THREE EXITS FROM THE MEXICAN INSTITUTIONAL REVOLUTIONARY PARTY: INTERNAL RUPTURES AND POLITICAL STABILITY
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Introduction

The Mexican political system is famous among other Latin American political regimes for having remained stable over a period of sixty years, during which time the nation experienced rapid economic growth, profound social change, and the disappearance of the military as a primary political force. Several authors, both Mexican and American, have studied various aspects of the ability of the regime to maintain the primacy of the President as arbiter of all decision and policy making, the PRI as the dominant party and, more generally, the rules of the game as understood by all actors in and out of the official regime.¹

The prevalent vision of Mexico’s political regime is of a strongly presidential system linked to the dominant party — the PRI. The President controls both the executive bureaucracy and the Party, which gives him the reigns of economic and political policy-making. This control is underscored by the lack of independence of the legislative and judicial branches of government.

The dominant political-electoral force in Mexico, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), is officially one party among others, but in fact acts as a semi-dominant electoral machine closely linked to the executive bureaucracy. Its central function is to win elections to the almost complete exclusion of other parties. It also serves as a job-placement center which rewards party members who work on campaigns. The President of the nation is the leader of the Party, and almost all top government officials are PRI members. Until the late 1980s, the Party had not lost an electoral race for governor, senator or President, and had given up only a few municipal and mayoral races, primarily in the North to the National Action Party (PAN).²

Lázaro Cárdenas, President from 1934 to 1940, was able to integrate large numbers of Mexicans into the Party by organizing them into four sectors: workers, peasants, the middle classes, and the military (which was dissolved in 1946). By drawing large groups of Mexicans into the official organization, Cárdenas was able to strengthen his hand over other Party power-holders as well as to lay the base for future political stability.

According to Newell and Rubio, the political story of Mexico is the constant renewal of legitimacy for a broad-based, inclusive, non-democratic dominant Party

¹ Basanez (1982); Brandenburg (1964); Johnson (1971); Meyer (1977); Newell and Rubio (1984); Scott (1964); and Vernon (1963).
² In addition to a single-member district system which sends representatives to a bicameral Congress, Mexico also has a proportional representation system tacked on. In 1963, President López Mateos instituted a PR electoral reform in which a minimum of five and a maximum of 20 seats in the Chamber of Deputies were granted to any party gaining more than 5% of the overall popular vote. Opposition parties could thereby be granted congressional seats without having won an electoral race, thereby gaining their loyalty to the system, with continued PRI electoral dominance (Peter Smith, 1990).
system headed by a strong President. The system was able to maintain legitimacy by agilely coopting dissenters into its ranks, while allowing different interest groups to vie for power and share spoils. Societal groups were either captured by the PRI (often by giving in to immediate demands in exchange for future quiescence) or repressed by selective violence. As long as the economy grew and the regime’s leaders were agile enough to coopt, integrate or repress new or potential groups, the system’s legitimacy remained intact despite the fact that policy was made by a small elite. Thus, legitimacy created and nurtured the stability of the system’s institutions.

Although this overall vision of how the Mexican system works is by and large accepted, it is static and incomplete. It does not explain how and why distinct threats to the system’s institutions were possible in some eras and not in others, nor how the system over time became more adept at meeting certain challenges. A picture of how the system works can only be complete by looking at moments when its very supports were being attacked. The Mexican system has been politically stable over the past 60 years, which can largely be explained by the power of the President and the inclusive nature of the PRI’s sectors. But unless one looks at how the regime’s leaders dealt with internal challenges to their very positions, or in other words, how they dealt with the regime’s losers, one cannot fully grasp the component parts of the notion of stability: what it is, how it is maintained, whose interests are threatened, and how.

One problem which has been virtually ignored by academics has been a comparison of the “exits” from the official regime (the Party together with the executive bureaucracy at the national level). Four powerful PRI functionaries and members of the “Revolutionary Family” have challenged the entire structure of the Mexican political regime by running against the Party’s candidate in four separate presidential elections. In all cases, these challengers had been unsuccessful presidential pre-candidates for the official Party.3

The Mexican political system by and large delivers well to those who play by the rules and stay within the boundaries. Even those who make grave mistakes (que-mados) or do not win the presidential nomination are almost always reintegrated into the system at a later date. However, those who refuse to play by the rules can be intimidated, harassed, jailed, or even killed. So why and under what conditions would powerful members of the ruling coalition choose to leave the safety of the official realm to challenge it electorally from outside these limits? And as a secon-

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3 The two central figures of the 1988 exit, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, represented a part of the ruling coalition which had been displaced from the governing elite in the 1980s. In a sense, Muñoz Ledo closely resembled the 1952 challenger, Henríquez Guzmán, as both came from a once powerful faction and elite ‘type’. However, whereas Almazán and Henríquez Guzmán were both still relatively powerful members of the elite coalition, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas had never been and Muñoz Ledo had been completely marginalized.
dary question, what effects do these exits or ruptures have on the regime’s institutions over time? In other words, how do individuals effect endogenous institutional change in the Mexican system?

By understanding these ruptures, one can get a far clearer view of what stability within a one-party state means, mainly because they represent the greatest threat to that very stability. Since the end of the Mexican Revolution in 1920 until today, the sharpest challenges to the continuing dominance of the President and the PRI have come from internal splits within the regime — not external, societally driven movements. Plenty of losers in internal power struggles have left public administration, but most, such as Carlos Madrazo, returned quietly to private life, either to remain there, or to attempt a return at a later time. Very few have chosen to leave the Party to run against its candidate in presidential elections.

All four exits have come during the process (lasting one to two years) of the transfer of power from one non-reelectable President to another, otherwise known as the presidential succession, while the leading actors in the drama have been unsuccessful pre-candidates for the official Party’s presidential nomination. During this period, many in government, especially at the national level, form groups whose central goal is to place one pre-candidate (or posible) on the Presidential Chair in the next six-year term (sexenio). While political power and influence are slowly slipping from the hands of the sitting executive and the posibles are maneuvering to be chosen, the dangers to the regime’s continuance are at their greatest. Once a new executive has been chosen by the outgoing President, then everyone within the official regime stands firmly behind him because it is the executive who hands out positions and almost single-handedly chooses his successor. The Presidency is the greatest prize in Mexican politics: the chief executive chooses hundreds of top-level bureaucrats and party leaders (who then in turn choose thousands of mid-level functionaries), selects projects, sets the direction of economic policy, and decides on the political course the nation will take for the next six years.

One of the keys to understanding the stability question in Mexico is to ask why internal splits do not explode more often into fully-fledged ruptures during the succession process. To do this, this paper will examine the three most important exits, those of 1940, 1952, and 1988. By understanding when and why powerful politicians leave the coalition, one can also focus on why they stay and why the system

* The exit of Ezequiel Padilla in 1946 was not as important as the other three in that he was not able to gain the widely based official and societal support the other three dissenters did. His case will only be referred to in passing. However, it is important to note that his attempt to beat the official PRI candidate, Miguel Aleman, in 1945-1946 means that three ruptures occurred sequentially over three sexenios. Added to the two armed rebellions in 1924 and 1929 and J. Vasconcelos’ electoral challenge in 1929, the regime suffered continuously from internal fissures from the end of the Revolution until 1952. Thus the question of how the leaders of the system were able to quell internal dissent from 1952 to 1986-87 becomes a central question which will be addressed later in the paper.
remains so stable. Also, by studying the exits and the regime's reactions to them, one can understand how the institutions were designed over time to keep powerful but unsatisfied politicians from attempting to bring the system down.

One way to link stability to individual action is institutional change. Actors working to promote their own interests attempt to and are sometimes successful at promoting changes in the political rules of the game. These rules constrain human interaction, structure incentives for behavior, and influence actors' preferences. The rules, which can also be conceived of as institutions, therefore constrain, structure and influence political outcomes, such as economic policy making, or political reforms. Yet, except in the case of revolution or external invasion, institutions are not created or changed overnight. They are incrementally modified by individuals, and these small changes go on to influence how future actors working within the same system behave and cooperate (North, 1990).

Part of Mexico's political stability can be explained by the ability of its political institutions to react to new challenges without modifying the central political institutions: the strong Presidency, no re-election, and one-party electoral dominance. But what has not been closely examined is how this process actually works, i.e., how and under what conditions do political actors work, either alone or in concert with others, to change the rules under which they operate. Furthermore, how do the changes made at one point in time affect those made in the future?

According to North (1990), actors will attempt to alter the rules of the game to maximize their gains, and will do so when they estimate the likelihood of success is relatively high and are willing to risk their resources to gain possible benefits (p. 87). Part of the cost of altering institutions is organizing groups to support the attempt. As we shall see, this was one of the central problems for the challengers: the regime's leaders could offer divisible goods such as better positions within the government to those threatening to participate in the exit while the dissident leader could only offer highly uncertain future benefits.

Both challengers and regime leaders were involved in altering Mexico's political institutions. The challengers (who, before their exit, had participated in and benefited from the regime's rule structure) fundamentally wished to change how the President was nominated. The Presidents who had won against the dissident politicians worked to lessen the ability of regime elites to openly form political groups to work in their favor, or to entice large numbers of other unsatisfied regime members to leave with them, or make alliances with important societal groups. In other words, the Presidents, in concert with other regime leaders, recognized that it was in their interests to stamp out the possibilities for dissent during the succession and took steps to raise the costs of challenging the system. The loyalists modified the system marginally, making it more difficult for dissidents to change it fundamentally.

This work also clarifies the importance of internal political factions and the changing role they play in the presidential succession. In studying the activity of both the Party dissidents and loyalists in the three exits, several different types of internal political factions came to light. First, there are the groups directly tied to
the politician fighting for the nomination: these are other Party members who had worked for the leader, towards whom they showed a great deal of confidence and loyalty, and on whom their careers depended. The individuals in these groups were responsible for organizing other Party members to back their candidate.

The second type of group also worked to push their candidate into the presidential office, but their connections with the possible nominee were looser. In the case of the dissidents, other groups which were aligned against the apparent official nominee would join forces with the dissident. Groups formed that did not have close ties with the heir apparent, but wanted to show support beforehand in order to extract benefits once the Party’s candidate took office.

As we shall see, apart from organizing other Party members who openly back one pre-candidate (and thus showing numerical support), members of these groups also perform other important political tasks in the pre-nomination period. The most important of these are attacking the other candidate in stories and columns in the national press, through whispering campaigns, and by publishing stories in Party organs. All these channels are meant to capture the ear of the sitting President or actually force his hand when choosing his successor. These attacks usually center around the inability of the other candidate to govern the nation because of his ties to extremist groups or his professional background.

One of the clearest problems experienced by all dissenting groups while still active in the Party is organizing enough regime members to sustain a challenge within the coalition. Even if it is in the dissatisfied members’ interests to have the dissident pre-candidate become President, these benefits only accrue in the future, which has to be heavily discounted because of the enormous risks posed by backing a dissident candidate in the present. Some types of activities are relatively cost-free, such as attending dinners to discuss political issues, but once one’s name becomes attached to an opposing group, the regime’s leaders possess such tools as to make future involvement extremely costly. These weapons include loss of employment, public attacks, investigation into private business dealings, etc. The regime can also deliver divisible goods to individuals, such as better public positions, which changes their personal calculation of the costs and benefits of involvement. We shall see that the incentives for unattached Party members were either to form a group early for the officially favored candidate, or to pursue a lesser option, which would bring fewer benefits, but was safer because one wouldn’t be burned by choosing incorrectly, which was to simply bandwagon once the official candidate was more or less obvious. By moving early, one shows one’s loyalty and willingness to risk a good deal, and therefore, the rewards are greater.

A riskier strategy, but one that can bring successful results, is to move for an opposition or dissident candidate in the hope that the regime leaders consider the possible defection too costly and therefore offer the dissident-to-be a better position in order to forestall his defection. Because many knew the regime would offer these incentives, it led to the possibility of demonstrating false preferences. One way to look at the problem of dissidence is through the lens of Albert O. Hirschman’s Exit,
Voice and Loyalty, which allows one to explore when and under what conditions distinct strategies are used to influence the behavior of an organization — in this case the official regime — especially during the succession process.

Hirschman writes that there are two basic strategies to change the way an organization behaves: one can either exit and find other external possibilities (such as buying another brand, or switching political parties), or one can voice one's discontent. Both courses of action can be used together by voicing one's griefs to the point where this seems to do no good and then exiting. For Hirschman, loyalty raises the costs of exiting (through high entry or initiation costs, not to mention the psychological pain which can be caused by exit). In the Mexican context, the best way to view loyalty is as 'disciplina política' or political discipline; i.e., no matter how bad one's situation is now, it is better to put up with it for the time being with the well-based hope that conditions will improve in the future.

Hirschman poses two central questions: one, under what conditions will voice be chosen as an option over exit (and vice versa), and two, which more effectively changes the organization over the long term? A related question is how can voice be combined with exit to alter the organization's course of action? Hirschman believes that exit will be used in situations where the costs of switching to an alternative are low and/or the price of voicing one's opinion is high and in general fruitless. This is often the case in simple economic transactions. In political situations, exit from the system is often far more costly (such as exile), and so voice is more often used. There are several degrees of voice, ranging from writing a letter to one's elected representative, to organizing a faction, or to taking over the party leadership. Thus, collective action problems are an implicit problem in Hirschman's work: if several people or groups are complaining, the probability that their complaints will be acted on rises.

