Politics in Mexico
The Decline of Authoritarianism

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Who Governs? The Structure of Decision Making

> Once the Mexican president and his advisers are in agreement regarding the wisdom of making the decision, the president publicly associates himself with it by making a formal announcement or an executive-sponsored legislative proposal, or both. All important decisions are formally initiated by the president, and the president both claims and receives full credit for the decision, whether or not the idea for the decision was originally his. Because of the patrimonial nature of staff arrangements, all individuals who participate in the decision-making process supposedly do so at the president's will and serve in the capacity of his subordinates. In return for receiving the delegated power to serve, they attribute all credit for their accomplishments to their patrimonial leader, the president.
>
> SUSAN K. PURCELL, *The Mexican Profit-Sharing Decision*

Every political system devises a set of structures and institutions to facilitate political decision making. Studies of decision making reveal that there are a number of interrelated steps in the process. The steps begin with a problem requiring a political solution and pass through a series of institutions in which the problem is ignored or resolved, often legislatively. Some institutions primarily channel demands from society through the political system. Other institutions contribute to the selection and election of political leadership. Still others carry out the solutions proposed by the political system.

Each political model performs the steps in decision making differently, although many models have certain similarities. For example, in the United States, the legislative branch plays a critical role in the formulation of laws and as a focus of interest-group activity. In the United Kingdom, although Parliament plays a critical role in approving legislation, most of its formulation and lobbying are done through the executive branch. The

cabinet, however, is a product of the legislative branch; that is, its members are members of Parliament, and so election to Parliament determines who will make many government decisions.

Mexico, as has been suggested earlier, evolved a political system that formally resembles that of the United States but centralizes much greater authority in the executive branch. The powers of the executive branch combined with the dominance of a leadership group represented by a single party—the PRI and its antecedents—has led to a government dominated by the executive, largely in the person of the president. Which institutions are the most salient, and what functions do they perform?

THE EXECUTIVE BRANCH

The seat of the Mexican government is Mexico City, in the Federal District, a jurisdiction with certain similarities to the District of Columbia in the United States. Mexico City, however, unlike Washington, D.C., combines the qualities of New York City, Chicago, and Los Angeles, for Mexico's political capital is also its intellectual and economic capital.

The executive branch of the government houses two types of agencies: those that have counterparts in most First and Third World countries, such as departments of foreign relations and national defense, and others that are idiosyncratically Mexican, sometimes called decentralized or parastatal agencies, somewhat analogous to the Tennessee Valley Authority in the United States. Parastatal agencies are a product of Mexican nationalism, Mexicanization, and state expansion from the 1940s through the 1980s, culminating in the nationalization of private, domestically owned banks in 1982.[1]

The preeminent parastatal agency in Mexico, recognized internationally, is Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex), the national petroleum company. Pemex was born when President Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized foreign-owned petroleum companies in 1938.[2] Since then the government has controlled the development of petroleum resources, including exploration and drilling, and the domestic retailing of petroleum products. Because of the vast Mexican oil reserves and their rapid exploitation in the 1970s and 1980s, Pemex became Mexico's number-one company. Its sales at their apex accounted for more than three-quarters of export revenues.

Among the fifty leading firms (excluding banks) in Mexico during the 1980s, a fourth were government owned. Other important government entities included the Federal Electric Commission, which develops and dis-

tributes electricity; the National Bank of Foreign Commerce, designed to promote trade; the National Company of Public Commodities (Conasupo), a distributor of basic foodstuffs to low-income Mexicans; Sidermex, a basic-steel producer; the National Finance Bank (Nacional Financiera), a developmental bank; and many other companies in utilities, communications, transportation, minerals, fertilizers, and so on. These agencies had semicabinet status, and the president announced his appointees to them simultaneously with those of formal cabinet members.

The formal cabinet has nineteen agencies: Attorney General of the Republic; Secretariat of the Comptroller General; Secretariat of Fishing; Secretariat of Agrarian Reform; Secretariat of Tourism; Mexican Institute of Social Security; Secretariat of Agriculture and Hydraulic Resources; Secretariat of Communications and Transportation; Secretariat of Foreign Relations; Secretariat of Government; Secretariat of Energy, Mines and Government Industries; Secretariat of Health and Welfare; Secretariat of Commerce and Industrial Development; Secretariat of Labor and Social Welfare; Secretariat of National Defense; Secretariat of the Navy; Secretariat of Social Development; Secretariat of Public Education; and Secretariat of the Treasury and Public Credit.

An examination of the major agencies suggests some interesting aspects of Mexican policy issues and the importance of specific economic problems. For example, the historic impact of agrarian issues and agrarian reform after the revolution can be seen in the fact that *two* cabinet-level agencies are devoted to agriculture, one specifically to agrarian reform, and until recently, hydraulic resources were the purview of a separate agency. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to say that any president since Lázaro Cárdenas has given priority to agrarian issues. In fact, the desire of the Salinas administration to eliminate land-tenure problems generated by village-held land titles (*ejidos*), incorporated in constitutional reforms of Article 127, may mean the eventual disappearance of the Secretariat of Agrarian Reform. A second agency of special importance is Tourism, which has had departmental status since 1959, indicative of the industry's impact on the economy. The current secretary has asked President Zedillo to give the agency more responsibilities. The most recently reconstituted secretariat is that of Social Development, in response to its political and economic importance. It administered Salinas's highly touted solidarity program, giving its head control over extraordinary resources and opportunities to establish personal contacts at the grassroots level. Luis Donaldo Colosio, its first secretary, used these opportunities to great personal advantage.

