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A Mexican Fairytale: The Fall of a Villain and its Perfect Dictatorship

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**A Mexican Fairytale:
The Fall of a Villain and its Perfect Dictatorship**

Senior Project Submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
of Bard College

by
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Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

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Introduction

The reign of the world's longest one-party authoritarian regime came to an end in July 2, 2000. Mexico's Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), had been able to rule the country for seventy five years uninterruptedly, and until the 1990's decade it seemed to have been able to do so in a relatively smooth and effortless manner. At a publishing conference held in Mexico City seventeen years ago, Peruvian novelist, Mario Vargas Llosa, provided an accurate depiction of the rule of the PRI: "The perfect dictatorship is not communism, nor is it the Soviet Union, nor is it Fidel Castro: it is Mexico."¹ As the quote suggests, the PRI and its executive administrations were able to successfully hold absolute power over the state through a system that proved to be even more effective than that of other authoritarian regimes across the globe.

As opposed to other Latin American countries like Chile, Brazil, or Argentina, the Mexican PRI ruled without suppressing the masses through means of violence and military intervention. The party was successful in exercising power based on a method known as the 'dedazo', a practice whereby Mexican presidents literally got to handpick who their successor would be, all the time disguising this process as a democratic one. The government had a pyramidal structure based on personal relations where the head of the executive would be placed at the top in exchange of dispensing favors to all those members in the bottom part of the pyramid², once the six-year-term ended each respective president would leave and give the opportunity to his chosen successor to lead. Interestingly enough, this undemocratic structure

¹Jorge I. Domínguez, "The perfect dictatorship? Comparing authoritarian rule in South Korea and in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico." *Prepared for delivery at the 2002 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, August 29-September 1, 2002, Boston. Panel 11.* Vol. 25. 2002: Pp. 22.

² Viviane Brachet-Marquez, "Explaining Sociopolitical Change in Latin America: The Case of Mexico." *Latin American Research Review*, vol. 27, no. 3, (1992): Pp. 94.

was able to last longer than seven decades without the PRI restricting constitutional content or banning the opposition parties as a means to silence the competition.

Indeed, the PRI succeeded in exercising a perfect dictatorship long enough. However, in the 2000 Mexican presidential elections, the rule of the former longest ruling party as of then, finally suffered its final defeat when the opposition's party candidate Vicente Fox obtained an electoral victory. There is some debate regarding where exactly the fall of the PRI started to take place, however, it is widely known that the ruling party had its major blow in 1977 when the opposition parties denied the PRI a majority in the Chamber of Deputies and where PAN and PRD candidates had major triumphs in gubernatorial and municipal elections, including Distrito Federal with Cárdenas having been elected as the governor of the country's capital.³ Regardless of these major events undermining the PRI's strength, the results from the 2000 presidential election were still far from expected by the world audience, including the PAN itself.

There had been three main contestants in the 2000 election: Roberto Labastida (PRI), Vicente Fox (PAN), and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (PRD). Nevertheless, the main protagonists of the presidential contest were without a doubt reduced to Labastida and Fox. "Soy honesto, trabajo un chingo, y no soy tan pendejo."⁴ these words spoken by the PAN candidate during his campaign tour around Mexico caused an uproar of popularity among the population, "*I am honest, I work like a motherfucker, and I am not that stupid.*" As opposed to previous opposition presidential candidates, Fox showed to have 'the guts' to fight for change, he was charismatic,

³ Joseph L. Klesner, "An Electoral Route to Democracy? Mexico's Transition in Comparative Perspective." *Comparative Politics*, vol. 30, no. 4, (1998): Pp. 108.

⁴ Rodolfo Martín Gómez Castellanos. *Mercadotecnia política: uso y abuso en los procesos electorales*. Mexicali, Baja California: Universidad Autónoma de Baja California, (2006): Pp. 96.

portrayed a deep connection with Mexican ‘ranchero’ roots, was foul-mouthed, and in general irradiated this idea of an indestructible Mexican ‘macho’ capable of fighting for social justice. According to Dillon, Mexicans “needed a Lech Walesa, a Nelson Mandela, a challenger, a guy who’s a winner, a guy with guts.”⁵ Apparently, Fox was altogether a product too irresistible for Mexicans to refuse.

Regardless of Fox’s magic and strong personality, as the year 2000 began the PRI had looked invincible yet again⁶. This situation can partly be attributed to Zedillo’s growing popularity. During the former president’s rule, the Mexican economy had experienced a substantial growth and the party itself had started to portray a subtle but continuous transformation from an autocratic PRI to that of a liberalizing one. By the end of the 1990’s Labastida had already widely vocalized and demonstrated his repudiation of the PRI’s exercise of corruption. This premise along with Zedillo’s aim to build a stronger political system seemed to convince a respectable amount of voters that the PRI would finally adopt more democratic measures. By the year 2000, Labastida had led all opposition candidates by a huge margin in all presidential polls.⁷ Therefore, the whole world was appalled when a non-PRI actor resulted victorious in the contest for Mexico’s executive office.

The unexpected and unforeseen fall of the Mexican one-party regime left an important question in the air: What could have possibly caused the collapse of the PRI after seventy years of enforcing a perfect dictatorship? And what does the Mexican experience contribute to our

⁵ Julia Preston and Sam Dillon. *Opening Mexico: the making of a democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (2004): Pp. 489.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid. Pp. 487.

understanding of the breakdown of authoritarian regimes? These are the questions that animate this study. It is organized as follows: Part I reviews the literature on authoritarian breakdowns, with emphasis on O'Donnell's argument of soft liners vs. hard liners, Linz and Lipset's premise of regime legitimacy, and Huntington's explanation based on economic development and modernization. Part II reviews these political science models of authoritarian breakdown and offers a critique in the light of the Mexican experience. Part III provides an alternative explanation to the fall of the PRI based on the idea of a political culture shift against the PRI at the national level. Finally, part IV offers a conclusion reflecting on what the Mexican experience and the fall of the PRI contribute to our understanding of authoritarian breakdowns.

Part I. What Causes the Fall of Authoritarian Regimes

Explanations for the breakdown of authoritarian regimes fall into at least three major schools of thought: (1) Guillermo O'Donnell's argument elaborating on a regime split between hard liners and soft liners, (2) Juan Linz and Seymour M. Lipset's argument explaining the loss of regime legitimacy, and finally, (3) an argument associated with Samuel P. Huntington suggesting modernization and economic development are contributing factors that explain the breakdown of authoritarian regimes. All these arguments provide insightful and enlightening perspectives in understanding the fall of the PRI.

Guillermo O'Donnell's study on the split between soft liners and hard liners suggests that the decay of a regime can be attributed to a rivalry among members of the government based on their dichotomous views on how to respond to liberalization demands.⁸ Given situation leads to

⁸ Guillermo A. O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter. *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, (1986): Pp. 17.

a subtle disintegration of the government's power in addition to making the ruling group lose strength as a solid political force. This means that the head of the government in an authoritarian regime can only enjoy its position of absolute power as long as it is propelled and sustained by an homogeneous force; once fissures start cracking the consolidated political structure, the authoritarian regime is endangered.

