THE ANALYSIS OF PRESIDENTIALISM IN MEXICO: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE
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Presidential studies is not a field that has been particularly developed in Mexico. Apart from a relatively large number of legal studies, the presidency and its incumbents have not received the attention one should expect. Little in-depth research has been done on the administrative structure of the presidency, of its relations to Congress, of decision making, of its sources of power, the constraints upon it etc.

This does not mean that we lack studies dealing with the presidency. Any study of the Mexican political system or of the process of government includes an account of the presidency. In doing a review of the literature it is precisely to this type of literature I will refer.

I propose to organise this review in terms of the perspectives that have dominated the field from the late 50s onwards. This will allow me to present the consensus at certain points in time as well as to stress the differences of interpretation over time. Within each perspective a distinction will be made between the explanatory, normative and predictive propositions that authors bring forward in their analysis. As the paper develops it will become clear that although knowledge on the presidency has advanced, the explanatory propositions remain more or less unaltered while the normative judgements and the guesses about the future have changed dramatically.

In general terms three stages can be identified in the analysis of the Mexican political system and, within it, of the presidential institution. The first goes from the late 50s up to the late 60s and is dominated by modernisation theory. The second, covers the 1970 decade, structuralist analyses prevail and a statist-interventionist-perspective is favoured both in theory and in political practice. Finally, from the early 80s on neo-liberalism establishes itself with its growing concern for market forces, the reduction of direct state intervention and, in the Latin American context, a growing concern with political democracy and liberty.

The Early Analysis

Before the late fifties the study of the political institutions and processes in Mexico was either historical or legal in nature. Few attempts were made to analyse systematically the structure and workings of the political system. In less than a decade the situation had changed and a considerable quantity of research on the Mexican political system began to be published. The field belonged almost exclusively to North American historians and political scientists interested in the revolutionary process and the distinctive political system it gave birth to. Based on empirical analysis of different aspects and institutions of the political system, their general accounts constituted the only authoritative sources of knowledge and were the basis on which a decade later Mexican analysts would build their own studies.

1 One such exception was Tannenbaum's (1950) analysis of different aspects of the Mexican polity
Although some differences in emphasis regarding certain features of the Mexican political system can be pointed out, most authors within this tradition share basic agreements in their explanatory and normative views as well as visions of the future. First, they all begin by recognising the distance between constitutional theory and political practice but justify it in terms of both performance and lack of available alternatives. Second, they state that the Mexican government is in transition and that although not yet fully democratic it is moving in the right direction towards political democracy. Third, there is a wide consensus regarding the absolute centralisation of power within the executive branch of government. Finally, all agree that the Mexican polity and within it the presidency are highly institutionalised.

The divergence between legal forms and political reality is clear in a passive legislative, a dependent judiciary and a non-existent federalism (Vernon, 1963, p. 11). Although some authors claim that the executive dominance has a legal basis and does not represent an usurpation of the limited judicial and legislative powers (Cline, 1962, p. 137), most are certain that the legal basis is insufficient to explain the president's power and the executive's involvement in the political process.

The demonstrable discrepancy between theory and practice precludes the characterisation of the system as fully democratic. However, the achievements and observed direction of the system lead the authors to describe it not as authoritarian or undemocratic but rather as a developing democracy (Tucker, 1957, p. 419, Cumberland 1968, p. 271), as a particular and private version of democracy (Brandenburg 1964, H, ch.6), as a stable plural society (Scott, 1959, p. 32), as a single party democracy (Cline, 1962, ch. XV) or, at worst, as liberal authoritarianism (Brandenburg, 1964, pp. 163-165).

Like most North American political scientists in those days, those that made the Mexican polity their object of study were concerned with explaining the process of government in Mexico. The interest was to describe and explain how the system could operate in a stable fashion. The answer lay in the effective concentration of power in the presidential institution.

The characterisation of the Mexican presidency is not couched in constitutional terms although most authors begin by listing the wide powers with which the executive is endowed. Rather, we find an analysis of the role played by the executive and the sources of power available to him in order to dominate the political process.

Here, the first point of agreement is that the system and, in particular, the presidency is institutionalised. In fact, the credit for characterising the system as institutionalised is given to an American political scientist far removed from classical modernisation theory and its basic assumption that economic development would lead to political development, that is, to the creation of a legitimate public order (Huntington, 1968). Nevertheless the works under review give credit to Huntington's claim that México is an institutionalised polity ranking high in the criteria of autonomy, complexity, adaptability and flexibility. (Huntington, 1968, pp. 318-322).
When speaking about the presidency what authors mean by institutionalisation is that power does not lie in a particular incumbent but rather in the office itself and that each new president is entitled to command the allegiance of all the social forces that make up the system regardless of who he might be. Thus, Scott (1959, pp. 246-247) argues that Mexico has solved the main problem of charismatic government by doing away with the emotional tie between leader and follower through the institutionalisation of the presidency.

