THE ROLE OF POLITICAL GROUPS IN THE SUCCESSION PROCESS
Joy Langston

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Introduction

Since 1929, Mexico has been governed by a series of Presidents from the same party—what is now known as the PRI. Beginning in 1934, each president has ruled the nation for six years and then turned over executive power to his hand-picked successor, with greater or lesser consultation with other powerful members of the governing coalition: be they revolutionary generals, party and sectoral leaders, or ex-presidents. In 10 consecutive successions, the president of the nation, who is at the same time the de facto leader of the PRI, has chosen who will follow him, and has devolved the enormous prerogatives and responsibilities, both formal and informal, that are held by the Mexican chief executive. This paper will examine what the regime’s internal political groups and their leaders do during the period of the presidential succession: their goals and strategies inside a game whose outcomes have been determined by the rules of the succession process (which themselves have evolved over time because of the activity of the political groups during the transferal of power from one president to another). We will examine how the rule structure of the Mexican political system, which remained essentially unchanged from 1954 to 1993, created a situation in which the president had enormous power to choose his successor, and in which the rival pre-candidates were seriously constrained in their range of possible alternative strategies to win the PRI’s presidential nomination.1

The lack of serious opposition and fair electoral procedures causes a curious phenomenon to occur: the true fight for the presidency takes place within the ranks of the governing regime, not at the ballot boxes.2 (The partial exceptions to this general rule are discussed in the chapter Three Exits.)

The paper will discuss how the political groups within the regime behave given a set of rules that were formed over a period of time beginning in 1934 and which lasted until 1993. The rules circumscribe the political factions’ and their leaders’ ability to maneuver within the regime during the succession battle, while giving the president a large space to determine his choice. First, we will discuss the importance of the succession in the Mexican political system. Then the formal and informal rules that had governed the transfer of power will be reviewed. We will end this paper with a theoretical examination of the 'game' among the President, the pre-candidates (for the PRI’s presidential nomination) and their groups under the set of rules which existed until the end of 1993.

1 Although one could argue that the events of 1994 constitute a sea-change in the rule structure of the Mexican presidentialist political system (for more on this, see especially Lorenzo Meyer in Reforma, August 18, 1994), the majority of this paper will be written in the present tense for the purposes of presentation.

2 In this paper, we will use the terms "governing coalition", "political class", and "regime" to mean the same thing: the President, the executive bureaucracy and the PRI. Other authors use terms such as "Revolutionary family".
What is the Presidential Succession?

Simply put, since 1934 the presidential succession in Mexico is the transferal every six years (the *sexenio*) of executive power and authority from one president of the dominant party (the PRI) to another member of this same party. Until now, the Mexican system has been unique in that the sitting president chooses his successor without following the formal rules or guidelines of his own party which dictate how this choice should be made and who should make it. Informal rules (which we shall see in the next section) evolved to place limits on the range of possible successors, but within these limits, the presidents of Mexico have much leeway of decision: their fundamental goals (in what is known as the most important political decision a Mexican president can make) are to choose his favorite without splitting the governing coalition.³

Mexico was also unique in the role elections played. Opposition parties were weak, and the occasional PRI strongman who left the Party to run for president was defrauded of his possible victory. Still, presidential elections were held, and PRI candidates spent months on their campaigns traveling around the country, attending rallies, organizing meetings with local leaders, and speaking with and to the populace. As early as the 1950’s, American academics recognized what the Mexicans themselves had long known: national presidential elections (and the campaigns) were not meant to give the voters a choice among candidates of parties with different electoral and policy platforms —rather, they were a manner in which the candidate could see the problems facing the nation, and come into office with the overwhelming support of the voters.⁴

Inside the governing coalition, the succession means a readjustment of political alliances and loyalties as well as a renewal of public positions. For these two reasons, the changeover in executive authority is so important and so dangerous. In the process of giving over his power to another within the same coalition, the president’s political group splits up and begins to fight among themselves for the Presidential Chair; it is during this process that the new alliances are created. Those within the regime who had once owed the present Executive their political careers must (gently) cut ties with him in order to align themselves to who will follow, and help their pre-candidate win the nomination. To be allied with the winning pre-candidate can mean access to high positions and the possibility of contending for the next succession battle. To choose badly or to be tied to a leader who has burnt himself politically during the succession can mean the end of one’s career or at least a six year hiatus.

The incoming president has the authority to place thousands of high and medium level bureaucratic posts, PRI leaders, and elected positions in the Congress and Senate.⁵

³ We will the examine how the two clauses in this general preference are not always compatible.
⁵ See the *Diccionario Biográfico del Gobierno Mexicano* for more on how many public officials owe their careers directly or indirectly to the president’s good will. The president has a role in placing secretaries of state, subsecretaries, general directors, coordinators of advisors, and other positions.
The arrival of a new executive means the renewal of the governing coalition, and the assurance that even if one was out this sexenio, one had the possibility of building new alliances and returning in the next. This renewal also gives the new president an enormous boost within his own coalition: it is he who holds the tickets to the feast at the beginning of the term, so regime members are forced to align themselves with him and his project.

Just as the succession is the time of greatest possibilities, it is also the moment of greatest danger for the regime. First, internal splits over who will hold the Presidency have in the past grown into full-scale ruptures in which one or two of the Party’s losers in the presidential nomination race leave the coalition to challenge it electorally. Second, there is always the chance the opposition can win, even in elections whose rules are weighted to favor the dominant party (and these victories are more possible in the case of an internal split and exit). Therefore, when making his choice, the president must choose a candidate who will cause the fewest splits in the coalition and be at least passively accepted by the voters.

In the period from 1957 to 1985, the internal political groups of the regime were limited in their attempts to gain the Presidential chair for their leader. The role of the groups in the succession period (as will be discussed in greater detail below) depended in part on the strength of the outgoing president: if he was in control, their activities were limited (as was the case with Echeverría); if he was weak, their attacks and alliances flourished (the case of De la Madrid), although in both cases, the strategies were similar, but only carried out to greater or lesser degrees.

The Rules of the Game from the Mid 1950s to 1993

The rules which governed the presidential succession in Mexico for many years were a form of map which the pre-candidates and the sitting president followed. The formal and informal institutions evolved after Calles brought the quarrelling regional factions under one party in 1929 were given a push by Cárdenas’s strengthening of presidential control over the Party and solidified by the regime’s response to the internal conflicts over the succession from 1929 to 1952. The rules placed limits on the actors’ behavior and strategies by dictating how far their internal proselytizing could go, by lowering the number of possible pre-candidates, and by controlling the losers’ actions after the

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7 It is important to note that during this period the groups and their members were also very active after the destape in their attempts to gain good positions within the new PRI candidate’s closest circle of people (his equipo) or, if they had bet on an opposing pre-candidate, their attempts to not be completely excluded from the next sexenio. In this paper, because of time and space constraints, we will not be able to touch on this topic.
8 As is apparent, this paper was written before the presidential elections in August 1994 and makes certain assumptions about the changing political scene which may simply turn out not to be the case.
destape. Actors knew the possible range of outcomes, and knew what would happen to those who did not accept their defeat. The rules regulated the conflicts among the participants by channeling them into acceptable bounds that everyone understood. In short, the institutions which grew up around the transfer of power from one regime leader to another lent certainty to a difficult process upon which the participants' careers depended. It became in the interests of all involved to play by these guidelines because 1) they were known and understood; 2) because the winner was not he who held the greatest use of force; 3) the uncertainties of returning to a factionalized system of the Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary times were too great, and 4) most participants, even if they lost out in the PRI's strange nomination race, gained more from staying within the coalition than they would from rupturing it.