On the other hand, Linz' explanation is based on the idea that the loss of legitimacy of the ruling power in whatever authoritarian regime is vital to its eventual breakdown. Adding to Linz's insight into the matter, Mattei Dogan raises the questions of why people voluntarily follow and obey their rulers and why people accept and maintain their authorities and institutions. One reason provided as an explanation to this phenomenon is that the regime in power simply has certain sense of legitimacy to rule, allegedly, even the most tyrannic rulers try to justify their exercise of power. In Dogan's words, "only legitimacy can transform brutal power into recognized authority."⁹ But in order to understand how losing legitimacy might lead to the collapse of an authoritarian regime, it is important to have a decent grasp of the conceptual elements attributed to the term in a political realm.

Lipset provides the following definition of the legitimacy: 'the capacity of the system to engender and maintain the belief that the existing political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society.'¹⁰ According to Lipset, the granting of legitimacy rests on the people themselves, this seems to suggest that regardless of how repressive and authoritarian a regime is,

⁹ Juan J. Linz, 'Legitimacy of democracy and the socioeconomic system', in M. Dogan (ed.) *Comparing Pluralist Democracies: Strains on Legitimacy*, Boulder: Westview Press. (1988): Pp. 116.

¹⁰ Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959): 69-105. doi:10.2307/1951731: Pp. 77.

the people still need to believe to a certain extent that their government is entitled to lead the nation. Adding to Lipset's explanation, Juan Linz argues that the people's attitude towards their government is based on the belief that in spite of its shortcomings and failures, their political institutions are better than any other that might be established, and that therefore the people in power can demand obedience.¹¹ Hence, it can be concluded that the matter of legitimacy does not equate to the people fully approving and being content with their current government, but that nevertheless, in spite of their lack of support for their government the people still acknowledge that there is no other system that could better the situation of the Nation.

The loss of legitimation can be attributed to several factors. Guillermo O'Donnell explains that while authoritarian governments tend to legitimate their rule by emphasizing their immediate and substantive accomplishments, usually related to social peace and economic development; their own political discourse can seldom backfire when they trespass or violate the limits of given discourse of legitimation.¹² In other words, when an authoritarian regime bases its legitimacy to rule in the ways it has propelled the well-being of the state, then when its actions lead to damaging consequences to the state their initial discourse becomes counterproductive and invalidates its legitimacy to rule. Further adding to the idea of the regime failure to preserve its legitimacy to rule, Lipset argues that there is a strong relationship between legitimacy and effectiveness and that one directly depends upon the other.¹³ This means that the actual

¹¹ Juan J. Linz, "Legitimacy of democracy and the socioeconomic system', in M. Dogan (ed.) *Comparing Pluralist Democracies: Strains on Legitimacy*, Boulder: Westview Press. (1998): Pp. 117.

¹² Guillermo A. O'Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter. *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, (1986): Pp. 17.

¹³ Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy." *The American Political Science Review* 53, no. 1 (1959): 69-105. doi:10.2307/1951731: Pp. 120.

performance of the government in satisfying the overall basic needs of the population will determine whether the people chose to legitimate the government or not. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two elements that may lead to the delegation of a government can be the inability of given government to adhere to its discourse promoting the wellbeing of the nation and its incapability of providing the population with the fulfillment of basic needs.

Finally, opposing O'Donnell's claim that economic development has no effect in political transitions, Samuel Huntington argues that modernization and political development can indeed lead to the collapse of authoritarian structures. The author describes modernization as a complex process that involves changes in virtually all areas of human thought and behavior. "At a minimum, its components include: industrialization, urbanization, social mobilization, media expansion, increasing literacy and education, and the expansion of political participation."¹⁴ In general, the process of modernization is directly related to the change and development of the people. While the man in a traditional society does not look for change and believes himself incapable of achieving it, the man pertaining to a modern society believes both in the possibility and the desirability of change.¹⁵ In addition to this, Huntington supports Almond and Powell's argument establishing that modernization leads to political development which in the authors' words is "a response of the political system to changes in its societal or international environments and in particular, the response of the system to the challenges of participation and distribution."¹⁶ In this sense, one can say that a conflict between modernization and the

¹⁴ Samuel P. Huntington, "The Change to Change: Modernization, Development, and Politics." *Comparative Politics* 3, no. 3 (1971): Pp. 288.

¹⁵ Ibid. Pp. 287.

¹⁶ Ibid. Pp. 300.

constrictions imposed by authoritarian political system arises and that eventually the former is forced to open up for change.

Part II. Arguments of Authoritarian Breakdown in the Case of Mexico

I. Soft liner vs. Hard liner Theory

In the case of Mexico, the disputes between soft liners and hard liners can be predominantly perceived in the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo. Mexico had been used to strong executive figures who would not bother themselves working out ways to make the country's political system a more democratic one. However, Zedillo had a ruling personality that greatly differed from that of his predecessors. To begin with, no one within the PRI including Zedillo himself had expected him to be hand-picked by Salinas after Collosio's death given that he did not fit the profile of former actors in charge of the executive. In this case, Zedillo was considered a soft liner who actually pursued political liberalization in Mexico. Julia Preston elaborates on Zedillo's character by depicting his stance on the 2000 presidential campaign, "The clearest path to change according to Zedillo was for the party's candidate to be nominated in a legitimate democratic process. The President was proposing to give up his unwritten right to exercise the *dedazo*- his most important means of power."¹⁷ As it is, the former president seemed to believe that by fostering a liberalization and change within the party's structure, the people would begin to trust the PRI and eventually allow them to remain power through a legitimate electoral process.

¹⁷ Julia Preston, and Sam Dillon. *Opening Mexico: the making of a democracy*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, (2004): Pp.483.

Nevertheless, not every one inside the party agreed with his methods. Hard liners on the conservative side of the PRI believed that the perpetuation of authoritarian rule was possible and desirable, if not by rejecting democratic forms then at least by erecting a facade behind which they could maintain the hierarchical and authoritarian nature of their power. In contrast to their point of view, Zedillo was adamant that the party would have to allow, to a certain degree, some form of electoral legitimation that could strengthen and polish the view of the PRI in the eyes of the population and the international audience.¹⁸ In addition to this, Zedillo had chosen a perfect setting to pursue political liberations. As it had been previously mentioned, Zedillo had gained popularity given the overall development of the country during his tenure and according to O'Donnell, "The most favorable occasions for attempting liberalization come at periods of widely acknowledged success of the authoritarian regime, including a high economic conjuncture, in which the soft liners hope that the regime's effectiveness will be transferred into popular support for the regime during the transition."¹⁹ Hence, it made perfect sense for Zedillo to take such a drastic step towards change precisely when he did, the former president knew that the regime could not wait long before reintroducing certain freedoms not only to moderate segments of the domestic opposition but also to appease international public opinion.²⁰ However, the former president's assertiveness of rooting for change when he did, did not change the fact that the majority of members in the PRI did not agree with his liberalizing measures which defied years and years of the PRI's status quo. This sense of antagonism raised among members

¹⁸ Guillermo A. O'Donnell, and Philippe C. Schmitter. *Transitions From Authoritarian Rule*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, (1986): Pp. 16

¹⁹ Ibid. Pp. 19.