Regarding the sources of power there is a general agreement that around the 40s the army ceased to be the main supporting force of government and that through a number of events and policies --the physical destruction of most leaders, the professionalisation of the army, the recurring demonstration that military rebellions against the government were doomed to failure, the steady reduction in the military budget-- the army had been reduced to one among several factors in politics.

It is also widely accepted that Cárdenas expanded the basis of power of the system by creating or drawing close to it mass organisations of labourers and peasants. However, differences in emphasis are to be found in what can be considered as the backbone of presidential power. While some authors (Tucker, 1957; Scott, 1959; Cline 1962; Padgett, 1966) focus more on the party and within it on the agrarian, labour and “popular” sectors as the sources of power of the presidency, another set of authors (Tannenbaum 1950, Vernon 1963 and Brandenburg 1964) rely much more on a bureaucratic or administrative source of power.

Those that stress the importance and role of the party claim that without its organisation structures there would be no way of aggregating demands and delivering supports, no mechanisms for deciding political disputes and no legitimacy to make authoritative decisions.

Within this view there are authors which would go as far as saying that the PRI is the locus of power and has the role of aggregating interests (Scott, 1959, p. 29) or that it is the body that “presents the issues and patterns policies” (Cline, 1962, p. 166). From a more moderate point of view, it is argued that what the PRI does is to facilitate or contribute to the final aggregative decisions emanating from the President's circle (Padgett, 1966, p. 48). Moreover, the PRI is credited with performing a number of tasks without which it would be difficult to imagine a working system: it legitimises the succession pattern, has permanence beyond the incumbent allowing for party continuity rather than personal continuity, facilitates political communication, works as a sounding board, distributes propaganda nationwide, promotes consensus around

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2 In spite of being one of the best textbooks on the Mexican political system, Scott's *Mexican Government in Transition* is rather contradictory in the role it assigns to the presidency and to the official party. While at some points he states that the locus of power is the PRI (pp. 23, 29 and 108) and that the decision making process lies within it, at other points in the same text he claims that it is the presidency we must consider if searching for effective political power (pp. 135, 244, 246 279-280).
one project or other, serves as a symbol of unity and as a mechanism for mobilising
support (Padgett, 1966, pp. 48, 50, 61, 62).

No author would go as far as denying political importance to the official party,
but claims on its subordinated status and lack of autonomy abound. Authors such as
Brandenburg (1964, p. 5) or Tannenbaum (1950, p. 85) have it that the party is merely
an appendage of the executive and that for all practical purposes the sectors of the PRI
are creatures of the state, that they draw their strength from the administration —i.e. the
president— and that they are a stick to lean upon but the stick is only as strong as the
arm that wields it.

These other authors, who rely far more on elitist rather than on pluralist
theories to understand the political process, stress the control over an extensive
bureaucratic apparatus as the primary source of power of the presidency. Various
propositions are advanced to explain how and why the bureaucracy is a source of
power. One of them, to which all authors adhere, views the recruitment and appointive
powers of the presidency as a source of power. Since all political careers depend on the
will of the executive all must owe allegiance to the president. Another explanation is
that given the absence of Congress as an aggregator of the whole array of interests that
enter the coalition, the president and his staff are the only ones that can provide an
integrated policy (Scott, 1959, pp. 279-280). Finally, others point to the control of the
economy through the bureaucratic apparatus and the enormous discretionary power
this has to take decisions without reference to “objective standards” (Vernon, 1963, pp.
25-26).

Whether the PRI or the administration are stressed as power factors, it is
recognised that what exists and keeps the system working is a hierarchy of interrelated
groups and associations, the loyalties and relations of whose leaders culminate in the
president (Scott, 1959, p. 259; Cline, 1962, p. 141; Vernon, 1963, pp. 257-59;

Alongside these two factors as backbones of presidential power a number of
other sources are mentioned. Two of them that figure prominently are tradition and
political culture to which almost all authors refer as supporting structures of
presidentialism. Tradition reinforces the acceptance of a strong executive in so far as
experience shows that Mexico has only been governable during those periods in which
a sole individual has succeeded in imposing his rule. On the other hand, it is claimed
that deep rooted traits like paternalism and authoritarianism go well with the
concentration of power in the executive.

Additional strength derives from the acceptance by the greatest portion of
politically minded Mexicans of the legitimacy of the revolutionary government and
the political mechanisms through which it works (Scott, 1959, p. 258; Padgett, 1966, pp.
155-156, Almond and Verba).

Finally, a most important source of both power and legitimacy to which all
authors agree is the presumed and real dedication to acceptable social goals.
High rates of growth accompanied by rising social expenditure are presented as evidence of the continuous compromise of successive presidents to the goals of the Revolution (Wilkie, 1967). In spite of recognising an enormous concentration of power in a constitutionally and politically strong president, analysts of the Mexican political system allow for a number of checks that effectively constrain the executive. These constraints are part of the explanation to the system's predictability and stability.

