

T. K. K. K.  
from  
C. K. K.

**Politics in Mexico**  
*The Decline of Authoritarianism*

Third Edition

RODERIC AI CAMP

*New York Oxford*  
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
1999

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## Acknowledgments

Anyone who has been in the business of teaching eventually writes a mental textbook, constantly revised and presented orally in a series of lectures. As teachers, however, we often dream of writing just the right book for our special interest or course. Such a book naturally incorporates our own biases and objectives. It also builds on the knowledge and experiences of dozens of other teachers. While still a teenager, I thought of being a teacher and, perhaps unusually, a college professor. Teachers throughout my life, at all levels of my education, influenced this choice. They also affected the way in which I teach, my interrelationship with students, and my philosophy of learning and life. To these varied influences, I offer heartfelt thanks and hope that this work, in some small way, repays their contributions to me personally and professionally and to generations of other students.

Among those special teachers, I want to mention Thelma Roberts and Helen Weishaup, who devoted their lives to the betterment of young children, instilling worthy values and beliefs and setting admirable personal examples, and to Mrs. Lloyd, for numerous afternoon conversations at Cambridge School. I wish to thank Ralph Corder and Don Fallis, who encouraged my natural interest in history toward a more specific interest in social studies. Sharon Williams and Richard W. Gully, my toughest high school teachers, introduced me to serious research and to the joys of investigating intellectual issues; and Inez Fallis, through four years of Spanish, prompted my continued interest in Mexico. Robert V. Edwards and Katharine Blair stressed the importance of communication, orally and in writing, helping me understand essential ingredients in the process of instruction. My most challenging professor, Dr. Bergel, during a high school program at Chapman College, opened my eyes to Western civilization and to the intellectual feast that broad interdisciplinary teaching could offer.

For his humanity, advice, and skill with the English language, I remain indebted to George Landon. As a mentor in the classroom and a model researcher, Mario Rodríguez led me to the Library of Congress and to the joys of archival research. On my arrival in Arizona, Paul Kelso took me

under his wing, contributing vastly to my knowledge of Mexico and the out-of-doors, sharing a rewarding social life with his wife, Ruth. I learned more about Latin America and teaching in the demanding classrooms of George A. Brubaker and Edward J. Williams. Both convinced me of the importance of clarity, teaching writing as well as substance. Finally, Charles O. Jones and Clifton Wilson set examples in their seminars of what I hoped to achieve as an instructor.

Indirectly, I owe thanks to hundreds of students who have graced my classrooms and responded enthusiastically, sometimes less so, to my interpretations of Mexican politics. I am equally indebted to Bill Beezley, David Dent, Oscar Martínez, and Edward J. Williams, devoted teachers and scholars, who offered many helpful suggestions for this book.

# 1

## *Mexico in Comparative Context*

The contours of political development in modern Mexico often appear clearer and more pronounced when viewed as the products of tension among three key ideological traditions—namely, corporatism, pluralism, and Marxism. For its advocates, corporatism offers a humanistic alternative to both interest group liberalism identified with the United States and other western democracies, and communism as practiced in China, Cuba, North Korea, or the former Soviet union.

GEORGE W. GRAYSON, *Mexico: From Corporatism to Pluralism?*

An exploration of a society's politics is, by nature, all-encompassing. Political behavior and political processes are a reflection of a culture's evolution, involving history, geography, values, ethnicity, religion, internal and external relationships, and much more. As social scientists, we often pursue the strategies of the modern journalist in our attempt to understand the political news of the moment, ignoring the medley of influences from the past.

Naturally, each person tends to examine another culture's characteristics, political or otherwise, from his or her own society's perspective. This is not only a product of ethnocentrism, thinking of one's society as superior to the next person's, for which we Americans are often criticized, but also a question of familiarity. Although we often are woefully ignorant of our own society's political processes and institutions, being more familiar with the mythology than actual practice, we become accustomed to our way of doing things in our own country.<sup>1</sup>

I will attempt to explain Mexican politics, building on this natural proclivity to relate most comfortably to our own political customs, by drawing on implied as well as explicit comparisons with the United States. This comparison is further enhanced by the fact that Mexico and the United States have been joined together in a free-trade agreement since January 1994. We also are products of a more comprehensive Western European



civilization, into which other traditions are gradually making significant inroads. Although some critics suggest that we have relied too exclusively on Western traditions in our education, they are unquestionably the primary source of our political values. Thus our familiarity with political processes, if it extends at all beyond United States boundaries, is typically that of the western European nations and England.<sup>2</sup> For recent immigrants, of course, that heritage is different. Again, where possible, comparisons will be made with some of these political systems in order to place the Mexican experience in a larger context. Finally, Mexico is a Third World country, a category into which most countries fall, and hence its characteristics deserve to be compared with characteristics we might encounter elsewhere in the Third World.

### WHY COMPARE POLITICAL CULTURES?

The comparison of political systems is an exciting enterprise. One reason that the study of politics in different societies and time periods has intrigued inquiring minds for generations is the central question, Which political system is best? Identifying the "best" political system, other than its merely being the one with which you are most familiar and consequently comfortable, is, of course, a subjective task. It depends largely on what you want out of your political system. The demands made on a political system and its ability to respond efficiently and appropriately to them are one way of measuring its effectiveness.