²⁰ Ibid. Pp. 16.

of the authoritarian party without a doubt made it lose its strength and cohesion as the absolute political power reigning in Mexico, in the words of Guillermo O'Donnell: "We assert there is no transition whose beginning is not the consequence of important divisions within the authoritarian regime itself, principally along the fluctuating cleavage between hard liners and softliners."²¹

II. Loss of Legitimacy

Regarding the relationship between the loss of legitimacy and the fall of the PRI , one can look at the party's inability to rule according to the democratic principles established in the Mexican constitution; in addition to a government characterized by corruption and a variety of self-proliferating mechanisms that by essence go against the well-being of the people in the state. Lipset establishes that in order to determine whether a government is legitimate to rule or not, it is necessary to analyze indicators that measure the exercise of political rights and civil liberties. Some of the elements that effectively portray the strength or weakness of such indicators include "freedom of expression, the degree of military intervention in the political arena, fair elections, free competition among parties, and absence of government terror."²² If one takes into account given elements the loss the PRI's legitimacy to rule could become materialized in the party's failure to show a good performance on given democratic indicators.

Although the PRI was never known for using military forces to control the masses as other authoritarian powers in Latin America, its rule was quite recognized by its manipulation of the media, the use of terror as a threat to political activity against the government, and of course

²¹ Juan J. Linz, 'Legitimacy of democracy and the socioeconomic system', in M.Dogan (ed.) *Comparing Pluralist Democracies: Strains on Legitimacy*, Boulder: Westview Press. (1988): Pp. 116.

²² Ibid. Pp.122.

the lack of a functional electoral institution that could account for fair elections. It would seem that the people that benefited the most from the rule of the PRI were mostly the people that were actual members of the party, leaving almost no room to the improvement of the Mexican population's social conditions. The party's ineffective and long-lasting rule gradually reduced the number of persons willing to recognize the party as a righteous political force, the PRI had lost its legitimacy to rule.

III. Economic Development and Modernization

According to Huntington, the following pattern summarizes the main stages of modernization leading to the political change, and in this particular case study, to the fall of the PRI's authoritarian regime:

(1)	$\frac{\text{Social mobilization}}{\text{Economic development}}$	= Social frustration
(2)	$\frac{\text{Social frustration}}{\text{Mobility opportunities}}$	= Political participation
(3)	$\frac{\text{Political participation}}{\text{Political institutionalization}}$	= Political instability

²² Huntington, *Political Order*, p. 55.

The chart above explains that modernization and the range of developmental processes it entails make people want to engage in political participation after experiencing social frustrations which eventually leads to the instability of the political entity in power of the nation.²³ Jose Woldenberg argues in his book, *A Brief History of Mexico's Democratic Transition*, that the political system changed because Mexicans had changed. According to Woldenberg, “el crecimiento económico había forjado un México más urbano que agrario, más alfabetizado que analfabeta, más educado,

²³ Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2006. Pp. 55.

con más industrias. En una palabra, un país más moderno. Y esa modernidad se expresaba en sensibilidades muy distintas que a su vez se traducían en reclamos para tener un país más abierto, menos vertical, más democrático, menos autoritario.”²⁴ The author explains that economic development in Mexico had led to the urbanization of the country, and to the development of a far more literate and educated population. These changes in turn propelled the people to start making demands to have a less restricted government, one that could be more democratic and less authoritarian.

Woldenberg explains that Mexico had experienced significant economic growth from the years 1932 to 1977 and that although given development had not resulted in obvious political changes, the actual effect of such development had flourished when young generations grew to become a group of “new Mexicans”²⁵, people that got jobs in developing industries, people that left the country to study abroad and that continued to be exposed to a globalized Western marketplace of ideas. These new generations of Mexicans refused to settle to be represented by a single political party and by a single ideological platform that had proven ineffective throughout the years. The country had experienced high rates of development and been exposed to a diversity of ideals that eventually led to the people’s strive for political liberation and change.

It could be then argued that this subtle but yet constant evolution of the people ignited by modernization and the economic growth it entitles, eventually created fractures and tensions in the government. The PRI could no longer stay in rule without facing any severe consequences and apparently it was president López Portillo who first realized this premise when promoting a

²⁴ José Woldenberg, *Historia mínima de la transición democrática en México*. Distrito Federal: Colegio de México, 2012. Pp 12.

²⁵ Ibid. Pp. 2.

constitutional change in 1977 that would widen the opportunity of members of the opposition to occupy more places in the chamber of deputies. These small changes constantly escalated according to the demands of society and reached its peak when president Zedillo's advocated for a more concrete democratic change. It can be argued that this transformation also led to an increase in political participation, the development of more democratic institutions, and the eventual victory of Vicente Fox in the 2000 Mexican presidential elections.

After reviewing these main arguments in the light of the Mexican case, it can be concluded that O'Donnell, Linz, Lipset and Huntington's theories do offer compelling and useful insights explaining the breakdown of the PRI's authoritarian one-party regime. However, it would seem that the effective rationales that given arguments attribute to the understanding of the fall of this undemocratic structure still fail to capture the main essence behind the end of Mexico's perfect dictatorship. For one thing, the PRI outlasted all other authoritarian regimes and one-party states, including the Soviet Union. Secondly, in contrast to the fall of other authoritarian regimes in Latin America, the case of the PRI's breakdown can hardly be placed under a unique category or be attributed to a specific set of events. Thirdly, because the PRI always showed to be a special kind of authoritarian structure given its civilized nature and the lack of overtly repressive policies in its government. Lastly, because unlike any other case of authoritarian collapse, the fall of Mexico's one-party regime was both, unforeseeable and unexpected.

This study thus offers an alternative explanation to the Mexican experience arguing that the breakdown of the party's perfect dictatorship can best be understood as a counter-reaction to the PRI and its policies. This argument provides more of a local explanation based on the

premise that the long-lasting, undemocratic and corrupt performance of the PRI eventually led to the rise of profound cynicism among the Mexican population and that such sense of tiredness and anger is what mainly triggered the fall of the party. This study will support its main argument by explaining how the alternate explanation here presented succeeds in explaining the breakdown of the PRI where other theories fail, and by engaging in an analysis of the PRI's political performance throughout the years alongside major events outlining the history of Mexico and its people.

Part III. Offering an Alternative Explanation

Since its origins in 1929 as "Partido Nacional Revolucionario" until its 1948 evolution into the current "Partido Revolucionario Institucional", the party had been espoused to revolutionary values. Some of these included the premise of no reelection, the promotion of indigenous rights, the guarantee of labor reforms for workers, and the guarantee of land reforms for peasants and anti-clerical regulation²⁶. All of these were incorporated into the 1917 Mexican Constitution. However, throughout its rule, the PRI's actions in many occasions went against the revolutionary principles upon which the party had been built. The Mexican population did not fail to eventually notice the undemocratic and counterproductive political performance of its leading party and the sense of treason against revolutionary pro-people values. Generally supported by the popular sectors as an advocate of the workers, the peasantry and the employees of the state, the PRI thoroughly started to turn its followers into skepticism. Mexico experienced various instances of political unconformity and instability rooted in the PRI's anti-democratic

²⁶ Larry K. Storrs, "Mexico's Political History: From Revolution to Alternation, 1910-2006." *Faith and Impiety in Revolutionary Mexico*, January 26, 2006. Pp.1.

performance that made the people develop a strong sense of cynicism towards the government. This phenomenon eventually led to the undermining of the party's right to rule Mexico.

