

A “Perfect Dictatorship”: The PRI, Corruption, and Autocracy in Mexico

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Abstract

Mexico’s celebrated democratic transition in the year 2000 belied the centuries of authoritarian rule that preceded it. From the start of Spanish colonialism in 1519, Mexico has been a monarchy and a personalist dictatorship, and was most recently a single-party dictatorship helmed by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) for over seventy years. The PRI’s decades-long rule may be surprising to observers given Mexico’s proximity to the United States, a country that has long sought to promote democratic rule in the region. This paper explores the reasons behind the longevity of the PRI’s rule, especially given the failure of other authoritarian forms of government in Mexico’s history. We found that the structural conditions following the Mexican Revolution favored the creation of a party-based regime, as many former revolutionaries later became party elites. These findings form a basis through which to understand the current political environment in Mexico, as well as a cautionary tale for those who wish to protect the democratic institutions in this fledgling democracy.

Introduction

For Mexicans, the year 2000 was more than just the start of a new millennium. It also proved to be the start of a new political era. After 71 consecutive years in power, the country’s ruling political party, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), lost the popular vote and allowed an opposition candidate to assume the office of the presidency. Mexico’s peaceful democratic transition has made the country a model case study in the Latin American context,

where democracy has historically struggled to take hold (Santiso, 2006). Despite these achievements, corruption marks the country's democracy as one that is still in development and may be hampering economic and social development (Emmerich & Benitez Manaut, 2010).

All of this begs the question of why Mexico has struggled so much to attain and maintain a democracy in the first place. After all, Mexico shares the world's most frequently crossed border with one of the world's largest democracies. The United States has repeatedly intervened in Latin American politics to ostensibly ensure democratic outcomes; in fact, when the French attempted to reestablish a monarchy on Mexican territory in 1865, the American government offered to send its armed forces to assist Mexican freedom fighters (*Our Documents - Monroe Doctrine (1823)*, n.d.). How is it that Mexico, with its proximity to one of the most vocally democratic countries in the world, came to have an authoritarian government so deeply entrenched and efficient that it was once referred to by Nobel Prize-winning poet Mario Vargas Llosa as the “perfect dictatorship” (Langston, 2017)?

As it turns out, the roots of authoritarianism run deep in Mexico, and a multitude of factors—including colonial history and the circumstances surrounding the Mexican revolution—prevented an effective democratic transition until 2000. We briefly outline Mexico's history to illuminate the foundations upon which the country's political institutions were built. From there, we analyze the strategies that the PRI used to remain in power and why they were so effective in the Mexican context. Finally, we discuss why Mexico was more vulnerable to a single-party autocracy than to other forms of authoritarian governance and how seven decades of PRI rule continues to affect the social, economic, and political environment to this day.

A Political History of Mexico

The Olmecs, the earliest documented civilization in the territory now known as Mexico, laid the political foundations for many of the indigenous societies that followed. Their political leaders are believed to have depicted themselves as demi-gods who exercised control through their supposed connection to the divine (Kirkwood, 2000, p. 18). Similarly to the Olmecs' framework, the pre-Colombian civilization in Teotihuacán is thought to have controlled its population through a sophisticated hierarchical political apparatus, with the divine ruler and priest class at the top and slave laborers at the bottom (Kirkwood, 2000, p. 20). As Teotihuacán elites began to lose their grip on power in the surrounding areas, they relied on a highly developed military to terrorize their subjects into submission (Kirkwood, 2000, p. 21). Later Mexican civilizations followed similar practices: politics and religion were inextricably intertwined, and warfare was frequently used to subjugate the populace. Since many of the details surrounding these civilizations are lost in the annals of history, one hesitates to classify these political systems as monarchies or military dictatorships. Regardless, it is important to consider how these pre-Colombian proto-autocracies shaped Mexico's political history in centuries to come, especially given the willingness of the Spanish crown to exploit these political systems for their own benefit.

Though the arrival of the Spanish in 1519 brought about monumental change, in some regions extant political institutions persisted. Indigenous elites ("caciques") pledged their allegiance to the Spanish crown and were granted some degree of autonomy over their subjects; in return, they collected tributes for the Spanish and adopted European customs (Pohl, 2012). Despite this continuity, it is undeniable that this era is where we start to see the development of the "state" in the Western sense; the Spanish consolidated these fragmented civilizations under their rule and developed centralized institutions to extract a wealth of

natural resources and transport it to market. During this time, Mexico can clearly be classified as a monarchy, since it operated entirely as an extension of the Spanish Empire.