Throughout the twentieth century, perhaps the major issue attracting the social scientist, the statesperson, and the average, educated citizen is which political system contributes most positively to economic growth and societal development. From an ideological perspective, much of international politics since World War II has focused primarily on that issue. As Peter Klarén concluded,

U.S. policymakers searched for arguments to counter Soviet claims that Marxism represented a better alternative for development in the Third World than did Western capitalism. At the same time U.S. scholars began to study in earnest the causes of underdevelopment. In particular scholars asked why the West had developed and why most of the rest of the world had not.<sup>3</sup>

The two political systems most heavily analyzed since 1945 have been democratic capitalism and Soviet-style socialism. Each has its pluses and minuses, depending on individual values and perspectives. Given recent

events in eastern Europe and the breakup of the Soviet state, socialism is in decline. Nevertheless, socialism as a model is not yet dead, nor is it likely to be in the future. Administrators of the socialist model rather than the weaknesses inherent in the ideology can always be blamed for its failures. Furthermore, it is human nature to want alternative choices in every facet of life. Politics is just one facet, even if somewhat all-encompassing. The history of humankind reveals a continual competition between alternative political models.

In short, whether one chooses democratic capitalism, a fresh version of socialism, or some other hybrid ideological alternative, societies and citizens will continue to search for the most viable political processes to bring about economic and social benefits. Because most of the earth's peoples are economically underprivileged, they want immediate results. Often, politicians from less fortunate nations seek a solution through emulating wealthier (First World) nations. Mexico's leaders and its populace are no exception to this general pattern.

One of the major issues facing Mexico's leaders is the nature of its capitalist model, and the degree to which Mexico should pursue a strategy of economic development patterned after that of the United States. Since 1988 they have sought to alter many traditional relationships between government and the private sector, increasing the influence of the private sector in an attempt to reverse Mexico's economic crisis and stimulate economic growth. In fact, Mexico received international notice in the 1990s for the level and pace of change under President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.<sup>4</sup>

In public statements and political rhetoric, Salinas called for economic and political modernization. He explicitly incorporated political with economic change, even implying a linkage.<sup>5</sup> Thus, he advocated economic liberalization, which he defined as increased control of the economy by the private sector, more extensive foreign investment, and internationalization of the Mexican economy through expanded trade and formal commercial relationships with the United States and Canada. Simultaneously, Salinas advocated political liberalization, which he defined as including more citizen participation in elections, greater electoral competition, and integrity in the voting process—all features associated with the United States and European liberal political traditions.

Salinas's successor, Ernesto Zedillo, who took office on December 1, 1994, inherited a political system in transition and an economic situation that shortly turned into a major financial and political crisis. A combination of economic decisions and an unsettled political context led to capital flight and a significant decline in investor confidence in the Mexican econ-



omy. Accordingly, Mexico began pursuing a severe austerity program, exceeding even those in the 1980s during a time of severe recession. By 1997, however, Mexican economic indicators showed strong growth, even if those results were not translated into improved income levels for most Mexicans. Investor confidence in Mexico returned. Zedillo continued to pursue an economic liberalization strategy and increase the pace of political reforms compared to his predecessor. Strong doubts about neo-liberal economic policies remain from various quarters, however, generating some nationalistic, anti-United States sentiments.

It is hotly debated among social scientists whether a society's political model determines its economic success or whether its economic model produces its political characteristics. Whether capitalism affects the behavior of a political model or whether a political model is essential to successful capitalism leads to the classic chicken-and-egg argument. It may well be a moot point because the processes are interrelated in terms of not only institutional patterns but cultural patterns as well.<sup>6</sup>

The comparative study of politics reveals, to some extent, a more important consideration. If the average Mexican is asked to choose between more political freedom or greater economic growth, as it affects him or her personally, the typical choice is the latter.<sup>7</sup> This is true in other Third World countries too. People with inadequate incomes are much more likely to worry about bread-and-butter issues than about more political freedom. A country's political model becomes paramount, however, when its citizens draw a connection between economic growth (as related to improving their own standard of living) and the political system. If they believe the political system, and not just the leadership itself, is largely responsible for economic development, it will have important repercussions on their political values and their political behavior. If Mexicans draw such a connection, it will change the nature of their demands on the political leadership and system, and the level and intensity of their participation.<sup>8</sup>

The comparative study of societies provides a framework by which we can measure the advantages and disadvantages of political models as they affect economic growth. Of course, economic growth itself is not the only differentiating consequence. Some political leaders are equally concerned, in some cases more concerned, with social justice. Social justice may be interpreted in numerous ways. One way is to think of it as a means of redistributing wealth. For example, we often assume that economic growth—the percentage by which a society's economic productivity expands in a given time period—automatically conveys equal benefits to each member of the society. More attention is paid to the level of growth than to its beneficiaries. It is frequently the case that the lowest-income groups

benefit least from economic growth. This has been true in the United States but is even more noticeable in Third World and Latin American countries. There are periods, of course, when economic growth produces greater equality in income distribution.<sup>9</sup> Per capita income figures (national in-

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Social justice: a concept focusing on each citizen's quality of life and the equal treatment of all citizens.

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come divided by total population) can be deceiving because they are averages. In Mexico, for example, even during the sustained growth of the 1950s and 1960s, the real purchasing power (ability to buy goods and services) of the working classes actually declined.<sup>10</sup> Higher-income groups increased their proportion of national income from the 1970s through the 1990s, decades of economic crisis, and that of the lower-income groups fell.<sup>11</sup> This pattern has been further exacerbated since early 1995. The importance of social justice to Mexicans, defined as redistribution of wealth, is illustrated by the fact that one-fourth of Mexicans surveyed in 1998 consider it to be the second most important task of democracy.<sup>12</sup>

Another way of interpreting social justice is on the basis of social equality. This does not mean that all people are equal in ability but that each person should be treated equally under the law. Social justice also implies a leveling of differences in opportunities to succeed, giving each person equal access to society's resources. Accordingly, its allocation of resources can be a measure of a political system.