The Formal Rules

The president of Mexico is elected for one six-year term and can never be reelected. There is no vice-president in the Mexican system. The presidential candidate who wins a majority of votes at the national level in a direct vote takes office. The incoming Congress votes on the legality of the national presidential vote, which enables the winner to become president in December of the election year. To be eligible to be a presidential candidate, the nominee must be (this will hold true until the elections of 2000) the child of parents born in Mexico and cannot have held public office, either as a Cabinet Secretary, under-Secretary or director general of a Secretary, during the six months leading up to election day.9

These rules are costly to alter (obviously, some, such as the no reelection clause, are more costly than others) as was seen in 1993 when the President negotiated a change in the 82nd article of the Constitution which states that only children of parents born in Mexico can be eligible to run for president. The Senate, which is heavily controlled by the PRI, voted for the constitutional change, but only after the Senate PRI leadership forced other PRI members to vote for the measure. During the debate over the Constitutional change, many PRI senators began to grumble that maybe Salinas wanted to change the 83rd Article as well—which states that the President cannot be reelected.10

9The first measure was taken at the Constitutional Convention in 1917 as a nationalistic measure to protect against foreign influence in Mexican affairs. The second rule was established as a way of stemming the flow of regime members from rupturing the coalition if they did not win the nomination. The limit was raised from 3 to 6 months during the sexenio of Ruiz Cortines as a reaction against the Henríquez split of 1952.

10The clause—which had affected such prominent politicians as ex-Secretary of Gobernación Jesús Reyes Heroles, ex-President of the PRI and Regente of Mexico City and current Secretary of Agriculture Carlos Hank González, as well as the current Secretary of Commerce Jaime Serra Puche—had strange effects on those politicians whose parents were not born in Mexico. Because they could not become president of Mexico, they threatened the sitting president and the contending pre-candidates far less than
The candidate that gains the highest percentage of votes becomes president. There is no second round run-off in a multi-party system with three strong parties, and five smaller parties which until 1993 needed 1.5% of the vote to retain their registration. The vote is monitored by a semi-autonomous tribunal, which is headed by the Secretary of the Interior (Gobernación) and run by a regime member who is also a director general of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), which is under Gobernación's auspices.

The PRI has a complete set of formal guidelines which regulate how the presidential candidate should be nominated. The outward forms of these rules are respected, while the true decision is made and the internal battles over that decision take place outside the purview of these nomination procedures. The PRI does not hold national primaries to determine which PRI candidate registered voters prefer. The official nomination takes place at the end of the fifth year of the sexenio.

The Party body responsible for outwardly choosing the next president of Mexico is the National Political Council, which is made up of 200 distinguished members of the PRI, as well as members of the National Executive Committee (CEN), which is the governing body of the Party. Once he is chosen by the National Political Council, the now-official candidate begins his campaign the following January — the last year of his predecessor's term.

Informal Rules in the pre-1994 Succession

The most important rules of the succession process in Mexico are that the president chooses the priísta that will follow him and that no one questions his right to make this decision, be it alone or in consultation with powerful members of the ruling coalition. During the ruptures and exits of 1940, 1952 and 1988, all three of the ex-priísta challengers openly questioned the sitting president’s right to single-handedly decide and then proposed that the PRI initiate democratic nomination procedures to choose the next president. Between 1953 and 1986, however, no member of the regime openly challenged the president’s prerogative to choose his successor. Interestingly,
despite the problems of the 1986-1988 succession, during the first part of the Salinas succession very few criticized his right to decide the fates of the pre-candidates. This changed after the murder of the PRI candidate in March 1994 (which took place after the first destape of November 1993 and the start of the Chiapas uprising of January 1994). Then, internal battles over who would replace Colosio came out into the public eye and public calls for internal democratic nominating procedures were heard.

The unquestioned right of the current Chief Executive to choose his successor is not simply a tradition handed down to Mexico from Revolutionary days—it plays a crucial role in how alliances and loyalty work to maintain the system intact during the transition of power from one regime leader to another. First, because the president chooses his successor from within the high posts of the executive bureaucracy, these actors must stay disciplined to the first executive until the destape. Because the president cannot be reelected, the end-point (or in game-theoretic terms, the last play of the game) of his term is easily measured. If he were not the one to make the final choice, the other actors who are presently subordinates would stop obeying his dictates or cooperating with him and each other sooner, as they would have to concentrate on whatever governmental body did in fact make the decision. Because the president determines the fates of all the pre-candidates, they must be far more disciplined to his orders.

The second rule which governs the behavior of the actors in the succession process, especially that part which leads up to the uncovering of the official PRI candidate, prohibits pre-candidates from openly campaigning within the regime for support. Those vying for the nomination cannot publicly state their ambitions, propose platforms, or form support groups within the regime. This informal rule began in the 1940s and became stronger throughout the 1950s as presidents grew weary of internal Party challenges over the succession and started to dictate how pre-candidates could campaign, or not, as the case may be.

In fact, proposals are forwarded, promises made, and attacks launched by pre-candidates on the route to the president’s nomination of his successor, but these internal quests for support are muted to the point of silence, at least for those outside the top-reaches of the governing coalition. The interesting question is, why stop the overt campaigning within the regime’s limits, and allow underhanded promises, alliances and attacks to be made? A partial answer is that the sitting president cannot stop all forms of internal coalition building and campaigning, but if they are discreet, then one candidate does not become more powerful than another outside the coalition, and the president can still maintain control over his choice. Second, if the information concerning the activity of the political groups is difficult to obtain, then the president is in the

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14Manuel Camacho Solís, a leading pre-candidate, only admitted that he wanted to become president of Mexico after he had lost out to Colosio. Fernando Ortiz Arana, who competed against Ernesto Zedillo to replace Colosio, never openly stated he wanted to become the official candidate of the PRI. In fact, as President of the CEN of the PRI, he sent out a decree prohibiting any form of support from within the Party for any possible candidate.
best position to hold more information than any other major actor within the small and closed elite, as he has better access to the information that Gobernación has accrued on the internal workings of the political class.