Mexico gained independence from the Spanish in 1821 and began to shape its own political identity after centuries of colonial rule. In 1824, Mexico drafted its first constitution, which was modeled heavily after the American Constitution and contained numerous provisions to promote the development of a democratic state (Macías, 2011). Regardless, the state struggled to permanently establish democratic governance and periodically fell back into authoritarianism, such as in two attempts to re-establish a monarchy in the country (Macías, 2011). During one period of democracy, General Porfirio Diaz made several attempts to overthrow the presidency and install himself as the head of state; though these coups were always unsuccessful, he was eventually elected president in 1867 and would remain in office for the next three decades, a period historians refer to as the Porfiriato (*Mexico During the Porfiriato - The Mexican Revolution and the United States*, n.d.).

The Porfiriato would be defined by remarkable leaps in infrastructure development and economic expansion, though the vast majority of Mexicans would never enjoy the benefits of these advancements. Diaz surrounded himself with a technocratic elite that he referred to as the “científicos,” men who served as policy advisors and were lauded for their economic prowess; regardless, the Diaz regime relied heavily on authoritarian techniques of political repression to keep critics in line, including false imprisonment, assassinations, and threats of military force (*Mexico During the Porfiriato - The Mexican Revolution and the United States*, n.d.). Though Diaz frequently cited his military experience as one of his greatest assets as a leader, he did not actively involve military leadership in decision-making. As such, the Porfiriato would most likely be classified as a personalistic regime with heavy support from the military, or perhaps an evolutionary military regime. The latter term refers to a regime that begins as one type and later transforms, or “evolves”, into another; in the case of the Porfiriato, the argument can be made

that the Porfiriato began as a military dictatorship but transformed into a personalist regime with time.

Try as he might, Porfirio Diaz was ultimately unable to stem the tide of revolution in Mexico. He was finally ousted in 1910 amidst an outbreak of conflict fueled by decades of inequality; the constitutional republic that emerged from the seven-year-long struggle was, on paper at least, strongly democratic and radical in its provisions for social and political rights (Bantjes, 2011). Still, democracy continued to struggle to find a foothold in the country. Though the revolution officially ended in 1917, political instability continued to plague the country; after president-elect Alvaro Obregon was assassinated in 1928, his hand-picked successor, Plutarco Elias Calles, took the reins amidst the chaos. Ultimately, Calles decided that the best way to stop the infighting was to consolidate various revolutionary organizations under a single party in 1929: the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (PNR). This party would later come to be known as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) (Langston, 2017).

The single-party regime stewarded by the PRI was famously referred to as a “perfect dictatorship” by poet Mario Vargas Llosa; indeed, the party was able to maintain a stranglehold over Mexican politics for seventy years (Langston, 2017). The president, who served as the party’s leader, would have the final say in selecting his successor. Institutionally, most power was concentrated under the PRI’s executive party leadership instead of the general rank-and-file membership so as to prevent fragmentation (Langston, 2017). The PRI maintained power through political patronage, election-rigging, and in some instances, violence. This system proved effective, so long as the party could deliver spoils to its patrons and economic stability to the general public; however, Mexico experienced several economic crises in the last two decades of the 20th century, leading to increased scrutiny of the party’s ability to lead the country. Fearing a popular revolt, party leaders began gradually allowing opposition candidates to win and quietly reformed the country’s electoral system (Langston, 2017).

In 2000, the PRI was finally ousted from the office of the presidency in the country's first truly democratic election (Langston, 2017). In the two decades since, the presidency has been mostly free of accusations of electoral corruption, and elections in the country have been classified as “generally free and fair” by scholars of democracy and electoral integrity (Emmerich & Benitez Manaut, 2010). While Mexico's democracy is far from perfect, it is strong enough that it is unlikely to slip into authoritarianism in the near future (Emmerich & Benitez Manaut, 2010).

Analyzing Mexico's Political System under the PRI

The PRI exemplifies the longevity of rule that party-based regimes can attain, as it effectively monopolized Mexico's political arena for seventy years. Understanding the political history of the state, we can now analyze the specific apparatuses that allowed for the PRI to endure as long as it did. First and foremost, we must acknowledge the bedrock of the PRI's power—co-optation—as one of the many strategies autocratic regimes employ to consolidate their rule.