The discussion of checks on the presidency is seldom couched in constitutional terms. There is not a sustained discussion on whether the Constitution allows for enough checks on the executive and, if so, why these are not observed. In fact, the only reference to constitutional checks is the norm of no re-election which apart from posing a temporal constraint on the executive is considered to be responsible for the great mobility that characterises the system.

In contrast, the discussion revolves on what can be termed political checks on the presidency. Here we find a combination of élite theory, pressure group politics and revolutionary ideology that combine to make demands on the executive and to limit his personal power regarding decision making. Some authors stress the role of sectoral organisation and their demands as a check on presidential policies (Scott, Padgett, Brandenburg), others point to the business sector (Vemon, Schaffer), still others refer to the maintenance of intra-elite balance. Whatever social, economic or political force may be invoked, the agreement is that the executive's power is checked by the need to maintain the broad coalition that characterises the revolutionary family (Padgett, 1966, p. 144) and that given the diversity of interests, the president must engage in a constant process of consultation, conciliation and compromise if the system is to be held together (Vemon, 1963, pp. 13-15).

This leads us to the final point of what is expected of the chief executive. In spite of an image of a strong presidency, the degree of institutionalisation means that the incumbent need not possess the personal energy and individual ability required to capture loyal support and assure authority. These come with the post. But although the chief executive no longer needs to be a charismatic leader he nonetheless is expected to fulfill a demanding role as the “leading decision-maker”, “leading aggregating agency” and “settler of clashes of conflicting interests” (Scott, 1959, pp. 116-17; Padgett, 1966, p. 155; Brandenburg, 1964, pp. 4-5; Vernon, 1963, p. 13).

What emerges then is a picture of a highly centralised structure of power revolving around a presidential institution headed by a chief executive endowed with extended legal, economic and political powers that enable him to perform a number of political functions that in less centralised systems are performed by other institutions and branches of government: aggregation of interests, decision-making, arbitration. To perform these functions the presidency can rely upon a single party and a well disciplined bureaucracy united in their outlook and behaviour by a loose set of goals whose origins date back to the Revolution.
Thus, although few studies would go to the extreme of explicitly stating that the “government of Mexico is the President” (Tannenbaum, 1950, p. 83), few of them wholly reject this image.

From a normative perspective, two types of propositions are put forward. First come those that justify the enormous concentration of power, the gap between theory and practice and the relative absence of some key democratic procedures. Then comes the appraisal of the system.

Regarding the first, the claim is that there are overriding considerations in favour of practice over theory (Cline, 1962, p. 149), that departure from constitutional concepts is not so much an indication of power hungry presidents but evidence of failure of the basic law to meet the country’s present day political needs (Scott, 1959, p. 255). The consensus is that given the conditions of the country there was no alternative to power being centralised (Tannenbaum, 1950, p. 2; Tucker, 1957, p. 82; Scott, 1959, p. 255; Cline, 1962, p. 135).

The divergence between theory and practice was judged not only unavoidable but also positive. Thus Brandenburg justifies what he calls deviations from the model of western political democracy on the basis of the efficiency shown by liberal authoritarianism (1964, p. 163); Scott states that the centralisation of authority was not entirely bad for it led to stability (1959, p. 251), and Cline states that the combination of an official party and a centralised system centred in the president that would seem conducive to despotism has had the opposite result of a gradual broadening of liberties and a widening of participation in national decisions (1962, p. 149).

Just as a highly positive appraisal of the system is offered, so optimism pervades prospective analysis. Most authors view the Mexican political system as a system in transition and the direction is one in which westernisation will continue, liberties will steadily broaden and participation and representation widen. These optimistic predictions derived not only from what was deemed the success of the system in attaining economic growth and political stability over the past two decades but also from their faith in the basic tenet of modernisation theory that economic development will necessarily entail political development as a by-product.

There are, of course, some few words of caution. As early as 1959 Scott warned that the executive in Mexico was not politically responsible for his acts and that sooner or later the official coalition might not be able to juggle all the power factors successfully (Scott, 1959, p. 30).

From an altogether different perspective, Vernon argued that Mexico may have reached a platform in her upward climb and may need, on the side of the economy, some new source of energy to push her into the next phase of productive investment and economic growth; and that on the side of the political system it must either find the means to reduce the extent of its control over the economy or find the means to exercise that control in a way which, by sacrificing the goal of unanimity, could be more responsible to the country’s needs (Vernon, 1963, pp. 189-190).
This leads us to what can be considered the failures or weaknesses of the concentration of power in the presidency. As said before, the lack of outright democratic procedures is not seen as a failure; first because the context would not have permitted combining them successfully with the imperative of governability, and second, because the system is viewed as progressively moving towards that goal.