The possibility of an organization changing its practices or policies in response to complaints increases if exit is also possible. For if actors have no hope of exiting or no alternative once they do exit, it is far easier to ignore the opinions of dissatisfied members. Leaders of different types of political organizations order their preferences distinctly, although loyalty is always at the top of the ordering. For example, in many Latin American dictatorships, if intellectuals or dissidents cannot remain loyal or silent, then it is far easier to invite them to leave the country than to listen to or answer their public calls for political liberties. In contrast, in Mexico, because of the inclusive nature of the regime, political leaders and the President would rather disgruntled members of the Revolutionary Family voice their discontent than leave the ranks, precisely because the exit of a powerful Party member can threaten the entire system. Dissidents within the Mexican system obviously have contrasting preference orderings. For them, the easiest solution is to voice their complaints and negotiate on the outcome. But if this fails to work, then they are faced with a dilemma: if they exit to challenge the system from outside, they could lose everything, including their lives in some cases. But if they do not leave the Party, then their voices will continue to be ignored. Even the threat to exit becomes empty here.
Yet before 1952, the exit option was very much possible and therefore the Party leadership took internal counter-currents seriously. After the 1950s, as exit became less possible, the economy and state sector grew at such a rate that there was little to complain about as all groups were taken care of, by giving them either public positions or financial benefits. Democratic reformers, such as Carlos Madrazo in the 1960s, were simply 'shut up', either permanently or simply by removing them from their posts. But as the economics of Mexico became gradually more desperate during the late 1970s, the option of buying off alienated members became less possible. Furthermore, the governing elite became more closed and homogeneous during de la Madrid's sexenio which again raised the question: what to do with the dissenters? To state it in another way, how were those unsatisfied with the regime going to bring it around?

If the dissenters were to be heard, they had to complain in numbers, and if their threats to leave the system were to be taken seriously, then many must be willing to risk all to leave it. And if these defectors were to challenge the system, instead of simply retiring to private life, some sort of organization must be created. All these imperatives imply collective action. A regime that is not cutting back on positions and whose governing circle is not shrinking is a moderately indivisible good: all members benefit from it while the consumption of the good by one does not detract from the enjoyment of the good by another. In other words, all public officials and Party members benefit from a large State whose ruling elite is porous. But if everyone was to benefit from the good regardless of whether they directly worked toward it or not, few would spend resources, in the hope that others would. Thus, some sort of enforcement mechanism must exist to force the discontents to exercise their voice. Furthermore, the costs of fighting for this type of regime are high in a system where exit is extremely risky.

Thus, a problem for any dissenter in the Mexican system is how to organize a group within the regime to either voice a disagreement, threaten to leave, or actually exit. As we shall see, some conditions are more propitious than others. For example, if the moderately unhappy PRIista sees that (1) many others share his dissatisfaction, (2) his possibilities within the system are dwindling rapidly, and (3) the possibilities for improvement are small, then he may be more likely to attend a dinner or a meeting where these issues will be discussed, especially since these actions are virtually cost-free. And as he sees many others join in these small discussions, perhaps enticed by the promise of future positions (i.e., selective incentives), he may be more willing to climb a ladder of political escalation. But at any moment the political leadership can knock him out of action by offering him a divisible good: a better

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job. Thus, the ability of the dissenters to garner support, particularly inside the official system, has to be a central question.

In the first section of the paper, the three ruptures will be examined. Within this section, I will examine why no ruptures occurred from 1952 to 1986. Then, to complete the comparative analysis, I will also concentrate on a non-case, or a presidential succession in which a dissatisfied, or rejected pre-candidate for the nomination, did not leave the regime’s boundaries and run against the official Party’s candidate. This way, it will be easier to identify the reasons which led to the decisions of those who did exit. The case chosen is the presidential succession of 1976, primarily to test for the importance of economic crises and support from powerful political outsiders, mainly the large-scale capitalists of the North. Finally, in the conclusion I will return to the question of political stability.

The Three Cases of Exit

The three cases of exit examined in this paper are Juan Andreu Almazán’s in 1940, Miguel Henríquez Guzmán’s in 1952, and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Porfirio Muñoz Ledo’s in 1988. These three cases are worth comparing because, despite some differences, their similarities can tell us much about the threats to the regime from internal divisions, and how the official regime leaders learned to deal with these challenges over time. The differences in the three exits are worth pointing out. One could argue that, at the time of their exit, Muñoz Ledo and Cárdenas were not members of the governing elite as were Almazán and Henríquez Guzmán. But Muñoz Ledo had enjoyed a long career in public service, reaching the Presidency of the PRI in Echeverría’s sexenio and the level of secretary in López Portillo’s. He was also considered a long shot for President in Echeverría’s succession. Therefore, while Muñoz Ledo’s career had fallen sharply, it closely resembles that of Henríquez Guzmán’s in that he was attempting to regain the heights of the elite.

A sharper difference is that both Henríquez Guzmán and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (1988) wanted to reinvigorate the Cardenismo of the 1930s, in terms of both economic policy and the Cardenist faction’s representation within the government’s
elite. Almazán, on the other hand, came from the right of the political spectrum in terms of economic policy and was trying to increase the dwindling chances of the Calles' faction (Calles was President from 1924 to 1928) within the highest circle. Another fundamental difference between the three cases is the long period of time that elapsed between Henríquez Guzmán's exit in 1952 and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Muñoz Ledo's in 1988. During the intervening 35 years, no dissatisfied official had left the Party to run against the official PRI's presidential candidate. The official structures had offered enough incentives to disgruntled pre-candidates to stay in the game, while at the same time they had closed off the possibilities of exit during the presidential succession through better control of the pre-destape period\(^7\), factional movements and of the PRI's sectorial organizations (worker, campesino, and popular groups organized by and tied to the PRI). Not only had the Party changed over time, so had society, becoming better educated, richer, and better informed. It is precisely this break-down in the PRI's and the president's ability to control the succession process, given its 35 years of success, that makes the 1988 case so interesting, especially given its many similarities to the 1940 and 1952 examples.

Despite the differences in the three exits, their similarities are fascinating in what they can tell us about how the system works. This work will concentrate on three general points of comparison. First, the conditions which enabled these powerful public officials to even conceive of leaving the Party. As will be shown, two issues crop up in all cases: a shift in the overall economic development model and the closing-off of possibilities for a heretofore important faction. Second, the strategies used by the dissidents to gain recruits and unite the opposition and the regime's attempts to stifle the opposition will be examined. Finally, the threat represented by the ruptures and the Party leadership's responses to it will also be shown to be fundamentally similar.

The comparison of the three cases is structured as follows: an analytical description of each case will be presented with certain themes: 1. a general background of the previous sexenio, including its economic program and factional experience; 2. a short political biography of the leader of the rupture; 3. the dissident's ability to gain followers and unite the opposition; 4. the Party's response to the threat. The question of why the PRI suffered no challenges from 1952 to 1988 will also be addressed in this section.

**General Almazán's Exit Attempt of 1940**

None of the system's ruptures can be understood without knowledge of the then-current sexenio in which they took place. For example, the attempt of Almazán to gain

\(^7\) Destape means the uncovering of the official PRI candidate for President, and because the regime has never lost an election since the 1920s, the destape in effect reveals who will be the next President of Mexico.
the Presidency in fact began in mid-1938, approximately one and a half years before the transfer of power to the next chief executive. Therefore, to understand why Almazán was willing to threaten the regime at the end of Lázaro Cárdenas' *sexenio* (1934-1940), one must examine the broad characteristics of this period, especially the economic model, and the changes in the possibilities of the powerful factions.

Although Lázaro Cárdenas is now seen as one of Mexico’s greatest presidents, during his period in office profound doubts and criticisms were leveled against his economic and political reforms. Cárdenas’ policies can be summed up as: 1) increased State involvement in the economy, especially in primary inputs such as oil (Cárdenas expropriated the petroleum industry in 1938), electricity, and steel; 2) an attempt to push the *ejido* as the central agrarian unit of production, coupled with broad-sweeping land redistribution; and 3) the re-organization of the unions (CTM) and *campesino* groups (CNC) into large centrals which were then drawn into Party sectorial organizations. Added to these wide-reaching programs was a socialist rhetoric used by the President and many of his supporters which included references to Mexico’s recognition of the class struggle and the eventual need to create a workers’ state. These policies and rhetoric were a shift away from the politics of Mexico’s previous leader and strongman, Plutarco Elias Calles, and they threatened the interests of several powerful groups within society, such as the Northern businessmen, who feared expropriation, Catholic groups, who watched the State rally behind lay, government-controlled ‘socialist’ education, and worker and *campesino* groups whose independence was shattered as their organizations were taken over by leaders imposed and controlled by the government. According to Mexican historians such as Ralsky de Cimet, Lerner de Sheinbaum, and Garrido, Mexico was being split between those who opposed Cárdenas and those who wanted his programs to reach even further.

The Party could not allow free elections or an open campaign if it hoped to 1) hold on to the government and 2) discipline its elite so that every presidential succession would not be a cause for open dissent within the regime’s elite. The President, often after consulting sectorial leaders and Zone Commanders, decided on his successor, and once this decision was made, all others, especially the losing pre-candidates, must discipline their ambitions. Assassinations and armed rebellions had been the favored way to decide political transitions until Calles drew the various military, worker and peasant leaders from the Revolution into one organization — the Revolutionary Party. All these groups would share in government as long as they were

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4 Ibid., pp. 150 and 264.
willing to accept the central rule of the game: the President retaining the final say, especially in the nomination of his successor.

Not only were fundamental economic and political changes sweeping the nation, a basic realignment was taking place within the confines of the Revolutionary elite: the hopes of members and leaders of the Calles' faction were being shut down by Cárdenas' successful move to exclude Calles himself from the political game. Lerner and Ralsky write:

The displacement of the Calles' group from political leadership constituted a powerful motive to create difficulties for the regime in the moment of the presidential succession. They were interested in recovering the force they had lost and integrating themselves once again in future politics.

Because Calles himself posed such a threat to Cárdenas, the latter had to destroy Calles and his faction as a political force. Thus Cárdenas threw out Calles' Congressmen and Senators, and ejected others tied to the old Caudillo from the public administration. To be a Calles supporter was not to have much future in the highest reaches of the Revolutionary elite.

General Almazán, because of his background and experience, was in a unique position to take advantage of the discontent both in and outside the governing elite. The General began his military career during the Revolution, aligning himself with Calles and later spending many years as Zone Commander of the region that included Nuevo León. Here he made contacts with the powerful Northern business leaders of Monterrey, and in fact became extremely wealthy himself. The General had enjoyed a long military record, with a good number of important positions enabling him to form a political power base.

It must also be remembered that during the 30 years following the Revolution, the military in Mexico played a far more important political role than it does now. General Calles realized that independently-based Revolutionary Generals had to be integrated into a central organization to keep them from continually fighting over

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13 Lerner de Sheinbaum and Ralsky de Cimet, op. cit., p. 148.
14 Calles, after stepping down from the presidential chair in 1928, had ruled Mexico as head of the new party he formed in 1929 and as "jefe máximo" of the newly joined revolutionary factions. Although three interim Presidents officially held power from 1928 to 1934, Calles remained the ultimate arbiter of major national decisions. When the PNR nominated Cárdenas for a six-year term beginning in 1934, most believed Calles would continue his rule from behind the scenes. Cárdenas soon demonstrated his drive to place the Presidency beyond Calles' domination.
15 L. Medina, Del cardenismo al avilacamachismo, in Historia de la revolución mexicana, 1934-1940, El Colegio de México, México, 1981[?].
16 Garrido, op. cit., p. 271.
the nation’s political and economic spoils. The post-Revolutionary Presidents used ‘their’ generals to ward off regional armed threats, to support their agrarian reforms, and to assure their presidential successor would take office. The military figures who had led quasi-independent armies during the Revolution formed the very center of the governing elite. From their ranks came every post-Revolutionary President (except interim President Ortiz Rubio) until Miguel Alemán rose to power in 1946. Thus, in the early post-Revolutionary era, they were the source of, the support for, and the ultimate threat to the coalition in power. For why should one Revolutionary General have more right to be President than another, except that the sitting chief executive chose one and not the other?

Almazán began his run for power as a legitimate pre-candidate to the Party’s (at that time the PRM) nomination to succeed Cárdenas in 1940. He also became a natural candidate for all those inside the ruling coalition who opposed the sexenio’s reforms or the closing-off of their career possibilities. Calles’ faction chose Almazán to lead them, while at the same time Almazán’s own people were forming groups within the Party to support his candidacy. The General from Guerrero became the candidate for, and of, those who had suffered the most under Cárdenas and wanted back in the game.

Almazán’s candidacy was discarded early by the sectorial leadership of the Party because he was considered too far to the right and too likely to dismantle, instead of consolidate, the reforms of the past sexenio. Múgica, a close Cárdenas’ collaborator and another front-runner against Ávila Camacho, admitted defeat in the race to gain the PRM’s nomination: he did not leave the confines of the regime to challenge the official candidate in the electoral arena. He pulled out of the race but stayed in the Party. ‘Se disciplinó’: that is, he disciplined himself politically by accepting defeat gracefully, probably because he knew he would be rewarded for his personal loyalty to the President and for his place in the Cárdenas’ faction, which at the end of Cárdenas’ sexenio was still very powerful. Almazán, however, did not subordinate his ambitions and remain within the Party, because he had fewer opportunities inside the coalition and greater support outside for an independent run.