Among the most notorious events illustrating the undemocratic government of the PRI and the thorough disenchantment of the people with the government are: the 1958-1959 strikes of teachers and railroad workers, the 1963 and 1977 constitutional reforms, the 1968 student protest and the 1990's economic policies. Starting with the 1958 conflict, the 'Teacher's Revolutionary Movement' demanded a wage increase of at least 40 percent along with retirement benefits. They made such demands through a pacific demonstration that was violently repressed by police officials.²⁷ Later that year, on September 6, the teachers went on strike one more time as a sign of nonconformity with the government's unresponsiveness towards their demands, receiving support from railroad workers and electricians. The strike once again was brought to an end violently after the police arrested over two hundred participants.

According to Rebecca Schreiber's argument in *Cold War Exiles in Mexico*, "U.S. officials in Mexico were wary of the influence of the Soviet Communist Party in trade unions and viewed the leaders of the teacher's union as Communist agitators."²⁸ In order to distract national and international audience from the political turbulence led by the teacher's movement, the PRI ordered the arrest and deportation of foreign refugees from the United States, Spain, Germany, Cuba and Guatemala on the grounds that they were Communist rebels responsible for instigating disturbances in Mexican worker's unions.

²⁷ Rebecca M. Schreiber, *Cold War exiles in Mexico U.S. dissidents and the culture of critical resistance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008. Pp. 185.

²⁸ *Ibid.* Pp. 185.

This measure representing a counter-attack strategy serves as an illustration of a political strategy constantly employed by the PRI. Whenever the party could not provide an immediate response to a specific demand from the population then it would either employ repression and/or quieten the problem at hand by constructing an even bigger imaginary problem to distract the national and international audience, just like the false accusations that held political refugees responsible for the 1950's strikes. What should also be noticed from this particular case is the framework outlining U.S.-Mexican relations, for although there is no doubt that a sense of harmony has always been pursued among countries, Mexican subordination to American policies has mostly been regarded as an anti-nationalist trait by the people of Mexico and as a violation of Mexican revolutionary values. The *revolucionarios* had fought to put to end to the rule of Porfirio Díaz in the 1900's, a dictator who would disregard Mexican roots while expanding, imposing, and promoting foreign modes of rule and policy; hence, the repression of the teachers and the seemingly close relationship between the Mexican and American government contested the nature of the PRI's nationalistic nature.

Related to the teacher's movement, in 1959 railroad public servers demanded that their rights as workers were protected and that their wages were raised in a period of inflation. Although some negotiations were made between president Adolfo López Mateos and the movement's leader, Demetrio Vallejo; in the end, things shifted towards the PRI's benefit. A day before the biggest strike took place, the *Federal Conciliation Board* declared union strikes illegal and the government sent in army troops to guard the rail installations, "army telegraphers replaced union telegraphers, and soldiers accompanied by the police broke into the homes of

people on strike and forced them to work at gunpoint.”²⁹ Both 1958 and 1959 incident portray how the PRI’s behavior not only betrayed its revolutionary values, but also showed to go against national interests and the well-being of Mexican workers, one of the social groups that needed the state’s protection the most and one of the most important PRI supporters within the Mexican population.

From its part, the PRI did not fail to understand the threat that its unpopularity among the people symbolized, after the teacher’s and railroad workers’ incidents, the López Mateo administration established a new reform in 1963. According to George López and Michael Stohl, the reform “was designed to defuse the political dissent that occurred after the repression of the teachers and railroad worker’s strikes in 1958 and 1959. By introducing this reform measure, the regime demonstrated its flexibility in expanding the rules of the game in a way that did not seriously challenge the boundaries of the political system.”³⁰ This phenomenon, depicts a specific pattern followed by the authoritarian party in order to deal with people’s discontent. It seems that the PRI kept on employing innovative tactics to facade its undemocratic means and to subdue external pressures embodied by the population’s voiced discontent; if the party could not come with an apparently efficient way to satisfy the population’s demands, then at least it made sure to quieten whatever political scandal by staging a larger one as a diversion in order to fool the people. However, the PRI was not expecting that the people of Mexico would eventually become familiar with the government’s ways of making fools out of them.

²⁹ Robert Francis Alegre,. "Mexican Railroad Workers Strike for Wages and Union Rights, 1958-1959." Global Nonviolent Action Database.Rutgers University Press. (2007) Accessed April 1, 2017.

³⁰ George A. López, and Michael Stohl. *Liberalization and Redemocratization in Latin America*. New York: Greenwood Press, 1987. Pp. 18.

Moving on to one of the most significant blood prints in the history of Mexico, Tlatelolco served as the stage of one of the country's greater human-rights violations in 1968. Weeks before the 1968 Olympics took place, the PRI had been struggling to deal with student strikes led by university and high school students from the most renowned public schools; 'Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México' and 'Instituto Politécnico Nacional'. *La plaza de las tres culturas*, witnessed one of the greatest acts of violence enacted by the government when hundreds of students and civilians were slaughtered by the Mexican Army during a non-armed and peacefully-led protest. This incident left a national scar that still remains. The brutal actions of the PRI under the rule of president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz and its secretary, Luis Echeverría, once again undermined the party's democratic and pro-people values to the eyes of all of the Mexican population.

In the words of Mexican renowned writer, Octavio Paz, "The killing of Tlatelolco reveals to us that a past we believed buried is alive. Like the heartless sacrifices of the Aztecs or the brutal hegemony of Coates's Spaniards, the use of terror by the PRI did nothing to inspire confidence, but fear."³¹ The author here provides an interesting simile between the PRI and all previous enemies of the people of Mexico. It makes it seem as if the history of the country has tragically been subjected to a spiral effect that continuously leads to the brutal sacrifice of the people, who give their blood to feed the heartless ruler in turn. The party suffered a substantial erosion of political legitimacy during the 1970's that can mostly be attributed to the 1968 student strike and what came to be known as *La Masacre de Tlatelolco*, this event shocked the whole of

³¹ Gene D. Pace, 2003. "PAZ, PRI, AND PROGRESS: OCTAVIO PAZ'S POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND LITERARY STRUGGLE TO INSPIRE REFORM IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY MEXICO." *Essays In Economic & Business History* 21, 61-70. *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, EBSCOhost (accessed April 20, 2017).

the country but it had a special effect on the urban middle class, “the ruling elite’s most politically articulate constituency”³² according to Kevin Middlebrook. The people of Mexico seemed to be tired of being ruled by fear and repression as it had throughout the years, hence, the populace went through a process of socio-political evolution that made them begin to exert pressure for change and democratization.

