Highlights from the briefing Paper on Mexico

Strong one-party rule with the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) has dominated the political history in the past 100 years … one-party rule ended 10-15 years ago!

Mexico is a major global oil producer: BUT oil makes up less than 10% of Mexico exports in contrast to Iran (about 80%) and Nigeria (90%)

Pop of Mex. = 100 million (1/3 size of U.S.), Mexico is geographically diverse, but mountainous overall

Middle income nation – per capita GDP just less than 10,000 $US (U.S. = 37,000 $US)

Mexico has a wide gap between rich & poor: the richest 10% of Mexicans control over 40% of national wealth (in China = 30%, Nigeria = 40%, Russia = 47%, UK = 28%, US = 30%) while the poorest 10% of Mexicans only control 1.6% of national income (in China = 2.4%, Nigeria = 1.6 %, Russia = 5.9%, UK = 2.3%, US = 1.8%). Mexico has income distribution structure similar to Nigeria.

Most Mexicans are Catholic Christians; Catholic Church still a powerful force in Mexico

History

* Mexico has a long history of racial discrimination (Europeans discriminating against indigenous peoples)
* 1810 – Father Miquel Hidalgo led a peasant revolt that turned into a revolution once conservative Mexicans joined to overthrow Spanish rule
* 1821 – Mexico becomes independent but its early years are marked by political instability, shifts of conservative and liberal governments, the power of the Church & wealthy landowners, foreign interventions from US & France
  + US and Mexico fight a war over Texas in 1845-1846
  + France installs a member of the Hapsburg family to become emperor in Mexico from 1864-1867
* Porfiriato (name for dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz 1876-1911); Diaz modernized and Mexico grew economically, more foreign investment, freer trade, some state projects; peasants get poorer, wealthy get wealthier; Diaz is forced to resign in 1911 toward the beginning of another revolution
* In the revolution that followed, two peasant armies (one led by Emiliano Zapata in the south and another led by Pancho Villa in the north) created a lot of problems; so did the US who tried to install a pro-US Mexican ruler named Victoriano Huerta as president (he did not last long)
* New constitution in 1917; the one Mexico still has creates a federal republic much like the U.S.
* The revolution lasts until the mid-1920s and over 1 million people died

PRI created in 1929

* Pro-Mexican, protective tariffs, glorifies Mexican history, state-led development creates a corporatist state
* Corporatist state = one is which all social classes have a role and function; government serves each class virtually and promotes continuation of classes; corporatist states are relatively conservative
* Very popular party because its leaders brought stability; begins long era of one-party rule (70 years)
* Other parties legal, but PRI won all major elections b/c of popularity, corruption, corporatism
* Mexico’s economy grows during this time
* 1968: government fires on group of student demonstrators in the run-up to the 68 Olympics; 400 killed; belief that PRI needs reforming
* By 1980s, PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party), a leftist party that promotes even more government spending on social welfare programs begins to contest elections
* Presidential Election of 1988: Salinas (PRI) versus Cardenas (PRD) computer crash tallying votes and Salinas wins very little legitimacy
* 1997 PRI loses majority in Chamber of Deputies
* 2000 Vicente Fox (PAN – National Action Party) wins presidency; PAN is a center-right party; pro-business favoring less government and more free trade
* Today Mexico has a true pluralist, multi-party system; democratization in Mexico is growing

Political Institutions

* Federalism: national government w/ 31 separate state governments; national government is sovereign; Mexico is pretty centralized … Mexico City being a lot like London … center of the nation
* However, as multi-party democracy is growing, Mexico is becoming more decentralized (no more one-party state SO states and municipalities have more say-so than ever
* Presidency (executive) : historically has had a lot of power b/c he was elected chief of state + head of party (PRI) SO he could appoint loyal party members to great government jobs (and did); since end of one-party rule, the President’s informal powers have decreased; President limited to ONE 6-year term
* Legislature: bi-cameral (upper = Senate, lower = Chamber of Deputies)
  + Senate: 128 seats: 3 for each state + 3 from federal district all elected thru FPTP system, another 32 seats are decided by proportional representation; 6-year terms; cannot run for consecutive reelection
  + Chamber of Deputies: 500 seats, 300 in district FPTP system and another 200 allocated in a proportional system; 3-year terms; cannot run for consecutive reelection
  + During one-party rule, the legislature did not have much power; they do now and they are independent of the president
* Judiciary: not powerful during one-party rule; it is now
  + Power of judicial review (declaring laws as unconstitutional) established in 1994
* Political parties: PRI, PRD, PAN
* Elections: long tradition even tho PRI won most of them for years and years; today these elections are very competitive
* Constitutions: Mexico has had 3: 1824, 1857, 1917; all established a federal republic
* Military: plays less of a role in Mexico than other Latin American nations
  + Headed by civilians
  + Today main functions – stopping drug traffic and putting down rebellions in the South

Citizens, Society, and the State

* Corporatist for much of the 20th Century
* Corporatist: representing interests of citizens virtually thru dividing them into groups: peasants, workers, middle class professionals, military
* Pluralist: representing interests of individuals through interest groups and/or political parties
* Mexico has gone from being corporatists to pluralist. Here’s how

Cleavages: there are three big ones:

* Ethnicity: mestizo and indigenous
* Social class: rich and poor, rural urban
* Region: north (wealthier, urban, more industrial, more educated) versus south (poorer, rural, agricultural, less educated, more indigenous)

Gender

* Women underrepresented in almost all political systems
* 47% of university pop = female
* 16% membership in Congress (better than the US)
* Lots of participation in grass-roots organizations, interest groups, and NGOs
* Many labor jobs now going to women (perceived as causing firms fewer problems)

Media no longer state-run nor dominated by PRI – now plays an important socializing role in democratization

Political Economy

* PRI pursued state-led development – “Import substation” taxing imports and producing domestic substitutes; protect domestic industries and jobs; also had many state-run industries (rail, communications, oil, banks, sugar, steel); gave subsidies to everyone for food, housing, & agriculture
* Debt crisis of the 80s changed things
* Neoliberalism: free markets, less government, free trade, lower tariffs; by 1994 almost all protectionist policies were gone NAFTA a good example of a neoliberal policy and treaty
* NAFTA North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement
  + Permanent so future leaders must continue to follow a neoliberal course with respect to trade and the economy
  + Mexican access to US market
  + Assure foreign investors that Mexico is a safe place to invest
  + Trade with US has increased tremendously (both good and bad effects)
  + Maquiladores (foreign owned assembly plants close the US border)

Key Issues and Policies

* Human Rights: not good during one-party rule: lots of corruption, voter fraud, police and military intimidation, etc.
* After 200, things are changing: New undersecretary of human rights and democracy and a freedom of information act
* Corruption still a problem, lots of it tied to drug trade
* Transparency International corruption index, Mexico is 100th (US is 24, the UK = 16, China = 75, Russia & Nigeria tied at 143)
* Social welfare & poverty reduction: subsidies for food and housing have ended; instead, specialized, targeted programs to help prro; ex, = PROGRESA where poor families are paid a certain amount to ensure children stay in school
* Environment: air quality in Mexico City is bad, industrialization has led to degradation of environment in places; some industries forced to relocate in Mexico City; car ownership limited; switch to unleaded gas; better but still a problem
* Illegal immigration still a prblem