Almazán’s Decision to Leave the Party

When it became obvious at the end of 1938 that Cárdenas had moved for Ávila Camacho, Almazán had to decide whether he would stay in the Party and resign himself to a dwindling career, or leave in order to challenge the system. There was no hope of a democratic vote among the mass-based sectors of the PRM regarding who would be the Party’s presidential candidate. Cárdenas had reorgan-

17 Ibid., p. 94.
18 Garrido, op. cit., p. 278; and J. L. Reyna, op. cit., pp. 140-141.
19 Garrido, op. cit., p. 266.
ized the structures in 1938, centralizing political power into the mass-based sectorial organizations controlled by the PRM and at the same time taking away what little say the sectors or the legislature had in policy decisions. The President became stronger as he now controlled the Party.  

Thus, Almazán had to convince the President, and when he was unable to, the decision point emerged.

Cárdenas attempted to convince him to stay within the Party. Both the President and the leader of the PRM invited the General to present his official candidacy to the Party’s National Assembly, where the representatives of the sectors voted for the official presidential candidate. Almazán of course knew that the decision had already been made in favor of Ávila Camacho and that the National Assembly’s members were controlled by the President, and therefore the decision was simply a rubber stamp.  

What were Almazán’s expectations? Did he who had used his troops to assure Party victories at the ballot box really think that he would not be either assassinated or simply defrauded of his votes? The fact that he did leave the regime provides some evidence that he thought he could win legally. But this does not explain why he thought he could beat the PRM’s candidate. What probably convinced him that the risk was worth it was the level of anti-Cárdenas and anti-Party sentiment both in and outside the PRM. Garrido writes: “The character of the Cardenist policies and the transformation of the Party in 1938 had created certain favorable conditions for the creation of a broad opposition movement.” Perhaps he thought a mass movement against the Party was enough to “detrench” it.

Added to these sources of support was the lack of possibilities for the faction to which Almazán pertained. Calles’ people, even if they had switched loyalties and become useful to Cárdenas (as had E. Portes Gil, for example), were not fully trusted and were jettisoned once their immediate usefulness was exhausted and Calles fully defeated. They had been expelled from the Legislature and forced from their administration positions, while Almazán was offering them a chance to recuperate their careers. Almazán himself had been loosely identified with the Calles group, and while he had served Cárdenas well, he was not one of his ‘people’. Perhaps with the outside support and the end of his career in sight, the choice to leave was not so difficult after all.

Almazán’s program was not fundamentally different from Ávila Camacho’s: in general terms, both advocated nationalism, the political participation of the masses, and the enrichment of the poor. The largest difference between Ávila Camacho and Almazán was that the latter was in favor of private property, particularly for the small landholder, and against the ejido, because this land tenure system

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20 Ibid., p. 257.
22 Garrido, op. cit., p. 277.
23 Paoli Bolio, op. cit., p. 144; and Medina, op. cit., p. 259.
would supposedly ruin rural productivity. In other respects, Almazán was no radical. He favored industrial production, and wanted to free sectorial union leaders from their ties to the Party and therefore introduce democratic practices within the PRM. A one-party system was not the problem, merely the direction — both politically and economically — taken by Cárdenas. As we shall see, each dissident leader passed over the Party's closed, secretive selection process in silence, and later called for greater openness in this nomination process. These complaints had not been heard from any of the central figures prior to their impending defections.

While Almazán was promising to first open up the Party decision-making process, the PRM's leaders were accusing the General of purely selfish, ambitious motives in his attempt to win the nomination outside official rules. The national press described the campaign as a fight "between personalistic groups who were comparable in force, acts, and ambitions...", i.e., as a fight between internal factions. Almazán, in his memoirs, defends the reasons behind his exit by declaring that his campaign was in reality a fight between the Mexican people who wanted political democracy and a "privileged caste who wanted to dominate the nation for purely personal ends". We will see almost the exact exchange in the 1952 and 1988 cases, and with good reason: if one is losing out by playing by the authoritarian rules of the game, it makes sense to call for a democratic opening, especially if there is a good chance of winning in a free election, at least in the moments these people chose to exit.

Groups Supporting Almazán

Almazán's strategy before the final break with the PRM was very simple: to create groups to support his candidacy and to form alliances with other anti-Cárdenas factions. Lorenzo Meyer, a historian, gives a simple description of how to win the Party's presidential nomination:

The victory or defeat of all those members of the Revolutionary coalition that at one time aspired to the Presidency depended on their capacity to generate and sustain alliances in the cúpula, that is to say, with leaders of the Army and mass organizations.

Were it not for the wave of anti-Cardenismo sweeping the nation and the splits within the Revolutionary coalition, Almazán would not have had a chance of winning an election against the PRM, and therefore probably would not have

24 J. A. Almazán, Memorias del General Almazán, E. Quintanar, México, 1941, pp. 112-113; Newell and Rubio, op. cit., p. 78; and L. Meyer, op. cit., p. 95.
25 Almazán, op. cit., p. 121.
26 Ibid., p. 121.
27 Lorenzo Meyer, op. cit., p. 93.
left the regime. But the opposition sentiment within the heart of the Party was what gave the General his impetus: he was able to form groups on his behalf and alliances with several other factions and high-level public officials. Furthermore, although the leadership of the CNC, the CTM, and the Army was firmly behind Ávila Camacho, their membership was certainly not convinced, and dissenters within each organization either openly or privately went for Almazán.

A number of unions and workers supported Almazán despite their allegiance to the CTM, whose leaders forced them to back Ávila Camacho. These workers were unhappy with the means of control used by the Central to limit wage increases. The ties between unions and Central were becoming more authoritarian as the CTM developed mechanisms which took away the ability of the union members to vote on issues pertaining to their interests. Campesino groups under the umbrella of the CNC experienced similar internal fights over the same issue: the imposition of peasant leaders beholden to Party officials and deaf to the demands of the rank and file who then lacked any influence over policy making or the selection of candidates.

There is also evidence that the Army was divided over the issue, with the majority of Zone Commanders supporting Ávila Camacho, while Almazán captured some of the officers of the lower ranks. In addition to groups within the sectorial organizations and the Army, there were Senators, Congressmen, and ex-public officials — especially those active during the Calles era — who split off from the Ávila Camacho movement to support Almazán. Thus, within every part of the Party, at every level, defections (not from the PRM itself, but from the official nominee) became more commonplace.

Strategies of Party Members

But there were those within the Party who were not so quick to follow Almazán out to the cold reaches beyond the governing coalition. Those public officials who were not completely tied to Calles still had possibilities and could hope that Almazán’s attempt to influence the succession — to open it up to a larger number of participants — would improve their career possibilities within the next sexenio without having to exit the regime. These semi-dissidents had options: they could support Almazán silently, and in effect do nothing for the official candidate; they could openly join a pro-Almazán group, but not follow the General when he left the Party; or they could openly follow him out, hoping that, if he

28 Garrido, p. 279.
30 Newell and Rubio, op. cit., p. 78; and Correa, op. cit., p. xxix.
31 Garrido; pp. 279 and 287.
lost, they would be welcomed back into the PRM and be given decent positions. Each of these strategies was followed by different members of Almazán’s coalition.

While the General from Guerrero was willing in his bolt from the Party to rupture the very structures of the political institutions, many of his followers simply were not: they appeared to be more interested in influencing the nomination decision or, failing this, they hoped to improve their career position by means of the threat. Paradoxically, by threatening the system, one could re-start one’s career. By joining a pro-Almazán group, the Party member was showing his willingness to leave, causing the official coalition troubles. One of the PRM’s most successful tactics for breaking up the Almazán coalition inside the Party was offering individuals positions in the following sexenio. Party members, knowing the leadership would do this, falsely threatened departure, precisely to precipitate this reaction.

Those who actually left the Revolutionary circle played a far riskier game. Some actually believed the rhetoric of democratization and were willing to lose everything, including their fortunes and, in many cases, their lives. Others, however, were not such sticklers for their principles and returned to the fold successfully. They knew that the end was near — that their generation was passing away, and with it, their individual possibilities of career advancement.\(^{32}\)

The Regime’s Reaction to the Exit

Once Ávila Camacho took over, he took steps to centralize authority under the banner of the Presidency, thus continuing a trend begun under Cárdenas. To do this, he took both short-term and more institutionalized steps to change Mexico’s governing institutions — those that regulated the relations between the Party and the political bureaucracy — as well as opposition groups and the regime, through manipulation of the electoral rules. In the short term, Ávila Camacho took back as many of the ex-Almazanistas as wanted to rejoin the Party, thus coopting dissidents back into the system where they could do less harm.

The new President also took several long term measures. Centrally, he removed decision-making responsibilities from the PRM and placed them within the executive bureaucracy. His first step was to form the Federal Electoral Commission (CFE), which was placed under the aegis of the Interior Ministry (Secretaría de Gobernación, which can be seen as a combination of electoral college and internal security agency). Now, the bureaucracy and not the Party would monitor elections and their results, an important source of power.

With the Party reforms of 1942 and 1946, the PRM/PRI (which changed names for the last time in 1946) began to lose its ability to select candidates, this authority instead going to Gobernación. Not only was the Interior Minister responsible for

\(^{32}\) Carreño Carlón, *op. cit.*, p. 319.
choosing federal deputies and senators (following the dictates of the President), he could also force the ouster of governors, a political maneuver previously controlled by the Party. The Interior Minister had no independent base, but rather depended on the good-will of the President to keep his position, thereby shifting more control to the executive.

President Ávila Camacho also dissolved the military sector of the Party and strengthened the then diffuse popular sector of the PRM by fusing together disparate organizations into a single confederation known as the CNOP (National Confederation of Popular Organizations). The President followed this up by cutting the number of federal Congress and Senate seats awarded to leaders of the labor and peasant sectors and shifting these seats to the CNOP. More importantly, those who were attempting to make a career in the government shifted their activities to the CNOP — working and organizing in the new sector, to rise within the regime, thus supplying the coalition with its new political stars. In this it replaced the labor sector, which had been up until that time important in this regard, second only to the military, which also lost importance during the following two sexenios of Ávila Camacho and Miguel Alemán.

Garrido notes that the Party would no longer be the center of ideological debate or decision-making, but rather an electoral support mechanism for the President. The Party for example, no longer could debate and diffuse ideological debates — it lost its press organ El Nacional to Gobernación during this period. The President was able to control the Party and its sectorial and bureaucratic leadership by shifting many of its responsibilities over to the bureaucracy, controlling the labor organizations, dissolving the military sector, and strengthening the popular federations of the PRI, which he packed with men personally loyal to him.

Not only did Ávila Camacho weaken the Party while strengthening Gobernación, he also reformed the electoral laws, making it more difficult for opposition parties to gain legal status. The 1946 Electoral Law for the first time made registration of new political parties (by Gobernación) a legal necessity. The new party had to have at least 30,000 adherents, with 2/3 of the states having party organizations of at least 1,000 members. The party also had to be registered for one year to be able to participate in elections. Gobernación would be responsible for both granting and revoking registrations. These new rules made it difficult for elite breakaway factions to form parties to challenge their former colleagues, while making it easier to control them when they did break off through Gobernación’s registration powers.33 The exit of Almazán thus instigated changes in the Party, government, and electoral arenas which became part of what we now consider normal Mexican politics.

33 Paoli Bolio, 1985, pp. 146-147.
Langston / Exits From the Mexican Revolutionary Party

General Henríquez Guzmán's Attempt of 1952

Henríquez Guzmán's attempt to leave the Party and beat its official presidential candidate in fair elections shared many characteristics with Almazán's exit in 1939-1940. Both were Revolutionary generals with long careers within the governing elite who came out losers in the Party's pre-candidate nomination process. In the salidas of 1940 and 1952, both Generals received support from leaders and groups within the official ranks of government. Both organized their efforts around the strength of their personalities and lacked any sort of permanent party organization. The Party reacted in similar ways to each threat: its leaders attempted to convince Henríquez Guzmán to stay within the government elite, and when this failed, they reverted to threats, intimidation, and violence.34

The sexenio of Miguel Alemán (1946-1952), during which the exit of Henríquez Guzmán took place, was characterized by two basic changes which led to the attempt of 1951-1952. First, Alemán sharpened and deepened the shift towards capitalist development begun by his predecessor, Ávila Camacho (1940-1946). Second, the Cárdenas faction (no longer led by the ex-President, but still active after the end of his term and identified with his more socialist policies) lost a good deal of ground to new groups with distinct backgrounds.