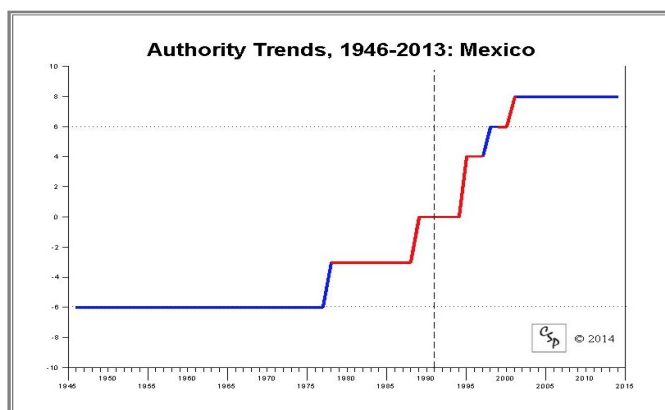
The political environment experienced after 1968 proved that not only the urban middle class, but most of the population sectors in general could no longer be forced to accept the political system by traditional means. The sequence of events taking place during the 1950’s and 1960’s can without a doubt be argued to stand as a damaging blow to the PRI’s right to rule. Hence, the notion of the loss of legitimacy being a contributing element leading to the fall of an authoritarian regime can here be disproven for the Mexican case. The reason is that even though the party experienced its greatest loss of support, credibility and legitimacy to rule by the end of the 1960’s, it still took over three decades for its reign to come to an end. Therefore, it can be concluded that the loss of legitimacy was not the main reason explaining the eventual breakdown of the PRI’s one party regime.

Another important aspect of the PRI’s performance that should be taken into consideration is that even though the 1958, 1959, and 1968 events undermined the party’s popularity to the eyes of the people, the country still experienced what came to be known as the ‘Mexican economic miracle’ during the rule of the PRI. The Mexican miracle makes reference to a period between the 1940’s and 1970’s where the country experienced a considerable economic

³² Kevin J. Middlebrook, "Political Liberalization in an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Mexico." In *Transitions From Authoritarian Regimes*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. Pp. 125.

growth with a modest percent of inflation rate a year. However, this period of apparent success eventually came to an end when the growth of the economy slowed giving rise to various social problems such as income inequalities, unemployment, inflation and foreign indebtedness. The Mexican economic deterioration reached a peak during the 1980's when and according to Middlebrook, "The sudden collapse of a petroleum led economic boom in 1982 produced a sharp reversal in popular expectations and raised new concerns regarding Mexico's political stability."³³ The author here suggests that an element adding to the eventual fall of the PRI was related to a public discontent taking over the population as the government's performance failed to prevent and combat a deterioration in the Mexican economy.

Reflecting on Huntington's argument posing modernization and economic development as elements leading to authoritarian breakdown, the Mexican economic experience in relation to the PRI's stability prove that these were not the factors explaining the fall of the party in Mexico.



"Polity IV Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946-2013." Polity IV Project.³⁴

³³ Kevin J. Middlebrook, "Political Liberalization in an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Mexico." In *Transitions From Authoritarian Regimes*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. Pp. 130.

³⁴ "Polity IV Individual Country Regime Trends, 1946-2013." Polity IV Project: Country Reports 2010. 2013. <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

The Polity IV chart here presented shows Mexican authority trends from 1946 to 2013. The vertical side of the graph indicates the levels of polity spectrum ranging from -10 (hereditary monarchy) to +10 (consolidated democracy) while the horizontal axis shows a timeline divided by years.³⁵ This study suggests that Mexico experienced a period of a ‘peacefully led’ undemocratic regime from the 1940’s all the way to the mid 1970’s. Hence, if one takes into consideration that the Mexican economic miracle took place between exactly those decades, then it can be concluded that modernization and economic development were in this case closely related to the stability of the rule of the PRI contrary to what Huntington’s conclusions would suggest. Economic growth seems to have helped maintain the PRI in power as opposed to leading to its breakdown.

Further explaining the shift of authority trends in Mexico in the late 1970’s, Kevin J. Middlebrook provides the following argument on the liberalization of the authoritarian one party regime in Mexico, “the political liberalization initiated with the López Portillo administration in 1977 with a political reform that increased the number and ideological diversity of officially registered political parties participating in the electoral process.”³⁶ The main question lies on why the former president decided to undertake such a measure to empower the participation of opposition parties in Mexican politics. Middlebrook further explains that this political reform was part of López Portillo’s plan to ease a series of disturbances that had initiated within Echeverría’s rule.

³⁵ Polity Project. <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html>.

³⁶ Kevin J. Middlebrook, "Political Liberalization in an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Mexico." In *Transitions From Authoritarian Regimes*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. Pp. 123.

Allegedly, Echeverría's administration had authorized emergency wage increases, heightened labor mobilization and increased an economic uncertainty that eventually ignited the discontent from the private sector. At the same time, rural violence had increased dramatically and there had been public speculation that a military coup d'état might sooner or later take place given the armed forces' renewed involvement in national politics.³⁷ Hence, López Portillo tried to take path that would soothe the political turmoil caused by both sectors, he did so on the one hand by implementing economic policies that would regain the government's support from the private sector and on the other hand by opening the PRI's rule to new liberal elements.

Firstly, it is important to address the notion that O'Donnell's argument in light of the Mexican case suggesting that a rupture within the PRI between soft liners and hard liners can here be partly undermined. Going back to the era of the 1970's, the members of the PRI seemed to share the same ideological and political values. Regardless of the shared sense of corruption and undemocratic pursuits characterizing the party and its members, the fact still remains that virtually all of the PRI's actors were on 'the same team', they accepted and lived through the rules engrained in Mexican politics and the 'dedazo' system; there was no opposition between soft liners and hard liners, there was just the corrupt PRI as an homogeneous political entity. Nevertheless, president López Portillo determined that a constitutional change that would provide opposition parties with more opportunities to become politically active was necessary, it was the president under a consolidated PRI who took the first step towards liberalization, according to Middlebrook's argument. Hence, it can be concluded that one of the first and most

³⁷ Kevin J. Middlebrook, "Political Liberalization in an Authoritarian Regime: The Case of Mexico." In *Transitions From Authoritarian Regimes*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991. Pp. 131.

important steps towards the fall of the Mexican authoritarian regime was the result of a different political or social pressure, and not the fragmentation of members in the party.

Further explaining the events leading to the rural violence and discontent taking place in Mexico during the 1970's (pressures that fostered López Portillo's plan to liberalize the Mexican party system), Jose Woldenberg provides the following explanation depicting the Mexican population's attitude towards the government during that decade, " Los 'nuevos' mexicanos de entonces no se resignaban a verse representados por un solo ideario, un solo partido político, una sola plataforma ideológica. La diversidad que cruzaba el país empezó a manifestar su hartazgo con el entramado vertical de gobierno que se había tejido a lo largo de muchos años."³⁸

Woldenberg explains that Mexicans during the 1970's were part of a new generation characterized by the sense of ideological diversity that the country had experienced at the time. It further elaborates on how the ever-lasting, undemocratic, corrupt, and unchanging rule of the PRI had led the people in the country to become fed-up and sickened by the party's mediocre political performance. This sense of tiredness and fury on behalf of the population was ignited by the government's verticality in exercising an undemocratic rule throughout its years in power, thus, it can therefore be argued that the people's inconformity with the PRI was the main reason explaining the 1977 constitutional reform undertaken by López Portillo.

However, even though the events of 1977 did work as a platform to political liberalization, it would be quite a mistake to believe that the former Mexican president intended to provide opposition parties with actual political power. The PRI would not for a long time let go of its ruling supremacy; the 1977 reform was more of a facade to appease the country's

³⁸ José Woldenberg, *Historia mínima de la transición democrática en México*. Distrito Federal: Colegio de México, 2012. Pp. 12.

discontent while fully holding the reins of power in the country. Similar subtle and non-effective reforms had taken place before the López Portillo administration, and they had been undertaken both to soothe public discontent and to regain the support of the people to a certain extent. As it had been previously mentioned, one of the aspects of the PRI that explains its long-lasting rule is that the party's roots were revolutionary, and thus they had provided the the political party with a sense of entitlement to rule.