The third rule in the succession process is that the president allows a certain amount of dirty political maneuvering (golpes bajos) among the contending pre-candidates, but not to such an extent as to threaten the overall image of his presidency or his ability to control his subordinates. Strong presidents will be able to limit the amount of golpes bajos, while weak ones will have difficulty stopping them. The attacks that are launched between one posible (pre-candidate) and another will be discussed below in the section on strategies.

Just as the president in power allows the posibles to attack each other within certain fungible limits, he also gives them budgetary and political “space” to form alliances with other groups and individuals within the coalition and outside it as well. State resources are an important currency in the succession race, as Secretaries who control them are able to deliver public works, contracts, and projects to governors, sectoral leaders, senators, and other groups which allow the pre-candidate to build a coalition of groups and tendencies within the PRI/regime which can influence how the president chooses his successor. Some secretaries obviously have more access to public monies than others, and those in charge of spending Secretaries, such as SPP and Sedesol (Social Development), have had success in the past four sexenios.15

Another rule, which was in force until the Salinas transition (during the first succession process of Salinas, when the other rules seen above still applied), was that the president let the posibles burn themselves politically during the pre-destate race as a way of winnowing out the prospective candidates without the president having to appear arbitrary in his final choice. In other words, if a pre-candidate removed himself through his own mistakes,17 the president could argue that he had consulted with the political class in his decision, and thus make it a more open choice. Furthermore, it would be more difficult for a pre-candidate to argue that the choice was unfair if he himself had ruined his chances by making mistakes that became public. This too protects the sitting president, as few groups would support the internal pseudo-campaign of a burnt (quemado) politician. Of course, this also gives enormous incentives

15 Directly before being named the PRI’s presidential candidate by Luis Echeverría, López Portillo was head of the Secretary of Finance before the financial and spending sides of the Secretary were separated. De la Madrid was Secretary of Planning and Budget (SPP) when the SPP controlled the flow of state resources to the states and federal entities. Salinas was also head of the SPP. Colosio was Secretary of Social Development (Sedesol), which housed the Pronasol money. The SPP (which had controlled the Pronasol resources) was dissolved by Salinas in early 1992 and many of its resources and responsibilities were devolved to Sedesol.

16 Interview, academic specializing in the Mexican political elite, March 1994.

17 For example, Moya Palencia, during the succession race of 1975, made the mistake of allowing his wife to semi-publicly state that her husband would win the Presidency. Fernando Casas Alemán (1951) began to print up posters that carried the words Casas Alemán, PRI candidate for president. Pedro Aspe, during this current succession race, declared unemployment in Mexico a myth.
to other posibles to feed information to the press and directly to the president that burns their rivals.

One of the most important rules of the succession process is that after the PRI candidate for president has been chosen, all members of the political class, especially his defeated rivals, must publicly show their support for the next president of Mexico. Furthermore, the attacks must stop, and it is in the interests of even the losers to desist, as their future careers now depend on their recent rival.

The charge to publicly support the new PRI nominee is known as la cargada, and can be as amusing as it is important. All bureaucrats and members of the Party go to express their congratulations and support, either in person or in front of the PRI headquarters. All state that the President has made the best choice possible (and the obvious one) and reiterate that the Party has the best candidate possible. The importance of la cargada stems from the ruptures, both armed and electoral, of the early history of the PRI. Since these splits revolved around the defeat of a secondary contender for the presidential nomination and his subsequent exit from the ruling coalition, the wave of homage and support serves to remind the political class that no second-guessing the sitting president’s choice is permitted. A corollary to this rule is that once the president has chosen his successor, he cannot reverse his decision in the period between the destape and the elections approximately nine months later, no matter how quickly or drastically the PRI candidate distances himself from the sitting chief executive or how inept the nominee turns out to be.\(^\text{18}\)

The final important rule of the Mexican succession process concerns the fate of the losers in the PRI/regime’s internal nomination race. The general rule is—with the exception of gross mistakes or acts of disloyalty—those who are not chosen, but have competed, will be taken care of and, in certain cases, so will their people. The following is a list of the losing pre-candidates in the succession battles of the previous four sexenios and their professional fates (see table 1).

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**The Goals of the Various Participants in the Succession Under the Rule Structure of 1952-1993**

In discussing the goals of the various relevant actors in the succession game, it is important to note the variance in the ends these people and groups are working toward. First, the sitting president has an entirely different outlook and preference ordering than the pre-candidates who are vying to replace him. Second, one must specify whether

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\(^{18}\) In one example, after Díaz Ordaz nominated Echeverría to replace him, the new PRI candidate began to openly criticize Díaz Ordaz and his policies. Apparently, Díaz Ordaz woke up every morning during the sexenio of his successor and said, "It's your fault, you idiot, for choosing him." *Mito de la sucesión*, p. 225. In a more serious example, after the Chiapas uprising began in January 1994, many began to question the official nominee's ability to govern effectively, and rumors raced around Mexico City stating that Salinas would replace Colosio with Camacho Solís.
Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Losing Pre-Candidate and Position</th>
<th>Future Positions</th>
<th>Timeout</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>Martínez Manautou Secretary Presidencia</td>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td>Muñoz Ledo Secretary of Labor</td>
<td>Secretary of Education</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Moya Palencia Secretary of Gobernación</td>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Augusto Gómez Villanueva Agricultural Affairs</td>
<td>Head of Cámara de Diputados</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hugo Cervantes del Río Presidencia</td>
<td>Head of CFE</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1982</td>
<td>Ojeda Paullada Secretary of Labor</td>
<td>Secretary of Fisheries PRI</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>De la Vega Domínguez Commerce</td>
<td>Head of PRI</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>García Paniagua Head of PRI</td>
<td>National Lottery</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Del Mazo Secretary of Patrimony</td>
<td>nothing until 1994</td>
<td>6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Silva H.og Secretary of Treasury</td>
<td>Ambassador</td>
<td>4 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bartlett Díaz Secretary of Gobernación</td>
<td>Secretary of Education</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

one is referring to a leader (usually a pre-candidate, or a boss of an important political group within the regime) of a camarilla or a member of that group, for their interests can converge and separate at different steps of the succession process. Third (as we have already discussed in Three Exits), the rules which helped limit the behavior of the rival regime groups have changed over time. What the camarillas were able to do in 1940, they could not do in 1976; but in 1994, they have alternatives which did not exist in either of the previous periods. In this first section, we are concentrating on the stable

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19 Year of succession.
20 Position during succession.
21 Length of time without public position. This is usually a good indication of how badly the losing candidate was burnt in his attempt to win the presidential nod.
22 The Federal Electricity Commission.
23 Now he is the Commissioner for the Citizens' Mobilization Committee.
set of rules which held sway over the succession from approximately the mid-fifties to 1993.\textsuperscript{24}

We discuss the preference ordering, or set of goals, because we believe these "ends", in conjunction with the set of rules under which the actors labor, help determine behavior, "sub-outcomes" and final outcomes. A "sub-outcome" would be the president's nomination decision, while the final outcome is the transfer of power from one PRI president to another. Under the rule structure from 1952-1993 (with the exception of the 1988 elections), there was no doubt of the final outcome, only in the sub-outcomes: who would the sitting president choose? In examining what the individuals and groups are trying to achieve and how these ends differ, we are able to better identify what resources they can and will use, what strategies they will employ knowing the goals of the other participants, and how they are able to form intra-regime alliances to better their chances of advancing their positions. In other words, we can reason out a typical succession game, in which stylized actors aiming to achieve different goals interact.