Alemán instituted a true change in the development model, implying changes in State economic and investment priorities, and concomitant political difficulties. Land distribution dropped sharply, following a trend from Ávila Camacho's term. Development now meant industrialization, encouraged through the State's protection of its economy and the substitution of many imports. Economic growth was good during Alemán's term, and the growth of the industrial base was significant.35 The threat of expropriation dropped as foreign investment in Mexican firms was encouraged, and union activity controlled, often violently through the State-controlled CTM.36 Through these strong-arm tactics, the government was able to reign in wage increases and the demands of the large urban unions. The State began to invest heavily in infrastructure programs and industrial protectionism of all sorts, which allowed for an enormous rise in the level of corruption as men tied to the government won contracts worth millions based on their contacts.37

Added to these economic changes were major shifts in where and how public functionaries were recruited and how they advanced within the system. Not only was Miguel Alemán the first civilian President, he initiated the rise of the university-trained, non-military, political bureaucrat. As the generation of Generals with Revolutionary experience passed away, the UNAM-trained lawyer began to replace

35 *Reyna*, p. 105.
36 *Rodríguez Araujo*, p. 114.
37 *ídem*.
these other types of leaders in positions of power within the public administration. The military as an institution lost influence: it would no longer be a source for men to fill positions of leadership, and its ability to mediate on the succession issue began to disappear.  

As the economic model changed and the generation of military leaders was replaced by younger men without independent military bases, the faction once led by Cárdenas, as well as other groups and individuals tied to the older regime, saw their ability to continue to advance within the governing coalition decline dramatically. O. Pellicer points to this as a fundamental reason why enough frustration built up within the ruling coalition to create the conditions making an exit possible. She writes that older members of the Revolutionary Family were not content because they had been excluded from "the direct exercise of power during the Alemán administration". These leaders and the members of their groups would later act on their frustration by threatening to follow or actually following Henríquez Guzmán out of the Party (now called the PRI).

What brought many within the PRI to the brink of open rebellion was the possibility of Alemán or a carbon-copy of the sitting President continuing in power for another six years. First, Alemán floated rumors that he would force a constitutional amendment through the Congress allowing for the reelection of the President. These rumors were taken seriously enough that reportedly Lázaro Cárdenas and Ávila Camacho went to talk to Alemán to warn him that, if he ran for reelection, Cárdenas would run against him and certainly win. Alemán realized reelection was impossible and so then attempted to impose Francisco Casas Alemán, the unelected mayor of Mexico City, on the Party leadership. Casas Alemán was so unpopular because of his ties to corruption and his heavy-handedness in the capital that not even Alemán’s own people wanted him to succeed.

Into this situation of discord, dissatisfaction, and rumor stepped General Henríquez Guzmán, a Revolutionary leader who had enjoyed a series of increasingly important positions under Calles and Cárdenas until Ávila Camacho took power and ‘diplomatically’ sent Henríquez Guzmán into political exile. The General had enjoyed the confidence of Cárdenas for many years, and so belonged to the once powerful faction that saw its possibilities being reduced. Pellicer writes: “Henriquismo represented the banners that justified the Revolutionary movement and specifically tried to rescue Cardenismo as a political alternative and current within the government.”

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38 Reyna, p. 105.  
40 Interview, Mexico City, January, 1993.  
41 Interview, Mexico City, January, 1993.  
42 Reyna, p. 106.
In short, the movement, headed up by one of Cárdenas' old political allies and which began inside the PRI before being expelled, was a reaction against the loss of political strength of the old Cárdenas faction as well as the displacement of the army by the younger generation of university-trained lawyers within the highest ranks of government. Henríquez Guzmán was perfectly placed to head up the Cárdenas coalition and save his own career at the same time.

Even more than Almazán, Henríquez Guzmán did not want to leave the Party. Rather, he wanted to force the sitting President and Party leaders to open a space for himself and the other Cardenistas being pushed out of the political game. Reyna writes that, especially at first, the Henriquista movement was an internal fight over the future of the Cárdenas faction. One group simply wanted to force themselves into a better position and the succession was the best moment to do this. Pellicer agrees with this by writing that when pro-Henríquez groups began to form, their intention was not to break away from the PRI, but to force its leaders to consider the General as an alternative presidential candidate, and give Cardenistas the places they deserved within the ruling coalition.

In all areas of the regime, Henríquez Guzmán was able to garner support, with a particularly strong base in the army, for the reasons outlined above. The list of ex-public officials, both elected and administrative, that supported Henríquez Guzmán is also impressive: former governors, leaders of the Senate, Congressmen, directors of public utilities, the founder of the CNC (Graciano Sánchez). Another author, J. Carreño Carlón, notes that apart from the solid support given by the military, peasant leaders who had organized groups to promote agrarian reform and labor leaders who had renovated national union movements also supported the dissident. It is not clear whether the quoted author refers to CTM union leaders, those that were unaffiliated with the national Central, or to those thrown out of the workers' sector of the Party. Another author states that no organized union inside the CTM supported the dissident movement. The issue of increased Party control over sectorial members is important. During Almazán's exit in 1938-1940, many members of affiliated unions split off from their imposed leaders to support, in one way or another, the opposition movement, and the CTM leadership was not wholly able to control this phenomenon. If the second author is correct in that even the members of these unions were not able to back Henríquez Guzmán, despite Alemán's anti-union policies, then Party control over its sectorial organizations had increased notably. A third author states that workers' groups were in favor of the opposition General, or at least against the CTM, so perhaps the ability of the PRI to force its members to back the official candidate was still not fully developed.

43 Reyna, p. 105.
44 Lozoya, p. 122.
46 Paoli Bolio, p. 150.
47 Pellicer, p. 37.
Party Members' Strategies

Again, as in the case of Almazán's Party supporters, one needs to ask how far they were willing to go to influence the succession in their favor. There is strong evidence that the Cardenistas launched General Henríquez within the Party structure because they thought it was still possible to influence the future course of internal politics in their favor. Political groups were openly formed by Henríquistas inside the PRI's sectors with the intention of creating some counterweight to the presidentially controlled sectors already existent. Perhaps because of what had happened to Almazán, the Henriquistas were more determined to win the presidential chair within the framework of the official rules. This was a clear case of an inside attempt to influence the succession to better the dissenters' individual career possibilities. When it became clear to some of Henriquez's supporters that the internal split was not to be resolved by giving Henriquez the official nod, many were convinced to stay within the ruling coalition, in the same way similar Almazán quasi-dissenters had been convinced: through a mixture of job incentives and threats. It is probably safe to believe that middle- and upper-level public officials were offered incentives while members of the worker and peasant sectors were threatened. Furthermore, many coalition members had supported Henriquez largely to force Alemán to drop Casas Alemán as his choice of successor. Once the sitting executive had done this, Henriquez was dropped by these Party members in favor of the PRI's official candidate, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines.

Just as Henriquez was able to garner support among disaffected members of the Revolutionary Family, so was he able to take advantage of the widespread societal discontent brought about by Alemán's change in development programs. Disgusted with Aleman's favoritism towards his family and friends, the urban sectors supported the General in his campaign as they had supported Almazán just 12 years earlier. Small- and medium-sized business owners were also a part of this backing. In the rural areas especially, Henriquez's Cardenist policies fell on willing ears. Alemán's policies had benefited large landholders at the expense of the large mass of peasants and smallholders. The PRI's control over the peasant Central would be especially important for the final vote, since in 1952 the great majority of Mexicans were still rural dwellers.

Most of the economic and administrative policies promised by Henriquez were similar to the official candidate's. Rodríguez Araujo writes: "The ideology was the same, the difference was based on the criticism of the worst abuses of power (of the

48 Rodríguez Araujo, op. cit., p. 113.
49 Pellicer, op. cit., p. 35.
50 Reyna, op. cit., p. 106.
51 Pellicer, op. cit., p. 35.
52 Ibid., p. 37.
regime), that is to say, its vices. The opposition candidate saved his strongest criticism of the PRI for its internal, non-democratic decision-making practices. The main intention of the movement was to force the PRI's leaders and the President to open up the process of the designation of the official candidate and allow more members of the ruling coalition to actually vote on the candidate democratically. Henríquez added another demand: to democratize the relation between the Centrales and the Party so that the members could elect their own leaders (instead of simply accepting imposed ones), and in this way, through democratically elected bosses, the rank and file could have some representative voice in how the Party operated and was led.

Henríquez Guzmán denied that his attempt to challenge the Party stemmed from his frustrated ambitions. As we have seen, during the Ávila Camacho's and Alemán's sexenios, the General had not done well career-wise, nor had many other Cardenistas and Revolutionary military leaders. Rodríguez Araujo writes:

> During the first post-Revolutionary years, before political control had crystallized in the Party, splits in the elite were caused by the frustration of personal ambitions of famous military leaders. After this, when the Party had become better organized, the crisis occurred when the leaders of a faction couldn't reconcile themselves to the nomination of a presidential candidate outside their faction and so started an opposition movement to the left or right.

Thus, Henríquez Guzmán had to follow in Almazán's footsteps: while he was still working within the PRI, he emphasized his desire to open up the nomination process, which would enable his Cardenista faction to garner either the executive office or at least more influence over the following President (because he would owe his position to the faction which helped place him in office in a more democratic fashion).

Just like Almazán, Henríquez Guzmán claimed the Party in power had betrayed the Revolutionary ideals enshrined in the Constitution of 1917, and only by bringing down the Party could the Revolution continue. As we shall see, this rhetoric would be used again in 1986-1988 as Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Muñoz Ledo justified their departure from the PRI and their attempt to be the first and only opposition winners against the official Party in its history.

The Party's Strategies

Not only was Henríquez's democratic rhetoric similar to that used by Almazán, so were the Party strategies employed to neutralize the electoral threat. The PRI

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53 Rodríguez Araujo, op. cit., p. 118.
54 Rodríguez Araujo, op. cit., p. 108.
Langston / Exits From the Mexican Revolutionary Party

reacted to the dissidents with a mixture of threats, violence, offers of negotiation, and important positions in the next administration in exchange for maintaining internal discipline. Some in fact accepted these offers. In a press release of mid 1950, which was the opening salvo from the dissidents within the Party, 25 Henríquistas pledged their support for the General and his program. By December of that same year, 12 of these public officials had recanted and agreed to openly support the official candidate and thus maintain political discipline.

As in 1940, once the dissident leader had left the Party to challenge the regime electorally, the Party stepped up the attacks against the motivations of the Henríquistas and crossed the line into violence, which again continued through and after election day.

Henríquez Guzmán won less than 16% of the vote, which was of course rejected as massive fraud by the General and his supporters. The day after the elections, a large protest march took place in a central park in México City. It was dispersed violently, with more than a hundred reportedly killed. The persecution of the Henriquistas continued throughout the year. In February of 1954, Henríquez Guzmán’s party lost its registration with very little protest from any sector.

As was the case in 1940, the PRI in 1952 welcomed back into the heart of the governing coalition many of those who had left the Party to support Henríquez Guzmán. Pellicer writes of this phenomenon: “The government of Ruiz Cortines contributed to facilitate this option (of return), by receiving with open arms the Henríquistas who desired to reintegrate themselves back into the heart of the Revolutionary Family, and make theirs some of the policies advocated by the Henríquistas.” The same author goes further by stating that the decision of the Party dissenters to re-enter or not reveals their motivations for leaving. Those who refused to reintegrate themselves, Pellicer believes, were the dissenters who truly desired to change the governing institutions of México. Those who returned had fought in the riskiest manner to re-open their career possibilities and then reconciled themselves to Ruiz Cortines’ victory. In fact, General García Barragán, a central figure in Henríquez Guzmán’s exit, went on to become the Secretary of Defense in Díaz Ordaz’s sexenio (1964-1970). The President channeled the remaining military ambition into a new opposition party (the Authentic Party of the Mexican

55 Pellicer, op. cit., p. 36.
56 Rodríguez Araujo, op. cit., p. 114.
57 Rodríguez Araujo, op. cit., p. 120; and Paoli Bolio, op. cit., p. 151.
58 Ibid., p. 120.
59 Lozoya, op. cit., p. 128; Carreño Carlón, op. cit., p. 339; and Interview, Mexico City, January, 1993.
60 Pellicer, op. cit., p. 41.
61 Lozoya, op. cit., p. 128. Díaz Ordaz, while not playing such an important role in Henríquez Guzmán’s attempt as García Barragán, was also working with the opposition General at the end of Alemán’s sexenio. Rodríguez Araujo, op. cit., p. 116.
Revolution - PARM) which he helped form specifically to give a safe outlet beyond the coalition's boarders to those of the armed forces who wished to participate politically. As another part of his short-term strategy to increase the popularity of his government, Ruiz Cortines altered Articles 34 and 115 of the Constitution so women now had the vote. He modified the laws governing the behavior of public officials to stop — superficially at least — the level of corruption Alemán's cronies had displayed and he altered the fines levied on those charging more than the official price for basic goods.  

On a more institutional level, Ruiz Cortines continued the drive to centralize political and policy authority under the executive branch, not the Party, thereby weakening the possibilities for ruptures within the coalition. The role of the Party under this term became the model for following sexenios: to receive and transmit executive decisions to the organized masses, contain the possibilities of mass mobilization, organize participation in elections, and give out benefits and favors to political supporters. The labor Central was split between the larger CTM and the CROC, which was tied directly to the government, and less likely to call for strikes, although the CTM was generally pliant. The popular sector was given more executive backing as well. The days of independent political maneuvering by factions within the Party were over. Gobernación was strengthened yet again when it was given the responsibility of removing governors, a task previously undertaken by the Party.  

The electoral law was once again changed in reaction to the newest rupture. In 1954, the prerequisites for party registration went from 30 000 affiliates (instituted during Ávila Camacho's term) to 65 000 overall, with 1 000 to 1 500 distributed in two-thirds of the states. These restrictions worked so well for the following several years that the electoral law was next changed in 1963, when it was modified to give opposition parties representation even if they won no elections. Overall, the institutional reforms worked — there would be no opposition coalition for the next 35 years. The reasons why will be discussed in the next section.