The degree to which a political system protects the rights of all citizens is another criterion by which political models can be compared. In Mexico, where human rights abuses are a serious problem, the evidence is unequivocal that the poor are much more likely to be the victims than are members of the middle and upper classes. This is why the arrest of Raúl Salinas, brother of the former president, as the alleged mastermind of a political assassination, is such a dramatic departure from past practices. This also helps to explain why only a third of all Mexicans have any confidence in their court system.<sup>13</sup> The same can be said about many societies, but there are sharp differences in degree between highly industrialized nations and Third World nations.<sup>14</sup>

From a comparative perspective, then, we may want to test the abilities of political systems to eliminate both economic and social inequalities. It is logical to believe that among the political models in which the population has a significant voice in making decisions, the people across the board obtain a larger share of the societal resources. On the other hand, it



is possible to argue, as in the case of Cuba, that an authoritarian model can impose more widespread, immediate equality in the distribution of resources, even in the absence of economic growth, while reducing the standard of living for formerly favored groups.

Regarding social justice and its relationship to various political models, leaders also are concerned with the distribution of wealth and resources *among* nations, not just within an individual nation. The choice of a political model, therefore, often involves international considerations. Such considerations are particularly important to countries that achieved independence in the twentieth century, especially after 1945. These countries want to achieve not only economic but also political and cultural independence. Although Mexico, like most of Latin America, achieved political independence in the early nineteenth century, it found itself in the shadow of an extremely powerful neighbor. Its proximity to the United States eventually led to its losing half of its territory and many natural resources.

A third means to compare political models is their ability to remake a citizenry. A problem faced by most nations, especially in their infancy, is building a sense of nationalism. A sense of nationalism is difficult to erase, even after years of domination by another power, as in the case of the Soviet Union and the Baltic republics, but it is equally difficult to establish, especially in societies incorporating diverse cultural, ethnic, and religious heritages.<sup>15</sup> The political process can be used to mold citizens, to bring about a strong sense of national unity, while lessening or dampening local and regional loyalties. The acceptability of a political model, its very legitimacy among the citizenry, is a measure of its effectiveness in developing national sensibilities. Mexico, which had an abiding sense of regionalism, struggled for many decades to achieve a strong sense of national unity and pride.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, Mexico did not have sharp religious and ethnic differences, characteristic of other cultures such as India, to overcome.

Many scholars have suggested that the single most important issue governing relationships among nations in the twenty-first century will be that of the haves versus the have nots.<sup>17</sup> In fact, Mexico's linkage to the United States and Canada in a free-trade agreement highlights this point. One of the arguments against such an agreement was the impossibility of eliminating trade barriers between a nation whose per capita wage is one-seventh of the per capita wage of the other nation.<sup>18</sup> One of the arguments for such an agreement was that it could temper this disparity.

The dichotomy between rich and poor nations is likely to produce immense tensions in the future, yet the problems that both sets of nations face are remarkably similar. As the 1990 *World Values Survey* illustrates, an

extraordinary movement in the coincidence of some national values is afoot, for example, in the realm of ecology. This survey, which covers forty countries, discovered that from 1981 to 1990 an enormous change in concern about environmental issues occurred in poor as well as rich nations. Other problems that most countries—regardless of their standard of living or political system—share include availability of natural resources, notably energy; production of foodstuffs, especially grains; level of inflation; size of national debt; access to social services, including health care; inadequate housing; and maldistribution of wealth.

Another reason that examining political systems from a comparative perspective is useful is personal. As a student of other cultures you can learn more about your own political system by reexamining attitudes and practices long taken for granted. In the same way a student of foreign languages comes to appreciate more clearly the syntax and structure of his or her native tongue and the incursions of other languages into its constructions and meanings, so too does the student of political systems gain. Comparisons not only enhance your knowledge of the political system in which you live but are likely to increase your appreciation of particular features.

Examining a culture's politics implicitly delves into its values and attitudes. As we move quickly into an increasingly interdependent world, knowledge of other cultures is essential to being well educated. Comparative knowledge, however, allows us to test our values against those of other cultures. How do ours measure up? Do other sets of values have applicability in our society? Are they more or less appropriate to our society? Why? For example, one of the reasons for the considerable misunderstanding between the United States and Mexico is a differing view of the meaning of political democracy. Many Mexicans attach features to the word *democracy* that are not attached to its definition in the United States.<sup>19</sup> As will be discussed later, for many Mexicans, democracy does not incorporate tolerance of opposing viewpoints. Problems arise when people do not realize they are using a different vocabulary when discussing the same issue.

Another reason for comparing political cultures is to dispel the notion that Western industrialized nations have all the solutions. It is natural to think of the exchange of ideas favoring the most technologically developed nations, including Japan, Germany, and the United States. But solutions do not rely on technologies alone; in fact, most rely on human skills. In other words, how do people do things? This is true whether we are analyzing politics or increasing sales in the marketplace. Technologies can improve the efficiency, quality, and output of goods and services, yet their application raises critical questions revolving around values, attitudes, and in-



terpersonal relationships. For example, the Japanese have a management philosophy governing employee and employer relations. It has nothing to do with technology. Many observers believe, however, that the philosophy in operation produces better human relationships and higher economic productivity. Accordingly, it is touted as an alternative model in the workplace. The broader the scope of human understanding, the greater the potential for identifying and solving human-made problems.

Finally, as a student new to the study of other cultures, you may be least interested in the long-term contributions such knowledge can make for its own sake. Yet your ability to explain differences and similarities between and among political systems and, more important, their consequences, is essential to the growth of political knowledge. Although not always the case, it is generally true that the more you know about something and the more you understand its behavior, the more you can explain its behavior. This type of knowledge allows social scientists to create new theories of politics and political behavior, some of which can be applied to their own political system as well as to other cultures. It also allows—keeping in mind the limitations of human behavior—some level of prediction. In other words, given certain types of institutions and specific political conditions, social scientists can predict that political behavior is likely to follow certain patterns.