Co-optation can take two primary forms: economic and political. Within the former derivation, the regime buys the loyalty of its supporters, incorporating politically salient groups into their operation by securing for them a direct line of rents, such as exclusive government contracts of preferential tax breaks, to ensure their complacency (Haber, 2006). In this context, “rents” are primarily economic and political capitulations granted to the backers of a regime. On the other hand, there is political co-optation, or as Haber calls it, “organizational proliferation”, the regime either aligns the incentives of its rank-and-file membership with its leadership in order to ensure their loyalty, or it makes the leadership coordinate with other organizations newly-mandated by the regime itself, like paramilitary forces or dispute arbitration mechanisms (e.g., the Italian “Blackshirts” under Mussolini, the Chilean military tribunal courts under

Pinochet). This is all done to raise the cost of collective action, disincentivizing the subversion of the regime's institutions by rogue actors, as they may compromise their own position and, thus, their own payoffs coming from the regime (Haber, 2006). In Mexico under the PRI, we see both derivations of co-optation at play.

Economically, a few of the main currencies by which the PRI co-opted their support base were property rights and public policies, which they doled out selectively to their winning coalitions (Haber, 2008). This clientelist system, distinct because of its informal business-state relationship, dates back to the Porfiriato, during which Diaz would reward his coalition of landowners, bankers, and industrialists with tangible benefits delivered through policy (Haber, 2006). According to Haber, regimes would generate these economic rents by the institution of policies like regulatory barriers (2006). For example, Diaz would provide the industrialists in his coalition protective import tariffs and financial barriers to market entry, sheltering his circle from foreign and domestic competition alike (Haber, 2008). Similarly, in the oil industry, Diaz awarded drilling concessions, tax exemptions, and property rights to federal lands to incentivize oil magnates in order to benefit from any attracted investment coming off of the fruitful oil revenue (Haber et al., 2003). After Diaz's deposition, the PRI would continue the informal working relationship of the state and businesses for the pursuit of profit (Thacker, 2012).

By ensuring stable relations with Mexico's "big business", the PRI established itself as necessary for the acquisition of profit and, thus, stabilized itself, co-opting the economic sector into relying on the politicians to keep the rents and concessions flowing (Purcell, 1981). An example of this symbiotic relationship can be found in Mexico's relation to its sugar industry. In the 1940s, the PRI government passed decrees that bound sugar cane farmers to work for the sugar mill owners by fixing their wages to the wholesale sugar prices that the mill owners set (Purcell, 1981). This allowed the sugar magnates to profit from exploiting their labor base with

menial wages, and, in turn, the government co-opted those same magnates into controlling the farmers at their behest. Mexico's financial sector offers another example of this mutually beneficial and informal relationship. As was common during the Porfiriato, the PRI established alliances with Mexican banks (Haber, 2008). The terms of this alliance included the government allowing bankers to write their own rules when it came to their lending practices, while in return banks kept a line of credit selectively open for PRI politicians; this created a "revolving door" effect by which politicians would receive rents from bankers or become bankers themselves (Haber, Razo, et al., 2003). As demonstrated, the PRI managed to stay relevant and stable in the political arena because of its strategic economic co-optation of key industries in the economy.

Politically, the PRI engaged in co-optation by shoring up the membership within its ranks to ensure loyalty. They were able to do this by maintaining a corporatist, patrimonial structure that "coordinated and controlled disparate societal interests under auspices of the revolutionary party" (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009, p. 192). By cultivating the concept of the inclusive "revolutionary family," the PRI was able to co-opt different interest groups under the same wide tent and control them by handpicking their leadership, manipulating the operations and objectives of said interest groups (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009). Many of the PRI's rank-and-file were of urban middle-class origin, gaining access to their positions via "kinship ties or shared educational and occupational experiences" (Haber, 2008, p. 27). These members, admitted into positions that allowed for ample personal gain, then agreed to certain norms about power-sharing within the regime; for instance, norms on office rotations stabilized the PRI as it ensured access to higher level positions for politicians with progressive ambition, keeping them loyal to the party as they waited to access the upper offices and their corresponding benefits (Haber, 2008) This system allowed the PRI to act as the hegemony of Mexican politics until 2000.

