Mexico: The Long Road to Democracy and Beyond

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Source: Palmer 2004
Population:
106,202,903 (July 2005 est.)

Life expectancy at birth:
75.19 years (total population)
72.42 years (men)
78.1 years (women) (2005 est.)

Literacy:
92 percent of people age 15 and over can read and write (2003 estimate)

Capital:
Federal District (Mexico City)

Per capita income:
$9,600 (2004 est.)

Source: Palmer 2004
Mexico in Historical Perspective

• Mexico’s early anthropological history dates back to 10,000 BC and includes numerous indigenous cultures. The classical period from 200 BC to 1000 AD features the Teotihuacan in the valley of Mexico, the Monte Alban in southern Oaxaca, and the Maya on the Yucatan peninsula. The Toltecs, the Zapotecs (later the Mexica from whom the country derived its name) or the Aztecs whose empire covered much of the central and south by the 16th century and others followed. Many of Mexico’s popular legends, beliefs and practices come from this indigenous past and are a source of pride and a part of the national and personal identity that was “nurtured by the government during the 1920s and 1930s.”

Source: Palmer 2004
Mt. Alban Ruins, 2005
Photo by Philip Skorokhodov
Source: Palmer 2004
Mexico in Historical Perspective

• The majority of today’s Mexicans are mestizos who come from mixed Spanish and Indian families although the nearly seven percent indigenous remain culturally and linguistically distinct from the mainstream. They live primarily in the impoverished south. Discriminated against and politically repressed, their treatment triggered the 1994 guerrilla uprising in Chiapas and their continuing struggle - through peaceful and political means - to assert their rights.

Source: Palmer 2004
## Spanish Vocabulary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mestizo</td>
<td>Mixed Spanish and Indian families</td>
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<tr>
<td>conquistadore</td>
<td>Conquerer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eijo</td>
<td>State-controlled cooperative</td>
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<tr>
<td>hacienda</td>
<td>Ranch</td>
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<tr>
<td>camarilla</td>
<td>Informal loyalty-based network of politicians (particularly characteristic of the PRI, Mexico’s major party)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>machismo</td>
<td>Male domination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>maquiladora</td>
<td>Assembly plant on Mexican side of US border</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Palmer 2004
Conquest and Colonization

- Spanish conquistador Hernan Cortez seized the great Aztec city of Tenochtitlan, now Mexico City, in 1520 to usher in three centuries of Spanish rule. The Spanish imposed a centralized, authoritarian state with power concentrated in the hands of the viceroy. They also imposed the Catholic Church and its policies of Christianization, the Spanish language and attitudes of intolerance towards those who disagreed with the church. The Spanish turned Mexico’s mineral resources into Spanish wealth. The colonial system had a strict racial and cultural hierarchy: those of Spanish decent on top, the mestizos who were “relegated to an ambiguous legal-social status,” and the indigenous peoples who provided the physical labor. Forced labor continued well after the crown abolished slavery in the 1550s. Because of disconnects between law makers in Spain and realities in Mexico, a culture of disrespect for law and corruption took hold. The most insidious result of the Spanish colonization was the introduction of smallpox and measles. The indigenous population had no immunity, and this population, it is estimated, dropped from 30 million in 1520 to 1 million by 1620. Mexico’s population did not reach 30 million again until around 1950.

Source: Palmer 2004
Independence and Instability: The 19th Century

Europe’s Napoleonic wars were the catalyst for Mexico’s independence struggle which lasted from 1810-1821. The independence legacy of peasant, mass-based uprisings under the banner of the Virgin of Guadalupe initially failed to bring about independence, but provided the state with some of its most important heroes – priests Miguel Hidalgo and Jose Maria Morelos - and the ideals of liberty, an end to slavery, and modest social reforms. The Hidalgo and Morelos’ peasant armies attacked Spanish citizens and property. Both leaders were captured and executed. The struggle continued, however, and in 1821 Mexico gained its independence under the leadership of a conservative general – Augustin de Inturbide – who switched sides, joined the rebels and established himself, albeit briefly, as Mexico’s first emperor.