The agencies of greatest standing in the executive branch are those with long histories. In the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s, the Secretariat of National Defense carried far more weight than it does today, not because of its impact on day-to-day policies but because it often was the source of presidential leadership, given the control exercised by revolutionary generals. With the centralization of power in the hands of the president and, as we have seen, the importance of individual, federal bureaucratic agencies as sources of political recruitment, some relationship exists between decision-making influence and the degree to which individual agencies are the source of high-level personnel. In the 1950s and 1960s, the Secretariat of Government, an agency devoted to internal political affairs, replaced the Secretariat of National Defense as a source of presidential leadership and as a major voice in policy decisions.[3]

Despite the roles played by the Secretariat of Defense and the Secretariat of Government, the Secretariat of the Treasury wielded considerable influence, and its head received much attention in each cabinet. President Cárdenas enhanced both Treasury's authority and its leader by permitting him to act as an arbiter in the allocation of funds to other agencies and to state governors in connection with the federal revenue-sharing program.[4] Thus, other than the president, the treasury secretary became the key figure in the distribution of economic resources, as well as in the determination of the direction of financial policy.

Economic agencies in the government gained substance with the onset of hard times. By the 1980s, the Secretariat of Programming and Budgeting (combined with Treasury in 1992), the Secretariat of the Treasury, and the Bank of Mexico (the federal reserve bank) became the troika in setting economic policy.[5]

The most interesting of these three agencies, and the most politically influential during its short life (1977–1992), was the Secretariat of Programming and Budgeting, which produced three consecutive presidents: de la Madrid, Salinas, and Zedillo. More important, it produced a cadre of important political-technocrats who have dominated the Salinas-Zedillo camarillas, their political generation, and economic decision making.[6] It is ironic, therefore, that this agency and the presidents it produced both expanded statist economic intervention in the form of hundreds of government-owned enterprises—whose budgets the new secretariat managed, and then presided over its eventual disappearance as a budgeting agency.[7] To streamline cabinet coordination and facilitate policymaking, Miguel de la Madrid organized subcabinet groups along policy lines, including an economic cabinet. These groups were more active under Salinas, and he added another category, national security, giving it heightened visibility. It includes the Secretariats of Government, Foreign Relations, National Defense, and the Attorney General of the Republic.

Groups in Mexican society who want some part in national policy decisions must make their concerns and interests known to the executive branch at the highest possible level. Yet as Daniel Levy observed, this is difficult to accomplish:

> As most important legislation is initiated and carried through to approval by the president, hardly any opportunity exists for effective interaction between citizens and their representatives during the lawmaking process. However, groups and individuals may occasionally influence the way in which laws and policies are actually implemented. A common element of day-to-day politics in Mexico is the presentation of demands to local and state governments, to departments of the federal bureaucracy, and even directly to the president.[8]

The cabinet secretary is the key figure in initiating policy proposals, and his staff thoroughly studies the issues and collects information relevant to the formulation of policy. He may be responding to a presidential request or pursuing matters associated with his agency's mandate under broad guidelines outlined to him by the president and the presidential advisers.[9] The persons who have access to the president himself are even more successful in influencing decisions than are those whose highest-level contacts are cabinet figures.

Because the decision-making structure is so hierarchical and the president exercises so much influence (or is expected to exercise authority over the system), considerable pressure is put on channels of access to the presidency. The president's private secretary, who functions as a chief of staff and whose position is essentially a cabinet-level appointment, has the complete confidence of the president. Because he acts as a gatekeeper in denying or granting requests to see the president, he performs a crucial role in the decision-making process.

Salinas emphasized two positions in his administration, positions that reflected the nature of the decision-making process. To coordinate the cabinet and keep closer control over policy initiatives, the president appointed a coordinator of the technical cabinet subgroups who reported directly to him. Zedillo followed this same pattern. Unlike his predecessor, however, he has not chosen to exercise a similar level of authority. In the first two-thirds of his administration, the president appears to be more strongly influenced by his individual cabinet secretaries.

Part of any decision-making process is informing the public about policy decisions. Salinas understood public opinion better than any recent Mexican president. Consequently, he gave much thought to the position of head of social communication for the presidency, the Mexican version of

the U.S. presidential press secretary. But more than coordinating presidential press conferences, a rarity in Mexico, the press secretary attempts to shape media coverage of presidential actions, policy initiatives, and policy outcomes.

Salinas used other party, governmental, and semigovernmental agencies as "spin doctors" for both the domestic and foreign media. His government also understood the importance of public opinion polls and hired its own pollsters, who used data that presented the administration or the president in a favorable light. Salinas, however, introduced a significant but dangerous variable in government decision making: image building as a public relations tool. The president himself became, in part, a victim of his own creation shortly after Zedillo succeeded him, when a major devaluation decision and its consequent economic results were blamed on the former president. Salinas, who had maintained extraordinarily high approval ratings through the end of his administration, suddenly found himself an outcast in his own country, less than four short months into the next administration.[10] Zedillo, on the other hand, has taken decisions which were not popular with Mexicans or with his own party, such as his austerity program. Nevertheless, his persistence in his economic strategy, despite failures in other policy arenas, has contributed to a gradual but steadily increasing level of popularity, which tapered off in 1998.