These preference orderings are not arbitrarily given by the author. Rather, based on interviews, readings, autobiographies of principal participants, and past actions, the goals have been surmised.\textsuperscript{25} Obviously, the goals of the actors are in part determined by the set of institutions in which they are imbedded. One cannot (nor would it be interesting to) simply state preference orderings without acknowledging the changing circumstances under which they are pursued. The goals for which the participants struggle are shaped by rules which themselves change based on the activity of the actors. Thus, as rules change, so do preferences.\textsuperscript{26}

\textit{The Goals of the President}

Before discussing the goals of the president in the succession, we must examine why should the sitting president care who replaces him, if he is now effectively taken out of the future political game by virtue of his position as ex-president. First, the president needs to choose a successor of confianza who will protect the former president’s

\textsuperscript{24} The exception during this period is the 1986-1988 rupture of the Corriente Democrática. These rules also held for almost the entire succession of Salinas. It was not until the Chiapas uprising struck that the transfer of power was affected and the breakdown of the rules governing the transition began.

\textsuperscript{25} In recurring to so many sources to determine what the various actors are trying to achieve, and not just relying on past actions, we are trying to avoid judging preferences based only on revealed action. This is a serious problem with the choice theoretic approach: one divines the preference orders of the actors by looking solely at their actions. By looking at other sources, we believe this problem has at least been alleviated.

\textsuperscript{26} For example, before the tightening of rules to control internal regime ruptures, contending pre-candidates for the presidential nomination of the predominant party held preference orderings which placed winning the Presidential Chair above all other considerations. Once the institutions were set in place from the mid-fifties on, the goals of the competing actors changed. They still fought to win the nomination, but losing that, were no longer willing to press on in the form of a rupture.
finances and those of his family. Secondly, if the outgoing Chief Executive has been involved in a serious reform project, such as De la Madrid and Salinas were, then there is an incentive to place a person who shares membership in the close-knit group of collaborators, who will be more likely to follow the general outlines of the reform plan. (Because no outgoing president can be sure of the future actions of his successor — there is absolutely no way for an *ex-ante* contract to be written and enforced that allows the former to direct the actions of the latter come the exchange of the Presidential Sash.) Thirdly, the outgoing president wants to be able to place his closest collaborators in the high ranks of government in the upcoming sexenio, if only to continue his influence a small while after his term ends. Finally, the leader of Mexico does not want to place a future president who is incapable of governing the country.

An Explanation of the Preferences of the President

The president has two central goals: one, to place his most preferred candidate and two, to choose a candidate who lowers the possibility of splits in the political class. Within the rubric of "most preferred candidate", there are two categories to be considered: one, who is closest to him in terms of personal friendship or *equipo* membership and two, who is more likely to continue the economic or political project that interests him. A candidate who has not made too many enemies, or is unobjectionable to a majority within the coalition, and/or who holds no radical views on the direction of the national economy can be considered a coalition candidate. We suppose that the president's first preference is to place his "favorite", which overrides the need to place a coalition candidate. We shall see in Table 1 that this has not always been the case.

Why is one candidate more desirable in the eyes of the sitting Executive than another? When the possible rupture of the political class was not of great concern, two variables dominated (this before 1988): first, that the pre-candidate be of complete confidence (*confianza*) in that he would not betray the sitting executive after taking his place. Since there is no contract that can be legally enforced once the new president has taken office, other methods must be used. The assurance that the agent will not renig on the pre-investiture agreement can stem from life-long friendship and the knowledge that, in six years, the soon-to-be-president will be an ex-president and equally vulnerable to his successor.

The second reason why a certain pre-candidate would be more preferred than another is his willingness to continue the economic or political project of his antecessor.

27 For more information on protecting the president after the end of his term, see *Reforma* June 28, 1994. Also, interview with a political columnist, February 1992.

28 Lázaro Cárdenas is an interesting exception to this general rule: he was the last president before de la Madrid to offer a dramatically different development program, yet he did not place "his" presidential candidate, General Múgica, who would have continued or deepened his reforms. Instead Cárdenas placed an economic moderate, Ávila Camacho, in the Presidential Chair.
Again, we see the serious problem of implicit contracts written for future contingencies which are next to impossible for the now all-powerful boss to enforce. The central problem here is that the president must trust his agent to act properly in following the general guidelines of his (the sitting president’s) administration. The pre-candidate must convince the sitting president that he will not drastically change the present project. This often leads the posibles to hide their true preferences concerning their future projects.29

How do these two concerns combine? If the president does not have an important project whose survival he wants to assure, then perhaps he will choose a successor who is closer to him personally in terms of confianza. If the future of the sitting president’s project is paramount, then he perhaps will accept a higher level of personal risk and choose a pre-candidate who will lead the project into fruition. The best option for the hopeful nominee, of course, is to combine both personal friendship or equipo membership and an outward appearance of complete loyalty to the project, if there is one that concerns the president.

Yet ever since Lázaro Cárdenas had to decide between his left-leaning reformist friend General Múgica (who would have deepened the socialist reforms in agriculture and education) and a more centrist candidate, regime presidents have had to maintain a balance between their preferences in terms of friend/reformer versus a nominee who would not split the political coalition. In all presidential successions, the power of the president’s immediate group, the project of the sexenio, and the stability of the coalition matter. The question is when and why the president chooses one type of candidate over the other.

Table 2 is an impressionistic illustration of how the Mexican presidents have chosen since 1940: between a friend/collleague or a candidate who will insure the stability of the political regime.

As is apparent, the health of the political coalition mattered more from 1940 to approximately 1970. This finding is consistent with Newell and Rubio (1984) and Centeno’s (1990) work on changes within the elite. Both sets of authors find that Echeverría eradicated an entire set of politically powerful actors when he took over from Díaz Ordaz. The presidents following Echeverría all chose either a group member or a confirmed reformer to succeed them. We would add that the strength of the internal rules governing the regime’s political groups and their possible alternatives made it easier and less dangerous for consecutive presidents to disregard the political coalition. However, this was not a real problem until the De la Madrid/Salinas succession.