Source: Palmer 2004
Independence and Instability: The 19th Century

- Political instability, foreign intervention and economic turmoil characterized much of the 19th century. After independence and with an economy in chaos, the two main factions – Conservatives and Liberals turned on each other. The Conservatives demanded “centralized authority, respect for traditional Spanish values and protection of the Catholic church.” The Liberals, influenced by the values of the French and American revolutions, rejected Spanish traditions, supported republican and free-market goals, and wanted to restrict the extensive political and economic power of the Church. Conflict was interspersed by military strongmen and foreign intervention. The latter led to the loss of fifty percent of its territory to the US – its overwhelmingly powerful northern neighbor – as a result of “Manifest Destiny” (the belief that God had destined the U.S. to conquer and civilize the western frontier.) The fighting ended with a US invasion of Mexico City, a tremendous loss of Mexican pride and a feeling of anti-Americanism for years to come.

Source: Palmer 2004
Guadalajara Cathedral
Source: Palmer 2004
Photo by Judy Groves
Independence and Instability: The 19th Century

• The War of Reform (1858-1861) resulted in a Liberal victory under the leadership of the popular Benito Juarez, but European foreign intervention followed. Napoleon III’s forces temporarily gained control of the country in 1864 placing Austrian archduke Maximillian on the throne. In 1867, the Liberals, under Juarez’ leadership and with American help, overturned the monarchy, restored the republic, and modern Mexico was born. The Church lost political and economic power. A free internal market and private landownership – to the detriment of Indian communal holdings – were instituted, the power of the government was strengthened and secular education and development encouraged.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution

• Divisions among the Liberals brought about the 1871 revolt; General Porfirio Diaz – “assailing the practice of indefinite re-election” took control of Mexico in 1876. Emphasizing the need for order, Diaz consolidated his grip on power and ruled the country for the next three decades. Ruling from the wings, Diaz relied on the army and rural police to maintain order. By 1900, Mexico was politically stable, growing economically, increasing in population, improving health and sanitation, and experiencing the “beginnings of industry and a boom in cultural and intellectual life. The Diaz policies, however, benefited large landowners (hacienda owners) but left millions of peasants landless. The country remained agrarian with land concentrated in the hands of the few and millions of peasants living in terrible conditions. Armed opposition to Diaz throughout the country brought about his resignation November 20, 1910 (known today as the Day of the Mexican Revolution) and his departure for Europe.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution

- The next several years consisted of military coups and counter-coups. By 1915, civil war engulfed the country causing the deaths of over 10 percent of the population and economic devastation. Finally in 1917, General Venustiano Carranza gained enough power to call a constitutional convention. Its document – with numerous subsequent amendments - remains in force today. The anti-clerical Constitution also gave meaning to the Mexican revolution and shaped Mexican political thought. The document restricted the Church’s role, promised land to the peasants, provided rights to workers, established a number of political freedoms and banned re-election of officials. Conflict, however, continued to inflame the country and Carranza was murdered. In 1929, President Plutarco Elias Calles (1924-1928) established the Party of the National Revolution (PNR) – the “forerunner of today’s PRI” – which became the political vehicle for the revolutionaries to run the country. The violence of the revolution had finally ended.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Porfiriato and the Mexican Revolution

- President Lazaro Cardenas (1934-1940), one of Mexico’s most popular leaders, strengthened the powers of the president and the state. He incorporated Mexico’s major labor and peasant organizations into the PNR’s successor known as the PRM (Party of the Mexican Revolution). The PRM, then, monopolized political power and represented ideologically and organizationally the major labor and peasant groups. Cardenas instituted land reform – taking land from the hacienda owners and giving it to peasants through state-controlled cooperatives (eijos). He nationalized foreign oil companies after a labor dispute and created the state owned oil company. He promoted the state’s involvement in the development of the country’s infrastructure – particularly in rural areas – that provided a foundation for industrialization. He also supported the development of a strong nationalistic and socialistic ideology based on the ideals of the Mexican revolution – the glorification of the country’s past and a rebirth of its rich culture.

Source: Palmer 2004
The “Institutionalized” Revolution

From the 1940s until the early 1980s, Mexico was blessed with forty or more years of political stability and economic growth. The president ruled – no questions asked. The PRI – the latest reincarnation of the PNR-PNM and Mexico’s sole governing party, “channeled popular demands, got out the vote and distributed political spoils and rewards of economic growth.” The prohibition against re-election ensured fluidity of leadership. And the government ignored the revolution’s more radical promises to develop capitalism although it did not believe in market forces alone to alleviate Mexico’s problems.

