mexicans in new industries. U.S. firms gain from access to inexpensive labor, raw materials, services and tourism, as well as new markets to sell and invest in. Mexico runs the risk of again being overshadowed by the United States, but hopes that the benefits will outweigh the problems. Presidents Fox and Calderón have generally supported freer flow of labor and goods between Mexico and its northern neighbors, but the issue of road transport has turned into a political battle between the two countries. American truck drivers have lobbied the U.S. Congress to ban Mexican trucks from crossing into the U.S., claiming that these trucks are unsafe and the drivers insufficiently trained. In 2007 the Bush administration set up a pilot program to allow a limited number of Mexican trucks to enter, and Calderón’s government reacted strongly when the pilot program was rescinded by the Obama administration.

IMMIGRATION POLICY

Unlike the agreement among member nations of the European Union, the NAFTA agreement currently does not allow free flow of labor across borders. Early in his term, Vicente Fox pushed hard to solve tensions between the United States and Mexico regarding immigration policy. Fox proposed a bold immigration initiative that included a guest worker program, amnesty for illegal immigrants, an increase in visas issued, and movement to an eventual open border. The plan would have allowed Mexicans to work legally in the U.S., while amnesty for illegal immigrants would have eventually offered a green card as well as legal citizenship to over three million undocumented Mexicans living in the U.S. In exchange, Fox pledged to tighten the Mexican border to prevent additional illegal immigration. President George W. Bush responded positively to Fox’s initiatives, but the plan fell through after the September 11, 2001 attacks in the United States. President Bush reevaluated the security risks involved with Fox’s plan, and the whole thing unraveled within weeks, and only recently came to life again.

In late 2006 President Bush signed a bill providing for construction of 700 miles of added fencing along the Mexico/United States border that he called “an important step toward immigration reform.” Bush had want-

ed a more comprehensive bill that provided for a guest worker program, as well as the possibility of eventual citizenship for many illegal immigrants, but those measures were opposed by Republicans in the legislature. Felipe Calderón sternly denounced the U.S. construction of the wall, comparing it to the “huge mistake” the Russians made in building the Berlin Wall in 1961. Calderón has promised to emphasize the improvement of the Mexican economy to take away the incentive for people to immigrate to the United States.

DRUG TRAFFICKING

Drug trafficking between Mexico and the United States has been a major problem for both countries for many years. The drug trade has spawned corruption within the Mexican government, so that officials have often been bribed to look the other way or even actively participate in the trade. The depth of drug-related problems was evident in early 2005, when the government staged a raid on its own maximum-security prison, *La Palma*, in an effort to regain control of the prison from drug lords who had engineered the murder of a prominent fellow inmate. Fox vowed to stamp out the corruption and some major arrests were made, but the problem remained far from resolved at the end of his sexenio.

When Felipe Calderón took office he stepped up the war on drugs, sending troops and federal agents into areas where gangs control local officials. He also promised to remake the nation’s police departments, root out corrupt officers, and support legislation that makes it possible for the local police to investigate drug rings. The immediate reaction has been one of the worst waves of drug-related violence ever. The number of brutal murders, often of policemen, has increased significantly. One cause of the violence is a fierce competition between competing drug rings that want exclusive control of very lucrative smuggling routes between Mexico and the United States.

Calderón has reacted to these problems by turning to the army, sending thousands of troops to patrol the streets in the most troubled cities. It was supposed to be an emergency measure, but the troops have remained, and some have criticized them for brutality against ordinary citizens. In May 2008 the violence reached a fevered pitch after Mexico’s police chief was gunned down as he arrived home late at night. Other top officials have also been assassinated, including the police second-in-command in the border town of Juárez and a top policeman from Mexico City. This targeting of senior law-enforcement officials is unprecedented in Mexican history. U.S. President Bush pushed for government assistance to Mexico to fight the drug wars, but the funding became bogged down in the U.S. Congress. On a visit to Mexico in early 2009, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton frankly admitted that America’s “insatiable demand for illegal drugs fuels the drug trade” and that “our inability to prevent weapons from being illegally smuggled across the border to arm these criminals causes the deaths of police officers, soldiers, and civilians” in Mexico. She promised Black Hawk helicopters for the Mexican police, but funding for them was cut by the U.S. Congress.