By no means was the PRI completely without opposition, however, and it was also not beyond the application of political violence to subdue dissenters. Opposition parties continued to exist, but because the PRI was able to form a diverse coalition drawing from a wide berth of constituencies by banking on its nationalist rhetoric and policies, it was able to safeguard its own dominance (Haber, 2008). When it was threatened by opposition groups that it could not co-opt politically, it would use violence selectively, such as clamping down on labor protests or intimidating critical journalists (Bartman, 2018; Haber, 2008). The PRI was also prone to commit electoral fraud by manipulating electoral results and using the media and state resources to mislead their citizens about oppositional candidates and the party's own positions (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009). They were able to accomplish this because of the tentacle-like nature of the PRI apparatus, which reached into various sectors of Mexican political life and maintained absolute political hegemony with their personnel and resources. In sum, while economic and political co-optation helped the PRI ascend to dominance in Mexico's political system, by no means were these strategies sufficient to maintain their undemocratic grasp on power. Like any other authoritarian regime, the PRI did not shun the use of state violence and electoral fraud to suppress those who would not follow the party line.

Mexico's Structural Conditions and the PRI

In this section we consider the structural factors of Mexico that allowed for the rise of the PRI as a party-based regime. We begin by explaining why other authoritarian regime types such as militarist, personalist, and monarchic regimes could not crop up in Mexico given the country's structural conditions. This section will end with our postulation of the primary factor that made Mexico a party-based authoritarian regime.

What is remarkable about Mexican governance when compared to the rest of Latin American politics is its stark lack of military coups (Hachemer, 2017). The closest Mexico ever came to a military rule was indeed the Porfiriato, but even then, it was an evolutionary—or a transitioning—regime, trending towards a personalist dictatorship. This means that the Porfiriato was never going to just be a military dictatorship, but rather a regime headed by a single dictator at the forefront as opposed to a cabal of military officers. When compared with other developing states, Mexico succeeded in implementing the formula of civilian supremacy over the military apparatus, incrementally reducing the power of the military by subordinating it to civilian leadership (Kurzer, 2015). Among the cited reasons for this phenomenon is Mexico's professionalized civil service corps as a competent leadership group, as well as the hegemonic nature of the PRI as a revolutionary party (Serrano, 1995). Regarding the latter, it is argued that the legacy of the Revolution of 1910 promoted a climate favorable to peaceable relations between civilian and military elite, as both arose out of the same roots in the populations and worked together to bring about revolutionary change; thus, the military esteemed themselves as “guardians of the Revolution” and of the revolutionary party, the PRI (Serrano, 1995, p. 428). We conclude that, because of this unique civil-military relationship, a military regime could not be born on Mexican soil.

Mexico arguably was a personalist regime during the Porfiriato, which means it was characterized by the reign of a single despotic leader. This is why the PRI, as a revolutionary party, could not adopt that same form without losing their legitimacy. One million Mexicans lost their lives not only in the insurrection against Porfirio Diaz but in the resulting civil wars as well (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009, p. 39). Diaz's regime was characterized by high amounts of inequality despite the high economic growth rates; many suffered from harsh working conditions, food shortages, and rampant squalor (Edmonds-Poli & Shirk, 2009). What followed

the overthrow of the Porfiriato was a brutal civil war between various liberal and conservative factions. The PRI rose into power amidst this chaos by carrying with them, in many former revolutionaries' eyes, the mantle of the spirit of the original Revolution of 1910. Tied into this rhetoric is a mythologized view of the civil war that emphasizes Mexican nationalism, statism, social justice, and political liberalism as the revolutionary goals the PRI, as a whole, worked to bring about (Kurzer, 2015). Reneging on these revolutionary goals by instituting a personalist regime would run counter to the PRI's legitimacy. Thus, Mexico's structural condition as a "revolutionary state" prevents personalism from occurring within the PRI.

Mexico could have been considered a monarchy in its colonial past, as under the Spanish crown, a viceroy was appointed to oversee the colony and report back to the crown (Kurzer, 2015). In 1865, French forces attempted to interfere in Mexican politics by propping up the Emperor Maximilian and his wife Carlotta as the monarchs; they were promptly deposed and the would-be king was executed by government forces (*Our Documents - Monroe Doctrine (1823)*, n.d.). Because of this legacy, it would have been highly unlikely that Mexico's citizenry would have ever accepted a monarchy, given the brutal colonial legacy of exploitation the Spanish and French left in the country (Martínez, 2004). Another possible explanation may reside in the Mexican state's relationship with the church. During the Spanish reign, the crown and the Catholic Church reached an agreement that allowed Catholicism to be the dominant religion of "New Spain"; Porfirio Diaz continued such a relationship but tempered its power by forcing the church to relinquish power in regards to politics (Kurzer, 2015). As a monarch tended to derive their legitimacy from some sort of divine right, the church played an important political role in bestowing that divine right to a ruler. But since the Catholic Church had exchanged its political power for dominance in the cultural and religious sphere of Mexico, it would not have been able to regain that role without severe consequences. Thus, Mexico after

the Revolution did not devolve into monarchy.