Source: Palmer 2004
The “Institutionalized” Revolution

- For thirty years, Mexico’s economy grew at six percent a year and during that time, the society became urbanized, largely industrial and literate. Its population expanded rapidly for the first time in history from 22 million in 1945 to 70 million by 1980. Mexico’s steady economic growth (the Mexican miracle) helped stabilize the country politically because there was more of everything to pass around and it also provided an air of popular legitimacy that allowed people to overlook the government’s major democratic shortcomings. Yet economic growth helped set the stage for political change by encouraging the rise of groups and interests that stood outside the PRI. Demands for greater autonomy and free elections grew as did the middle class. In 1968, just weeks before the Mexico City Olympics, the government responded violently to massive anti-government protests. This event became a watershed in Mexican political history.

Source: Palmer 2004
Crisis and Change

- Budget deficits and balance of payments problems during the 1970s and early 1980s came home to roost in 1982 when the government declared bankruptcy and its inability to meet obligations to foreign banks. The causes: increased social spending – to meet the demands of 1968 student protests – and the dramatic oil price bust in the early 1980s combined with the hike in global interest rates. In response, successive PRI presidents changed course. They cut back on social programs and government spending. They negotiated free trade agreements with many countries – the most important being NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement) with the US and Canada. They joined GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) – now the WTO (World Trade Organization). They privatized state-owned industries and opened the economy to foreign investment.  

Source: Palmer 2004
Crisis and Change

- The **political ramifications** were considerable. Bereft of spoils to spread around, the government’s traditional base weakened. Opposition parties gained support for their calls for free and open elections. New social organizations, human rights and indigenous groups combined with the traditional business and labor organizations to challenge the PRI. By the 1988 elections, the PRI, tainted with fraud and a fractured leadership, was losing its grip. Carlos Salinas (1988-1994) used “repression and fraud” to “win” but with just barely 50 percent of the vote. A revival of economic growth in the early 1990s helped forestall impending political change. But just as Salinas was to leave office and NAFTA to enter into force, the Chiapas rebellion erupted in this small, destitute southern state, and Salinas’ handpicked presidential replacement was murdered in Tijuana. The Chiapas violence soon turned into prolonged negotiations, and Ernesto Zadillo (1994-2000), Salinas’ second choice for president, won the August 1994 elections. Soon thereafter, however, recession again hit the economy. Bankruptcies and debt – public and private – reduced the middle class and poverty climbed. The PRI leadership further fractured. Opposition parties profited and the government was forced to establish the **Federal Electoral Institute (IFE)** an independent election commission that helped to equalize campaigns and set the stage for the PAN (National Action Party) victory of Vincente Fox Quezada December 1, 2000, the first opposition party leader to win Mexico’s presidential elections with 43 % of popular vote. In 2006 PAN Candidate Felipe Calderon won with 36.38 % of popular vote only 0.56 % ahead of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador who was a candidate of PRD-led coalition.

Source: Palmer 2004
Political Institutions

• The most important concept to remember when discussing Mexico’s political institutions is the chasm between how they are supposed to function and how they do. This discrepancy heightens political tensions and is, in large part, the basis for the incremental reforms designed to move the system closer to the ideal and distance it from its sordid past.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Constitution

- In this highly legalistic society – a Spanish legacy – governmental acts must be “justified and fully grounded in written law.” This means mountains of red tape, legal paperwork and regulations. The 1917 Constitution has been amended frequently, but it lays out the “basic parameters of the political system” and provides a guide to the country’s ideals and goals. It specifies what should happen even if it doesn’t. Like the U.S. Constitution, the Mexican Constitution established a democracy. It divides power between executive, legislative and judicial branches. The Constitution established the principle of popular sovereignty through elections. It created a federal system in which each of the 31 states has its own constitution. The Mexican Constitution established separation of church and state and “provides for individual freedoms and rights.” The Mexican Constitution differs from the American, however, in 1) its mandate for a “strong government role in the economy and society; 2) its creation of an electoral system that has both proportional representation and single-member district seats and 3) most importantly, its prohibition on re-election. This latter feature applies to all elected officials. Legislators may repeat in office, but they cannot run for consecutive terms, a feature that is now under debate.