De la Madrid’s exclusion of a good part of the political class from positions of importance in his administration (see Rogelio Hernández, 1993, for more on this) and his choice of successor once again brought the discontent of wide segments of the regime’s members into focus. In the last three successions (De la Madrid’s and both of

29In the case of Echeverría, he knew López Portillo would not continue to attack the large capitalistic class, but he also thought his successor would not drastically change the role of the State in the economy, which he did not.
Salinas's), the reaction of the coalition has become a problem in choosing the next president — either because of a rupture, or because of the threat of a possible rupture (which caused Salinas, when choosing for the first time, to prepare Colosio in a number of more political positions, so he would not be rejected by the políticos within the regime).

Strategies of the President

What can the president do to choose the candidate closest to his ideal point, both in terms of continuance of influence or his central project, while at the same time maintaining the unity of the political class (which becomes more or less important for their vote-getting ability depending on how seriously the PRI is challenged by the opposition parties at election time).

Assuming first that the Chief Executive judges there to be a weak electoral challenge, he is then free to choose a candidate who is close to his perfect choice. If the president does not have to concern himself about a candidate who will win at the polls, then his concern for the health of the political class lessens as he does not have to worry overmuch about winning votes. However, the coalition splits could still matter if a rupture and electoral challenge could act as a sort of political entrepreneur to take advantage of latent societal discontent as was the case in 1988. The best option would

30 There is no clear way to measure whether the sitting president has chosen a close colleague or someone to hold the political class together. These judgments were based on readings and interviews and only can give a rough idea of what kind of candidate was chosen.

31 The president can be mistaken in his judgment. Here, however, it is only his perception of the electoral state of nature that matters.
obviously be to field a pre-candidate who is a combination of the two, but if that is not
possible, then to choose one that is as close to his personal ideal point while not being
completely unacceptable to the governing coalition.\(^{32}\)

In order to place his most preferred candidate, the sitting president must control
the process of the succession, which depends on several factors: the timing of the
decision; the flow of information concerning the behavior of the political groups within
the regime; external pressures, such as an IMF stabilization plan or US Congressional
approval of the NAFTA; the quantity and quality of the political attacks delivered by the
rivals; the ability of the contenders to grow politically and ally themselves to political
groups and other pre-candidates in the race. We will consider each factor individually,
and then examine how the current president can best maximize his preferences in
choosing his succession given the constraints on his field of choice.

The best way the president can gain his ends is to place a certain number of
pre-candidates in positions from which they can contend for the highest political
position in the nation. At the same time, he must be able, without too much dissonance,
to rid the board of any powerful figures that he does not want to figure in the game.
Having done this, he can either protect his most preferred player, or allow each to prove
himself on the battlefield to see who survives best and only then choose this candidate.

All presidents —except perhaps De la Madrid, who stepped down amid a deep
economic and political crisis— have the incentive to delay their decision as long as
possible, because once they have specified their successor, their ability to influence
events declines drastically as new loyalties spring up around the figure of the PRI’s
nominee. But several types of pressure build up during the fifth year of the sexenio
which push the Chief Executive to name his choice. Most of these pressures center
around the uncertainty caused by not knowing who will be the next leader of Mexico,
which makes both economic and political decisions in and outside the government
difficult. So although the current president may want to extend his power until the last
possible month, it becomes more difficult to do so, especially after the State of the
Nation Report on November 1st.

The president must also be able to place posibles in institutional positions from
which they can contend for the Presidential Chair by at least the end of the fourth year.
Pre-candidates must come from Cabinet-level positions (which because of the predomi-
nant party structure of government also includes the head of the CEN of the PRI), so the
president has to place those he wants to be in the race in important Cabinet-level
positions with enough time to gain allies and national recognition. Conversely, if the
president sees a strong Cabinet Secretary gaining political force whom he does not wish
to become a posible, then he must get rid of him quickly because it will be more difficult
to fire him at a later date, as he would probably have garnered more allies.\(^{33}\) Conversely,

\(^{32}\) One must also take into account here the discount rate of the future for an outgoing president. He
may be more interested in continuing his project, for personal reputational reasons, than in the health of
the coalition. The first brings greater benefits in terms of personal gratification than the second.

\(^{33}\) Many believe this was the case of Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, who was becoming more popular
the president can place a weak politician in a strong institutional base, as was the case of Olivares Santana, also Secretary of Gobernación, during the second half of López Portillo’s sexenio.

The president must see that no one candidate becomes too powerful, or makes too many alliances which would make it difficult not to choose him. This is a problem of controlling the alliances and attacks among the rivals. To do this, the president must have access to an enormous amount of information concerning who is doing what to whom and for whom within the political class and especially among the pre-candidates. Because the president has a direct channel to the Secretary of Gobernación, he is able to gather this specific knowledge of the activities of the members of the political class at a relatively low cost. The pre-candidates know they are under surveillance, so they plan their strategies accordingly; that is, they take into consideration how the president will view their actions.

As stated above, the president allows the rivals to attack each other because, firstly, it would be difficult to stop this strategy completely, and secondly, the attacks in effect weed out some candidates who appear strong, but in fact cannot handle the intense pressure of the succession process. If the hidden favorite (the tapado) is the target of the golpes bajos, then the Chief Executive can either protect him by defending him publicly, or change his mind and not choose him. The attacks launched by the pre-candidates cannot go beyond a certain point, however, as that would bring the entire government and the sexenio into question, weaken the programs already initiated or perhaps weaken the president’s first choice.

Alliances can be dangerous for the president’s ability to choose his most preferred candidate but, in reality, agreements between the candidates are difficult to sustain. The accords among pre-candidates usually tend to be defensive in that there is a tactic non-aggression pact, rather than offensive, in that the two parties agree to both attack the third candidate, or agree to work so that one candidate wins with the president’s support (in return for a top-level position for the “loser” and posts for members of his equipo).

If the president does calculate that the political class is ripe for rebellion, then he can literally prepare a candidate by placing him in positions where he will be able to

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34 An interview with a director general of Gobernación was extremely helpful in this respect. The interviewee explained that the Secretary of Gobernación was the filter of information for the president in that it was part of the Secretary’s responsibilities to know the activities of the political groups and their members, especially during the succession process. The position of Secretary of “Information” gave the Gobernación’s chief enormous influence with the president, because as the Director General explained, the Secretary knew whom the president was interested in, as well as the specific details of the activities. When the Secretary is also a leading pre-candidate, he has an advantage over the other contenders because of his information base, which can easily be used to attack the other rivals. Perhaps because of the power of information, the Secretary of Gobernación has been a top contender in the last eight successions, with the exception of Olivares Santana in 1982.

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As we shall see, in each of these decision points of the president, the competing pre-candidates:

1) did not know beforehand how the president would select
2) did not know if the president had already made a decision
3) and did not know afterward if the president had chosen or not, or how he has chosen. In other words, there were extremely high information gathering costs.

We will examine how, under such uncertainty, and under the rules of the game, the rivals reacted to these presidential decisions within the course of the presidential succession.