The few studies of Mexican decision making have attempted to classify the role of the presidency in the decision-making process.[11] Although there is no question that decision making is centralized and that the president personally has greater influence over the outcome of policies than does the U.S. president, because more than 90 percent of legislation prior to 1994 came from his office, he cannot in most cases arbitrarily make a policy decision—nor is it likely he would want to do so. For example, in her recent study of Federal District Department decisions affecting the capital, Diane Davis discovered that even the president often failed to get his way.[12] The worst fears of critics of the Mexican semiauthoritarian decision-making process were borne out in 1982 when President José López Portillo announced without warning the nationalization of the banks. The circumstances surrounding the decision have been well documented, and according to the few people López Portillo consulted, he did not consider the views of any of the groups that would be affected.[13] The fact that a single political actor, in consultation with two or three others, could make a decision that would have major reverberations throughout the economy and bring relations between the private sector and the state to a breaking point demonstrates the dangers inherent in centralized power.[14] This can also occur in the political realm, as illustrated in the manner in which the incum-

bent president has been able to designate his own successor. This power was magnified in 1994, when the PRI's presidential candidate was assassinated, and the president had to decide quickly, and very much in the public eye, on a successor, without the charade of the party itself making such a choice. Salinas's choice of Ernesto Zedillo thus only exacerbated the divisions within the party and government leadership.

Typically, however, presidents do not operate in solitary splendor; their consultations tend to be more private and hidden from public view than in the United States, where lobbying goes on in front of the scenes as well as behind them. One of the characteristics of the decision-making process is that often it is the executive branch itself that takes the initiative in regard to affected parties rather than vice versa. In other words, the role of interest groups is often reactive, not proactive. This pattern is changing as Mexico's system becomes increasingly plural and as President Zedillo tries to establish new ground rules for decision making. President Zedillo has publicly committed himself to making his cabinet more representative, initially appointing the attorney general from the PAN and bringing more women into his party. He also has made clear his desire to minimize the president's intervention in the PRI's candidate selection process and to strengthen the judicial and legislative branches. Although in the first year of his administration Zedillo was perceived as "weak," part of this perception is due to the fact that he wants to reduce presidential powers in support of democratization, but at the same time, the Mexican people share an expectation of a president as decisive, energetic, and even strong.

Presidentialism, which has been the cornerstone of the Mexican system, becomes a liability in a transition from a semiauthoritarian to a democratic model. The origins of this pattern are both constitutional, although this has been exaggerated, and experiential.[15] As Miguel Centeno has suggested, certain structural changes, such as the reelection of congresspersons, would allow Mexico to construct a democratic model from below, rather than impose it through executive fiat.[16] The political crisis which Mexico faces can be attributed, in part, to the structural role of the presidency.[17]

THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Mexico's national legislature is bicameral, with the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Deputies are elected on the basis of roughly equally populated districts, of which there are three hundred. In 1970 one hundred seats

were added for deputies selected from party lists based on the proportion of the votes cast for the parties. The purpose of the increment was to increase the opposition's representation, owing to the overwhelming dominance of the PRI in the regular legislative seats. In the reforms in the 1980s, another hundred seats were added; now three hundred deputies represent districts and two hundred represent parties. These party deputies are elected at large, based on the proportion of votes received in five regions containing forty seats. As one astute observer concludes: "In terms of democracy . . . , proportional representation exacts a heavy cost for minimal benefits. Formulas which ensure minority representation, while bringing opposition to the legislature, are at best distorting and at worst antidemocratic."[18] This system breaks the link between voters and their representatives. Even more surprising, all three parties are using these relatively "safe seats" to elect party leaders to the Chamber.

The Senate, which has fewer powers than the Chamber of Deputies, has two senators from each state and the Federal District, a total of sixty-four, and in 1994 added sixty-four additional seats, thirty-two to be assigned to the party with the second highest vote count in each state in 1994, and the remaining thirty-two as national proportional representation seats in 1997, for a grand total of 128. Senators are elected for six-year terms, all of which will come up for election in 2000. The Chamber of Deputies and the Senate each have numerous committees, some with names like those in the U.S. Congress. But because deputies and senators cannot be reelected to consecutive terms, seniority does not exist, at least regarding committees, for all members are new to a particular legislature. Some critics argue that one means of enhancing legislative powers in Mexico is to allow consecutive reelection, which would permit members to develop stronger ties with their constituencies. Interestingly, many Americans would like to see a limit set on congressional terms. Mexican legislators proposed eliminating the reelection prohibition in 1995, but it remains in place.

An examination of the committee structure reveals that in many cases congressional leaders attempt to place persons on committees relevant to their expertise and/or interest. For example, in the past military officers on leave or retired were appointed to the National Defense Committee, or legislators representing the peasant unions were assigned to the committees dealing with agriculture.