Source: Palmer 2004
Executive Power

• The president is elected for a six year term. The executive branch has 19 cabinet level departments and numerous semi-autonomous or autonomous bodies. The latter include the Central Bank (Banixo), the National Development Bank (IMSS), the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), and large state owned firms such as Petroleos Mexicanos (PEMEX).

• Under the Constitution, the president is subject to checks and balances. During PRI’s reign, however, the Mexican president had almost unlimited powers and the president “ruled” through tight budgetary and policy control.

Source: Palmer 2004
Executive Power

• Until 1997 when the PRI lost the majority in the Chamber of Deputies, the president completely dominated the legislature, the judiciary, and the federal bureaucracy by controlling appointments to all three, setting the legislature’s agenda and even handpicking his own successor. Because of the PRI’s deep reaches into society, the president controlled the most powerful peasant, labor and other social organizations and his ability to choose candidates for all governmental positions ensured party discipline and personal loyalty. Constitutional checks on presidential power meant nothing. Endemic corruption and abuse of power permeated the system. Since 1997, however, because no single party has dominated the legislature’s lower house, presidential power has declined. This made it difficult for president Vincente Fox (PAN) in 2000-2006 to get his fiscal reform program passed. Meanwhile, growing autonomy of the central bank, the judiciary, state and local governments, and civic action groups have blocked energy reforms as well as even his proposal to build a new airport.

Source: Palmer 2004
Legislative Power

- The Mexican legislature is bicameral. The lower house, the **Chamber of Deputies**, is composed of 500 members each with three year terms. 300 deputies are elected via the single-member district electoral system. 200 are chosen by proportional representation. The **Senate** has 128 members. Each of the 31 states has four senators as does Mexico City (the Federal District) and they are elected to six year terms. Three senators are elected “at large” in each state and one seat is assigned to the runner-up party in that state. The Chamber has exclusive powers over finance, commerce, public education, health and defense. The Senate has the additional portfolios of treaty approval, ratification of diplomatic and consular appointments, naming of governors and authorization of Supreme Court appointments. The legislative year is short – from September 1 to December 31 although extraordinary sessions can be called.

Source: Palmer 2004
Legislative Power

- The Gran Comision, a joint executive committee takes care of legislative business when the legislature is out of session. Before 1963 and the introduction of the PR system, Congress rubberstamped presidential policies. After 1963, Congress became a vehicle for opposition parties to criticize the government. In 1988 when the PRI’s seats slipped below the 2/3rd majority in the Senate needed to ratify Constitutional changes, the opposition became a real factor in policy making and the legislature more than a debating society. Today, Congress acts as a watch-dog on the executive as well as a much more proactive role in the formation of policies. The rules of engagement between the Congress and the president, however, are poorly defined, the boundaries are fuzzy and the current prohibition on re-election of the members of the legislature is seen as a weakening the institution.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Judiciary

- The Judiciary includes the Supreme Court of 11 ministers, circuit courts, district courts, and a decade old Judiciary Board that performs the courts’ administrative tasks. Historically, the judiciary has had a limited political role - in good part because Mexico uses a civil or Roman law system that restricts judicial power in “making law and unmaking law” through judicial interpretation. This combined with the near autocratic powers of the presidency under the PRI undermined judicial independence. Judges, however, play an important role in criminal and civil cases. They work closely with public ministers and defense attorneys to collect and present evidence and decide applicable laws, relevant evidence and determination of the verdict. Civil law systems do not include jury trials.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Mexican legal system contains a unique feature called **amparo**. This is an order issued by a judge to temporarily restrain the government from pursuing a particular action against an individual or a corporation. It can be used to protect individual rights, but because of the corruption that pervades Mexican politics including the judiciary, it can also be used to undermine legitimate government activities. Beginning in 1995, President Zedillo strengthened autonomy of the courts and gave the Supreme Court limited ability to rule on the constitutionality of laws. He also established a professional judicial council to make lower-level court appointments. The courts, as a result, have become more willing to engage in political battles. President Fox was hurt by many of the court’s decisions, but he has also used this new judicial power to challenge Congressional powers.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Bureaucracy