Going back to the Polity IV chart showing authority trends in Mexico, the blue-colored section of the graph portrays peaceful periods of transition, while the red-colored section represents a period of political discontent and instability. This phenomenon illustrates the fact that the PRI struggled the most to maintain its position of power during the administrations of Miguel de la Madrid and Carlos Salinas de Gortari, (1982-1994). Both governments outline the most significant period of skepticism and reproof from the people of Mexico towards the PRI. Hence, both administrations and the understanding of their government and policies can serve to understand the eventual breakdown of the one party regime.

Mexico's 1988 presidential election took place under one of the most corrupt circumstances engrained in the electoral process. According to Dan La Botz, "Salinas found himself, surprisingly, running in a real election against Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas. While Salinas attended the usual rallies of party loyalists bussed in by political bosses, Cárdenas filled the streets and plazas of Mexico in what was perhaps the greatest political campaign in the country since Francisco Madero in the 1910's."³⁹ Two presidential elections before, López Portillo had virtually run a contest with no real contestants, meaning that his electoral victory had been

³⁹ Dan La. Botz, *Democracy in Mexico: peasant rebellion and political reform*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995. Pp. 105.

directly granted to him through a process of succession (the *dedazo*). However, twelve years later the electoral arena had taken a different path given that for the first time in years a PRI contestant had to actually fight for the right to run the country. Miguel de la Madrid had been Salinas predecessor, and his administration had planted the seeds of a dramatic change in the Mexican government that lied in substantial economic and political reforms.

The relationship between de la Madrid and Salinas de Gortari went back to the years when the former had had the later as a student in *La Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*. De la Madrid had chosen Salinas to succeed him as a head of the state, however, he did not expect that the lack of popularity and support during his administration would make it harder for him to turn the power of the executive over to his protégé. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas had won a plurality in the election but the PRI had still granted Salinas the presidential victory. “Installed in office by fraud, Salinas recognized the immediate necessity of rebuilding the base of the Party, particularly among rural communities and the poor.”⁴⁰ Salinas acknowledged the fact that the support of the people no longer backed the government of the PRI as it had for years, in fact, the opposite could have been said about the support received by the party in the late 1980s. Not failing to behave according to the pattern characterizing the PRI’s course of action, Salinas tried to make changes in the government that would not lessen the party’s hold of power as a means to regain popular support, however, his course of action proved counterproductive as he came to be known as the most corrupt president in the history of Mexico.

One of the reasons why Salinas de Gortari became so unpopular and resented by the Mexican people is that as opposed to his predecessors, Salinas had more blatantly and cynically

⁴⁰ Dan La. Botz, *Democracy in Mexico: peasant rebellion and political reform*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995. Pp. 106.

made use of undemocratic and corrupt measures that directly harmed the population and benefited the political elite. “As president, Carlos Salinas was a kind of Zapata in reverse. Salinas took from the poor and gave to the rich at an unprecedented rate.”⁴¹ This anti-Robin Hood quality of Carlos Salinas was most visibly apparent in the political measures he undertook during his administration. Along with Miguel de la Madrid, Carlos Salinas was part of a new generation of politicians known as the ‘technocrats’. These members of the government were known to come from upper class backgrounds and their families had been involved in business, or high office levels in the Mexican government. This political elite “believed in neoliberal values such as privatization of the economy and integration into the world market. The technocrats were extremely elitist and inherently undemocratic.”⁴² Nevertheless, more than their ‘inherently undemocratic’ character, the rule of the technocrats directly and openly undermined the revolutionary and nationalistic values that the Mexican population had been known to support for years.

It is widely known that many Mexican presidents have deliberately employed corrupt and undemocratic means to achieve their desired goals, this has been a very distinctive characteristic of the rule of the PRI throughout the years. However, it seems that the party always found new ways to subdue people’s discontent and succeeded in creating democratic facades that would reassure the people that their demands were being met. Salinas created a new social program meant to help the poor and rural classes in Mexico, the program came to be known as *Programa Nacional de Solidaridad*. What seems to make his naming choice ironic is

⁴¹ Dan La. Botz, *Democracy in Mexico: peasant rebellion and political reform*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995. Pp. 101.

⁴² Ibid. Pp. 103.

that the word *solidaridad* (solidarity), had gained a significant value after the earthquake that hit Mexico City in 1985. Members of the population from all social classes had organized various parties meant to rescue victims and reconstruct the city after the government had shown ineffectiveness in providing such services. Evidently, Salinas attempted to use the idea of solidarity so ingrained in the national memory to turn it into a PRI slogan that portrayed the party's intention to help the people.

Salinas had promised that all PRONASOL programs would be managed with honesty and efficiency and that they would lead to justice and democratization. Although the program actually managed to become successful, one of the most significant elements that led to its success was ironically the increase of low wages. In 1982 the devaluation of the Mexican peso had reduced workers' wages by almost a half, and PRONASOL further continued to decrease salaries. Mexico's low wages turned the country into a very attractive place to invest money to the eyes of the international community. However, the more PRONASOL became successful, the more undemocratic the country became. In the end, most of the budget acquired by given program was distributed amongst a very small sector of the population while the majority of its profits were divided among Salinas and his friends inside the government.

Along with the undemocratic program of PRONASOL, a set of various incidents also successfully reflected the cynical corruption and anti-national values ingrained in the Salinas administration. Some of the most important events characterizing Salinas' government took place in the year 1989. Firstly, on January the 10th of that same year, the *Petroleum Workers Union* went on strike and ended up arresting ten official including the leader of the Union, Joaquín Hernández Galicia, who had defied its alliance with the PRI. Salinas accused the leader

of weapon trafficking and held him responsible for the murder of a policeman during the raid.⁴³ Days later it was confirmed that the man in question had been murdered days before in a different state and that its corpse had been placed at Galicia's doorstep by the police. It would be delusional to believe that previous Mexican leaders had not employed such corrupt measures to get rid of their enemies, however, it was not until Salinas' administration that such blatant use of corruption and coercion was used against members of the Union. Going back to the worker's strike in 1963, López Portillo had taken a more subtle stand by banning political manifestations and by later making a constitutional reform, however, in contrast to Lopez Portillo's cautious actions, Salinas sent a more straight-forward and threatening message to the people of Mexico and Union workers.

A similar incident took place later that year when a teacher's riot broke out. The head of the state removed the previous union's head and replaced him with a loyal member of the PRI, Elba Esther Gordillo.⁴⁴ An article published by Forbes magazine in 2013 showed a study that ranked the 10 most corrupt Mexicans, Elba Esther Gordillo and Raúl Salinas de Gortari (the brother of the former Mexican president) made it to the list. The new union leader was proven guilty of having taken 200,000,000 Mexican pesos out of the union's fund to afford a luxurious lifestyle. The former president's brother on the other hand was imprisoned after being charged of corruption, money laundry and political homicide. After ten years in jail he was granted a pardon by the judge leading his case, who also signed an order allowing Raúl Salinas de Gortari to get

⁴³ Dan La. Botz, *Democracy in Mexico: peasant rebellion and political reform*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995. Pp. 111.