### SOME INTERPRETATIONS OF THE MEXICAN SYSTEM

We suggested earlier that social scientists set for themselves the task of formulating some broad questions about the nature of a political system and its political processes. A variety of acceptable approaches can be used to examine political systems individually or comparatively. Some approaches focus on relationships among political institutions and the functions each institution performs. Other approaches give greater weight to societal values and attitudes and the consequences these have for political behavior and the institutional features characterizing a political system. Still other approaches, especially in the last third of the twentieth century, place greater emphasis on economic relationships and the influence of social or income groups on political decisions. Taking this last approach a step further, many analysts of Third World countries, including Mexico, concentrate on international economic influences and their effect on domestic political structures.

Choosing any one approach to explain the nature of political behavior has advantages in describing a political system. In my own experience,

however, I have never become convinced that one approach offers an adequate explanation. I believe that an examination of political processes or functions entails the fewest prejudices and that by pursuing how and where these functions occur, one uncovers the contributions of other approaches.<sup>20</sup> An eclectic approach to politics, incorporating culture, history, structures, geography, and external relations, provides the most adequate and accurate vision of contemporary political behavior. Such an eclectic approach, combining the advantages of each, will be used in this book.

In general, the study of Mexican politics has provoked continued debate about which features have the greatest impact on political behavior and, more commonly, to what degree Mexico is an authoritarian model.<sup>21</sup> It is important, as we begin this exploratory task, to offer some theories about the nature of Mexican politics.

Does Mexico have an authoritarian political system? The simple answer is yes. Is Mexican politics in the same authoritarian category as Cuba under Fidel Castro, China since the Communist revolution, or Russia before 1991? The answer is definitely no. Mexico can best be described as a semiauthoritarian political system—a hybrid of political liberalism and authoritarianism that gives it a special quality or flavor—that is well documented institutionally in its 1917 constitution, currently in effect. Since 1994, Mexico can be described as a system in transition, especially in its electoral structures and division of powers. Although it appears to be moving rapidly toward a more pluralistic model that includes features associated with democratic politics, it has not yet made a complete transition.

Mexico's unique authoritarianism sets it apart from many other societies, including Latin American countries that have passed through long periods of authoritarian control, especially in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>22</sup> Normally, *authoritarian* refers to a political system in which fewer people have access to the decision-making process and fewer still are in a position to make important political choices and policies.

What sets Mexico's authoritarian system apart from many others is that it allows much greater access to the decision-making process, and more important, its decision makers change frequently.<sup>23</sup> Usually the advantage of a well-established authoritarian regime is continuity. Whereas it is fair

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Authoritarian: in political terms, a system in which only a small number of people exercise and have access to political power.

to say that successive generations of Mexican leaders, with ties to their predecessors, have controlled the decision-making process, that has not led necessarily to continuity in policy. Furthermore, its leadership, in the hands



of the executive branch, especially the president, is limited to a six-year term.

A second feature of the Mexican political model, integral to its hybrid authoritarianism, is a special feature found in many Latin American cultures: *corporatism*. Corporatism in this political context refers to how groups in society relate to the government or, more broadly the state; the process through which they channel their demands to the government; and how the government responds to their demands.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps no characteristic of the Mexican political model has undergone more change in the 1990s than corporatism. In the United States, any introductory course in U.S. politics devotes some time to interest groups and how they present their demands to the political system. Mexico, which inherited the concept of corporatism from Spain, instituted in the 1930s a corporate relationship between the state and various important interest or social groups, primarily under the presidency of General Lázaro Cárdenas (1934–1940). This means that the government took the initiative to

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Corporatism: a formal relationship between selected groups or institutions and the government or state.

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strengthen various groups, creating umbrella organizations to house them and through which their demands could be presented. The government placed itself in an advantageous position by representing various interest groups, especially those most likely to support opposing points of view. The state attempted, and succeeded over a period of years, in acting as the official arbiter of these interests. It generally managed to make various groups loyal to it in return for representing their interests. For example, it absorbed the largest groups in a government-sponsored political party, now called the Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, the PRI), giving them legitimacy and a role in party affairs. These included peasants, labor, and middle-class professional groups.

The essence of the corporatist relationship is political reciprocity. In return for official recognition and official association with the government or government-controlled organizations, these groups can expect some consideration of their interests on the part of the state. They can also expect the state to protect them from their natural political enemies. For example, labor unions hope the state will favor their interests over the interests of powerful businesses.<sup>25</sup>

The corporatist structure has made the state the all-powerful force in the society, and it is often patronizing in its relations with various groups.

Corporatism facilitated the state's ability to manipulate various groups in the state's own interest. In other words, Mexico's political leadership itself might be thought of as a separate interest group, but unlike all other interest groups, it is in control of the decision-making process.<sup>26</sup> The state's uncontested dominance has enabled its leaders to make some choices that benefit themselves rather than various social-class or group interests.