• The inefficient, vast and politicized bureaucracy has had limited political autonomy, but has also exhibited greater power than bureaucracies in industrialized states. Until recently, only the diplomatic corps, financial departments, and lowest levels of government operated on a merit system. Otherwise, patronage reigned supreme. The bureaucracy’s employees union belonged to the PRI, decisions were deferred to superiors, and employee turnover was high as positions changed hands with their political supporters. Yet, bureaucratic powers rested on the extensive government regulation of the society and economy, and the wide-scale use of bribery to influence the outcomes of government policies.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Bureaucracy

• Since the early 1980s and economic reforms that included the privatization of some industries and the opening of Mexico to foreign firms requiring Mexican companies to become more competitive, traditional bureaucratic powers have decreased. Presidents have also taken various steps to professionalize the bureaucracy, reduce red-tape, and increase training in ethics. The reforms, in general, seek to shift the political conflict away from the bureaucracy and toward the executive, legislative, judiciary and the independent IFE (elections institute) which has done much to clean-up the previously patronage laden, PRI dominated elections machine.

Source: Palmer 2004
Federalism

• Each state is structured similarly to the federal government, but with unicameral legislatures. The 2,400 municipios are similar to US counties. They are run by a mayor or municipal president and a local assembly. State and local governments have had limited autonomy because educational oversight, health care and other functions are controlled at the federal level. Eighty percent of tax revenues are controlled by the federal government which transfers only about 18 percent to the state and local level. Under the PRI, presidents controlled appointment and removal of the state governors. Some functions have been transferred to the states such as education and some states have begun to use local property taxes to enhance their fiscal options. The rise of opposition parties is perhaps the most important move in expanding the autonomy of state and local governments. PAN and the PRD have “won control of almost one-third of the states as well as important cities including the capital.” Yet, the balance of power still favors the federal level because it controls the purse.

Source: Palmer 2004
The Actors

Source: Palmer 2004
Elites

- From 1910 until the 1990s, a relatively homogeneous political class (PRI) tied together through informal networks and a set of informal political “rules” controlled Mexican politics. The president, surrounded by a strong cabinet, was at the center. The PRI, controlled by the president, was the determining factor in who got what, when and how. Because of the non-re-election rule, few PRI candidates had strong local bases outside the party. This factor enhanced the personal power of the president. Between 1884 and 1991, military officers predominated in the political elite, but by the 1950s a civilian political class arose. Most were middle class males who had graduated from the national university and had climbed the ranks of the bureaucracy. More recently, the majority came from Mexico City, had done graduate work abroad, previously worked in the financial/economic agencies of the federal government and had limited electoral experience.

Source: Palmer 2004
Elites

- The camarilla, a distinctive feature of Mexico’s political elite in particular the PRI, is an informal loyalty-based network of politicians who “work together to pursue mutual political objectives” and personal career advancement. These informal networks transcend agencies, pass from one generation to another, and sustain the “fluidity of recruitment and continuity” of the political system. As the PRI’s popularity and control of the government has declined, this traditional network is giving way to more open recruitment and nominating procedures. The PRI is currently beset with internal turmoil as the old system is breaking down. PAN, PRI’s chief rival, represents business and the middle class as do most of its political candidates and office holders. Fox, for instance, was a Coca Cola Company executive, owner of a vegetable processing company and a rancher. PAN selects its candidates through national conventions.

Source: Palmer 2004
Elites

• The left of center PRD, a spin-off from the PRI, largely consists of teachers, independent unionists, and NGO activists. The PRD has experimented with conventions, local primaries and even permitting nonparty members to run on the PRD ticket. The PRD has been long plagued with accusations of fraud. For most of the 20th century, the political and economic elites were distinct until PAN began to blur the lines and business organizations have become much more vocal with their demands on the government.

Source: Palmer 2004
Political parties and Elections

- PRI was created in 1929 to resolve disputes among the revolutionary elite and ensure it remained in power. It succeeded admirably for over 70 years and did so because of its inclusiveness and incorporation of the key groups in society allowing them a way to voice their demands in “exchange for the chance to partake in the spoils of power.” Consequently, the PRI was most of all a group of affiliated organizations working together. The PRI’s progressive ideology that emphasized social justice, equality, labor versus capital, land reform and nationalism was another factor. Toss in anti-Church, anti-business and anti-American sentiments. Finally, the PRI continued to dominate the government, control election procedures, grant and withhold favors, and buy off the media so as to edge out competitors. The Mexican president controlled the PRI and used the party to discipline the political elite and mobilize popular support during elections. (See chart on p. 442 for descriptions of the other parties.)