⁴⁴ Ibid. Pp. 111.

his monetary and property funds after regaining his freedom.⁴⁵ Both cases surrounding Salinas de Gortari protégés greatly outraged the people of Mexico for they represented the epitome of the abuse of power, injustice, and impunity.

Another important element that ignited the popular's rage towards the PRI was Salinas de Gortari's support of the privatization of national companies and *ejidal* lands. On August 20, 1989, Salinas prevented a strike by union workers taking place in Sonora protesting. The head of the state sent Mexican army troops to detain people protesting against the privatization of a regional copper mine. In addition to this, Salinas later modified *Article 27* of the Mexican constitution banning the privatization of *ejidal* lands. "Salinas' privatization not only led to an enormous concentration of wealth, but also brought about tremendous new economic inequalities. By 1994, Mexico had twenty four new billionaires whose wealth was equal to that of the twenty four million poorest Mexicans."⁴⁶ Rodrigo Treviño depicts the process of the decay of *ejidal* land owners in his book, *Precios, salarios y mordidas*. The author conducted an interview taking place after Salinas' land reform in which the former owners of and *ejidal* land described how they had been forced to surrender a high percentage of their harvest and properties to new foreign owners by orders of the government.⁴⁷ This situation once again outlined the lack of harmony between the government's values and the values fought for during the Mexican revolution. It was the Mexican leader Emiliano Zapata who had coined the phrase

⁴⁵ Dolia Estevez, "The 10 Most Corrupt Mexicans Of 2013." *Forbes*. December 22, 2014. Accessed April 22, 2017. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2013/12/16/the-10-most-corrupt-mexicans-of-2013/#4071b9345720>.

⁴⁶ Dan La. Botz, *Democracy in Mexico: Peasant Rebellion and Political Reform*. Boston, MA: South End Press, 1995. Pp. 119.

⁴⁷ Rodrigo García Treviño, *Precios, salarios y mordidas*. México: Editorial América, 1953. Pp. 123.

“tierra y libertad”⁴⁸, (land and liberty). At this point in time, it had become evident even to the lower social classes who had always been fooled by the PRI’s democratic facade, that the government was a corrupt one and that Salinas had flagrantly deprived them from both, *tierra* and *libertad*.

This situation further emphasised Salinas’ role as an inverted version of Robin Hood. More than a politics, Salinas had been greatly influenced by economics during his graduate school years at Harvard. During his time abroad, Salinas established notorious relationships with American scholars and economists from all over the world that shared its technocratic vision of politics. They all believed that economic openness and development were key elements to create a strong state. However, in the case of Mexico things did not work democratically after being subjected to technocratic ways. Making an allusion to the Mexican population and its social structure, the bottom of the pyramid weakened while the small top portion of it kept growing. Given sense of disproportion eventually led to the breakdown of the Mexican lower classes. Never before in the history of Mexico had the enrichment of the rich and the impoverishment of the poor become so evident than it had during the Salinas administration.

As a counter movement to Salinas’ neoliberal economic policies and anti-nationalistic government, a guerrilla group supporting revolutionary values was formed to fight the PRI. *El Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional* started to assemble in the mid 1980’s, and as its name suggests, it fought for the rights of the indigenous people and their land. The group's political activity reached its peak in January 1994 when it first staged a rebellion in Chiapas with

⁴⁸ Kenneth F. Johnson, *Mexican democracy: a critical view*. New York: Praeger, 1978. Pp. 90.

the purpose of condemning the Salinas' economic policies negatively affecting the country's indigenous population.⁴⁹

Lying at the core of the Zapatista movement's demands was the recently established relationship between Mexico, The United States and Canada through the new NAFTA agreement. In short, although the treaty did root for the improvement of Mexican economy, it still did so by following a path that would continue to impoverish the rural classes and the whole indigenous population. In January 1994, the EZLN (Zapatista National Liberation Army) published a letter raising awareness on the threat that the new relationship between the PRI and the American government could signify for the people of Mexico.

“Brothers and sisters,
 We address this letter to you to tell you that the Mexican Federal government is using U.S. economic and military support to massacre Chiapas' indigenous people. Troops, planes, helicopters, arms and military gear are presently being used not to chase narco-traffickers and leaders of large drug cartels, but to repress the just struggle of the Mexican people and the indigenous people in Chiapas and to murder innocent men, women and children. With the support that the U.S. government, the PRI is staining its hands with indigenous blood. Our desire is that all of the people in this world have true liberty and democracy. And we are prepared to give our lives for this desire. Do not stain your hands with our blood by making yourselves accomplices of the Mexican government.
*From the mountains of Southeastern Mexico,
 CCRI, of the EZLN, January, 1994.*⁵⁰”

The letter above was labeled as “A letter to North America”, which makes it clear that the guerrilla's message was aiming not only at the the Mexican people to raise awareness but also to

⁴⁹ "Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN)." Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zapatista-National-Liberation-Army>.

⁵⁰ Ben Clarke, and Cliff Ross. *Voice of fire: communiqués and interviews from the Zapatista National Liberation Army*. San Francisco, CA: Freedomvoice, 2000. Pp.70.

make a plea to the American government not to stain its hands with ‘indigenous blood’. It directly accuses the PRI of allying with the U.S. government to suppress the people as opposed to persecuting the real enemies of the nation. Furthermore, it makes it clear that the people in the movement were willing to sacrifice their lives in order to achieve peace and justice. Its sense of righteousness, along with the heart-felt, thought-provoking and revolutionary rhetoric of the guerilla group made its message and cause resonate with the rural masses. The importance of the EZLN mostly lied within the fact that unlike any other anti-PRI group, its leader, *Subcomandante Marcos*, had been able to unite the lower and rural classes into a sphere of political consciousness aimed at actively fighting for change. The guerrilla group served as a means to educate the people on the corrupt and anti-democratic PRI’s performance, it provided a convincing rationale that made the government’s self-serving enrichment at the expense of the well being of the Mexican population evident.

In an interview conducted in 1994 for *El Tiempo* newspaper, one of the EZLN members was questioned on why he thought that even though Chiapas was the state where the movement had its biggest base, the area still showed that 90 percent of people’s votes were given to PRI candidates during regional and national elections. The Zapatista *guerrillero* provided the following answer: “We’re sure this isn’t so, that in fact it’s pure fraud. It’s easy for candidates to make the indigenous people their stairway to power, and when they’re in power they forget us. When we ask for a solution to a problem the only response they give us is repression, torture, disappearances and the murder of our leaders.”⁵¹

⁵¹ Ben Clarke, and Cliff Ross. *Voice of fire: communiqués and interviews from the Zapatista National Liberation Army*. San Francisco, CA: Freedomvoice, 2000. Pp. 72-73.

As it is, even though the PRI had successfully employed the described methods to win the support of the indigenous groups for years, meaning, winning their votes through a persuasive rhetoric and by providing them with insignificant ‘gifts’ such as monetarian remunerations or grocery coupons, in the end the government’s undemocratic actions escalated to an extent where the people could no longer be fooled. Like the *Zapatista guerrillero* concluded in the interview, “We no longer raise our hands to ask for a piece of candy as before, or for them to give us a little money or a hat so we can cover our eyes. What we are going to ask for is freedom, democracy and justice.”⁵² Hence, it can be concluded that de la Madrid’s late 1980’s policies along with Salinas’ neoliberal economic reforms were the straw that finally broke the camel’s back.