The legislative branch has long been controlled by the PRI, whose members have accounted for more than 90 percent of the district seats in the Chamber of Deputies and, until 1988, all Senate seats (see Table 7-1). Until 1997, the president appointed a congressional leader (equivalent to the

Table 7-1 Representation in the Legislative Branch, Mexico, 1991–2000

	Deputies									Senators					
	District Seats			Party Seats			Total			State Seats[c]		Party Seats[b]		Total	
Party[a]	1991	1994	1997	1991	1994	1997	1991	1994	1997	1991	1994	1994	1997[d]	1991	1994	1997
PRI	290	277	165	31	23	74	321	300	239	61	64	32	13	61	96	77
PAN	10	18	64	80	101	57	90	119	121	1	0	24	9	1	24	33
PRD	0	5	70	40	66	55	40	71	125	2	0	8	8	2	8	16
PFCRN	0	0	0	23	0	0	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PARM	0	0	0	14	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
PPS	0	0	0	12	0	0	12	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1
PT	0	0	1	0	10	6	0	10	7	0	0		1			1
PVEM			0			8			8							
Total	300	300	300	200	200	200	500	500	500	64	64	64	32	64	128	128

[a]PRI = Institutional Revolutionary Party, PAN = National Action Party, PRD = Democratic Revolutionary Party, PFCRN = Cardenista Front for National Reconstruction Party, PARM = Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution, PPS = Popular Socialist Party, PT = Labor Party, PVEM = Green Party.
[b]The Senate did not have proportional representation seats until 1994–1997.
[c]The state seats were all elected in 1994.
[d]Only 32 seats were allocated in 1997.

majority leader in the U.S. Congress), who headed all the state delegations. Each state's delegation in the Chamber was usually headed by someone who had served before or by a rising star who was given the post for the first time. Many deputies from the PRI complained that decisions were made in an authoritarian fashion by the leadership and that as individuals they played a minor role.[19] Since the opposition won control of the Chamber of Deputies in 1997, the deputies have elected their own leader, in this case Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, a prominent PRD politician. Opposition members now chair and serve on the various committees as well. The Senate also has a leader, and the senior senators from each state form the internal governing body. The Senate has taken on a more plural character since 1994, when the PAN and PRD obtained thirty-two party seats, 25 percent of the total, but even after the 1997 elections, it remains in the hands of PRI.

Earlier discussion indicated that the legislative branch had little to say in the decision-making process, unlike the U.S. Congress. The reason for this is that each legislator who is a member of the government party was beholden to the political leadership, and indirectly the president, for his or her position. If such a legislator wants to pursue a public career, he or she must follow presidential directives. Although Zedillo announced that he would no longer select the PRI's legislative candidates, only a small minority of PRI deputies have shown any sign of believing that declaration and breaking ranks. In the most unpopular legislative decision in many years, approving the president's austerity package in March 1995, only two PRI deputies voted against it. They were greeted with cries from party loyalists to resign. This pattern is beginning to change, both because PRI has lost control of the Chamber and because some PRI legislators have begun to form their own internal groups, such as the "Galileo movement," in pursuit of independent policy goals.[20]

The role of the legislative branch in the Mexican decision-making process has changed dramatically since late 1997, after a coalition of parties, led by the PRD and PAN, took control of the Chamber of Deputies. In the past, congress primarily examined presidential legislative initiatives and made recommendations to the executive branch for alterations. Although theoretically it could have rejected a presidential initiative, most presidential legislation was approved, typically overwhelmingly (see Table 7-2). Today, however, not only have the opposition parties significantly altered executive proposals, but they have focused increased attention on bills proposed by the Chamber itself. The open debates on policy issues have generated a more contentious legislative environment. A subgroup from the PRI legislators, formed in the 1994–1997 session, known as the *Bronxistas*, shout down their opponents.[21]

Table 7-2 Legislative Initiatives in Lower House, 1997

Origin	Submitted	Passed	Success Rate (%)
Executive	90	89	99
PRI	16	3	19
PAN	74	7	10
PRD	36	1	3
PT	1	0	0

Source: Review of the Economic Situation of Mexico, September, 1997, 366.

The legislative branch remains in a weakened position via-à-vis executive policy initiatives since it requires the opposition parties to retain a unified front when voting on major or controversial legislation. For example, the PAN voted with the PRI, instead of with the PRD and the Green and Labor parties, on the federal spending bill in December 1997.[22]

Beginning with the administration of José López Portillo, the legislative branch began a practice common to the British Parliament: Cabinet secretaries are required to come before the Chamber at least yearly and report on their various activities. Although the Chamber was powerless in reality to alter cabinet decisions or to withhold resources, discussions of the reports and opposition pronouncements were covered in the media. Today, visiting cabinet officials are regularly grilled and publicly criticized. The Chamber has become a significant forum where public policy is debated, and those points of view are presented on the evening news and in the press.

The Senate does not initiate legislation but, rather, approves or disapproves of certain executive branch appointments—just as the U.S. Senate does with presidential appointments—and must approve certain bills emanating from the Chamber of Deputies. Because most senators are still elected under the same conditions as former PRI deputies, they are not likely to reject a presidential appointment. There have been some cases, however, when this has occurred, most notably in connection with military promotions. All career military officers above the rank of colonel are promoted by the president, subject to the pleasure of the Senate. In the early 1950s the Senate actually rejected an abuse of presidential authority involving promoting officers who had not met the required time in grade according to military law.[23] Recent presidents have not violated their authority in this regard.[24]

The legislative branch also serves to legitimize executive legislation. One of the potential consequences of the elections since 1988, when opposition parties began obtaing a significant representation in the Chamber of Deputies, was that the government lost its ability to amend the constitution; the PRI did not have two-thirds of the seats in the lower chamber, the number necessary to do so. Mexican presidents and the executive branch have used constitutional amendments to give major, controversial legislation an extra measure of legitimacy. The opposition's gains since 1988 prevent the government from using this technique without first achieving a coalition.