However, one author amongst the many we have been analysing claims that the presidency might not be as strong and autonomous as it appeared and that the whole structure was flawed by inefficiency. Both claims are linked in a two step argument. For Vernon (1963, p. 136), there was no possibility of coherent and continuous policy orientation or direction. This was so because the chief executive must maintain solidarity inside the official party and neutralise the hostile forces outside the PRI. At the same time he was obliged to seem tolerant of opposition and eschew acts of outright repression. Thus, the president could not act decisively in any direction. In this way, presidents need not worry about Congress, or about being blocked by a minister, or being declared out of bounds by an independent court. But in their ceaseless effort and need to enlist the loyalty of every source of power in the country, to achieve unanimity and extend the reach of the PRI to right and left they have gradually been eased into a strait-jacket. The result, as mentioned, is that presidents are held to a course of action which is zigzagging and vacillating (p. 189).

The characterisation of the presidency by these early analyses seems, on the whole, reasonable. Constitutional powers are first described, then they move to the political sources of power and convey a convincing picture of the means and ways in which the executive evolved until it became the indisputable centre of authority. They offer a good though general account of the political structure and the process of government. They describe in detail the mechanisms through which concentration of power and centralisation of power were achieved and the role that organisations inside and outside the official party play, the consensus bequeathed by the revolution and the reinforcing effects of tradition and culture.

If the general characterisation appears reasonable, can the same be said about the appraisal and projections? With the advantage of hindsight we can now say that the hopes for a greater degree and rapid move to democratisation did not materialise in the following years and that although the late 70's and then the late 80's witnessed some firm steps towards political liberalisation, the system still resists categorisation as a western political democracy.

As for the highly positive appraisal of the system it must be said that it was partly warranted by the facts. On the political side, Mexico succeeded in establishing a governing mechanism and a set of resilient institutions that have guaranteed political stability for 30 years. Undoubtedly there were signs of what authors called westernisation: increasing participation, a less exclusionary regime, electoral reforms, consolidation of civilian governments. On top of it, México had a sustained rate of growth of 6.5% for almost two decades, real wages grew steadily at an annual rate of
4.4%, employment was on the rise, inflation was maintained at negligible levels. In
sum, there was a sense that dedication to acceptable social ideals and success in
attaining them characterised one government after the other.

However, when a different perspective for analysis was chosen and emphasis
was placed not on the general process of government but on the different institutions
and their relations to government, the picture changed altogether. If in these early
analyses governability --not democracy-- was the goal to attain, stability --not the way
of achieving it-- was the focus of interest, and growth --rather than development or
distribution-- was the key objective, in the 70’s the terms of the discussion were to be
reversed. A critical approach was to take the place of the wave of praise and optimism
that characterised political analysis in the previous decade.

Just before entering the analysis of this second period the work of a Mexican
sociologist must be mentioned not only because his work on the Mexican political
system broke the monopoly of North American political scientists in the 60's, but
primarily because his study moved away from modernisation theory and conveyed a
more complex, more detailed and less biased picture of the system.

This is not the place to review González Casanova’s *La Democracia en
México*, I will just try to point out the topics he introduces and the main conclusions
that can be drawn.

*La Democracia en México* is organised into three main sections. In the first of
them the author looks at the relation between the formal and real structures of power.
Like his North American counterparts, although in greater detail, he describes,
provides empirical evidence and offers an explanation for the subordination of the
legislative and judicial branches of government and for the lack of federalism in any
meaningful sense. He then goes on to analyse what in his view have been the real
“power factors” and, thus, the constraints on the very strong executive, namely,
regional and local caciques, the army, the church, the landowners and the national and
foreign entrepreneurs (pp. 45-55).

Again, there is a justification for an overt concentration of power and for
circumventing constitutional theory. For González Casanova the presidentialist regime
served the purpose of terminating conspiracies within Congress, the armed forces and
the church; a centralist regime was necessary to overcome national disunity and put an
end to local and regional feuds; an official party was the only way of curbing the
caudillos’ power. On the economic side he claims that respect for property rights would
have meant maintaining semi-feudal property and that laissez-faire and a non-
interventionist state would have precluded the establishment of a national industrial
basis (pp. 85-87).

In the second section he introduces the international factor that hitherto had
been marginally, if at all considered. In its analysis he is interested in showing the
heavy dependence of Mexico on the United States and the consequences it carries in
terms of political autonomy.
Finally, he relates the power structure to the social structure where he finds all the failures of the system and the consequences of a non-democratic regime. González Casanova offers a picture in which marginality prevails and overshadows the fruits of economic growth. Mexico, he claims, is a country where just a minority of the population has the right to live under the Constitution, to organise itself into associations and parties, to vote. These rights belong to the participant Mexico not to the vast majority who are neither the subject of progress nor of the rule of law. So for all the justifications based on the achievements of growth and stability the truth remains that a growing inequality is there to remind us of the consequences of not having a democratic system (pp. 158-159).