Source: Palmer 2004
# Political Parties of Mexico

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Parties</th>
<th>Minor Parties</th>
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</table>
| **PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party)**
   Founded in 1929. The umbrella party that controlled Mexican politics until 2000. Officially, represents the ideals of the 1910 Revolution, but the Mexican president – also PRI leader until 2000– has emphasized some, and downplayed others.
   PRI is still the largest party with the most members in Congress and the most state governorships. Roberto Madrazo is the current leader. | **PT (Workers Party)**
   Formed in 1990 by local groups in three states. Major strength is in Durango. Platform calls for socialism, pluralism and democracy. Has allied with the PRD on occasion. |
| **PAN (National Action Party)**
   Founded in 1939. Center-right party that emphasizes democratic political reform and a pro-business platform. Strength: middle class, business and conservatives. Geographic strength: northern and western states. Mexico’s current president Vincente Fox won the elections in 2000. | **PVEM (Mexican Ecologist Green Party)**
| **PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution)**
   Founded in 1989. A center-left party composed of small independent leftist parties and PRI dissidents. The PRD opposes neoliberal economic policies, wants to reform NAFTA, but is not socialist. Supporters: poor and working class particularly from Mexico City and the south. Popular Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador currently leads the PRD. | |

Source: Palmer 2004
Elections and the Opposition

- The PRI always held elections. Opposition parties participated but could not to win. The people could vote but not choose. PAN, founded in 1939 in opposition to the PRI’s left-leaning, anti-clerical policies, drew most support from the conservative, anti-government northern and western regions. PAN challenged the government at every turn to hold free and fair elections. Voter abstention grew since the population understood the unfairness of the process. Finally, beginning in 1977 the government agreed to election reforms that gradually opened the system when it legalized independent leftist parties. In 1988, the leftist faction of the PRI split and established the PRD to unite a variety of leftist groups. The formation of the IDE was a major factor in cleaning up the fraudulent electoral system. IDE’s role in vote counting is its most important function. Although the political system is far more open today and three major parties compete, in reality it is a “segmented two-party system:” the PRI and PAN compete in certain regions and the PRI and the PRD in others. PRD is strongest in the south and in Mexico City. The PRI is still the only party with support throughout the country. PAN, in addition to its support for “good government” also is a free-market party, wants good relations with the US and has “staunch conservative” values. The PRD stresses social justice, equality, capitalism “with a human face” and represents the interests of the poorer classes.

Source: Palmer 2004
Pressure Groups

- The PRI’s corporatist policies ensured that the country’s major pressure groups became part of the system. This included the media. Despite Constitutional provisions mandating a free press, the government controlled the electronic media through broadcast concessions granted only to supporters. The print media was largely controlled through financial means – by placing or not placing advertisements, the subsidized sale of newsprint, and bribes to journalists for writing favorable stories. When labor, students or teachers strikes or demonstrations were perceived as threats, the PRI used the military to arrest the strikers. This is changing since the PRI’s monopoly on the president no longer exists. A plethora of new politically active NGOs burst onto the scene during the 1980s and 1990s in response to the economic crises, the 1985 earthquake, and the fraudulent 1988 election. They lobbied for electoral reform, monitored polling places on Election Day, coordinated quick counts to expose fraud, and disseminated information on the media’s biased coverage. Human rights organizations exposed government human rights abuses. These organizations and others, raised citizen awareness and activism and played a crucial role in moving the country towards democratic pluralism. More militant groups like the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) have violently challenged government rule and policies in poorer areas. The political situation remains tense.

Source: Palmer 2004
Drug Traffickers

• Mexico is a major transit point for Colombian drug cartels. About 20-30 percent of the heroin, 70 percent of the cocaine and 80 percent of the marijuana used in the U.S. come through or from Mexico. Annual earnings are estimated from $7 to $30 billion. The drug trade weakens political institutions, undermines social order, breeds corruption and vastly increases the security problem. Journalists in particular have been targets of organized crime.