This leads us to consider what structural condition *did* lead to the creation of a party-based regime. We ultimately believe that the answer lies in *how* the PRI came to power: revolution. The Porfiriato perpetuated a degree of wealth inequality so unacceptable that a left-wing revolutionary force had to depose it altogether with violence. Diaz's strategy of economic development favored the wealthy classes, cronies who propped him up as a ruler; his regime was also "repressive, favorable to the interests of foreigners, and politically antiliberal [dictatorial]" for most Mexicans (Kurzer, 2015, p. 211). This led to an uprising led by oppositional groups from the northern state of Sonora. After beating Diaz's forces on the battlefield, the victors forced Diaz to abdicate and went on to hold the election of 1913, the "fairest election in Mexican history," which saw the victory of Francisco Madero (Kurzer, 2015, p. 211).

Madero was assassinated soon after by Diaz loyalists, and this cycle of violence continued to repeat until Plutarco Calles founded the PNR in 1929 as a forum for all of the veterans of the Revolution to organize and pool their power and resources after the assassination of President-elect Alvaro Obregon (Brenner, 1971). Even though they came into formal power via election, the PRI was composed of the revolutionaries that fought against the old regime. That means the Revolution and the crises it wrought fostered cohesion amongst the revolutionaries, formalizing their cooperation as political elites and producing leadership seen as legitimate in the eyes of the Mexicans for whom they fought for (Levitsky & Way, 2012). Because of the violent and bloody road to victory, the founders of the PRI thought it prudent to bind together and create the "revolutionary family" as it is known today.

Impact on Human Rights and the Economy

Invariably, the PRI's system has created long standing effects in two major areas of Mexico's politics: narco-violence and the economy. Narco-violence, or drug violence as a result of the Mexican war on drugs, has had an adverse effect on human rights in the country (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). Alternatively, the PRI's statist approach to economic development helped sustain what many economists regard as the "Mexican miracle". How the authoritarian apparatus of the PRI interacted with the daily life of the party's constituents can be better discerned by analyzing these two areas of concern.

Mexico's drug trafficking organizations (DTOs) are the most significant players in the country's organized crime arena (Beittel, 2019). What makes these DTOs so threatening is their utilization of violence in not only an inter-organizational setting, but also against "the government, political candidates, and the media" (Beittel, 2019, p. 3). Many commentators have also argued that the Mexican DTOs can be "excessive" and "exceptional" in their displays of violence (Beittel, 2019, p. 3). In recent years, many government actors, including those of the PRI, have been implicated in criminal collusion with the DTOs; for instance, Javier Duarte, the Governor of Veracruz, was arrested in 2017 on the charge of criminal involvement with the DTOs that led to the "forcible disappearances" of more than five thousand persons (Beittel, 2019, p. 5). Given the PRI's proclivity towards co-optation, it stands to reason that many actors under the PRI umbrella would be prone to collude with the DTOs that hold immense power in the region, using their positions in the state to benefit from the illicit activities the DTOs carry out (Shirk & Wallman, 2015).

This complicity between the state and the DTOs proliferated the drug trade and its resulting violence in Mexico. According to Shirk and Wallman, because of the PRI's extended tenure in Mexico's high offices since the 1940s, "high-level corruption created a

blanket of protection throughout the political system. The illicit arrangements between Mexican drug traffickers and state authorities might be better understood not as criminals corrupting the state but criminals as subjects of the state” (2015, p. 1359). The PRI also kept corruption within law enforcement itself hidden from public eye “through control of the media and bureaucratic reshuffling of abusive police from one set of forces to another” (Davis, 2006, p. 64). Under the PRI, the military also became corrupt due to its longstanding relationship in combating the DTOs (Davis, 2006).

This led to Mexico’s democratic turnaround of 2000, in which a member of the opposition party (PAN), Vicente Fox, was elected to office, signaling a regime change into something more democratic. In this transitional period, however, violent intrastate conflict has worsened (Davis, 2006; Shirk & Wallman, 2015). With law enforcement’s former master, the PRI, relinquishing its old absolute power, corrupt police officers have fled to the criminal underworld (Davis, 2006). As a result, presidents since Fox have heightened the violence in the drug wars by centralizing their own police forces and increasing their usage of coercive power. As a result, the state has overseen many human rights abuses such as “extrajudicial killings, enforced disappearances, and torture” in their struggle against the DTOs (Human Rights Watch, n.d.). This was all a consequence of the PRI’s authoritarian regime cooperating with the violent cogs of Mexico’s organized crime.