**Critical Analysis in the 70’s**

The characterisation of the analyses on the Mexican political system during the seventies presents itself as a more difficult task than that of the preceding decades not only because the number of studies is much more voluminous but also because the depth, topics and variety of approaches increased. Thus, in attempting to do a review of the literature I will necessarily be selective and concentrate on what in my view constituted the generally accepted professional viewpoint in those days.

After 1968 North American political scientists no longer monopolised the study of the Mexican political system nor did they set the pace and mode of research. Although they did not abandon the field, Mexican social scientists produced a wide and searching range on diverse aspects of their polity and, above all, from different approaches.

Modernisation theory was questioned and abandoned altogether by North Americans and Mexicans alike. Its place was not taken by any single approach although structuralist (mainly from a marxist perspective) and systemic analyses tended to prevail.

In moving away from modernisation theory several factors were at work. First, there was the growing awareness that Mexico was beginning to experience trouble in sustaining its high and uninterrupted trend of economic growth. Second, the identification of growth with modernisation and development was seriously questioned. Linked to this was the growing evidence that for all its spectacular growth, the benefits of that growth had gone to an ever decreasing section of the population. The outcome of the successive revolutionary governments was no longer seen as being so beneficial in face of the well documented inequality and marginality.

There were also political reasons for the change in perspective. The 1968 movement appeared to many intellectuals as the consequence not only of economic inequality and what was seen as the state’s estrangement from its revolutionary purposes but also as evidence that the political system had remained unaltered in spite of the profound changes that had resulted from the Mexican industrialisation process.
Finally it must be mentioned that other paradigms in the social sciences began to make headway. Marxist approaches and dependency theory appeared alongside the more traditional approaches in political sociology. The 70's also witnessed the growth of an influential literature which criticised modernisation theory as expounded by its classical exponents and developed new interpretations for Latin American countries relying on typological analysis of political regimes.

All these factors combined to yield a new type of analysis. One that was critical, that introduced selected aspects that had been disregarded in the more general visions of the previous analyses and that gained in scope and depth.

The change was so great that it was as if it had suddenly been discovered that Mexico's revolutionary mandate was not being realised. That the state hadn't had the will or, simply, the capacity, to live up to the Revolution's expectations.

Almost without exception, all analyses pointed to the grave inequalities to which the process of capitalist development had given rise. Political scientists used the work of economists to question all the presumed accomplishments of what was then termed the "Mexican miracle" (King, 1970; Navarrete, Aguilar y Carmona, 1967; Aguilar y Carrion, 1972; Hansen, 1971).

Instead of stressing growth rates they emphasised all sorts of distribution figures; instead of pointing to Mexico's great leap forward they emphasised economic concentration; instead of focusing on the urbanisation process they focused on marginality; instead of drawing attention to the industrialisation effort they showed the dependent character of Mexico's development; finally, instead of signalling the benefits of an interventionist state, the services it paid to private accumulation were revealed.

On the political side, the terms of the discussion were also reversed. Far from seeing the political system as one that was gradually expanding representation, participation and political liberties, it was viewed as an authoritarian regime. Analyses of the system's success in building institutions and allowing the ordered participation in politics gave way to the study of phenomena of control, domination and repression. More than stability the new studies brought to light social and political movements that questioned such stability.

In what follows I will give a brief overview of the approaches that guided these new type of studies, the research into the particular aspects of the Mexican polity to which it gave rise and the new consensus which it reached.

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3 Studies such as Lipset (1959) and Almond and Coleman (1960) had set the parameters of modernisation analysis for most countries in Latin America. Cardoso and Faletto (1969) were among the first to counter this predominant theory in the analysis of development. O'Donnell (1973) was to follow with his influential views on modernisation and authoritarianism. Reyna and Weinert (1977) is the most authoritative source on the subject for Mexico. Analysis from the regime typologies view derive from Linz's (1975) influential work.
The Demise of Modernisation Theory.

Huntington's work had a great impact in questioning the main tenet of modernisation theory. By the end of the 60s it was recognised that stable political systems were seldom correlated with rapid economic growth. The latter's effects were presented as disruptive of traditional social structures, as expanding the number of winners and loosers with the consequent struggle on the part of the former to enlarge their gains and of the latter to protest and attempt to alter the outcome, as producing rising expectations which outdistance the capacity of the economy to satisfy them, as increasing literacy, exposure to mass media and capacity to organise (Hansen, 1971, p. 3).

Although signs of instability were already apparent by the end of the 60's, most authors agreed that Mexico had successfully avoided -or at least limited-- the threats posed by economic growth. Thus, from a political perspective the same question was still being asked. What had made possible for the political system to successfully contain the political and social stresses of the past 30 years within limits consistent with Mexico's development strategy? The question appeared all the more pertinent since instead of starting from the general economic accomplishments of the economy, the point of departure was the uneven distribution of the benefits of growth.