Source: Palmer 2004
Citizens and Politics

• Traditionally, Mexicans have been politically active, but their activities have been controlled by the government. In its infancy, the PRI supported the formation of peasant organizations and labor unions, sponsored marches and mobilized the members to support government policies. But this cooption by the party left individuals unprotected from abuses by the system. Abuses still occur and security problems have worsened. Torture, impunity and corruption continue. The lack of security is Mexicans’ most important social issue: kidnapping and robbery – especially in Mexico City – have increased and the citizens are demanding change.

Source: Palmer 2004
Women

- **Women** in Mexico have been and still are the second class sex. Few women are elected officials although the statistics are better in the Congress with 23 percent members of the Chamber and 22 percent of the Senate. In part a quota system has improved the ratio. Women are more often found in social movements and particularly those that are designed to serve the poor. Many civil codes still maintain male marital power and the culture of *Machismo* remains.

The drop in the birthrate from six to three children per family combined with economic necessity has added more women into the workforce even though they are paid less than males and work primarily in education, health and family care. Women are closing the education gender gap, but even in 2000 only 27 percent of females compared to 29 percent of males over 15 years old had completed high school.

Source: Palmer 2004
Rural woman and child

Source: Palmer 2004

Photo by Judy Groves
Mexican Boy at Tijuana Airport, 2005
Photo by Scott R. Akers

Source: Palmer 2004
Culture, Economics, and International Interdependence

Source: Palmer 2004
Culture

• Before 1910, Mexico had no common identity. The revolution and the government-sponsored “cultural revolution” that followed in the 1920s and 1930s changed that. This cultural revolution included extensive public education programs, commissioned murals – such as those by Diego Rivera – and instilled, through nationalistic rhetoric, a sense of Mexican identity and pride that is rooted in the shared values and its mixed ancestry. Deep reverence for the Virgin of Guadalupe, the downplaying of class differences, and shared support for the social and economic principles of the revolution are included. Suspicion and cautiousness of the U.S., a defensive attitude that has shaped Mexican foreign policy, is ingrained in history texts.

Source: Palmer 2004
“Poor Mexico, So Far from God, So Close to the U.S.”

- attributed to General Porfirio Diaz, Mexican dictator (1877-1880 and 1884-1911)

Source: Palmer 2004
“The prime lesson contained in Mexico’s history textbooks is that ‘the nation is lost, easily dominated by the Americans, when it is divided.’”


Source: Palmer 2004
Culture

• Events of the 1980s and 1990s have challenged socialist values and strengthened ties to the U.S. and business. Some see the current leadership as “selling out” the country. Others worry that closer ties to the US threaten Mexico’s cultural identity. Further, indigenous peoples demand their languages and cultures be respected – and the multicultural ideal promoted today seems at odds with the concept of a single identity. Church and family are viewed positively, but mistrust and cynicism of government and politicians are prevalent suggesting that functioning democracy has a long way to go. **Mexico’s social values** stress the importance of personal relationships, the family, hierarchy and Catholicism. Human relations take precedence and humanistic pursuits of “philosophy, literature and the arts” are emphasized over other subjects. Family bonds are sacred. In 1991, the Church was allowed to become more active in politics, diplomatic relations with the Vatican were restored and more liberal Church officials in the south have become important in promoting change.

Source: Palmer 2004
Blue modern art sculpture on the beach
Photo by Judy Groves
Source: Palmar 2004
Mexican family Tijuana, 2005

Source: Palmer 2004

Photo by Scott R. Akers
Between 1940 and the mid-1970s, the economy expanded at six percent a year, the middle class grew, and the country produced industrial goods for the domestic market. This was done through a policy called import substitution which placed high duties on imported goods, low domestic taxes, state funding for the development of Mexican infrastructure, incentives for companies willing to set up operations in Mexico, state ownership of communications, transportation oil and gas, electricity, steel, chemicals and automotive products to the point of selling their products at subsidized prices. By 1976, the system crumbled. Heavy borrowing and the discovery of new petroleum reserves delayed the collapse for a few years. But by August 1982, the country was bankrupt. This set off the Latin American debt crisis or “the lost decade.” The government cut state spending and tightened monetary policy under pressure from the US and the IMF. It replaced import substitution with neoliberalism – or privatization of state owned firms. It reduced tariffs, courted foreign investment, removed price controls and subsidies to the poor and middle class.