Mexico's political system is not only semiauthoritarian, while retaining some weak corporatist features, but it also allows the government and/or state to play a paramount role, a third distinguishing feature. State institutions have generally had far more prestige, resources, and influence than private, independent, or nonprofit organizations have had. The state's prestige has contributed to the perpetuation of its influence. Many of the best minds, regardless of profession or educational background, are attracted to lifetime careers with the state.<sup>27</sup> (This is also true elsewhere in Latin America and throughout Asia and Africa.) State dominance has contributed enormously to the growth and centralization of resources in the capital city and the Federal District, somewhat analogous to the District of Columbia in the United States. The power of the Mexican national state and the comparative weakness of local and provincial authorities contribute to a mentality of dependence on the state. The excessive dependence has engendered resentment as well, as various groups and geographic regions have sought to establish their autonomy from centralized state control.<sup>28</sup>

The dominance of the state within a semiauthoritarian, declining corporatist political structure contributes to a fourth political feature of the Mexican model: the centralization of authority in the executive branch. The Mexican model is unquestionably presidentially dominant, a phenomenon that Mexicans refer to as *presidencialismo* (presidentialism).<sup>29</sup> Americans think of their president as being tremendously influential. Of course, no other individual citizen or official can exercise the level of political influence that the U.S. president can. His influence is further exaggerated because he is seen as the, or a, major world leader. The Mexican president has no comparable international credentials—even though President Salinas

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*Presidencialismo*: the concept that most political power lies in the hands of the president and all that is good or bad in government policy stems personally from the president.

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(1988–1994) enhanced his domestic status considerably by virtue of his international reputation—but the president nevertheless exercises far more control over the Mexican political scene than does his American counter-



part in the United States. The strength of the presidency specifically, and the executive branch generally, comes at the cost of an ineffectual legislative and judicial branch, or any other autonomous authority. Although early in his administration President Zedillo introduced important reforms in the judicial system, especially at the level of the supreme court, they have not yet influenced the decision-making process. On the other hand, the influence of the legislative branch, controlled by opposition parties, has grown markedly in the late 1990s. By 1998, a majority of Mexicans believed that Congress was more important than the president for a functioning democracy.

The importance of Mexican executive leadership and the dominance of the state have led to the development of a dynamic political elite whose careers are formed within the national governmental bureaucracy. The elite, which has never been characterized by ideological homogeneity, is relatively open but has recently taken on fairly homogeneous social, career, and educational characteristics.<sup>30</sup> Although entry into political leadership ranks is available to well-educated Mexicans, it is a self-designated group. That is, most important decision-making posts are appointive in nature, and those selecting the officeholders are themselves incumbents. These persons change over time, thus facilitating access to leadership positions and the alteration of policy goals, but they are not as responsive to constituencies as are U.S. officials.<sup>31</sup> In fact, fewer than one out of three Mexicans in 1998 believed they were well represented by their congressperson. Moreover, because a primary goal of politicians everywhere is to stay in power, Mexican politicians, lacking constituent responsibilities, have generally been pragmatic, doing whatever is necessary to remain in office rather than pursuing a committed, ideological platform.

The final structural feature of the Mexican model is the presence and level of influence exercised by international capital and, since the 1980s, international financial agencies. As was the case among so many of its fellow Latin American nations, the impact of foreign investment on macroeconomic policy, and on the lives of ordinary Mexican citizens, became paramount in the 1980s, and again to an even greater degree in 1995, when Mexico suffered its worst recession since the worldwide depression of the 1930s. The dependence of Mexico on outside capital and on foreign trade has exercised an important effect on policy making, if not to the same degree on how decisions are taken.<sup>32</sup> Such influences raise significant issues of national sovereignty and autonomy.

The structural features of Mexico's political model—semiauthoritarianism, declining corporatism, state dominance, centralization of authority, and a self-selecting elite—are complemented by a dual political heritage

incorporated into the political culture. The political culture is neither democratic nor authoritarian. It is contradictory: modern and traditional. Mexico, as the late Nobel Prize winner Octavio Paz argued, is built from two different populations, rural versus urban and traditional versus modern.<sup>33</sup> It bears the burden of many historical experiences, precolonial, colonial, independence, and revolutionary. These experiences produced a political culture that admires essential democratic values, such as citizen participation, yet strongly favors intolerance of opposing points of view.<sup>34</sup> It is the cultural blend of contradictory values that explains Mexico's special authoritarian system. The contradictions in its political culture and historical experiences have also produced a set of policy goals, many incorporated in the constitution, that too are contradictory. On one hand, a strong state is favored; on the other, capitalism is the preferred tool for economic growth.

Place and historical experience have also contributed to another feature of mass political culture: a dependent psychology.<sup>35</sup> The proximity of the United States, which shares a border with Mexico nearly two thousand miles long, and the extreme disparities between the two in economic wealth and size tend to foster an inferiority complex in many Mexicans, whether they operate in the worlds of business, academia, technology, or politics. The economic, cultural, and artistic penetration of the United States into Mexico carries with it other values foreign to its domestic political heritage. Psychologically and culturally, Mexicans must cope with these influences, most of which are indirect, often invisible. A strong sense of Mexican nationalism, especially in relation to its political model, is expressed in part as a defensive mechanism against United States influences. The December 1994 devaluation of the peso and the perceived and real impact of the United States on Mexico's economic crisis have exacerbated this reaction. This level of nationalism has produced and sustained unique characteristics of the Mexican political model.

#### MEXICO'S SIGNIFICANCE IN A COMPARATIVE CONTEXT

From a comparative perspective, Mexico provides many valuable insights into politics and political behavior. The feature of Mexico that has most intrigued students of comparative politics is the stability of its political system.<sup>36</sup> Although challenged seriously by military and civilian factions in 1923, 1927, and 1929, its political structure and leadership have prevailed for most of this century, at least since 1930—an accomplishment un-



matched by any other Third World country. Even among industrialized nations like Italy, Germany, and Japan, such longevity is remarkable. The phenomenon leads to such questions as What enables the stability? What makes the Mexican model unique? Is it the structure of the model? Is it the political culture? Does it have something to do with the country's proximity to another exemplar of political continuity? Or with the values and behavior of the people?