The Salinas administration came to an end in a period of political turmoil and economic uncertainty that was further worsened by the assassination of the PRI’s presidential candidate. The murder of Luis Donaldo Colosio appalled the Mexican population, however, the new hand-picked candidate chosen by Salinas to succeed him was even more appalling even to the person in question. As it had been previously mentioned, Ernesto Zedillo failed to meet the criteria characterizing the corrupt and self-serving members of the PRI. “Adapting the perspective of a citizen who had ended up in the presidential chair by chance rather than that of a political animal hungry for power, Zedillo identified a series of problems and abuses in the traditional structure of the presidency. He radically displaced the center of gravity of Mexican politics from the presidency to the political parties and the governors.”⁵³ Unlike any other

⁵² Ben Clarke, and Cliff Ross. *Voice of fire: communiqués and interviews from the Zapatista National Liberation Army*. San Francisco, CA: Freedomvoice, 2000. Pp. 72-73.

⁵³ Susan Kaufman Purcell and Luis Rubio. *Mexico under Zedillo*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1998. Pp. 14.

previous head of state, Zedillo actively pursued a change in the corrupt Mexican government, it would almost seem that Salinas himself had sensed that the PRI's rule was reaching its breakdown and that nothing but a radical shift in Mexican politics could bring back credibility to the party. I would almost seem that Salinas choosing of Zedillo as a presidential successor was based on the premise that only a candidate with true democratic values would suffice to mend all the previous corrupt and undemocratic actions brought about by Salinas and his predecessors.

Zedillo, as well as Salinas, knew that as soon as he came into office he needed to change the political system and to keep its distance from the PRI's corrupt values. His administration redefined the presidency by bringing the concentration of power in the executive to an end, the new Mexican government needed to become one structured by the rule of law. However, even Zedillo was unable to completely live up to the democratic expectations he had so passionately agreed to meet. Probably followed by the 1968 student massacre, a new incident stained the hands of the government with the blood of the people. Early in his administration, Zedillo had engaged in a series of negotiations with the EZLN leader that had led to the creation of the *San Andrés Accords* outlining "a program of land reform, indigenous autonomy and cultural rights."⁵⁴ Nevertheless, not only did Zedillo reject the accords by the end of that year, but his government engaged in a series of covert interventions where Zapatista supporters were attacked by military elements. One of the most tragic attacks took place in December 1997 when 45 people that were part of a pacifist group, mostly women and children, were slaughtered in the Chiapas town of Acteal during a praying session. This event somehow, along with other discontents that the Zedillo administration failed to fix, only served to reinforce the people's skepticism on the PRI's

⁵⁴ "Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN)." Encyclopædia Britannica. Accessed April 25, 2017. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Zapatista-National-Liberation-Army>.

ability to successfully achieve a democratic transformation. While it is true that the people's process of disenchantment had started decades before the Zedillo administration, the 1990's staged a period of absolute National discontent. There was no social class in Mexico that did not question the PRI's government.

Part IV. Conclusion

After engaging in a thorough study of the PRI alongside major political events in the history of Mexico, it can be concluded that the party's collapse cannot, to its entirety, be understood by O'Donnell's soft liners vs. hard liners theory, nor Lipset's and Linz's argument on the loss of legitimacy, nor Huntington's explanation on the influence economic development in social change. Specific characteristics surrounding the Mexican case suggest that the fall of the PRI is far too complex and detailed to be fully grasped by any of the theories previously mentioned. Instead, the breakdown of Mexico's perfect dictatorship can be more thoroughly understood at a micro level based on the national, and historical particularities of the country.

The data provided by the Polity IV study shows that authority trends in Mexico remained stable until the late 1950's. It can therefore be concluded that the first stage leading to the fall of the PRI can be traced back to given decade, and that it can be mostly attributed to the railroad workers and teacher's acts of protest. These movements' significance lies within the fact that they symbolize the first acts of political activity expressing discontent and actively seeking a response from the PRI government to satisfy their demands. It would seem that the the PRI's behaviour towards the population's discontent throughout the years provide a significant insight explaining why the party was able to remain in power for so long and why its long-lasting rule eventually came to an end.

The PRI employed a particular strategy throughout its reign that consisted on molding and re-inventing itself in order to create the illusion that the party was actually responding to people's demands; hence the civilized nature of its dictatorship. The process was basically structured as a mechanism of deceit where no substantial changes were made on behalf of the government to pursue the population's well being, it was all a facade that with the passing of time became far too hard to sustain. The most important element leading to the PRI's eventual inability to keep up with its deceit mechanism was the constant and deliberate display of undemocratic, anti-nationalistic and corrupt political values. What the Mexican experience suggests is that unlike any other authoritarian regime in Latin America, the PRI's ability to understand the population's demands along with the overall character of the people of Mexico allowed the party to come up with new ways to appease political turmoil and successfully dodge anti-government blows.

However, the unconcealed way in which the government used its position of power to enrich itself at the expense of the people's suffering gradually escalated until it reached a point where the PRI could no longer come up with efficient ways to create facades of democracy and fool the people. What had for so long sustained the PRI's legitimacy to rule had been the values it had pledged to protect when it was first formed after the Mexican revolution. However, throughout the years the PRI constantly antagonized and deliberately violated the principles of sovereignty, liberty, justice, and national identity that were so ingrained in the in the Mexican nation. In other words, the breakdown of the PRI can mostly be understood as a counter-reaction to the party and its policies, amongst which economic neoliberalism, corruption, and anti-nationalism can be found. These elements and its resonance with the PRI's long-lasting

government served to awaken the people of Mexico from a state of political submission brought about by a new resentment and cynicism towards the party.

Carlos Fuentes once shared an interesting analogy depicting the people of Mexico as being “the body of a crippled tiger which has been overdosed with pentothal but that yet refuses to die.”⁵⁵ The author elaborated on how the PRI’s rhetoric and democratic facades functioned as a drug that numbed the Mexican population and that made its government reside in a hollow political system. However, the breakdown of the PRI’s one-party regime in the 2000 presidential elections suggests that after years and years of being subjected to an undemocratic government and of being sedated by the PRI’s deceiving ways, the Mexican people finally became immune to the party’s influence and the sedative qualities of its rule.

What the Mexican experience contributes to the understanding of authoritarian collapses is that national particularities need to be further studied in order to understand what elements ingrained in history and people-state interactions contribute to the fall of undemocratic structures. The case of Mexico portrayed a long process of authoritarian deterioration based on the people’s thorough disenchantment with the PRI’s corrupt, undemocratic and self-serving ways. The breakdown of Mexico’s perfect dictatorship and the uniqueness characterizing its most important features can lead us to conclude that although macro theories explaining the fall of authoritarian regimes do provide compelling and useful insights into the understanding of given political phenomena, they still leave a lot unsaid, while dwelling into particular histories provides a much more significant appreciation on the collapse of specific undemocratic structures.

⁵⁵ Kenneth F. Johnson, *Mexican democracy: a critical view*. New York: Praeger, 1978. Pp. 86.

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