**Why There Were No Exits between 1952 and 1987**

In the 35 years between Henríquez Guzmán's attempt and the rupture of 1986-1988, no other powerful losing presidential candidate or faction leader left the Party with the intention of beating its candidate in elections. What had changed from the 1940-1952 period of constant internal splits and the period of calm between 1952 and 1986-1988? Why in the late 1980s did this internal cohesion again end? Obviously, powerful, dissatisfied losers in the nomination battles still

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63 Pellicer, *op. cit.*, pp. 69-70.
existed; why did they choose not to risk an outside fight with the PRI? To simply say that such an exit was not worth the probable cost is not enough to explain why the calculations of the public functionaries changed. Four central factors explain why the regime was able to maintain internal stability and cohesion for 35 years, while the rupture of 1986-1988 shows how these conditions for stability broke down and created the opportunity for another internal split to threaten the entire system.

The first of the four factors was the increasing ability of the President to control the succession process: both the formation and behavior of groups as well as the ability of the PRI sectors to move independently for one candidate or another was controlled. Second, the true Revolutionary generation had passed away, taking with it the Generals' claim to the right to govern and/or decide who had the right to rule. Third and related to the second, is the destruction of the Calles faction and the control brought to bear over the Lázaro Cárdenas group, the two strongest political groups of the post-Revolutionary period. The final factor which explains internal control and stability is the continued growth of the size and role of the State, and the lack of any major changes in the economic development model that would create large groups of "losers" or organized groups that had previously enjoyed benefits now being denied them.

Following the three successive threats to the continuing survival of the post-Revolutionary political institutions, President Ruiz Cortines strengthened his control over the transfer of power to such an extent that not only was there no rupture in 1958, none of the presidential hopefuls even openly declared their ambitions, nor did they mobilize all the instruments available to their counterparts only six years earlier. Political groups did not begin to form openly in all sectors of the Party, army, Congress and bureaucracy up to two years before the actual exchange of the Presidential Sash as they had in previous successions. All pre-candidates were for the first time chosen from the sitting Cabinet, a practice that continues to this day, and serves as an efficient way to cut down the pool of pre-candidates to a minimum. Ruiz Cortines was able to control the "posibles" pre-nomination activity, especially the formation of groups, which made it difficult to know early who was preferred by the President, and as no one was sure he would not be the "preferido", no one dared to threaten to leave. In this succession, the "destape" was born; hiding the official candidate as long as possible to stop outward ruptures.64

Not only did the President initiate new informal rules of how the pre-candidates could promote themselves, he also tightened controls on the Party, a change which had begun with Cárdenas' reorganization of the Party in 1938. Beginning especially after 1946, the sectors were no longer able to participate in the designation of candidates for elected positions.65 José Luis Reyna writes that "[...] control over

64 Reyna, op. cit., p. 108.
65 Reyna, op. cit., p. 103.
the elections passed from being a function of the sectors to the leadership of the Party and, of course, the Executive".\[^{66}\] The PRI reorganized its sectorial bases so that there was little room for independent maneuvering.\[^{67}\] Lorenzo Meyer has written of the period 1911-1940:

>The power of the President was never so great that he could impede the members of his own party from announcing their pre-candidacies and working openly in search of positions that would facilitate the decision in their favor.\[^{68}\]

The story of increased executive control over the Party is in great part explained by its increasing control over the labor sector — the CTM. The regime, according to Alan Knight (1990, pp. 77-79), was able to stifle independent union and confederation formation and growth, while at the same time coopting loyal CTM leaders to the government’s policies by buying them off. When the CTM lost its independence, it lost its ability to influence politics as it had formerly.

The regime leaders during the 1940s and 1950s also formed and promoted the middle-class federation (CNOP) of the middle-class sector. To deprive the CTM of political weight, the CNOP was given what had been the labor sector’s responsibilities, and began to supply the top elite with politicians, who had before worked their way through either the military or the labor organizations, and served as a firm base of presidential power. The double-pronged strategy of bringing the CTM to heel worked as an instrument of the President: no longer would groups within the CTM be able to freely work for one pre-candidate or other. In fact, the simple act of forming groups openly would end as regime labor leaders controlled their followers’ political activity.

Furthermore, the Party’s political control mechanisms, such as choosing candidates for national offices and control over the governors’ fates, were transferred from the Party to Gobernación (as were election monitoring and registration of parties). Now the President would have a more direct mechanism for controlling the elite: how it chose its members, how it kept them content, and how it could put them out of the game without great repercussions when necessary. The more direct control ended the outright political maneuvering for and by different candidates and helped stifle elite ruptures.

The second factor which helps explain the lack of regime ruptures between 1952 and 1986-1988 is the passing away of the Revolutionary generation. Generals with military experience (and independent force in the form of almost private armies) began to die off or retire. The period of the Army as a decision-making center or source of highest-level public officials ended. The younger military officers who

\[^{66}\] Ibid., p. 103.

\[^{67}\] Interview, Mexico City, January, 1993.

\[^{68}\] Meyer, op. cit., p. 98.
rose to take their place had not led independent armies, which left them with no claim to rule and they therefore realized that their best possibilities now lay in the strictly military field, inside the regime.69

A third part of the explanation is the end of Calles' faction as a political force and better control over the remaining Cardenistas within government. Reyna writes:

This means that the institutionality of the system was achieved, in great measure, with political discipline and by neutralizing the nuclei of dissidents, in particular those stemming from the official ranks themselves.70

These two factions had been made up of those with Revolutionary experience and independent power bases (peasant groups and unions) which had been brought into the Party organization by Calles. Now those rising within the official ranks had no independent bases, their power resided in the temporary posts the President offered them.71 Factions still exist, but their members are far more beholden to the will of the President in office, who placed them in power and who can normally remove them if he wishes.

One would have to add the importance of sheer experience on the part of the PRIistas of whatever political faction. After three successive failures to win the presidential election, or more to the point, of being allowed to win the elections fairly, most could see the futility of such an action, except perhaps as a way of influencing the presidential succession process. But as the risks became higher, the possibilities for success lower, and control greater, there were enough negative incentives to stop such an action.

Added to the increased Party controls were positive incentives which took the form of a growing public sector which offered an ever-increasing number of public positions and opportunities for material enrichment. The public purse was used as a political tool to bring able and ambitious men into the ruling coalition, and even those groups that lost out in a presidential succession battle were assured of spaces for themselves and their people within the regime. We shall see that part of the problem in 1986-1988 was the shrinking of the State sector and the effect this change had on many officials' expectations about their future within the coalition.

A related issue is the continuance of an economic development model which called for a large, active State intervening in the economy, protecting its industries while keeping taxes low. Statism was a political instrument of stability, while the protectionist, pro-capital economic model retained the important business groups' loyalty to the political institutions of the nation. The urban sectors benefited enor-

69 Reyna, op. cit., p. 102; and Lozoya, op. cit., pp. 128-129.
70 Reyna, op. cit., p. 104.
71 Except, one could argue, a figure like Fidel Velázquez, who has survived in his position as head of the CTM for almost 50 years.
mously from State subsidies on food, education, utilities, etc. Thus, dissatisfied public officials would find it difficult to unite distinct social sectors in a campaign against the official candidate, as Almazán and to a lesser extent Henríquez Guzmán had been able to do (and, as we shall see, did Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and Muñoz Ledo in 1988).

What is interesting to note is the evolutionary change in the Party’s ability to control its own elite (which was parallel to its increasing ability to reign in the mass-based sectors). Calles confronted a set of quasi-independent actors who had organized large numbers into either armies, peasant groups, or unions: he began the process of national integration of these leaders by forming the PNR. As we have seen, this process of control was neither fast nor easy. Every President from Calles to Ruiz Cortines had to deal with some sort of internal division, and the individual efforts to meet these threats gave the Party an ever-increasing ability to control its members.

The Rupture of 1988

In 1986, the conditions for a rupture were all present: a profound economic crisis had rocked the nation for four years, driving down living standards for millions of Mexicans. The crisis was being dealt with in a startling fashion — the President and his closest advisors were opening the economy up to competition and the State as an economic actor and source of public positions was being reduced significantly. Forced to impose a new economic model on a very reluctant Party and bureaucracy, President de la Madrid closed off the highest ranks of the elite to all but his closest personal colleagues, denying positions to other well-trained, powerful politicians. The economic crisis and de la Madrid’s response to it opened the door for a disgruntled and ‘out’ PRI faction to exploit the enormous amount of societal and Party discontent. The only factor this scenario lacked was the resurrection of a Revolutionary general to lead the charge against the ruling faction, and in fact, the dissenters had the next best thing, Lázaro Cárdenas’ son, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, who became one of the leaders of the internal faction willing to force a systemic split.

Beginning in 1981, and lasting at least six years, Mexico experienced the most profound and prolonged economic crisis since the Revolution of 1910-1920. Spurred on by sharp oil price rises in 1974 and 1979, López Portillo decided to pursue a high-growth development policy by borrowing on the international market against the country’s proven oil reserves. This policy proved disastrous as oil prices dropped in 1981 and the US Federal Reserve drove up interest rates. These two external events took away Mexico’s ability to pay its debt just as the interest on this debt grew rapidly. In August 1982, the Mexican government admitted its inability to pay the interest. The national debt had risen from 30 billion dollars in 1977-1978 to 80 billion in 1982 and would rise to 96 billion in 1986.
De la Madrid took over the Presidency in December 1982 and accepted IMF conditions in return for a re-negotiation and re-scheduling of the debt payments. At first, the President and his advisors believed the nation’s economic problems could be solved by resolving the liquidity crisis, and responded by devaluing the peso, lifting price controls, and initiating a mild sell-off of state owned enterprises (SOEs). The shock of the 1985-1986 drop in oil prices finally convinced the governing coalition of the need for a profound restructuring of the economic development policy Mexico had followed since the 1930s. Mexico would quickly move from a protected capitalist economy with heavy state involvement to a liberalized, open, market-driven economy.

The de la Madrid’s economic team drafted a plan which opened the Mexican economy up to international competition. These changes included, among other policies, the sharp reduction in the number of SOEs through sales or closings. Tariff barriers were slowly lowered before 1986, and then when Mexico entered the GATT in 1987, they dropped sharply. Barriers to foreign ownership and investment were eased as well. Complementary to these changes were across-the-board cuts in social spending and a strong policy of austerity. Using the labor Central as its instrument, the government kept salaries capped even as inflation rose. Strikes were strongly repressed. Infrastructure, education and health spending was slashed.

Not only were the recipients of government services harmed by the austerity plans, so were the government agencies themselves. The State’s bureaucracy shrank notably: 17 subsecretarías were closed, while 148 direcciones generales and two oficialías mayores suffered the same fate. Obviously, as these positions were cut, many well-trained public officials lost their jobs. Those that didn’t saw their earnings drop sharply as inflation overtook them. So the public sector, which had always provided thousands of jobs and decent wages (augmented by countless ways of adding to one’s salary), was threatened in de la Madrid’s sexenio. The public purse simply couldn’t allow for the old political redistribution system which had kept many ambitious public officials content with the regime before 1982.

While the debt crisis was hacking away at the size of the bureaucracy in general, the ruling elite (the highest collaborators of the President) was closed off to all but the closest personal colleagues of de la Madrid. The President, who had come from the financial sector of the bureaucracy (Banco de México (The Central Bank), Hacienda (Treasury), SPP (Planning and Budget)), drew his ‘people’ from his personal relations within the Bank and Hacienda, leaving out many well-trained bureaucrats who simply didn’t have these close career ties with de la Madrid. Not only did he draw his team from the financial wing of the administration, he placed

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72 Carreño Carlón, op. cit., p. 332; and P. Smith, 1990, pp. 142-146.
73 Ibid., p. 332.
74 Hernández Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 261.
75 Ibid., p. 294.
them throughout the breadth of the bureaucracy, which allowed the President to force his austerity plans on a reluctant public sector, but again, left out a generation of other bureaucrats who had fewer hopes to rise to the positions they believed they deserved. Depending on who would win the Presidential chair in the next sexenio (1988-1994), their future career possibilities could well be closed off permanently, especially if they lacked the new profile that those from the financial sector shared: a higher degree, usually in economics or public policy from a foreign university, and experience in the public financial sector.

Thus we see the rise of the so-called 'technocrat' without political sensibilities in Mexican politics. In fact, while there is no sharp distinction between technocrats and políticos, there is some validity to the claim that a Ph.D. in economics from Yale does not help one win elections back in Mexico. Of course, 'técnicos' had always existed, while many políticos have advanced studies abroad. What was new in de la Madrid's sexenio was the emphasis on technocrats from the financial sector running departments usually reserved for other 'types' of public officials: for example, those with long-term political experience in other areas of the federal bureaucracy, such as Gobernación.\(^{76}\)

The Cabinet inaugurated by the new President in 1982 was extremely independent of other presidential factions. In fact, only one member of Echeverría's or López Portillo's factions was nominated to a Cabinet post: P. Ojeda Paullada, a López Portillo follower, was awarded the lowly Ministry of Fisheries, because he had displayed political discipline by not complaining openly about losing the official PRI presidential nomination in 1981, the succession that de la Madrid won.