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* This is not logically a dichotomous decision on the president's part. He can, as Salinas did, groom a candidate who was at least passively acceptable to a large part of both the political sector as well as the economic bureaucracy. Colosio has been the exception, however, and we will treat this as a choice between two different kinds of candidates. This was clear in the Zedillo candidacy: the Party bureaucracy and more political groups fought against Salinas's favorite, because he had no experience in any area except the financial sector of the government, except when he was Secretary of Public Education, where he is considered to have done a bad job.

make contacts and connections throughout the political regime, as well as disperse State resources toward that end. In this way, there is no conflict between the president's favored candidate and the preferences of a large part of the political class. This appears to be the example of Salinas's careful planning of the latter part of Colosio's career. Colosio was a good candidate for the presidency because he had experience in all aspects of the regime, not simply in the financial sector as had De la Madrid and Salinas himself, with disastrous results for the unity of the political class. By choosing Colosio, Salinas was able to eradicate the tension that had existed for at least two sexenios between the posible who was closest to the sitting president in terms of the economic project, and the pre-candidate who would not split the unity of the regime.

To clarify the ideas we have presented, Table 3 offers a sequential series of presidential decision points during the succession process. We see the outlines of the presi-

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Colosio moved (or was moved) from a Director General (working under his future rival Camacho Solís) in the Secretary of Planning, to Congressman in charge of the Congressional Treasury Commission, to Coordinator of Salinas's 1988 presidential campaign, to leader of the PRI, to Secretary of Social Development (Sedesol), and finally, to official presidential nominee of the predominant party.
dential game, assuming weak electoral possibilities of the opposition and little chance of a regime split. The choices are labelled in superscript 1, 2, 3, and 4; these are decision points, where the president sets out the states of nature. In the section below, which covers the pre-candidates’ game, we will fill in this table with the corresponding choices and dilemmas of the posibles in reaction to the choices of the president we see here.

**Goals of the Pre-Candidates**

The principal goals of the competing pre-candidates are somewhat contradictory. The first preference is to win the PRI’s presidential nomination. For the stronger candidates, the second best option in case of losing the nomination is to stay in the political game—that is, to not burn oneself in the process of fighting for the sitting president’s approval. This causes a dilemma at times: some strategies to win the presidential nomination create enemies among the rivals, so they should be avoided since one could very possibly ruin any possible relation with the winner of the prize. But at the same time, attacks are a central strategy for burning other hopefuls, and therefore useful.

**Strategies of the Pre-Candidates**

The two fundamental strategies the pre-candidates can use in trying to win the president’s favor in the succession are to attack their opponents or to ally with them, either defensively or offensively. Attacks can take various forms, from blocking policy initiatives, to accusations of corruption, to highlighting failures to carry out official responsibilities, to exaggerating miscomments, to harassing rivals’ supporters, to blocking nominations to party and elected posts of members of other groups. Many of these golpes bajos never come to light as they are carried out within the depths of the executive bureaucracy and the PRI, but in other instances, the national press plays a crucial role in keeping the politically interested public and political class aware of who has made mistakes, as well as who is attacking whom, and how.

The limits of how far the attacks can go are diffuse, unwritten, and vary with every president. The president usually knows who is behind the attacks and so can indirectly

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36 Various contenders for the throne do not enjoy equal chances for winning it: there are strong pre-candidates and “fillers”. The also-rans know that their chances of winning the Presidency are minimal, so they prefer to play the game loyally, and in doing so, be rewarded by the incoming president. Gen. Corona del Rosal made an interesting observation when Camacho Solís was behaving badly because of his loss to Colosio in the destape of November 1994. Corona del Rosal noted that when he was a pre-candidate for the presidential nomination during Díaz Ordaz’s transfer of power to Echeverría, he played knowing he would lose, and so he made no enemies during the succession race. Ramón Aguirre was a similar figure in the succession race of De la Madrid. He did not compete thinking he would win, but rather as a loyal friend to de la Madrid. He was rewarded with the governorship of Guanajuato, which he then lost.
let it be known that he wishes them terminated. We have already discussed why the
president would wish to limit the level of bellicosity among his possible successors. At
times, however, it is not clear to the general political class who is attacking whom. The
greater the level of uncertainty, the better it is for both the president and pre-candidates:
the president because he does not wish to tip his hand, and the rivals because if
animosity is openly admitted at least within the national press, then it will be more
difficult to make an alliance in the following sexenio. The attacks generally do not have
ideological content unless it is used in a direct policy manner, or as a resource to win
points with other members of the Cabinet or alliances within the PRI or with national
capital.

Alliances can be made among two sets of actors: with other pre-candidates or with
groups within the governing coalition. Those among groups active in the succession
and a pre-candidate are common. They involve governors, state-level caciques, sectoral
leaders, elected officials, PRI leaders at the state and national level, as well as Cabinet
members who are not in the nomination race. Alliances among rival posibles are
important for blocking third pre-candidates and for lowering the possibilities of splits
come the next term.

El Financiero, a daily newspaper based in México City, published a political
report at the beginning of the fourth year of the Salinas administration which outlined
the alliances among the most powerful members of the elite made during the first three
years of the sexenio. The list shows, first, how horizontal alliances can change over
time or, second, how unreliable political reports are when the papers themselves have
some sort of political role, in which they use their reports to push one possible
pre-candidate over another.

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<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>José Córdoba</td>
<td>Pedro Aspe</td>
<td>Camacho Solís</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P. Chirinos</td>
<td>Hank González</td>
<td>C. Rojas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Caso Lombardo</td>
<td>Colosio</td>
<td>E. Lozoya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Serra Puche</td>
<td>Gutiérrez Barrios</td>
<td>V. Cervera P.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Palacios</td>
<td>I. Pichardo</td>
<td>F. Solana</td>
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A year and a half later, the groupings were very different:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colosio/Córdoba</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Zedillo</td>
<td>V. Cervera P.</td>
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<tr>
<td>E. Lozoya</td>
<td>F. Solana</td>
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<td>C. Rojas</td>
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<td>P. Aspe</td>
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The above lists are Cabinet members tied to each pre-candidate. The next list is
of a more vertical nature: those subordinates who are tied to specific pre-candidates. This list can be seen as the political networks of the various rivals, which extend from the ministerial bases of each candidate to other ministries.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Colosio/Córdoba</th>
<th>Pedro Aspe</th>
<th>Camacho Solís</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Congress</strong></td>
<td>Ángel Aceves Saucedo</td>
<td>Congress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sen. Eduardo Robledo</td>
<td>Alfredo Baranda</td>
<td>Sen. Carlos Sales</td>
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<td>Con. Abraham Talavera</td>
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<td>Con. R. Echeverría</td>
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<td>Con. Miguel A. Yunes</td>
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<td>Pedro Ojeda</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Governors</strong></td>
<td>Angel Aceves Saucedo</td>
<td>Javier Garduño</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Salomón, Campeche</td>
<td></td>
<td>DDF</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dulce María Sauri, Yucatán</td>
<td></td>
<td>Marcelo Ebrard</td>
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<tr>
<td>M. Gurría Ordúñez, Tabasco</td>
<td></td>
<td>Juan Henríquez</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eduardo Villaseñor, Michoacán</td>
<td></td>
<td>Diego Valadez</td>
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<tr>
<td>P. Chirinos, Veracruz</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tulio Hernández</td>
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<tr>
<td>Diódoro Carrasco, Oaxaca</td>
<td></td>
<td>Guillermo Orozco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Silerio, Durango</td>
<td></td>
<td>Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sedesol</strong></td>
<td>Rafael Reséndiz</td>
<td>Luis Martínez</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rafael Reséndiz</td>
<td>Carlos Rojas</td>
<td>Ignacio Morales</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alfredo Philips Olmedo</td>
<td></td>
<td>F. Ruiz Massieu</td>
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<td>Óscar Navarro</td>
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Silvia Hernández (Popular Sector Leader)

