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Mexico: What Everyone Needs to Know

What were the leading political characteristics of Mexico's semi-authoritarian model?

As Mexico began to evolve its unique and often successful political model from the 1930s through the 1980s, it developed a number of qualities that not only characterized it but also

explain, in part, its longevity. The most important of those qualities included: a self-perpetuating political elite that represented each generation of younger politicians; a civilian leadership that institutionalized its supremacy and control over the military and the revolutionary veterans; a pragmatic ideology that legitimized itself in the rhetoric of the 1910 Revolution; the establishment of a corporatist system that linked the most populous occupational groups to the federal government and the party; a strong national party that served as an electoral vehicle; and the legitimacy of the presidency, reinforced by rejecting the concept of reelection, consecutive or otherwise.

The leadership of the PRI and its antecedent parties and the federal government developed a process by which they were able to satisfy a broad group of ambitious politicians and a wide range of ideologies, incorporating them and rewarding them with government posts in all three branches of government and in all levels, local, state, and national. The president was at the apex of this system and exercised the greatest influence over nominees for elective office and appointees for top posts in the judicial and executive branches. With the advent of the generation of President Miguel Alemán (1946–52), a post-revolutionary group of civilian lawyers took control of the national and state political system, and dramatically reduced the influence of combat veterans and professional military officers on the political system, establishing a firm benchmark for civilian control from 1946 to the present. The government and party leadership was more pragmatic than ideological, creating a broad ideological umbrella under which they could invite talented and ambitious politicians to join forces with their collaborators. The leadership, beginning with President Lázaro Cárdenas, encouraged labor and peasant organizations to develop formal ties with the party and the government, cementing a relationship that remains to some extent today with the PRI. It also created nonvoluntary business organizations that

channeled private sector demands to appropriate federal agencies. It developed an effective, grassroots electoral organization whose primary goal was to keep the PRI and its supporters in power, rather than to take power away from other political organizations. Finally, it assigned significant informal powers to the presidency, further legitimating its control and influence over the entire political model, creating an expectation, which remains in part to the present, that the president should exercise power firmly and definitively.