The critique of México's pattern of development or of the consequences to which it had given rise was a common feature of all studies. Similarly, authors with different theoretical perspectives joined in rejecting the claim of the official party representing the interests of the labouring masses, of these having an effective say in policy direction and of a strong but benevolent executive concerned with implementing policies that would meet their demands. In the end, no matter the theoretical framework adopted, all coincided in characterising the system as authoritarian and also in identifying and explaining the principal political mechanisms of control and domination. However, while structuralist analyses were more concerned with showing the necessary relations of domination that underpin a capitalist mode of development, others focused much more on the process of government and, within it, on the impact of different groups on the formulation of policy and on political stability.

Structural and Marxist Analyses.

Marxist analyses changed the terms of the discussion on Mexican politics. Rather than conducting research into different political institutions and the governmental process, the focus here was on social classes, the state and its relations.

As in classical marxism, the Mexican state is characterised by its class nature and, in later studies, the regime or form of state by the form of domination adopted. Since the state is viewed as functioning to reproduce a mode of production in which a
specific class is dominant, the workings of revolutionary governments are reinterpreted from this perspective.

Distorted development and social and economic inequalities are presented as the result of capitalism, aggravated in the case of Mexico by its dependent status. The state, like any other state in capitalist societies, has to set and further the conditions for private accumulation and is constrained by its class nature from pursuing policies antagonistic to the interests of the dominant class.

Given that Mexican capitalist society, like any other, is ridden by economic contradictions and class struggle, the state must protect capitalist development by preventing class conflict from endangering the conditions of private capital accumulation. To exercise domination the capitalist state sets up a number of institutions and mechanisms the aim of which is to prevent class consciousness and independent organisations by means of concessions, cooption and repression.

In dealing with domination, marxist analysis allows for different forms of state which are determined by such factors as class struggle, stage of development, geopolitical position and historical situation. Thus, in contrast to advanced capitalist societies that have a democratic form of state, Mexico's regime is characterised as authoritarian.

In it, domination operates by a much tighter state control on social organisations and by several mechanisms that either block the emergence of independent political and social organisations or repress them if they should arise. The principal instrument of this "controlled inclusion" is the official party with its corporatist structure. Formal as well as informal mechanisms are available to both party and state bureaucracy to effect control. On the formal side, the state or party controlled organisation of subordinate classes and the administrative and legal institutions linked to it are the rule. On the informal side, clientelism based on political and economic exchange defines relations between state and leaders and between these and affiliates, reinforcing and legitimating domination. These mechanisms have been so effective that, in spite of its authoritarianism, the Mexican state has been able to avoid the use of overt, frequent and widespread repressive methods.

Within this general framework of analysis of the Mexican capitalist state, several particular and detailed studies dealing with the origin and development of social classes, the role of foreign capital, state interventionism and state autonomy were produced in the seventies.

Research on the working and peasant classes, their organisations and political movements point to their subordinated character, describe the mechanisms of control over them and their attempts either to gain autonomy by breaking away from the control of the state or, by struggle for more favourable conditions within the existing status quo.4

4Among the several studies on the labour movement the following may be cited: Álvarez y Sandoval, 1975; Anguiano, 1975; Basurto, 1975; Leal, 1974; León, 1975; Peasant studies are well
The bourgeoisie is pictured as a class that initially developed under the aegis of the state and as the major beneficiary of development. However, thanks to the policies for favouring private capital pursued by the state, it is said to have gradually gained enough strength and autonomy to impose its interests effectively and curb the reformist capacity that the state had previously shown.

Few Marxist studies analyse the governing elite or personnel that controls the state apparatuses. When this issue is addressed, the focus is on the growing identification of interests between the high bureaucracy and the bourgeoisie (Bennett and Sharpe, 1980; Hamilton, 1976, and 1982, pp. 29, 275; Labastida, 1972, pp. 138-140; Leal, 1975, pp. 58-61) or, alternatively, on the “triangle of domination” that characterises dependent capitalism: domestic capital, foreign capital and the state (Leal, 1975; Labastida, 1972; Cardoso, 1969).

Finally, several important works on state interventionism and state autonomy were produced. The principal aim of these was, again, to show how interventionism had served to further the interests of private capital and the limits placed by a capitalist structure on the ability of a progressive alliance either to meet the needs of subordinated classes or at least to ameliorate the worse abuses (Pereyra, 1974; Hamilton, 1976 and 1982; Castañeda, 1976; Bennett and Sharpe, 1980; Fitzgerald, 1979).

Within this perspective no research was carried out on the formal political institutions of the capitalist state itself. They were normally ignored as state apparatuses with little or no influence on the general workings of the system. Given the new conceptual framework favoured to interpret political domination the executive as head of state and government presents no interest. Properties and attributes that in previous studies were predicated of the executive are now ascribed to the state: strong, interventionist, authoritarian. But, for all its strength, the state is structurally limited and unable to pursue policies opposed by the dominant class. Policies are seen as deriving from the needs of capital accumulation and the group that controls state institutions as carrying out the functions which any capitalist state has to carry out (Hamilton, 1976, p. 228; Flores Olea, 1976, p. 7; Stavenhagen, 1976, pp. 21-22).