The other factor which influences a pre-candidate’s chances of being nominated is his closeness to the president — i.e., membership in his equipo or a strong personal relationship. This factor can be considered a prior state of nature to the succession ordeal: either one has always been a member of the president’s closest circle of advisors or one hasn’t. A contender can make every attempt to work closely with the Chief Executive and gain his trust, but confianza is usually only gained through time. In any case, abject loyalty and discipline to the president’s dictates are practiced by every presidential hopeful in about equal measure, so this is taken as a given and will not be considered a strategy, except in special cases.

The best strategy for the posibles is to attack the least in route to being chosen by the president to succeed him. This makes it easier to govern once in office. The worst strategy is to attack the eventual winner. But since one cannot know who will gain the Presidency, one can only hope one isn’t attacking the eventual winner. If two pre-candidates can ally to keep a third from becoming too powerful, then there is the incentive

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37 The following list is taken from Proceso, number 826, September 30, 1992.
to do so. The ex-Mayor of Mexico City seemed to be the unlucky victim of this strategy in the latest succession. He was attacked for his inability to lower pollution during 1992, and the following year his attempt to negotiate a democratic transition for Mexico City was blocked. Some believe if his political reform of the City had been successful, his pre-candidacy would have been unstoppable.

One way of diluting the dilemma is to make an alliance with some strong contenders while attacking others, and hope that the others do not concentrate on eliminating you. By making an alliance, as well as attacking, one’s possibilities for having some connection to the winner are increased by 2/3 (the winner either being oneself or the alliance partner), while the attacks increase the possibility of eliminating at least one of the other strong candidates.

In Table 4, we fill in the complete game between the sitting president and the rival pre-candidates which shows the dilemmas of choosing between strategies during each step in the game. It is important to note that the rival contenders are in an interactive game and this game is structured by a set of prior states of nature, which are given by the sitting president’s preferences. Within each of the decision nodes, the pre-candidates have to make decisions based on how they believe the president will choose. Yet they have little information regarding the executive’s preferences, which makes their decisions much more dangerous. For example, if they attack a candidate which the president has already chosen, then they are attacking the winner, which is the worst outcome in terms of their future political prospects.

**Goals of the Members of the Pre-Candidates’ Equipos**

The central goal of a close collaborator of a strong pre-candidate is to have him win the nomination, and then work with him in some way during the campaign, on route to garnering a high(er)-level position in the next administration. The second goal is to not get burnt oneself should the pre-candidate lose. This means even close collaborators of the various *posibles* need to make some sort of accommodations with other groups, although these alliances need to be extremely discreet. If one is a member of an *equipo* of a pre-candidate, one has little choice in coming out openly for the * posible*. This lack of choice brings with it both advantages and costs: if the pre-candidate wins,

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38 See Arnaldo Cordova’s article in *Uno Más Uno*, April 21, 1993, and *El Financiero*, May 15, 1993, Informe Especial, num. 155 for more on Camacho’s reform attempts.

39 Manuel Bartlett Díaz is a good example of this phenomenon. Bartlett was a close collaborator of Moya Palencia, a strong pre-candidate who lost out to López Portillo in 1975. Bartlett, instead of losing his career when he lost his mentor, had connections to the new Secretary of Foreign Affairs, Santiago Roel. When Roel fell, Bartlett became a close advisor to his old friend, the new Secretary of Planning, de la Madrid. When the latter became president in 1982, Bartlett was made Secretary of Gobernación. From there, he launched a campaign to be de la Madrid’s successor, but lost out to Salinas.

40 As we have seen in a previous chapter, the members of the small group around the leader, his *equipo*, do not have the same freedom to make alliances as do members of his *camarilla*. 
Precandidates’s Reactions to Different States of Nature in the Succession

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Table 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presidential Decision 1</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Probability the President Wants a Reform Candidate vs. a Coalition Candidate</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

As we have seen, this is not necessarily a dichotomous choice for the president. However, in many successions, it has been. The pre-candidates must calculate the probability that the president will choose their basic category. If the contender decides from the outset that he has a good chance, then his following strategies will be to win the nomination, not just avoid being burnt in the process.

The preference hierarchy of the rival pre-candidates is as follows:

1) win the nomination,
2) lose, but not get burnt in the process,
3) lose, get burnt in the process.

| Presidential Decision 2 |
| The Probability the President will Protect his Choice or will Allow an Open Fight in the Succession Race |

If the president has already chosen his favorite early in the succession race, will he protect him? or is there a possibility that, given the battle among the pre-candidates, he will allow his mind to be changed should the favorite perform badly during the months before the destape? the contenders are in their most difficult decision node, for if they choose badly here, they could be burnt for the next years. Also, alliances among the rivals makes a large difference in this decision node. By allying in the attack strategy against the third candidate, the other two may be able to eliminate the third.

Strategies of the pre-candidates

1) Attack one pre-candidate, make an alliance with another.
2) Attack both pre-candidates, look for support among the larger political class.
3) Try to ally with both rivals.

Possible outcomes of different strategies

1) Win the nomination without having made any real enemies.
2) Win the nomination, but at the expense of creating rifts within the political class.
3) Ally with the winner (having lost the nomination oneself).
4) Attack the winner, and suffer the consequences.
Table 4

Presidential Decision 3

The Probability the President will Take the Larger Political Class’s Preferences into Account when Making the Decision, or that He Chooses without their Consideration or Negotiation

Vertical alliances are crucial in this decision point. If the candidate enjoys the support of a large assortment of groups scattered throughout the bureaucracy and Party, the president can be assured that the candidate enjoys the support of a large part of the political coalition. If the president is interested in maintaining the coalition, then this will be an important consideration; if not, the asset will make little difference. The candidates spend a large amount of resources attempting to strengthen their viability among the various groups of the coalition. Another strategy is to spend resources in a specific area of the regime, for example, the financial sector of the public bureaucracy. Also, alliances with other members of the cabinet can help the precandidates.