De la Madrid closed off the highest ranks of the elite because he believed that to push through a major opening in the economy accompanied by a drastic austerity plan which threatened the interests of many societal and regime groups would only be possible with a team completely beholden to him, who at the same time shared his reformist vision. Closing SOEs and large offices within the bureaucracy, controlling wages even as inflation rose, lowering subsidies on industrial inputs and public consumption goods, as well as chopping public infrastructure spending and contracts was not a popular set of tasks, especially during an economic crisis, whose root causes were not agreed upon. Thus, the President used his appointments as a way to impose his plans on his own bureaucracy and Party (not to mention society at large). Of course, both the reforms themselves as well as the manner in which they forced upon the regime (by using a tightly homogeneous elite) were highly unpopular and had profound political implications come the next presidential succession (1987-1988). Hernández Rodríguez writes of the public officials during this period: "In these conditions, to ask their loyalty towards the system that had ex-

\(^{76}\) For more information on 'types' of political actors in the Mexican regime, see M. Cen- teno, "The New Científicos: Technocratic Politics in Mexico 1970-1990", unpublished Ph.D. diss., Yale University, Department of Sociology, 1990.
pelled them and their leaders (of political groups within the bureaucracy) was a bit much (era una exageración).” It is to this problem of loyalty toward the system that we now turn.

Even as de la Madrid’s small group monopolized the decision-making centers of the regime, other factions within government still circulated and, beginning in 1986, began to plan ways to regain the political ground they had lost in the 1982-1986 period. Echeverría’s faction, which represented the ‘left’ of the regime, was especially active. After the designation of de la Madrid, the left had been marginalized from important positions and policy-making during the economic crisis. After all, it was during the more leftist, Statist sexenios of Echeverría and López Portillo that the growth of the public sector had occurred.  

Echeverría had opposed de la Madrid’s nomination, and tried with little success to influence the Cabinet selections of the new President in 1982-1983. Many of the Party dissidents in 1986-1988 came from Echeverría’s old faction, and had been powerful or had been linked to more powerful men during his sexenio, and were poised to inherit high-level positions during the 1980s, but had been frustrated by de la Madrid’s closure of the elite.  

In 1986, with the ‘political times’ (tiempos políticos) pressing towards the presidential succession, the best opportunity arose to place a candidate who would both open up the elite ranks to a more varied type of bureaucrat and repeal some of the worst abuses of the economic reforms of de la Madrid’s sexenio.

Groups Supporting the Corriente Democrática

In mid-1986, the press got wind of meetings between Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas del Río, Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, Carlos Tello Macías, Ifigenia Martínez Hernández, Rodolfo González Guevara, Augusto Gómez Villanueva, Beatriz Paredes Rangel, and other members of the left wing of the Party; Muñoz Ledo, Martínez Hernández, and Gómez Villanueva were close to Echeverría, while others had links to the peasant sector of the Party, an Echeverría stronghold. These PRI members formed a ‘corriente’ or political group within the Revolutionary Family which fought to influence the presidential succession, open the selection process, and turn back some of de la Madrid’s economic reforms. The current was named ‘la Corriente Democrática’ (hereafter CD). The two leaders of the CD

77 Ibid., p. 261.  
78 Acción, September 1, 1986, no. 422.  
79 Ibid.  
80 Hernández Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 262; and Carreño Carlón, op. cit., p. 334.  
were Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas* and Muñoz Ledo⁸⁸. Their possibilities for achieving high posts in the national bureaucracy looked weak if another de la Madrid ‘type’ followed as President. By August 1986, other powerful PRIístas were becoming linked with the new corriente, if only through participating in ‘talks’ with the two leaders of the CD: the Rector of the National University, the Governors of Querétaro and Quintana Roo, Senators such as G. Martínez Corbalá, Congressmen, and CTM union leaders.⁸⁴

Those dissatisfied with the closure of the elite government ranks, or with the direction of Mexico’s political economy during de la Madrid’s sexenio were willing to take part in chats with the CD leadership. These were not only Echeverría’s people: in fact, during mid-1986, as the political succession process began to heat up, the Corriente grew dramatically as all sorts of Party members showed some sort of support. Rogelio Hernández writes these public functionaries were worried because “[... ] of the intent of the new politicians to take over the government’s leadership positions, ignoring old traditions and marginalizing many men with experience”. In the first stage of the CD, these people were only ‘talking’ or exercising their voices, to influence the course of the next sexenio, which meant how to push de la Madrid not to choose a ‘tecnócrata’ with little political experience and few contacts with those outside the financial sector.

Members of unions and peasant groups affiliated with the PRI’s sectorial centrals were also concerned about the regime’s sharp turn away from a more Statist development model, and their inability to influence the government’s decision-making.⁸⁶ The ‘bases’, or mass membership, of the Party had almost no way of pressuring the government to form or carry out policies to benefit their economic interests. Supporting a new current within the Party, which was both Statist and in

⁸² Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas was Lázaro Cárdenas’ son, who although born in the presidential mansion during his father’s presidential term, had enjoyed only a mediocre political career. He had served as Under Minister for Agriculture under Echeverría, but was not considered a close collaborator. He later went on to serve as Senator and then Governor of Michoacán from 1980 to 1986, a post given to him by López Portillo. While Governor, he stood out as a populist leader who closely identified with the economic and social policies of his father.

⁸³ Muñoz Ledo had been more successful in his political career than Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and was closely identified with the Echeverría wing of the regime. During the 1970-1976 sexenio, Muñoz Ledo had risen to be Minister of Labor and had been a weak presidential possibility in the 1976 succession. Although he did not win the nomination, Echeverría put him in as President of the PRI to direct the 1976 elections. López Portillo switched him over to Minister of Education, where he was ousted one year later and sent to the UN as Ambassador. Muñoz Ledo had few ties with the government’s financial sector, and was considered a statist in his economic ideas. In addition, as part of Echeverría’s camarilla, he was tied to a group who had lost out badly during de la Madrid’s sexenio.

⁸⁴ Lugo Chávez, op. cit., p. 5.
⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 253.
⁸⁶ Ibid., p. 18.
favor of more democratic Party practices, was probably the best way to recuperate lost economic and political weight.

While Muñoz Ledo and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas were still intent on keeping their efforts within the official structure, their rhetoric only included opening up the candidate selection and decision-making circles of the government; they did not propose to destroy the dominant one-party system Mexico had enjoyed for over 50 years. Their Documento Número Uno, the first published expression of the CD’s proposed reforms, states: “The Party must implement an open process of struggle for the PRI candidacy for the Presidency of the Republic.” An open voting process within the Party must be established, and in this way, the masses (who were possibly pro-CD) would be re-integrated into the life of the Revolutionary Party. The official PRI statutes provided for the democratic nomination of presidential, congressional and municipal Party candidates. But in fact these guidelines were ignored by the President, who had enormous power to impose candidates at almost all levels. This is why the leaders of the CD willingly called only for the written rules to be followed. Because their internal Party faction was quickly gathering followers, a more democratic nomination procedure might have enabled them to displace the faction in power using the Party’s own statutes.

In the economic realm, the CD called for a return to Cardenist policies. It backed broad State involvement in several strategic sectors of the economy (which de la Madrid had spent four years trying to weaken), as well as a tool of redistributing wealth. While directing their appeals at a lofty level, the leaders of the CD were careful to deny that their motivations for forming an internal current were based on the need to re-start their stalled careers. This was no mere factional move on the part of one political group trying to regain from another political ground lost in the de la Madrid sexenio. We have seen this same denial in both the 1940 and 1952 ruptures. The PRI’s leaders gleefully reminded Muñoz Ledo that while he held top government positions, including President of the Party, he was not at all interested in internal democratic reform. This point, added to the fact that Muñoz Ledo had also unsuccessfully lobbied de la Madrid to replace the deceased J. Reyes Heroles in the Ministry of Education in 1985 made it difficult for an observer, pro or contra-CD, to believe that the CD was not born in an attempt to influence the 1988 succession. One observer writes that the CD’s criticism of the overall process of the presidential succession and their denials of factional interests “could only be credible in the measure that one ignored the political biography of the democratiz-

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87 Ibid., p. 6.
88 De la Vega Domínguez, “Entrevista con...”, in El reclamo democrático, op. cit., Mèxico, pp. 149-150.
89 Acción, September 1, 1986, no. 422.
90 Carreño Carlón, op. cit., p. 334.
91 Acción, September 1, 1986, no. 422; Hernández Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 121; Lugo Chávez, op. cit., p. 9; and Lerner and Ralsky, op. cit., p. 1.
ers". After all, Muñoz Ledo, as President of the PRI, had named the new President of the Republic in 1976 through an "acto administrativo" (or an administrative seal of approval), instead of a true democratic Party vote, exactly the process he was now criticizing.²²

Party Members' Strategies

Whether the average regime member believed the democratizing rhetoric is unknown, but it is clear that many realized their possibilities to advance were being cut off by the rise of de la Madrid's homogeneous clique and economic project. Many Party loyalists supported the CD in the early days as an alternative to the technocrats, or as a way of opening political space. But while the CD stayed, however precariously, within the PRI, public officials had several alternatives: they could openly support the new current; they could support it in private; or they could simply do nothing — not support either alternative —, which also harmed the official Party.

As Muñoz Ledo and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas pushed the challenge further within the official ranks, new decisions had to be made. In 1986, as the CD sharply increased its public criticisms of the political group in power, the Corriente lost important backers such as Senator Martínez Corbalá, González Guevara, Janitzio Múgica, Beatriz Paredes, Carlos Tello and Silvia Hernández.²³ Many who approved of the CD's general ideas were simply not willing to cause a complete and perhaps final rupture with the regime, and when they realized that Muñoz Ledo and Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas were capable of taking that final step, they withdrew their support. Some of them were willing to make threats, but from inside the Party’s limits. Once they had made their discontent clear, they went no further. In fact, some of the original CD supporters actually ended up denouncing the Current.

Even once the CD’s leaders had been expelled from the PRI, options remained. Some CD supporters stayed within the Party, but simply did nothing to help the official candidate win. For this reason Salinas almost lost the election, despite the PRI's advantages. Those who knew how to run a campaign simply did not perform their jobs as they should have, in order for Salinas to realize how important they were to the Party and the regime as a whole.²⁴ Of course, when the CD left, it drew out with it many traditional areas of support for the system, as well as those who were expert campaigners.

²² Carreño Carlón, op. cit., p. 334.
²³ Ibid., p. 333. González Guevara went on to act as a middleman between the CD’s leaders and de la Madrid’s people. After the elections in 1988, he formed the Corriente Crítica inside the PRI, and finally left the Party in 1990.
²⁴ Hernández Rodríguez, op. cit., p. 263.
The Party’s Strategies

The PRI, of course, had many strategies to meet the threat of a Party-wide rupture, some of which in fact deepened the split, rather than alleviating it. Because the Party leadership had not faced any real dissent for so many years, loyalists seemed unprepared to deal with it effectively. De la Madrid’s people and the hard-liners found it easier to threaten those within the CD, and to attack their motivations, rather than negotiate a way out of the internal crisis. Another negotiating block was de la Madrid’s determination that an economic liberal would follow him to complete the economic ‘modernization’, regardless of the political costs to the coalition. This reduced the space for maneuvering on both sides.

The PRI and the President’s people relied on a mixture of threats and accusations to stifle the growing influence of, and support for, the CD within the Party. As we have seen, the accusations centered quite reasonably on the democratizers’ motivations. Continuous calls to maintain political discipline — i.e., to put up with present conditions with the expectation that they would improve — were issued by PRI leaders to the democratizers. Given the reduced possibilities for these people within the regime, support from other PRIístas and societal-wide discontent, these calls had little weight. Still, many PRIístas that were dissatisfied with the regime did not leave, primarily because of their fears for their jobs in the public sector.

While the CD played within the Party’s limits, the strongest threat of the PRI leadership was to expel the dissident faction from the Party, leaving them no chance to exercise further political influence, unless of course they could organize the opposition and societal discontent of five years of economic crisis into a true political challenge. This was the great dilemma for the President of the nation and of the PRI: expelling the faction would create what had not existed since 1952 — an option for all those frustrated with the regime. In 1987, PRI’s President Jorge de la Vega Domínguez openly admitted the problem by stating it would be impossible to throw the CD leaders out because 1) the Cárdenas name was still revered in Mexico and thus untouchable and 2) because the expulsion would be public and place the PRI in a weak position.

While the Party was threatening and accusing, it would be an exaggeration to argue that it did not attempt to negotiate with the dissidents: it simply did not do it well, or perhaps the leadership of the Party was shackled by de la Madrid’s insistence that a financial hard-liner replace him. De la Vega met with Cárdenas, Muñoz

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95 Carreño Carlón, *op. cit.*, p. 333; and Hernández Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 263.
96 *Acción*, November 17, 1986, no. 433.
97 Interview, PRD activist, and former public sector employee, Mexico City, July, 1993.
98 *Acción*, November 17, 1986, no. 433; and Hernández Rodríguez, *op. cit.*, p. 262.
Ledo and Martínez various times throughout 1986 and 1987 while the CD was still in the Party, and agreed to "respect the procedures fixed in the Party statutes".100

The leaders of the CD had a wider space for maneuver because they could organize other unhappy PRIístas, negotiate and attack simultaneously. Perhaps the best strategy taken was for Muñoz Ledo, a former high-level functionary, to join with Cárdenas, the son of the most popular President of this century, to lead the dissident faction. With meetings, dinners, newspaper columns, and documents, the CD diffused its strongly pro-State message throughout the political bureaucracy and Party. Once they realized how well their program was received by discontented Party members, the dissidents pushed their attacks and complaints further out into the open, testing the PRI elite's reaction. They knew they had a cushion of time before they would be expelled, and they used it to gain supporters within the coalition ranks. When the President closed off dialogue with the faction, the CD used a double strategy of having some CD leaders, like Ifigenia Martínez, declare their desire to stay within the Party, while Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas continued the public attacks against the authoritarian nature of the Party elite.101

By bringing "Family" problems out into public, the dissidents were breaking the fundamental rule of not airing internal problems. But the CD's publicity was a good strategy for two reasons: it forced the PRI to answer the anti-democratic charges publicly and it laid the groundwork for an electoral challenge to the Party should the CD's demands not be met.