We know from other studies of political stability that a degree of political legitimacy accompanies even a modicum of support for a political model. Although social scientists are interested in political legitimacy and political stability each for its own sake, they assume, with considerable evidence, that some relationship exists between economic development and political stability. Although it is misleading to think that the characteristics of one system can be successfully transferred to another, it is useful to ascertain which may be more or less relevant to accomplishing specific, political goals.

Mexico has also attracted considerable international interest because it is a one party-dominant system encountering only limited opposition from 1929 through 1988, the year in which a splinter group from the official party ran a highly successful campaign. Mexico's system is unusual in that the antecedent of the PRI, the National Revolutionary Party (*Partido Nacional Revolucionario*, the PNR), did not bring the political leadership to power. Rather, the leadership established the party as a vehicle to *remain* in power; the PRI was founded and controlled by the government bureaucracy. This had long-term effects on the nature of the party itself, and on its importance to policymaking.<sup>37</sup> In this sense, the PRI is unlike the Communist Party in the Soviet Union, whose death in 1991 spelled the end of Communist leadership in the successor states. The PRI, because it does not produce Mexico's leadership, as do the Democratic and Republican parties in the United States, is much more tangential to political power and consequently much more expendable. If the Mexican model continues to evolve along democratic lines, then the party's function, and consequently its importance, will grow significantly. This is already apparent in the internal race for the party's presidential nominee for 2000.

A third reason that Mexico's political system intrigues outside observers has been its ability to subordinate military authorities to civilian control. Mexico, like most other Latin American countries, endured a century when violence became an accepted tool of the political game. Such acceptance makes it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to eliminate the military's large and often decisive political role. Witness many Latin American countries,<sup>38</sup> one has only to look at Argentina and Chile during the

1970s and 1980s. No country south of Mexico has achieved its extended *civilian* supremacy. Rather, in most Latin American countries where civilian leadership is once again in ascendancy, their dominance is tenuous at best.

Mexico, therefore, is a unique case study in Third World civil-military relations. What produced civilian supremacy there? Is the condition found elsewhere? A confluence of circumstances and policies gradually succeeded in putting civilian control incrementally in place. Some involve the special characteristics of the system itself, including the creation of a national political party. Some are historical, the most important of which is the Mexican Revolution of 1910, which led to the development of a popular army whose generals governed Mexico in the 1920s and 1930s and who themselves initiated the concept of civilian control.<sup>39</sup>

A fourth reason for studying Mexico is the singular relationship it has developed with the dominant religious institution, the Catholic Church. Throughout much of Latin America, the Catholic Church has been one of the important corporate actors. For significant historical reasons in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Mexico's leadership suppressed and then isolated itself from the Catholic hierarchy and even in some cases the Catholic religion.<sup>40</sup> The Catholic Church has often played a political role in Latin American societies and currently has the potential to exercise considerable political and social influence. A study of church-state relations in Mexico offers a unique perspective on how the church was removed from the corporatist structure and the implications of this autonomy for a politically influential institution.

A fifth reason for examining Mexico in a comparative political context is the opportunity to view the impact of the United States, a First World country, on a Third World country. No comparable geographic relationship obtains anywhere else in the world: Two countries that share a long border exhibit great disparities in wealth. Mexico provides not only a test case for those who view Latin America as dependent on external economic forces but also an unparalleled opportunity to look at the possible *political* and *cultural* influences and consequences of a major power.<sup>41</sup> The relationship is not one way but instead is asymmetrical.<sup>42</sup> The United States exercises or can exercise more influence over Mexico than vice versa. This does not mean that Mexico is the passive partner. It, too, exercises influence, and in many respects its influence is growing. Because of European civilization's influence on our culture, we have long studied the political models of England and the Continent. Our obsession with the Soviet Union exaggerated our focus on Europe. As Latino and other immigrant cohorts grow larger in the United States, our knowledge of the Mexican culture



will become far more relevant to understanding *contemporary political behavior* in the United States than anything we might learn from contemporary Europe.

A sixth reason to explore the Mexican political model is its experiences since 1989 with economic liberalization. One of the issues that has fascinated social scientists for many years, but especially since the downfall of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new economic and political models in eastern Europe, is the linkage between economic and political liberalization. What does the Mexican case suggest about its strategy of concentrating on opening its markets, which then may create conditions favorable to political development? Indeed, is there a causal linkage between economic and political liberalization? If so, what lessons can be offered by the Mexican transition?<sup>43</sup>

Finally, a seventh reason Mexico may offer some useful comparisons is the transition taking place between national and local political authorities. Long dominated by a national executive branch in both the decision-making process and the allocation of resources, Mexico is witnessing, since the first opposition-party victory at the state level in 1989, an increasing pattern of decentralization and deconcentration of political control at the state and local level, as the National Action Party and the Democratic Revolutionary Party win more elections.<sup>44</sup> How has the dominant, national political leadership responded to these victories? How have they affected the process of governance, as distinct from electoral competition? The potential implications of such change from the bottom up offers many insights into structural political relationships in Mexico.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize, then, approaching politics from a comparative perspective offers many rewards. It allows us to test political models against one another; it enables us to learn more about ourselves and our own political culture; it offers a means for examining the relationship between political and economic development and the distribution of wealth, and it identifies the common interests of rich and poor nations and what they do to solve their problems.

Scholars have interpreted Mexico's political system in different ways. This book argues that the system remains semiauthoritarian, with weakened corporatist features, but is in transition; is dominated by a declining state; is led by a bureaucratic elite and a centralized executive competing

with a legislative branch growing in influence; is built on a contradictory political culture that includes authoritarian and liberal qualities; is characterized by international economic features embedded in its domestic structures; and is affected psychologically and politically by its proximity to the United States. Mexico offers unique opportunities for comparative study because of its political continuity and stability, one party-dominant system, civil-military relations, unique separation of church and state, and nearness to a powerful, wealthy neighbor.