In terms of the future political development, most authors working within this tradition consider that there are no signs of advancing to more democratic forms of domination. Two main arguments are given to substantiate this belief. First, the contradictions to which dependent capitalism has given rise are deepening with the consequence of increasing the costs that subordinated classes have to bear, diminishing the state capacity to pursue redistributive policies and, thus, forcing the state to rely on more repressive methods or, at least, to strengthen control in order to avoid the creation of independent organisations or the breaking away of existing ones with the
consequence of raising the level of demands. Second, it is argued that Mexico has not yet achieved the historic conditions to develop a party system which could press for a liberal democracy. These historic conditions are held to be the independence of class organisations and their ability to exert pressure through parties that represent their interests.

Linked to the marxist tradition but keeping a certain critical distance from it, studies on bureaucratic authoritarianism also had wide influence on the explanation of political development. The authoritarian model was developed as an attempt to rethink the relationship between economic modernisation and political change in face of the resurgence of military rule in Brazil and Argentina during the 60's and in Chile and Uruguay in the 70's. A new set of hypotheses captured in the bureaucratic-authoritarian model were put forward to explain this political outcome in four of the most developed countries in Latin America.6

In contrast to modernisation theory, this approach claims that the pattern of development followed by late and dependent industrialising countries led to bottlenecks once the relatively easy initial stage of import substitution was passed. The policies implemented to overcome these bottlenecks tended to penalise the working and urban middle classes; and since these had already achieved a high level of political mobilisation, they reacted sharply, with a consequent increase in political instability. Given that civilian regimes were unable to insure the stability necessary for domestic capital to invest and to attract the foreign capital needed to further industrialisation, they were replaced by military regimes (O'Donnell, 1973; Hamilton, 1982, p. 34).

Unlike traditional military regimes however, these were led by development-oriented officers that adopted a technocratic and bureaucratic rather than political approach to policy making which implied economic and political exclusion through the repression of mobilised groups and the elimination of virtually all democratic processes and institutions (Collier, 1979, p. 6; Hamilton, 1988, p. 35).

Although not in its pure form, México was made to fit the new way of conceptualising the relation between economic and political development. The Mexican regime was characterised as authoritarian in view of its lack of democratic procedures. However, a number of important differences were pointed out. To maintain conditions conducive to domestic and foreign private investment, Mexico did not have to operate a change in regime, rely on the military institution, ban parties, elections and labour organisations, nor did it have to turn to widespread repression.

The explanation for these rather important differences lay in the fact that the affected sectors had either been previously excluded or controlled by the time that the worsening costs of the industrialisation process became apparent. Additionally, due to this previous exclusion or control, they had never been able to link their organisations

6O'Donnell (1973) is the classical work within this tradition. Collier (1979) is probably the best collection of essays dealing with different aspects of the relation between deepening of industrialisation and political development.
and interests to political parties which could contend for power\textsuperscript{7}. These differences explain why Mexican authoritarianism is often qualified by its "inclusive" character (Kaufman, 1975; Cardoso, 1979; Meyer, 1977).

In relation to presidentialism, it is a main tenet that authoritarian regimes organise power relations in favour of the executive in order to facilitate the decision making and implementing of policies needed to deepen industrialisation. The strengthening of the executive is viewed as involving the reinforcement of its technical capabilities, the increase in centralisation, the elimination or sharp reduction of the role of the legislature and control of the judiciary. All of these are widely present in Mexico (Cardoso, 1979, p. 41).

\textit{Other Approaches.}

Apart from these studies dealing more with the capitalist nature of the state, a number of other works on the Mexican political system were produced during the 70's. These defy any strict categorisation but fall more into the pluralist and systemic approaches within political sociology. Some of these studies are general in character while others focus on particular issues of the process or structure of government: decision-making, leadership, elite formation and circulation, recruitment.

Among the general studies, there is, again, an intent to cut through the mythology which, according to them, surrounded the work done by North American political scientists in the 60's (Adler, 1978). Few studies make presidentialism their particular object of study but all of them refer to it as the centre-piece of the system.

Again, most authors seek to explain stability in the face of a development strategy based upon high profits, low wages, regressive taxation, comparatively low expenditure on social programmes and maximum concentration of public sector expenditure on projects directly related to increasing private capital accumulation.

The idea of a party representing the interests of the labouring classes and a revolutionary coalition attempting to translate these interests into policies that will advance their welfare is discarded as a myth. In its place, two related arguments are put forward. First, that the economic development strategy is best understood in terms of the interests and value orientations of the country's self renewing political elite (Hansen, 1971, p. 130) and second, in terms of the entrepreneurs being the only strong enough social force to impose their interests upon this elite.