A proposed change by the Zedillo administration would considerably strengthen the opposition's voice in the Chamber of Deputies and significantly increase the importance of the judicial branch. According to the *Diario Oficial*, on December 31, 1994, Article 105 of the constitution was modified to grant the equivalent of 33 percent of the members of the Chamber of Deputies, the Senate, or local state legislators the right, within thirty days of passing a law, to question the constitutionality of such legislation before the supreme court.[25] Although the law will go into effect only when the implementing legislation is approved, the fact that it was proposed and signed by Zedillo indicates his seriousness about changing the balance of power and strengthening the other branches.

There are two important structural conditions which contribute to the legislative branch's weaker policy-making position compared to Mexico's executive. The first of these, mentioned above, is the continued prohibition on consecutive reelection, which limits the expertise among legislators.[26] The second condition is the limited budget devoted to congressional staff. The Chamber has approximately sixty researchers for five hundred legislators, and like their employers, many leave at the end of three years. By contrast, the executive branch has several thousand full-time permanent staff.[27]

The legislative branch is also a training ground for future political leaders and an important source of political patronage. It has been used to reward people prominent in quasi-governmental interest groups and among the labor, peasant, and popular, professional sectors.[28] Among opposition parties, it remains the only national venue for their leaders. Although professional people predominate among the legislators, peasant and labor leaders, as well as women, who might not obtain higher political office in the executive branch, are well represented. Even more important, the legislative branch provides upward mobility to a different type of politician: those who are more likely to have come from a working-class background, from the provinces (because of the district representation), from electoral careers, and with less formal education (see Table 7-3). Women, too, as in

Table 7-3 Legislators and Executive-Branch Officials, 1991–1994

Background Variable	Legislators (%)	Executive Branch Officials (%)
Gender		
Female	7	6
Education		
Preparatory or less	19	1
Career Experience		
Political parties	87	41
Unions	61	17
Elective posts	61	8
Parents' Occupation		
Peasant	5	1
Laborer	3	1
Birthplace		
Federal District	16	52

Source: Diccionario biográfico del gobierno mexicano (Mexico: Presidencia de la República, 1992); based on 1,162 officials and 550 legislators.

many European countries, are best represented in this branch of government. In short, greater percentages of persons who are excluded from executive branch careers, even at the departmental level, can find places in the legislative branch. The fact that some channels are open to these kinds of Mexicans, who in many background characteristics correspond more closely to the population in general, is important to social mobility and leadership fluidity.

The legislative branch also is a school for political skills. Among national government institutions, opposition leaders and parties are represented only in the legislative branch. Their electoral wins beginning in 1988 substantially increased their political influence, forcing government leadership to compromise on several policy issues related to electoral reform.[29] Negotiating skills will be more and more valued in the decision-making process as the opposition parties continue their progress in vote getting. Most officials in the executive branch have little or no experience in such skills; hence persons whose careers have brought them through the legislative bodies are likely to be in greater demand in the future. Zedillo's own attempts at expanding pluralism in the executive branch and decentralizing decision making are increasing the legislative branch's influence. For example, Zedillo's first attorney general, Fernando Antonio Lozano, was the head of the PAN delegation in the 1991–1994 session.

THE JUDICIAL BRANCH

A major principle in the U.S. government structure is the balance of power. The founding fathers were concerned that the executive branch might take on dictatorial aspects and hence sought to apportion power among the executive, legislative, and judicial branches in such fashion that none would dominate. The Mexican judicial system is structurally patterned after that found in the United States. It has local, state, and national levels, the last comprising a court of appeals and a supreme court.

A judicial branch influences the decision-making process when it is independent of legislative and executive authority, and when it can legislate through judicial rulings. The U.S. Supreme Court can declare a law unconstitutional, after which Congress can devise other legislation to achieve its goal if it so wishes. U.S. courts hand down rulings that bear on future cases and also on legislation regarding the issues involved.

Legislating through judicial precedent is not a viable procedure in Mexico. For the supreme court to establish a binding precedent, it must repeatedly reach identical conclusions about precisely the same issues. This rarely, if ever, occurs. Although the supreme court has some independence, justices do not sit for life, and their appointments have been political. Presently, the Supreme Court consists of eleven justices who may serve terms of up to fifteen years. They are appointed by the president with two-thirds approval of the Senate. District and circuit court judges are chosen by a six-member Council of the Federal Judiciary. The proposed changes in Article 105, allowing one-third of the members of congress to request a constitutional review of new federal legislation, or one-third of the members of state legislatures to make a similar request for state laws, potentially enhances its influence.[30] The high bench typically rules on appeals of individual persons, not on matters of constitutionality, and they do not venture into political issues. The lower levels of the legal system are tainted by corruption and outside political manipulation. An absence of consistency and integrity makes it difficult, if not impossible, for the average citizen to resort to the system to protect his or her rights. The criminal justice subsystem has incorporated the use of torture in obtaining confessions.[31] These circumstances combine to create a lack of respect for the law, a crucial element in a viable, legal system.

President Zedillo, recognizing this, has attempted to make respect for the law a crucial element in his presidency. By initially appointing an at-

torney general from the opposition and reopening three major cases, the president signaled his intent to reinvigorate the legal process. The arrest of President Salinas's brother as the alleged intellectual instigator of the murder of PRI official José Ruiz Massieu sent a clear message that even a president's family could not act with legal impunity. But since these major cases remain unresolved, and noted cases of corruption have been discovered throughout the criminal justice and drug enforcement agencies, the rule of law remains an unreached goal.