The PRI put forth a system that saw heavy intervention in the economy by the state, including the nationalization of many key industries such as railways, agricultural holdings, and petroleum (Cline, 1962). This particular route of state-economy relationships was pursued due to the nationalist nature of the Revolution of 1910, where Mexican nationals felt that their newfound identity as a state warranted a more hands-on approach to the economy to better deliver social welfare services to the citizenry (Kurzer, 2015). Rather than encroaching upon the

market's ability to function and thereby throttling it, the state under the PRI managed to align its interests with those of its private sector (Camp, 1989). An example of this can be found in the relationship between Mexican state and its banking industry that began in the 1920s. The state intervened in the banking industry by creating "a dependency of the expanding manufacturing sectors on government-supplied capital...a key channel for an exchange of private- and public sector leadership.a model in later years for state involvement in manufacturing and mining" (Camp, 1989, p. 17). Policies such as this manufactured an environment in which the relationship between public and private sector resembled that of a "mentor-disciple", for when the state "consolidated power, it doled out resources to nurture the nascent private sector" (Camp, 1989, p. 16). This was to set the tone of the state's interactions with the economy in the decades to come.

By 1940, these interactions had become formally institutionalized, and the PRI leadership began to turn towards a policy of industrialization to usher in economic growth. In order to incentivize the private-sector to target developmental goals, they created tax breaks and directed funds into domestic industries through providing them loans from state-sponsored banks with below-market value interest rates (Camp, 1989). By the administration of Miguel Aleman in 1946, a more technocratic approach to running the economy was adopted by the PRI's newer breed of educated administrators that ushered in the fastest period of social and economic change in Mexico. This time period saw a cooperative relationship between the government and the private sector, given Aleman's affinity towards private initiative (Camp, 1989).

The relationship would continue with relative stability until the 1960s and 1970s, when political agitation began to cast doubt on the system of the PRI as well as the 1940s' style of economic development. This strategy of development was none other than import-substitution industrialization, which is where domestic industry is jump-started by substituting

foreign imports for domestic goods; the high growth rates that occurred during this era were what dubbed this era the “Mexican miracle” (Antonio, 1977). By the 1970s, however, the state and the economy increasingly fissured apart because of more pressures on the PRI to liberalize politically; in order to appease growing opposition, presidents during this time implemented more populist policies. Despite still maintaining an alliance with the private sector, the PRI government in 1977 turned to international borrowing and deficit spending (Camp, 1989). Debt in both sectors increased, leading to an economic crisis in Mexico in the 1980s.

Eventually, the PRI looked to absolve the economic conundrum it found itself in by opening up its markets to trading partners, its sights set on the neighbor to the north: the United States (Cline, 1962). Eventually, the PRI government would stabilize the economic situation by pursuing neoliberal policies and free trade-agreements with its neighbors, although poverty levels in the country have not been alleviated (Kurzer, 2015). As can be seen, the PRI’s direct role in the Mexican economy ushered in fast growth from the 1940s to the 1970s, but this party also holds the responsibility for the economic crises and growing inequality the country has faced and continues to face.

Conclusion: Prospects of Democratization

Those tasked with stewarding Mexico’s fledgling democracy cannot afford to forget the centuries of authoritarianism that precede them. Though the PRI has not given any indication that it plans to forcefully retake power, echoes of its favored modes of power continue to ring through Mexican politics. High levels of corruption in the country, especially at the state and municipal level, harken back to the co-optation strategies that the PRI used to keep local officials in check; low levels of citizen participation and generalized distrust in the police are reminiscent

of the days when one's safety was only guaranteed by not rocking the boat (Emmerich & Benitez Manaut, 2010). At this point, the PRI's tentacular reach into the fabric of Mexican society as a megalithic party has entrenched corruption to the point that revolutionary steps would need to be taken to undo the damage. Mexico's current president, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, was elected on this very principle; one of his campaign promises was to stop political corruption at every level of governance (Malkin & Villegas, 2018). Of course, reality has proven to be much more complicated than Obrador bargained for, and his administration has failed to make significant headway in the fight against corruption in Mexico (Malkin & Villegas, 2018). Only time will tell if Mexico's democracy can uproot the "perfect dictatorship."

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