In the next chapter, the importance for Mexico of time, place, and historical roots is examined in greater detail and contrasted with the experiences of other countries. Among these elements are its Spanish heritage, the role of the state, nineteenth-century liberalism and positivism, the revolution, and U.S.-Mexican relations.

## NOTES

1. Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1965), 59.
2. Compare, for example, the number of academic course offerings and textbooks available on Europe and European countries with those representing other, especially Third World, regions and societies.
3. Peter Klarén, "Lost Promise: Explaining Latin American Underdevelopment," in *Promise of Development: Theories of Change in Latin America*, ed. Peter Klarén and Thomas J. Bossett (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986), 8.
4. See for example, the glowing statement in the *Washington Post*, that Salinas "has proved to be as radical in his own way as the revolutionaries who galloped over Mexico at the beginning of the century." May 17, 1991.
5. For Salinas's views in English, see the interview "A New Hope for the Hemisphere," *New Perspective Quarterly* 8 (Winter 1991): 8.
6. The clearest presentation of this argument, in brief form, can be found in Gabriel Almond, "Capitalism and Democracy," *PS* 24 (September 1991): 467-73.
7. In the World Values Survey (a collaborative survey of forty countries in 1981 and again in 1990, available in data format from the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Ronald Inglehart, Institute for Social Research, directed the North American project), 1990, data from Mexico show that approximately 60 percent of the population chose economic growth as most important, compared with approximately 25 percent who selected increased political participation. Similar results have been repeated in every major survey taken through 1998.
8. On a presidential level, most Mexicans have not yet made the connection, or if they have, it is not significant to their voting. See Jorge Domínguez and James McCann, "Whither the PRI? Explaining Voter Defection from Mexico's Ruling



Party in the 1988 Presidential Elections," paper presented at the Western Political Science Association meeting, March 1991, 23-24. They follow up this argument in "Shaping Mexico's Electoral Arena: The Construction of Partisan Cleavages in the 1988 and 1991 National Elections," *American Political Science Review* 89 (March 1995): 39-40, and in their *Democratizing Mexico. Public Opinion and Electoral Choices* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).

9. It has been argued, as a general rule, that as countries achieve advanced industrial economies, greater economic equality will be achieved. See Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1968), 57. Also see Dan Labovitz's statement that real minimum wages for Mexicans declined 44 percent between 1977 and 1988, in *Mask of Democracy: Labor Suppression in Mexico Today* (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 19.

10. Roger D. Hansen, *The Politics of Mexican Development* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), especially "Trends in Mexican Income Distribution," 72ff.

11. Sidney Weintraub, *A Marriage of Convenience: Relations Between Mexico and the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 36; and Wayne Cornelius, "Foreword," in *The Politics of Economic Restructuring, State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico*, ed. Mario Lorena Cook, Kevin J. Middlebrook and Juan Molinar Horcasitas (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1994), xiv-xv.

12. Rodéric Ai Camp, "Democracy Through Latin American Lenses," Hewlett Foundation, Pilot Study, Mexico, April, 1998.

13. Miguel Basáñez, Marta Lagos, and Tatiana Beltrán, *Reporte 1995: encuesta latino barómetro* (1996), np.

14. Of course, this is true worldwide. Unfortunately, the problems seem less severe when these groups are the primary victims. Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Mexico: A Policy of Impunity* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990), 53.

15. Karl W. Deutsch, *Nationalism and Social Communication: An Inquiry into the Foundations of Nationality*, 2d ed. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1966), 156ff.

16. Frederick Turner, *The Dynamics of Mexican Nationalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968).

17. The classic argument for this was presented by Barbara Ward, *The Rich Nations and the Poor Nations* (London: Hamilton, 1962).

18. Jeff Faux, "No: The Biggest Export Will Be U.S. Jobs," *Washington Post Weekly Edition*, May 13-19, 1991, 8.

19. See one commissioner's statement that this is a source of bilateral problems in the blue-ribbon Report of the Bilateral Commission on the Future of United States-Mexican Relations, *The Challenge of Interdependence* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1989), 237; these findings are reinforced empirically in Rodéric Ai Camp, "Democracy Through Latin American Lenses," 1998.

20. The most comprehensive explanation of various interpretations still is Carolyn Needleman and Martin Needleman, "Who Rules Mexico? A Critique of Some Current Views of the Mexican Political Process," *Journal of Politics* 31 (November 1969): 1011-34. Some of these issues have been reexamined by Diane E.

Davis, *Urban Leviathan, Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); and Viviane Bracher-Márquez, "Explaining Sociopolitical Change in Latin America: The Case of Mexico," *Latin American Research Review* 27 (1992): 91-122.

21. For example, Susan K. Purcell, "Decision-Making in an Authoritarian Regime: Theoretical Implications from a Mexican Case Study," *World Politics* 26 (October 1973): 28-54.

22. José Luis Reyna and Richard Weinert, eds., *Authoritarianism in Mexico* (New York: ISHI, 1977).

23. Lorenzo Meyer, one of Mexico's foremost independent commentators, expressed it in this way: "Mexico's system does allow, however, for some limited political pluralism and a higher degree of institutionalization and accessibility than the authoritarian regimes that dominated Latin America's Southern Cone a decade ago." See his "Democratization of the PRI: Mission Impossible?" in *Mexico's Alternative Political Futures*, ed. Wayne A. Cornelius, Judith Gentleman, and Peter H. Smith (La Jolla, Calif.: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, UCSD, 1989), 333.