THE PRI

Many analysts of Mexican politics commonly refer to the government as the PRI or, frequently, the PRI government. The label implies that the PRI, which is the political party of the government, exercises policymaking authority over the system. Nothing could be further from the truth. As pointed out in the previous chapter, the PRI plays a significant role in institutionalizing semicorporatist structures and in the relationship between certain groups and the government. In fact, the PRI acts as a channel in decision making for the least influential groups. Its own leadership has little if any impact on the making of policy, as Dale Story found:

> The Party [the PRI] clearly does not control the reins of political decision-making, nor is it even a coequal to the state. Yet most national elites are at least Party members, and more significantly, the Party is a very critical institution serving the executive branch of government, in particular the office of the presidency. Especially with national elites becoming so technocratic, the PRI provides the president with the necessary political legitimacy, the symbolic aura of the Revolution, and the machinery for running campaigns, winning elections, and maintaining contacts with the masses.[32]

As an institution, the PRI does not have policy influence over the members of the legislative or executive branches. Although its role is very visible in the legislative branch because until 1997 its members were the leaders of both chambers, they do not report to the party leadership. Even if they were to do so, the party leadership is selected by the president, thus placing the party under the thumb of the executive branch.

For example, of the members of the first PRI executive committee during the Zedillo administration, the president, secretary general, and press secretary owe their posts to the president. The president of PRI was responsible for the appointment of only two committee members, the electoral and social promotion secretaries (see Table 7-4). Only three members have held prominent posts in the executive branch; the remainder are former governors, deputies, senators, and labor union leaders. The Party has relied on the executive branch for financial support; generally the Secretariat of Government allocated the funds. Electoral reforms have eliminated this subsidy. Still, support is difficult to measure because it involves more than money. The government, through its contacts, provides many other resources, such as lodging, transportation, and meals for those doing party business. Individual candidates receive little direct financing from the party, but it does pay for party, as distinct from candidate, advertising, indirectly promoting the fortunes of the individual politician.[33] Party leadership has sought out new means of support, emulating some of the techniques long used by the PAN.

The PRI, as a party vehicle, does not even have much influence over executive branch officials, who are the most active in the decision-making process. Many of the officials have few formal ties to the party; in fact, a number of top officials have never been members of any party. Credentials other than active party experience are of greater value to an individual person's career. That may change if party rules requiring active PRI organizational experience before an individual can become a party candidate for governor or president remain in effect.

The PRI does not function autonomously. Its dependence on the government and on executive branch leadership in the past effectively eliminated any direct influence it might have had on the decision-making process, especially in connection with economic and social policy issues. Nevertheless, in terms of recent political reforms, officials who have made their careers within the PRI, particularly at state and local levels, have be-

Table 7-4 Zedillos' First PRI National Executive Committee

President:	María de los Angeles Moreno
Secretary General:	Pedro Joaquín Coldwell
Organization:	Jorge López Tijerina
Electoral:	Tristán Canales
Regional Coordination:	Arnoldo Ochoa
Information:	Heriberto Galindo
International Affairs:	Alejandro Carrillo Castro
Social Promotion:	Guadalupe Gómez Maganda
CNC:	Hugo Andrés Araujo
CTM:	José Ramírez Gamero
Popular Sector:	Mariano Palacios Alcocer
Territorial Movement:	Carlos Sobrino

Source: "Enfoque," *Reforma*, March 5, 1995, 6.
CVC = National Peasant Federation, CTM = National Workers Federation.

gun to express themselves as a viable interest group regarding executive-branch decisions affecting the party's strength and growth. The executive branch has demonstrated its superiority in the decision-making process in imposing solutions on party problems. This was illustrated clearly in 1995. The president removed one PRI gubernatorial candidate soon after his inauguration in Chiapas after the PRI had claimed victory in this hotly contested election over the PRD. Whether or not the PRI had won fairly, the president imposed his will on the party leadership, making clear their subordination to presidential authority.

Nevertheless, signs of change are apparent. In the case of Tabasco, in order to obtain the PRD's support for a national political pact, the federal government tried to impose a negotiated settlement on the newly elected PRI governor, Roberto Madrazo. Madrazo, skillfully drawing on local PRI leaders and supporters, successfully resisted his forced resignation, which had taken the form of a resolution imposed by the federal executive branch. In early 1995, in a meeting between the governors and President Zedillo, the governor of Puebla told the president that the governors would no longer submit to presidential intervention in state affairs. In mid-1998, the governor of Morelos resigned. It is unclear, however, the degree to which the president or the federal government determined his decision to leave office.

Opposition victories at the local level are forcing structural changes on the party. Therefore, to survive, the party must compete successfully against PAN and PRD candidates and seek out new means of financing. Once the PRI's monopoly on executive officeholding—on both the local or state levels—is broken, it will limit the PRI's ability to rely on comparatively unlimited resources from local businessmen and other interests, who can no longer count on favors from a PRI out of power. Thus, opposition-party victories have led to significant changes in the PRI and in its relationship to society. Finally, the party, encouraged by President Zedillo, began experimenting with the internal selection of candidates, experiments that were used in the municipal and state elections in Guanajuato and Jalisco in late 1994 and early 1995, and again in 1998, through party primaries.