ETHNIC REBELLIONS

In his first year in office, Fox made several efforts to negotiate with the **Zapatistas** to settle their dispute with the government. The **EZLN** (Zapatista National Liberation Front) began in 1994 in the southern state of Chiapas in protest to the signing of the NAFTA treaty. Zapatistas saw the agreement as a continuation of the exploitation of voracious landowners and corrupt PRI bosses. Their army captured four towns, including a popular tourist destination, and they demanded jobs, land, housing, food, health, education, independence, freedom, democracy, justice and peace. Their rebellion spread, and Zapatista supporters wear black ski masks to hide their identity from the government. Today the rebellion is technically still on, but has quieted down in recent years.

The Zapatista rebellion was based on ethnicity – the Amerindian disaffection for the mestizo, urban-based government. It has since spread to other areas and ethnicities, and it represents a major threat to Mexico's political stability. The 2006 uprising in Oaxaca is another indication that hostilities toward the rich and the government are still quite strong in the south, particularly toward PRI leaders.

DEMOCRACY AND ELECTORAL REFORM

Part of the answer to Mexico's economic and foreign policy woes lies in the development of democratic traditions within the political system. Mexico's tradition of authoritarianism works against democratization, but modernization of the economy, the political value of populism, and democratic revolutionary impulses work for it. One of the most important indications of democracy is the development of competitive, clean elections in many parts of the country. The Mexican political system went through a series of reforms during the 1990s that solidly directed the country toward democracy.

The **CFE (Federal Election Commission)** was created as an independent regulatory body to safeguard honest and accurate election results. Although it was dominated by PRI in its early years, in recent elections it appears to be operating as it should. Some election reforms include:

- Campaign finance restrictions – laws that limit contributions to campaigns
- Critical media coverage, as media is less under PRI control
- International watch teams, as Mexico has tried to convince other countries that elections are fair and competitive
- Election monitoring by opposition party members

The 1994 campaign for the presidency got off to a very bad start when PRI candidate Luis Donaldo Colosio was assassinated in Tijuana. PRI quickly replaced him with Ernesto Zedillo, but the old specters of violence and chaos threatened the political order. The incumbent president's brother was implicated in the assassination, and high officials were linked to drug trafficking. Despite this trouble, Zedillo stepped up to the challenge, and PRI won the election handily. Many observers believe that the elections of 1994 and 2000 have been the most competitive, fair elections in Mexico's history. The election of 2000 broke all precedents when a PAN candidate – Vicente Fox – won the presidency, finally displacing the 71-year dominance of PRI. The controversial election of 2006 was clearly competitive, but it also threatened to tear the fragile base of democracy apart. Obrador questioned the very legitimacy of the process, and the strong support he received from his followers is evidence that instability is still a part of the Mexican political system. However, the fact that the election tribunal followed the process set by law is a step toward becoming a liberal democracy. Members of Obrador's own party – the PRD – eventually came to criticize him for his behavior. Even more significant is the eventual acceptance by most Mexican citizens of its decisions, evidence that the country has successfully passed through the crisis.

What will the future bring? Will Mexico be able to sustain a strong, stable economy? Will the political system emerge from its peasant-based patron-client system and authoritarianism as a modern democracy? Will more social equality be granted to peasants and city workers? Many observers await the answers to these questions, including people in less developed countries that look to Mexico as an example of development. More powerful countries – particularly the United States – realize that international global politics and economies are tied to the successes of countries like Mexico. Despite the instabilities of its past, Mexico does have strong traditions, a well-developed sense of national pride, many natural resources, and a record of progress, no matter how uneven.

IMPORTANT TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Amerindians
 Calderón, Felipe
 camarillas
 Chamber of Deputies, Senate
 co-optation
 Cardenas, Cuauhtemoc
 Cardenas, Lazaro
 caudillos
 Chiapas rebellion
 corporatism (state and neo)
 Cristeros Rebellion
 dependency
 Diaz, Porfirio
ejidos
 election reform (in Mexico)
 EZLN
 Father Hidalgo
 Federal Election Commission
 Fox, Vicente
 GATT
 GNP per capita
 HDI
 import substitution
 Juarez, Benito
 mestizos
 "Mexican Miracle"
 NAFTA
 neoliberalism
 Obrador, Andres Manuel Lopez
 para-statal
 patron-client system
 PEMEX
 pendulum theory
 plurality (first-past-the-post)/proportional representation electoral systems
politicos
 Porfiriato
 proportional representation in Mexico
 PAN
 PPP
 PRD
 PRI
 Santa Anna
 sexenio
 technicos
 Villa, Pancho
 WTO
 Zapata, Emiliano
 Zapatistas
 Zedillo, Ernest