24. Ruth Spalding, "The Mexican Variant of Corporatism," *Comparative Political Studies* 14 (July 1981): 139-61.

25. An excellent analysis of this relationship can be found in Ruth Berins Collier, *The Contradictory Alliance, State-Labor Relations and Regime Change in Mexico* (Berkeley: University of California International and Area Studies, 1992).

26. For evidence of this view, see John W. Sloan, "State Power and Its Limits: Corporatism in Mexico," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 38 (1984): 3-18.

27. For the state's relationship to professional development, see Peter Cleaves, *Professions and the State: The Mexican Case* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1987); and David E. Lorey, *The Rise of the Professions in Twentieth-Century Mexico, University Graduates and Occupational Change Since 1929*, 2d ed. (Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center, 1994).

28. Edward J. Williams, "The Resurgent North and Contemporary Mexican Regionalism," *Mexican Studies* 6 (Summer 1990): 299-323, makes a strong case for northern regionalism.

29. Edmundo González Liaca, "El presidencialismo o la personalización del poder," *Revista Mexicana de Ciencias Políticas* 21 (April-June 1975): 35-42, discusses this at length.

30. For some of these, see Rodéric A. Camp, *Political Recruitment Across Two Centuries, Mexico 1884-1991* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).

31. For detailed, long-term patterns of continuity and turnover, see Peter H. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth Century Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 159ff. For comparisons with other countries, see John D. Nagle, *System and Succession, the Social Bases of Political Elite Recruitment* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1977), 23ff.

32. For current reactions to the intervention of the International Monetary Fund, see Rick Willis, "The IMF's Economic Role Causes Controversy," *El Financiero International Edition*, October 6, 1997, 8. Fifty-six percent of Mexicans believe that U.S. influence over Mexico is excessive. "Mexico's Economic Situa-



tion Survey," *El Norte/Reforma* poll of 1,100 urban Mexicans with a  $\pm 3$  percent margin of error, 1995. See *Dallas Morning News*, November 5, 1995, 3.

33. Octavio Paz, *The Other Mexico: A Critique of the Pyramid* (New York: Grove Press, 1972), 45. Paz noted the existence of "one fundamental characteristic of the contemporary situation: the existence of two Mexicos, one modern and the other underdeveloped. This duality is the result of the Revolution and the development that followed it: thus, it is the source of many hopes and, at the same time, of future threats."

34. Enrique Alduncin, *Los valores de los mexicanos* (Mexico City: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1986); Enrique Alduncin, *Los valores de los mexicanos, México en tiempos de cambio*, vol. 2 (Mexico: Fomento Cultural Banamex, 1991); Raúl Béjar Navarro, *El mexicano, aspectos culturales y psicosociales* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1981). The most comprehensive work in English is that by Rogelio Díaz Guerrero, *Psychology of the Mexican* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1975).

35. See Octavio Paz's classic, *The Labyrinth of Solitude: Life and Thought in Mexico* (New York: Grove Press, 1961).

36. For an overview of these issues, see Kevin Middlebrook's review essay "Dilemmas of Change in Mexican Politics," *World Politics* 41 (October 1988): 120-41; for predictions about the future, see Roderic Ai Camp, ed., *Mexico's Political Stability: The Next Five Years* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1986).

37. See Dale Story, *The Mexican Ruling Party, Stability and Authority* (New York: Praeger, 1986), 9ff; John J. Bailey, *Governing Mexico: The Statercraft of Crisis Management* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

38. This is nicely explained in Gary Wyma, *The Politics of Latin American Development*, 3d ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28ff.

39. For greater detail about the causes, see Roderic Ai Camp, *Generals in the Palacio: The Military in Modern Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

40. Karl Schmitt, "Church and State in Mexico: A Corporatist Relationship," *Americas* 40 (January 1984): 349-76.

41. For some examples of noneconomic variables, see Clark W. Reynolds and Carlos Tello, *U.S.-Mexico Relations: Economic and Social Aspects* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1983).

42. For various insights into this, from the points of view of an American and Mexican, see Robert A. Pastor and Jorge G. Castañeda, *Limits to Friendship: The United States and Mexico* (New York: Vintage Press, 1989).

43. For an extensive discussion of the Mexican case, see Riordan Roett, ed., *Political & Economic Liberalization in Mexico, at a Critical Juncture* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1993), 17-94.

44. See especially "The Politics of Public Administration," in *Opposition Government in Mexico*, ed. Victoria Rodríguez and Peter M. Ward (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1995). The editors also provide an excellent case study in their *Policymaking, Politics, and Urban Governance in Chihuahua* (Austin: LBJ School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, 1992).

## 2

### *Political-Historical Roots: The Impact of Time and Place*

The political life of all those states which during the early years of the last century arose upon the ruins of the Spanish Empire on the American mainland presents two common features. In all those states, constitutions of the most liberal and democratic character have been promulgated; in all, there have from time to time arisen dictators whose absolute power has been either frankly proclaimed or thinly veiled under constitutional forms. So frequently has such personal rule been established in many of the states that in them there has appeared to be an almost perpetual and complete contradiction between theory and practice, between nominal and the actual systems of government.

CECIL JANE, *Liberty and Despotism in Spanish America*

Understanding politics is not just knowing who gets what, where, when, and how, as Harold D. Lasswell declared in a classic statement years ago, but also understanding the origins of why people behave the way they do. Each culture is a product of its own heritage, traditions emerging from historical experiences. Many aspects of the U.S. political system can be traced to our English colonial experiences, our independence movement, our western frontier expansion, and our immigrant origins. Mexico has had a somewhat similar set of experiences, but the sources of the experiences and their specific characteristics were quite different.

#### THE SPANISH HERITAGE

Mexico's political heritage, unlike that of the United States, draws on two important cultural foundations: European and indigenous. Although large