Although the focus of this chapter is on decision making at the national level, the changing structure of electoral competition and the numerous successes of the PAN and PRD imply far-reaching changes in this pattern at the state and local level, and subsequently through the national congress. Thus, it is important to recognize the role of not just the PRI in decision making but increasingly that of PAN and the PRD. PAN now administers numerous state bureaucracies, and the PRD is in charge of the Federal District government, formerly a major national cabinet agency. As Victoria Rodríguez and Peter Ward wrote in their important work, the opposition parties have been confronted with the task of governing, as distinct from the task of winning office.

> Invariably the personnel coming to power in representation of the successful parties lack experience or background in urban governance. In the case of non-PRI parties, we have seen how public officials have had to be recruited from the private sector and how this, in turn, shaped their performance while in office. This problem is accentuated by the shortness of terms and by the constitutional no reelection clause. Although junior personnel may show some continuity in office, the rule in the past has been for all senior officers to change with the election of a new municipal president.[34]

Despite fraud, the PRI has shown its ability to adapt and survive. If the political leadership wishes to rely on the PRI to continue legitimizing its authority through the electoral process, as the opposition strengthens, then the PRI bureaucracy will gain in influence in the political arena. Party officials who make their political careers in the party bureaucracy and in elective office, will develop and express their own interests, as do officials in the federal bureaucracy, attempting to have a say in decisions that affect their institutional future as well as their political careers.

CONCLUSION

Decision making in Mexico is still controlled through the executive branch, centralized in the person of the president. As economic problems have overshadowed all other issues, the influence of the economic cabinet has expanded. The decision-making process listens to demands more through informal internal channels than through formal public channels. As the analysis of interest groups in Chapter 6 demonstrates, leaders from various sectors seek out individual decision makers in the executive branch, typically the cabinet secretary or, if they have access, the president.

The degree of centralization of decision-making power in the president and the executive branch affects the whole government process. Not only does a president have a huge reservoir of political authority, but most Mexicans expect—indeed, react positively to—his exercise of his powers. Salinas was praised for his decisiveness during his administration, when he used his decision-making authority to rebuild lost confidence in the presidency. Zedillo, on the other hand, has been criticized for appearing indecisive.

The reliance on informal channels of influence favors certain groups

over others. Business interests have been more successful than labor or peasants in having their point of view heard. The government does not stress listening to demands made through formal channels; rather, it concerns itself with how its policies are received and its image. The powers exercised by the executive branch since the revolution have left Mexico with weak legislative and judicial institutions. Not only did the state grow in size throughout most of this period, reversed only since 1988, but its power lay within the executive branch. Because ambitious politicians understand this, competition for careers in the executive is more intense than in the other branches. In fact, the imbalance discouraged formation of an active, independent opposition, which contributed to the leadership's cooptive capability. The increasing pace of recent opposition victories and President Zedillo's willingness to relinquish his presidential authority over party affairs are promoting changes in the pattern of decision making, allocating much greater influence to the legislative branch, strengthening federalism, and altering the influence of various actors.

NOTES

1. For an analysis of how this sector has functioned, see the case study by William P. Glade, "Entrepreneurship in the State Sector: Conasupo of Mexico," in *Entrepreneurship in Cultural Context*, ed. Sidney Greenfield et al. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1979), 191–222.

2. For background, see George Grayson, *The Politics of Mexican Oil* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1980); Edward J. Williams, *The Rebirth of the Mexican Petroleum Industry* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1979).

3. Miguel Alemán, 1946–1952; Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 1952–1958; Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, 1964–1970; and Luis Echeverría, 1970–1976, are presidents indicative of this changing institutional influence and the rise of civilian leadership; they came from the Secretariat of Government.

4. See the introduction by Antonio Carrillo Flores in Eduardo Suárez, *Comentarios y recuerdos, 1926–1946* (Mexico City: Porrúa, 1977).

5. For background on the rise of the Secretariat of Programming and Budgeting, see John J. Bailey's excellent "Presidency, Bureaucracy, and Administrative Reform in Mexico: The Secretariat of Programming and Budgeting," *Inter-American Economic Affairs* 34 (Summer 1980): 27–59.

6. Miguel Angel Centeno and Sylvia Maxfield, "The Marriage of Finance and Order: Changes in the Mexican Political Elite," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 24 (February 1992): 84.

7. Julie A. Erfani, *The Paradox of the Mexican State, Rereading Sovereignty from Independence to NAFTA* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 127ff.

8. Daniel Levy and Gabriel Székely, *Mexico, Paradoxes of Stability and Change*, 2d ed. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987), 49–50.

9. For case studies in education, hydraulic resources, and agricultural policy, see Guy Benveniste, *Bureaucracy and National Planning: A Sociological Case Study in Mexico* (New York: Praeger, 1970); Martin H. Greenberg, *Bureaucracy and Development: A Mexican Case Study* (Lexington, Mass.: Heath, 1970); Merilee S. Grindle, *Bureaucrats, Politicians, and Peasants in Mexico: A Case Study in Public Policy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977). A new examination of oil policy formulation concluded that "conflict, lobbying, and coalition building between patron-client pyramids, or bargaining" were typical. See María de la Luz Valverde, "A Heuristic Model of Mexican Public Policymaking," paper presented at the Latin American Studies Association, Los Angeles, 1992, 19.