As 1987 wore on and the presidential succession grew hotter (and before the CD leadership was ejected from the Party), the dissident statements and threats grew steadily stronger. In the Segundo Documento de Trabajo (May 1987), the authors warned that the upcoming succession would be like no other, implying that the faction would not allow the President to simply nominate his successor without a challenge from the dissidents.102 At the same time, Ifigenia Martínez stated that further CD moves depended on how the PRI's presidential candidate was nominated and who received the nod. This meant that if the President named a político instead of a financial technocrat, the CD would be more likely to lessen its attacks.103 It is not clear whether this meant the President had to choose Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas as the official candidate, or simply an unnamed político. In the end, de la Madrid chose Carlos Salinas de Gortari, then seen as a pure technocrat with few political abilities (an opinion which would soon change); in other words, the worst possible candidate to reconcile the PRI leaders with the dissident faction. Ten days after the official 'destape' (the unveiling of the President's choice of successor), Cárdenas accepted the nomination for the candidacy of the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution

100 Acción, November 17, 1986, no. 433.
101 Idem.
102 Lugo Chávez, op. cit., p. 15.
103 Ibid., p. 16.
Langston / Exits From the Mexican Revolutionary Party

(PARM), a heretofore satellite party which had always supported the official regime. Three other smaller parties, the PST, PSD and PPS, soon followed up by also nominating Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas for President.104

Muñoz Ledo quit or was thrown out of the PRI two months later. The split within the heart of the Party, the first since 1952, had become finalized, and would become even more dangerous as the ex-Cdístas mounted an effective electoral challenge to over 60 years of PRI's political domination.

Once the dissidents left the Party, their central task was to unite all opposition parties, groups and movements behind the Cárdenas candidacy. Besides the PARM, PST, PSD and PPS, the dissidents were able to convince Herberto Castillo, leader of the Mexican Workers Party (PMT) to not run for President and instead support Cárdenas' movement.105 By late January, 1988, the ex-PRIístas had formed the National Democratic Front (FDN), which was backed by 10 leftist organizations. A new party (the PRD) would be born from the exit: unlike the electoral vehicles of Almazán or Henríquez Guzmán, this party lived on after the presidential campaign for which it was born.

It is ironic that the electoral and party reforms of the 1970s, instituted to draw-off criticism of the official PRI, would later create parties and organizations which supported a true challenge to the system. Because of the political opening of the 1970s, the ex-Cdístas were able to broaden their appeal to a broad-based political and economic organization capable of reaching millions of Mexicans who were unhappy with years of government corruption, economic crisis, and political stagnation. The threat to leave the Party was extremely well-timed: the FDN was able to organize disparate societal groups under its banner. Yet not all those unhappy with the regime were pro-FDN. In fact, the economically liberal, politically conservative, pro-Catholic National Action Party (PAN) was led by a popular figure who rallied businessmen and conservative groups to his cause, thus splitting the anti-PRI vote, although Cárdenas won more votes in the official count.

Many of Mexico's citizens, especially in urban areas (Mexico is now 60% urban), voted for the FDN simply to protest the PRI's poor performance over the last three sexenios, knowing that the official Party would never allow the challengers to end 60 years of one-party dominance in a fair vote.106 In the decades following the formation of the Party in 1929, the rural vote was well organized and numerically important to overall electoral victories of the regime. However, as the population changed dramatically from a rural to an urban base, the PRI's vote-getting ability began to suffer as it was not able to organize middle-sector urban voters as well as it had the rural sector. Furthermore, urban groups have been able to maintain greater autonomy from the regime, which gave the FDN and the PAN their strong votes in

104 Ibid., p. 21.
106 I thank J. A. Crespo for pointing this out to me.
the cities. The FDN won 36% of the vote, the highest for the opposition in a Presidential election ever. Most observers, and many citizens, believe the PRI stole the vote when its computers 'went down' directly after election day. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas and the FDN protested the results which brought hundreds of thousands of Mexicans into the streets, but Salinas took office in December 1988 as planned.

The Regime’s Reaction

When the new President did take office, he reacted to the Party split much as had Ávila Camacho in 1940 and Ruiz Cortines in 1952: he used the presidential office and its powers to make future ruptures less likely and safeguard his own ability to govern. Salinas brought leaders from different Party factions into the Cabinet, re-opening avenues to advancement, he strengthened his hold over the Party, and he formed new political-economic institutions designed to decrease societal discontent, while at the same time weakening the Party’s hold over its mass membership.

On entering the Presidency, Salinas took care to give Cabinet seats to people from his own political group as well as to other powerful politicians from outside the government's financial sector. For example, he gave Fernando Solana, a politician with a long trajectory in the public sector, the Ministry of Foreign Relations; the Ministry of Agriculture eventually went to Carlos Hank González, another old-time politician, while the powerful Interior Ministry (Gobernación) was placed in the hands of Fernando Gutiérrez Barrios, the 'mano dura' (roughly, strong arm) of both Echeverría and López Portillo. Víctor Cervera Pacheco, a politician with a strong base in the state of Yucatán and in the CNC, was awarded the Ministry of Agrarian Reform, while Manuel Bartlett won the Public Education portfolio and later became Governor of the state of Puebla. These Cabinet appointments showed how conscious Salinas was of the need to open up the governing elite to those public officials outside of Treasury and Budget (Hacienda and SPP). His ability to form alliances with distinct factions also shored up his weak position following his near defeat in the presidential elections, which was caused in some part by the abstention from electoral activities by otherwise loyal regime leaders. Furthermore, early CD supporters who had later backed away from the 'corriente' when it became apparent that a full rupture was possible, such as Beatriz Paredes, Carlos Tello and Silvia Hernández, were given positions within the Salinas government. Paredes became the Party's General Secretary (the 2nd highest position within the Party), Carlos Tello became Ambassador to Russia, and Silvia Hernández became Senator (for the PRI) for the state of Querétaro.

Cervera Pacheco had been able to place three governors in Yucatán during his political career, and was tied to Echeverría through Gómez Villanueva, an early CD supporter.
Institutionally, the new President initiated the Programa Nacional de Solidaridad (Pronasol or Solidaridad), which was designed to bring government money for infrastructure improvements and social welfare programs directly to poor communities, usually those that voted against the PRI in recent elections. Pronasol money goes directly to local level committees formed specifically for this purpose, thereby by-passing other pre-existing government and Party welfare agencies. The President arrives in a town, receives the committee's petition for funds, and when the money becomes available, Salinas himself seems directly responsible. The funds for these programs come from the government's sales of public enterprises, but it is also directed away from other government and Party programs, thereby taking credit for improvements away from the PRI and placing it in the hands of the President. Salinas has also used Solidaridad as a job placement service, much as the PRI is used. He has put a number of rural, union and social activists, who were never members of the Party, in posts within the agency that administers Solidaridad. Many of these activists should have been natural allies or members of the PRD, but were in effect coopted into the system.

More directly, Salinas has weakened the Party's power by stripping some PRI governors of their offices after winning contested elections. In Guanajuato, San Luis Potosí, and Michoacán, Salinas forced the recently elected governors of his own party to step down after opposition protests, a completely new development in the Party's history, while also allowing the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) to win governorships in free elections (Baja California and Chihuahua in 1992). The PRI militants at both the state and national level have thus been shown that the President can take away even their final and most fundamental responsibility: winning elections.

**Similarities between the Three Cases**

Having reviewed the three most important cases of exit from the ruling coalition, several fundamental similarities stand out. The most important is that these internal divisions and electoral challenges represented a serious, if not the most serious threat, to the official regime's continued dominance. R. Hernández Rodríguez writes that these divisions and exits prove that the worst threats to the political system did not come from outside opposition groups, but rather from the internal rebellions like those of Almazán and Henríquez Guzmán. Vincent Padgett wrote in 1966 that the challenges of 1940 and 1952 constituted the only serious threats to the peaceful transfer of power.

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Many experts on Mexican politics have written that the student demonstrations and massacre of 1968 constituted the most dangerous threat to the political regime. The threat stemmed from the possible alliance between middle-class students and workers in Mexico City in favor of a democratic opening. This was met by an overly repressive response of the political elite which in effect amounted to "killing its own". But it is not clear that the events and responses to the massacre ever threatened the regime's foundations. Some student leaders were shot, others jailed, while the majority probably found employment in the public sector. A few attempted a guerrilla movement which was crushed during the Seventies.\textsuperscript{110}

In each case, the right of the PRI to call itself the Party of the Revolution, and therefore its continued right to rule basically unchallenged, was questioned, not by historic enemies of the regime, but by part of its elite. This point leads to the next similarity: in all three examples, the challengers came from (or had once been part of, as in the case of P. Muñoz Ledo) the heart of the ruling coalition and made their attempts during the process of the transfer of power, one of the most delicate moments for any regime, except for perhaps the most stable, accepted democracies. The leaders of these splits had held important posts and enjoyed personal and professional contacts with others within the governing elite. Their defections began as an attempt to influence the succession in their favor — i.e., to force the sitting President to choose them as his successor, or at least offer their groups (or their people) a larger place in the ruling coalition through better positions. The timing of their attempts was not random: by threatening a decisive split in the most fragile period, the dissidents stood a better chance of gaining their ends.

While in all the cases the leaders had been leading members of the Revolutionary elite, they were not among the front-runners in the succession contest. In fact, all four leaders were bosses of cliques or groups that no longer could look forward to continued advancement, either for the leaders or members of the camarillas. If the entire group's future is in doubt, then the leader is more able to organize these people into a solid force which threatens the regime, if only for the sheer numbers of possible dissidents. This is especially clear in the Henríquez Guzmán and Cárdenas/Muñoz Ledo exits: an entire wing of the Party was being denied further possibilities. Henríquez Guzmán led both the Revolutionary Generals who were being phased out of power by younger civilians as well as the PRistas tied to Lázaro Cárdenas’ faction who still remained active in government. In the 1988 case, the CD’s leaders represented capable public officials frozen out of leadership positions by de la Madrid’s imposition of his financial-sector allies, as well as functionaries threatened by the reform of the State which was whittling away at their positions and budgets.

In all cases, the challengers wanted to change the informal, tightly controlled manner in which the following President was chosen, in favor of the official guide-

\textsuperscript{110} Interview, former aide to a Governor of Guerrero, R. Figueroa, Mexico City, December, 1992; and with a student leader of the 1968 movement, Mexico City, July, 1993.
lines which allowed for a representative vote among the Party’s sectors (which would have favored their candidacies in a fair vote). All called only for more democratic nomination methods until they left or were expelled from the PRI, at which point their rhetoric expanded to include calls for multi-party democracy and the downfall of the official Party as the dominant force within the Mexican political system. None had complained of the procedures before beginning their challenges.

It was not until a conjuncture of conditions existed that these political leaders decided to rebel against Party discipline or complain about the informal Party rules of transitions. This set of conditions includes: the weakening of possibilities for the leaders and their groups (as well as a sector of the coalition); the transfer of power from one President to another; generalized discontent within society caused by changes in the nation’s economic development model. Lázaro Cárdenas’ (1934-1940) reforms had threatened the interests of the business classes; Alemán’s (1946-1952) economic program took political and economic weight away from the sectorial supports of the Party, especially peasants and workers, while de la Madrid’s shift away from Statism threatened the political class as well as the middle sectors and small- and medium-sized entrepreneurs, giving the dissidents a broad base of support for their electoral attempts against the PRI.

Not only were the conditions which made the exits more likely similar, so was the opportunity for the dissidents to use ‘voice’. Voice in this case could be considered the meetings, political dinners, etc., that each candidate participated in before organizing his group within the Party, and then the negotiations between the loyalists and the challengers before the final break. As Hirschman points out, voice is used when those dissatisfied with the status quo believe that there is some hope it will work, which also implies that the exit option exists, but is not too easily taken. (If exit wasn’t possible, the organization’s leaders could safely ignore complaints, while if this same option was too easy, the dissidents wouldn’t bother voicing their dissatisfactions.) But even given that Mexico enjoyed the conditions for voice to be used, it did not mean the organization’s leaders would react to it, preferring to allow a rupture (which was in each of the three cases controllable), rather than change the cause of the problem, which was the closed nature of transferring power from one leader to another.