Source: Palmer 2004
Political Economy

- Within a decade, trade increased immensely. The maquiladoras (assembly operations along the US border) shifted exports from petroleum to manufactured goods totaling about 80 percent of Mexican exports. NAFTA has made Mexico the “new industrial belt” of the US. Almost 90 percent of its trade is with the US, but Mexico has signed a number of free trade agreements with other countries and the EU is its second largest trading partner. Growth under neoliberalism has been lower than under import substitution and the economy has expanded by around one percent per year. Mexico still faces high poverty, low wages, lack of jobs, a poorly educated workforce and increasing inequality. NAFTA membership has been a double-edged sword.

Source: Palmer 2004
Tijuana, shanties near roadside, 2005
Photo by Scott R. Akers

Source: Palmer 2004
Political Economy

• It spurred growth in exports, foreign investments and an integration of the US and Mexican economies. NAFTA, however, has not, for instance, helped Mexico keep pace with its growing labor force’s need for jobs or high wages. Mexico also needs to make a number of fiscal reforms. The economy is still too dependent on the sale of oil and a number of its companies remain bloated state monopolies. Investment in infrastructure, the rural areas and education remain particularly low. President Fox has not addressed these challenges effectively primarily because of Congressional opposition.

Source: Palmer 2004
International independence – The U.S.

- The US dominates Mexico’s foreign relations and the Mexican government seeks to balance concern about US influence on its domestic affairs with a pragmatic policy of engagement with the world’s largest economy. Its foreign policy – based on principles of international law, self-determination and nonintervention – differs from America’s. Mexico retains a close relationship with Cuba, opposed U.S. military (overt or covert) intervention in Central America as well as the US-led war in Iraq. Yet, polls show that Mexicans like the US economic and political system. Many have relatives on the other side of the border or have come as visitors. Disagreements between the two governments are solved diplomatically. Cooperation, not conflict, best describes the relationship. Growing economic and trade interdependence has, ironically, also resulted in greater problems with drug trafficking. The tightening of controls along the 1,952 mile border after 9/11, has had serious human repercussions. The increased controls have not decreased the number of illegal immigrants seeking employment in the north, but they have caused thousands of deaths.

Source: Palmer 2004
Present Challenges and Future Prospects

• Mexico has made great strides on the democratic front. But the more competitive system has left power vacuums where the PRI used to dominate. Congressional gridlock and partisan disputes make it extremely difficult for the president to succeed. Power struggles abound among levels and branches of government. This demonstrates that democracy means more than elections, it also requires respect for the law and public accountability. This has yet to occur in Mexico. Old traditions die hard and a president – even with the best of intentions – cannot – by himself - make miracles happen.

Source: Palmer 2004
Human Rights

- Human Rights problems relate directly to weaknesses in the criminal justice system. At the roots are abuse by law enforcement officials and the failure to hold officials responsible for human rights violations and other criminal activities. The Fox government made some important inroads but much more remains to be done.

Source: Palmer 2004
Economic Growth, Quality of Life, and the Environment

• During the early 2000s, Mexico lost export markets and jobs to China. Meanwhile the US recession demonstrated how dependent the Mexican economy has become on its northern neighbor. Slow growth, millions of poor and about a million new workers entering the labor market each year severely strain the government’s ability to cope. Many Mexicans will continue to migrate north in search of a better life. Years of environmental neglect and abuse characterize the Mexican environmental situation. The laws are on the books and the organizations exist, but the government lacks trained personnel, resources and enforcement mechanisms. Mexico City’s air pollution problem and the maquiladora border towns’ uncontrolled growth and inability to handle toxic waste are the most severe problems.

Source: Palmer 2004
Future Prospects

“Mexico is on a new political path heading toward an uncertain future.” Attention is already centered on the 2012 presidential election. The outcome is by no means certain and whether future presidents will be better than Vincente Fox (in 2000-2006) and Felipe Calderon (in 2006-2012) at assembling coalitions needed to govern effectively is an open question.

Source: Palmer 2004