10. For example, the PRI headquarters from 1988 to 1994 had a special section that provided information to foreign scholars; the government sent copies of its favored newspaper, *El Nacional*, to various academics; and the embassy mailed data on election results and speeches of party officials.

11. See, for example, Purcell, *The Mexican Profit-Sharing Decision*, 4; Roderic Ai Camp, *The Role of Economists in Policy-Making: A Comparative Case Study of Mexico and the United States* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1977), 9; Judith A. Teichman, *Policymaking in Mexico: From Boom to Crisis* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1988).

12. Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan, Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 316.

13. Carlos Tello, *La nacionalización de la banca en México* (Mexico City: Siglo XXI, 1984).

14. Roderic Ai Camp, *Entrepreneurs and the State in Twentieth Century Mexico* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 128–33.

15. Jeffrey Weldon, "The Political Sources of *Presidencialismo* in Mexico," in *Presidentialism and Democracy in Latin America*, ed. Scott Mainwaring and Matthew Shugart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 225–58.

16. Miguel A. Centeno, "The Failure of Presidential Authoritarianism: Transition in Mexico," in *Politics, Society, and Democracy: Latin America*, ed. Scott Mainwaring et al. (Boulder: Westview Press, 1997), 44.

17. Lorenzo Meyer, "La crisis del presidencialismo mexicano," *Foro Internacional* 36 (January 1996): 11–30.

18. For excellent background on the legislative structure, see Michael C. Taylor, "Constitutional Crisis: How Reforms to the Legislature Have Doomed Mexico," *Mexican Studies* 13 (Summer 1997): 319.

19. The best description of how the committee system functions and the role of the Chamber of Deputies prior to pluralization is Rudolfo de la Garza, "The Mexican Chamber of Deputies and the Mexican Political System" (Ph.D. diss., University of Arizona, 1972). The best analysis to date is Alonso Lujambio's excellent *Federalismo y congreso en el cambio político de México* (Mexico: UNAM, 1995).

20. *Reforma*, September 22, 1997, 1.

21. Sam Quiñones, "Legislative Rowdies," *Mexico Business*, July 1997, 79–80.

22. *El Financiero International Edition*, December 22, 1997, 5.

23. Senado, *Diario de los debates*, 1953, 5–6.

24. Personal interviews, Mexico City, 1990–1991.

25. *Diario Oficial*, December 31, 1994, 2–6.

26. For a discussion of this issue, see my "Mexico's Legislature: Missing the Democratic Lockstep," in *Legislatures and the New Democracies in Latin America*, ed. David Close (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1995), 17–36.

27. Sam Quiñones, "Politicians Learning to Play Nice," *US–Mexico Business*, November 1997, 20–22.

28. See Peter H. Smith, *Labyrinths of Power: Political Recruitment in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), 217ff.

29. For background, see Robert A. Pastor, "Post-Revolutionary Mexico: The Salinas Opening," *Journal of Inter-American Studies and World Affairs* 32 (Fall 1990): 1–22.

30. Pilar Domingo, "Democratization Without Separation of Powers? The Case of the Mexican Supreme Court," paper presented at the National Latin American Studies Association, Washington, D.C., 1995.

31. Americas Watch, *Human Rights in Mexico: A Policy of Impunity* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1990), 1; *Unceasing Abuses, Human Rights One Year After the Introduction of Reform* (New York: Human Rights Watch, 1991).

32. Dale Story, *The Mexican Ruling Party: Stability and Authority* (Stanford, Calif.: Hoover Institution, 1986), 131–32. For a historical exploration of its founding, see Carl Henry Marcoux, "Plutarco Elías Calles and the Partido Nacional Revolucionario: Mexican National and Regional Politics in 1928 and 1929" (Ph.D. diss., University of California at Riverside, 1994).

33. Interview with a candidate for federal deputy, Mexico City district, 1985.

34. Victoria Rodríguez and Peter Ward, eds., *Opposition Government in Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1994), 226. This is the first major work that explores fully the consequences of opposition-party victories at the local and state levels.

8

Expanding Participation: The Electoral Process

> The period from 1968 onward has been characterized by many authors as one of "transition," as Mexico moves away from the traditional political and social order built around Revolutionary principles. But does this political transition also constitute a democratic one? While recognizing that it is not feasible to respond definitely to this question, the progress in opening the electoral space to recognize more victories of the opposition at the state and local levels seems to indicate that at least as far as local elections and access to political office are concerned, Mexico may well be on its way to consolidating its democratization. The test, naturally, will be whether this urban electoral pattern can be transferred to the national level. As some analysts have argued, the consolidation of democracy in Mexico will only become evident when a candidate of the opposition wins the presidency of the Republic. That seems, indeed, a rather ambitious yardstick by which to measure a democratic transition.
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> VICTORIA RODRIGUEZ, "Opening the Electoral Space in Mexico"

A little over a decade ago, most political analysis would have given little space to elections and electoral politics in Mexico. Although elections have been a feature of the political landscape since the time of Porfirio Díaz, with the exception of Francisco Madero's election in 1911, they never functioned as the crucial determinant of political leadership or furnished a policy mandate.

Beginning in the mid-1970s, elections took on a new dimension. At first, the uncharacteristic emphasis could be tied to the desire of some establishment figures to strengthen the PRI's image and that of the political system by promoting the opposition's fortunes. In other words, the government itself, through a series of electoral reforms, tried to stimulate the