One important point to which Hirschman does not give enough attention is that the Party loyalists reacted more to each exit than to the voicing of complaints. Ávila Camacho, Ruiz Cortines and Salinas all took steps to re-integrate the dissidents (in Salinas’ case, he gave jobs to those that had come close to exit, but who had not carried out the threat) back into the Party, to alter the worst of the abuses named by the dissidents, and to open up the elite to more members and groups of the coalition. But none actually democratized the Party’s nomination process, which was always the central problem causing the exits by dissatisfied Party members.

Aside from the similarities in the conditions for exit and the possibilities for voice, each battle followed similar trajectories in the patterns of negotiations and strategies used by each side as well as the calculations and actions of those support-
ing the challengers. The Party leaders in all three examples accused the rebellious leaders of simply wanting to improve their career positions, rather than promoting a true opening in the nomination procedures. The Party offered positions to those wavering so they wouldn’t leave the coalition, and threatened others, especially workers, to the same end. While attacking the dissident faction, the loyalists also engaged in negotiations with the leaders, usually offering them positions, a chance to run in the nomination race under the official rules (which would mean certain defeat), or a pre-candidate to represent their challengers’ interests (also without possibilities). After the split, the official Party, in all three cases, used a mixture of threats, coercion, and fraud to intimidate the opposition parties’ campaigns, free voting, and a fair count.

The calculations used by those who supported the dissidents also followed the same pattern; there were those who openly backed the Party rebels and then left with them. After the electoral defeat, some of these returned to high positions within the Party’s ranks, while others chose not to, or were not offered this option. Other supporters carefully played their hands by participating in early meetings, almost inviting Party leaders to offer them a prize not to leave, while others who stayed simply didn’t perform their tasks, or were coerced into loyalty.

One difference is important to note. In the 1940 and 1952 exits, neither rupture deepened into a permanent alternative for dissatisfied members of the coalition, or society. The 1940 and 1952 exits had a return ticket attached, while the 1988 attempt was one way out of the regime coalition for good. Only those who had stopped short of a full exit were given posts, not those who actually left. The PRD became a permanent party, even with its factional struggles, which continues with the PAN as México’s other (now more serious) opposition. The new “socialist democratic party” offers a more palatable alternative to old-style PRIístas than does the Catholic, pro-business, anti-State PAN, so the elite leadership now has to act with the possibility that a group within the PRI will make a jump to the PRD.

A Non-Case: The 1976 Presidential Succession

To clarify the conditions that made these ruptures possible and to highlight the calculations of politicians who lose out in the presidential process, this section will examine a non-case, or a succession in which none of the losers chose to leave the Party to make an electoral bid against the PRI. The case chosen, the 1976 succession, will test for the economic crisis variable, versus that of a radical shift in the development model. Otherwise, the 1976 transfer of power was like any other between 1940 and 1988: different pre-candidates vied for the sitting President’s favor. Yet, in 1976, no powerful loser rebelled against the decision. Why not?

The Echeverría’s sexenio (1970-1976) was characterized by strange contrasts in both the economic and political arenas. Economically, the growth of the economy
slowed moderately against the miracle years of 1956-1970, but was generally respectable. Agricultural production dropped, denying Mexico much needed foreign currency, and this drop was not compensated by either foreign earnings from other sectors of the economy (as the government followed a protectionist development policy) or an increase in tax receipts (Echeverría’s proposed tax reform failed when the business sectors fought hard against it). The President, faced with dropping production, chose to spend his way out of it by increasing the size, budget and responsibilities of the public sector. Disputes between the government and large business owners increased as the latter grew nervous of the growing State and the harsh rhetoric emanating from the administration. The government also infuriated the capitalists by supporting unions in their struggles for their wages. In fact, workers got higher salary increases during Echeverría’s sexenio than during any other sexenio since.¹¹¹

By the succession period, public spending had gotten out of hand, capital flight ensued, the peso had to be devalued, all of which caused a loss of confidence in the government’s ability to manage the economy effectively. Echeverría responded by blaming the capitalists for disloyalty toward the nation’s interests.

Politically, Echeverría had allowed more openness for press and political opposition mainly as a result of his disastrous handling of the 1968 student demonstrations when he was Interior Minister. The enormous growth of the bureaucracy and the public sector (especially the SOEs) allowed the regime to buy off the political opposition, while keeping the political class in good condition. At the same time the President opened up the political sphere, he heavily controlled his own governing elite, especially the Cabinet and sectorial leadership of the Party.

Echeverría’s transfer of power to his successor was disciplined; he was strong enough to resist pressure to name the next President until extremely late in his sexenio, which gave him more time and ability to force the distinct political leaders within the regime to follow his dictates. (Once the next PRI’s presidential candidate has been named, all forces in effect desert the dying ‘king’ to make alliances with and show loyalty to the new ‘prince’, making it difficult for the sitting President to govern.) Echeverría was able to avoid this by forcing the pre-candidates to keep silent about their ambitions and stay relatively inactive in their attempts to garner support.

Newell and Rubio write that a struggle was raging between two wings of the Party during the 1976 succession: one side wanted to continue the spending policies to buy political tranquillity while the other wanted to retake a more economically rational route, ignoring the political problems this would cause. Each side backed different pre-candidates and refused to agree on a common favorite, leading Echeverría to reject both these ‘posibles’ and settle on José López Portillo, a politician who, despite his career trajectory, was not known as a man with a strong group behind him.¹¹²

¹¹² Newell and Rubio, op. cit.
Despite the economic problems and political fractiousness, none of the losing pre-candidates left the Party — all held their criticisms of the choice made and maintained discipline. Why didn’t Moya Palencia or one of the other pre-candidates leave after losing out on the nomination? What was different about this case? Probably the most important variable is the lack of a faction whose members viewed their chances as hopeless. The expectations for future success were high, as were the risks of exit, making a rupture unnecessary and overly dangerous. The sectors were well controlled (and the workers and teachers, two large parts of the PRI rank and file, were content under Echeverría’s term), giving any internal opposition movement little base for organizing.

The second major factor explaining why no discontented pre-candidate left the Party is the lack of support from any major societal group outside the regime, such as the largest business groups of the North. These groups, despite the threats and accusations stemming from Echeverría’s administration concerning their blame for the currency devaluation, did not appear to try to draw out any of the losers to run outside the regime as ‘their candidate’. This is due in part to the losers’ reluctance to exit and partly due to López Portillo’s calming rhetoric, which did not emphasize class struggle, the capitalists as traitors, or any other inflammatory issues.

The general conclusions one can draw from the 1976 non-case support the argument of why the 1940, 1952, and 1988 ruptures occurred: in Echeverría’s transfer to López Portillo, there was no single ‘out’ faction or wing of the Party without future possibilities for advancement; the elite was not freezing out any particular faction; the Party wasn’t weak — it could and did organize its bases to support the official candidate, and finally, the losers had no real options outside the regime.

**Conclusion: Ruptures, Institution Building and Political Stability**

Throughout this paper, we have been discussing how the exits of 1940, 1952, and 1988 are fundamentally similar in their causes and also their effects on the political institutions of Mexico. But what effects have these ruptures had on overall political stability? Do these internal Party rebellions threaten the rules, laws, or governing norms of the country, i.e., its political institutions?

One way of examining this problem is to understand the relationship between institutional change and political stability. To do this, one must first define political stability. A central theme is actors’ expectations of how outcomes will be decided. Therefore, the central rules of the game do not change or change so slowly that the alterations do not cause disruptions in the short term. For many years in Argentina, for example, one could not say with much certainty that in five years time political outcomes would be decided by civilian institutions such as a written constitution, an elected President, and a Congress, because there was a high probability that the military would take over and rule by executive fiat. Fundamental institutional change could occur in the short-term, and even when elected civilians were in
power, the expectations that they would remain there were low. People acted on these expectations of short-term change, which created and enhanced the instability of the nation’s political regime.

Individuals within institutions working to maximize their individual self-interest both compete and cooperate under the constraints and opportunities presented by the formal and informal rules. While these conventions on how things are done bind the actors’ behavior, they can and do change, either because of external changes, changes in preferences, or because one or more powerful political figures can agree to force through alterations in how people operate. These changes then lead to others as actors respond to new opportunities.

In the Mexican case, the early years of the Twentieth Century saw the breakdown of almost all institutions — economic, political, and social — during the Revolution of 1910. Following this disruption came a conscious recreation of these institutions, especially political, by the “winners” of the Revolution, led by Elias Calles. By offering the leaders of near-independent armies, peasant and worker organizations a place in the political leadership of the nation, in return for the promise of loyalty toward the regime (and therefore toward the Caudillo), Calles was able to convince the majority that cooperation would bring greater long-term benefits than a short-term defect strategy. Calles was strong enough to destroy those that refused the bargain, like Saturnino Cedillo and Adolfo de la Huerta, while retaining the support of others within the coalition.

But even as the institutions were initially created, agreed upon, and strengthened (for example, by Cárdenas’ mobilization and inclusion of thousands of Mexican into the bases of the government party), individuals within the coalition were not locked into the same cooperative strategy. Game theorists (Axelrod, 1984; Taylor, 1986; Hardin, 1982) predict that cooperation is possible in long-term repeated play as long as the future is not too heavily discounted, if the rewards from cheating are not too great in the present, and if actors have some sort of commitment that other actors will continue cooperating. As we saw in the 1940 and 1952 cases, the cooperation strategy followed by both Almazán and Henríquez Guzmán before their exit attempts broke down as they saw their future possibilities diminishing. Furthermore, the hopes for a successful challenge in the present increased as widespread discontent within the Party swelled the ranks of their political factions.

The resources brought into the Mexican political game of the decades 1930s, 1940s and 1950s by distinct actors and the low costs of alliance-making facilitated the defect strategy taken by regime dissidents. The central institution-building task of Party leadership during this period was to weaken the incentives for succession challenges. To do this, the main strategy was simply to win presidential elections at any cost. Apart from the learning curve, the incentives for possible dissidents were also altered through presidential institution-building, which decreased the ability of elites to communicate and organize.

Presidents Ávila Camacho, Ruiz Cortines and Salinas de Gortari each took steps to modify the formal and informal rules of the game to make the ruptures that
had marred their presidential campaigns more difficult in the future. The three most common steps were welcoming some of the dissenters back into official political life (except for Salinas), weakening the Party by taking away larger and larger chunks of its primary responsibilities, which usually ended up under Gobernación's jurisdiction in the case of Ávila Camacho and Ruiz Cortines, and under Solidaridad in Salinas' case. At the same time, the electoral laws were altered, making future elite dissent less likely to turn into dangerous electoral challenges. Thus, the short-term manipulation of available punishments and rewards which were available and necessary to all Presidents to keep their people in line changed subtly as the more formal institutions were modified by presidential action. Each President's attempt (beginning with Calles) to reign in the unruly factions of the Revolutionary Family led to different opportunity costs for voicing dissent and/or exiting in succeeding political generations. The costs rose as political control was solidified under the President's mantle. The political possibilities for politicians in 1976 were far different than in 1940 when Almazán made his jump. These opportunities changed slowly over twenty years as successive Presidents changed electoral laws, controlled the sectors of the Party more successfully, and redirected political tasks away from the Party.

The changes made by the chief executives, especially after dangerous exits, were marginal and evolutionary. The Presidents, because of their already strong constitutional position, were able to gather enough support within the alliance to strengthen their informal powers. Presidential collaborators agreed to the changes precisely because they were his 'people' in the highest posts of the land whose careers depended on his good will. Those who had opposed him were defeated in the electoral challenge and were not in a position to dispute his modifications.

The generational shift from independent Revolutionary actors brought into the official coalition to public servants whose entire career depended on their ability to continue climbing within the ranks of the regime gave Mexican Presidents better leverage over their actions. Bureaucrats had little ability to independently organize large groups outside the regime loyal only to themselves with which to negotiate with the regime's top leadership. A new type of internal political group or faction would grow out of these reduced possibilities for organization. The 1988 case shows, however, that this generational shift was not enough to stop all possible ruptures from culminating in electoral challenges.

Thus we see that Mexico's famous political stability derives in large part from the Presidents' control over the regime's elite. But this ability to reign in ambitions and change the cost-benefit ratio of loyalty to ambition was not born with Calles' call to institutionalize political relations in 1929: it evolved over more than two decades of constant challenges from powerful, dissatisfied members of the elite. The internal stability of the regime was matched by the Party's ability to co-opt and repress political movements within civil society.

Yet, the question must be posed: even if one of the challengers had won (or been allowed to win) in fair elections, how much would the regime, or the set of
political rules have changed? One could argue that two central foundation stones of the regime would have crumbled: the electoral dominance of the PRI and the President’s ability to choose his successor. 

It is certainly conceivable that even after winning over the dominant Party, the new President would have been forced to use the Party’s sectorial machinery to govern, or risk a dissolution of his position as different groups attempted to force better arrangements with the government. This is especially true given that all three ruptures began as attempts to simply force the choice of the sitting President in the succession. The rhetoric of great democratic change by and large began once it was clear that the nomination process would not be opened up. Even if the Party structures survived one sexenio, as the new term approached, actors who had seen a clean victory in one presidential election would believe it was possible for them to do the same, which seems in all likelihood to lead to the formation of a multi-party system. This growth of truly independent parties could only then be stopped by a system far more repressive than Mexico has ever had. By taking away the President’s ability to choose his successor almost single-handedly, and the Party’s role in winning elections, the regime as we know it seems difficult to imagine. For this reason, the coalition’s elite strove so mightily to contain internal divisions before they became true ruptures.

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