Presidential Decision 4

The Probability the President will Choose a Candidate with a Strong Political Network over a Candidate with a Weak One

Depends on whether the sitting president wants a strong successor or not.

the subordinate wins as well; however, if he loses, the career of the subordinate at times can end as well. There are, though, plenty of cases in which a close collaborator continues his career with another political group.

Goals of the Individuals and Groups within the Regime

For those who are not openly tied to the leading pre-candidate, the first preference is to publicly proclaim one’s allegiance to the would-be winner. But because no one knows who will be proclaimed the nominee, openly stating a predisposition for one possible rather than another is dangerous, because if he should not win, then his supporter loses out as well for having come out in support of him. But if the individual comes out for no one candidate or for all of them, then his support is conditioned, and is not worth as much after the destape, when the positions are handed out.

Those who do come out openly either have a prior connection to the pre-candidate (although they are not of his equipo), or they believe they have better possibilities under one future leader rather than another. Francisco Ruiz Massieu, when Governor of the state of Guerrero, came out in support of Salinas’s campaign in 1987-1987 to win the PRI’s nomination. Ruiz Massieu had risen to become governor with the support of another camarilla, but had contacts with Salinas’s group from their university days.
together. The present Governor of Guerrero, Rubén Figueroa, came out in the national press a few months before the destape to state that Colosio was the best candidate for Mexico. An ex-leader of the PRI and former echeverrista, Sánchez Vite, went further than Figueroa in his support of Colosio by stating that not only did Colosio understand the problems of the nation better than anyone, but that the other strong contender, Camacho Solís, would lead Mexico to ruin if he were nominated to be the Party’s candidate for president. It’s not clear what relation, if any, Sánchez Vite had with Colosio. Those individuals who are loosely tied to certain pre-candidates have to be able to switch camps if their chosen posible should lose. This is not considered terribly disloyal, but comments are made when public officials survive their relationship with a failed pre-candidate. Usually either politicians with certain scarce ability or resource are able to follow this difficult strategy: Fernando Ortiz Arana, or Pedro Aspe.

If one’s goal is to survive rather than advance, then an excellent option is to jump on la cargada (the massive wave of support for the new official nominee of the Party) after the sitting president has made his choice and not before. This brings in the worst returns in terms of high level positions, but is the safest in terms of surviving into the next sexenio. See Graph 1 for an illustrated decision tree for those individuals within the coalition who are not part of the equipo of a pre-candidate.

The pre-candidates have an incentive to add followers, but to do so, they have to offer concrete side payments whose worth is greater than the risks incurred by openly backing a pre-candidate. Future promises can also be made, but have to be heavily discounted for two reasons: one, the rival contender may not be chosen and, two, even if he is, he may renege on the promise. The value of the side payment depends on the value of the non-aligned member—the more important the possible partner, the greater the bribe to join the alliance. The non-aligned coalition member has to make a decision whether to join a certain pre-candidate’s coalition based on 1) how likely it is he will win, and 2) what kind of chances does he have of aligning with other contending rivals. In this case, there is no clear majority driven minimum winning coalition. No one votes to nominate the next PRI presidential candidate. The more groups and group leaders who are included in the winner’s circle, the better, especially during the first months in office, when the new president is consolidating his tenure. There are two limits on coalition building within the regime: one, the budget’s capacity to pay off coalition members and, two, the president’s desire and/or ability to advance a harsh, unpopular reform. (The number of public positions is finite, but highly expandable; new positions, such as advisor, can always be created.)

See Roderic Camp’s “Las camarillas en la política mexicana”, 1990, for more on Salinas’s group. See article in El Financiero, October 23, 1993, for more on Figueroa’s public statement. It is interesting to note that both Rubén Figueroa and Sánchez Vite are caciques of their respective states, Guerrero and Hidalgo. Perhaps Colosio had made some deal with these state level leaders.

One could liken the choice here to the peasants that Popkin studied. In this case, the calculation has to made not only in terms of risk-aversion to possible political death, but also the rewards to the losers, and the connections already forged with one or another of the pre-candidates.
Graph 1
Unaligned Individuals' Strategies during the Succession (Under Old Rule Structure)

- Align openly → Your candidate wins (best option)
- Align with all or with no one → Join the cargada
- Align openly → Your candidate loses (worst option)

One's incentive to risk aligning openly with a candidate depends on:
1) Opportunities with possible winner, or previous connection to him.
2) Ability to withstand the worst alternative, which is to openly back the losing candidate.
An actor is more likely to not align with any pre-candidate if:
1) He has no real connection and
2) He cannot afford to be tied to the loser.

Coalitions among Members of the Cabinet

How do non-aligned members of the Cabinet choose who they will back in the upcoming succession? There are usually three strong pre-candidates vying for the nomination. First, an individual cabinet secretary must decide to back one candidate openly or behind the scenes, and second, he must choose the candidate who he believes has the best chance of winning and the fewest chances of being burnt in the case of losing. This double consideration sometimes leads the non-aligned cabinet member to choose the pre-candidate who is not locked into a conflict with another rival. In this way, the Secretary protects himself against the worst outcome—that of being tied to a burnt loser. The same strategy also gives the Secretary space to switch his loyalties if his original choice goes down early. Because neither is not involved in an acrimonious conflict, both the Secretary and the pre-candidate he was originally tied to can move into the orbit of the pre-candidate who appears to have better chances of winning.
Conclusions

We have examined how the rules, both formal and informal, of the Mexican political system have restrained the range of alternative strategies open to contending PRI pre-candidates. We have also seen that the president, while wielding great room of maneuver, cannot choose randomly—he must balance the health of the political coalition against his wishes to place a candidate who comes from his group or shares his preferences for reform.

During the period 1953 to 1993 (with the exception of the rupture of 1986-1988), rival pre-candidates did not exit the PRI if they lost the nomination as they had in 1940, 1946 and 1952. Instead, their best hope (in terms of maximizing benefits) was to continue their careers, if at a lower level, inside the regime. The dilemmas they faced were created by a structure where information costs were made deliberately high in terms of knowing the sitting president’s choice, and where attacking the winning candidate could mean political death while allying could also mean losing the nomination if the other contenders could successfully attack you.

The rule structure in which the rivals are chosen is led by a species of Arrovian dictator—the president—who operates under a series of constraints, such as having to choose a successor from the cabinet, and one whose parents were born Mexicans. The power of the constrained dictator and the near impossibility of an opposition victory (until the elections of 1988 and 1994) gives a unique shape to the game between the chief executive and the succession hopefuls, as well as to the game among the rivals. The sitting president holds a number of preferences regarding which type of successor he will choose, and these are usually hidden from the view of the political class, making it impossible to plan alternative strategies based on perceived presidential preferences.

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