To explain why this model of development has been accompanied by so little social unrest and effective political opposition authors have resorted alternatively to Easton's systemic analysis or to the corporatist approach. In the end, they all stress the

\textsuperscript{7}Reyna and Weinert (1977) remains the best example of analysis of Mexico conducted along the lines of the authoritarian model. For the differences between Mexico and other Latin American countries see Kaufman (1977).
centralisation of power and the system's or government's ability to avoid or control opposition of all kinds (labour, party, electoral, peasant, public opinion).

Following Easton's framework, a system must develop either an output capability (i.e. capacity to respond with relevant and authoritative policies) to match increased demands or the means by which to control and limit their numbers. Viewed from the side of support it must be able to produce either specific or diffuse support. The first is developed through concrete government policies; the second is independent of daily governmental output and consists of a reserve that enables the system to go on when the outputs cannot be balanced off against inputs of demands (Hansen, 1971, p. 174).

According to Hansen, the Mexican political system has succeeded in one or more of these: a) limiting demands, b) increasing its capacity to meet growing demands, c) stimulating diffuse support, d) retaining the specific support of the politically relevant members of Mexican society, that is, those who control enough of the society's total resources to threaten the system's stability if they choose to do so (Hansen, 1971, p. 175).

Demands have been limited in two senses. In terms of the proportion of the total population involved in the creation of demands, and in terms of the resources required by the government to satisfy them. Turning to González Casanova (1965) and Almond and Verba (1965) it is claimed that around 90% of the population is either of the “parochial” or “subject” type and thus either makes few demands or is essentially passive in relation to the system. This has meant that governments have been able to operate with a minimal claim on Mexico's resources.

Hansen points to a further factor limiting demands and enhancing political stability. That of the system's growing capacity to control -- and prevent -- elite competition for political power. This has the effect that ambitious individuals do not seek to construct new sources of political strength or to mobilise support among the disadvantaged (Hansen, 1971, pp. 182-183, 198). Finally, it is claimed that specific support from the politically relevant members has been solidified by the consequences of a very broad range of government policy (Hansen, 1971, p. 206).

Although making use of a different conceptual framework corporatist analysis of political domination in México does not differ much from the conclusions arrived at by Hansen. State corporatism (Schmitter 1974) is viewed as a variant of authoritarian domination and its main effects are that competition is greatly reduced while conciliatory relations are favoured. This kind of analysis tends to stress much more the effectiveness of the system in meeting demands from that fraction of the population that although subordinated is politically organised. However it also stresses the system's determination to repress when other methods fail (Reyna, 1974 and 1976).

Many other studies could be quoted (Furtak, 1974; Meyer, 1977; Adler, 1978; Córdova, 1972; Cosío Villegas, 1973) but the consensus remains: the apex of the political system is the chief executive who presides over a well disciplined, tight, self-
renewing elite; the PRI has no autonomy; nor do its social organisations; the only autonomous force capable of threatening the system is the business class; elections are more a legitimation device than anything else; competition is limited and contained within the institutions set up and controlled by government; the system, although authoritarian, has to be qualified by its inclusionary, flexible or non-repressive character.

In terms of the prospects of the system few (Needler, 1971) are optimistic regarding a democratic future. On the contrary, the fear of resorting to a greater degree of authoritarianism given a diminished capacity of government to satisfy demands and to its structural incapacity to deal with protest coming from outside the system's controlled organisations.

As stated above, few authors make presidentialism their object of study. For the purpose of their arguments, exposition can be divided into those whose main interest is to define in a more detailed fashion the role of the presidency within the system, those that stress its sources of power and those that focus on its limitations.

Regarding the structure and role of the presidency in the Mexican political system there is some broad consensus. All authors will grant that the principle of the system is absolute executive dominance and that the president is the leading political actor (Needler, 1971; Hansen, 1971; Córdova, 1972; Cosío Villegas, 1973; Carpizo, 1978). A second agreement is that the Constitution structures a very strong executive but that political practice endows it with far greater power than law prescribes (Córdova, 1972, p. 55; Carpizo, 1978, p. 9). It is also held that the reasons for the primacy of the executive are not to be found in the analysis of the Constitution but in the nature of Mexican society and the problems it has long faced and still confronts today. Thus, what authors argue for is the political, rather than the Constitutional, primacy of the executive. Most authors will also agree on the institutionalised character of the presidency and its origins in the destruction of “caciquismo” and the establishment of broad and permanent bases of support that, from their inception, were controlled.

Another area of consensus among political analysts is the role of the executive in the economic and political systems. The role of the executive is often blended into the analysis of its sources of power and most authors do not distinguish between the functions of the executive (constitutionally prescribed or not) and its sources of power.

In analysing these they distinguish between legal (deriving from the Constitution or from secondary laws), and political or extra-constitutional, functions and sources of power.

8A notable exception is that of Cosío Villegas (1974) who judges that given the almost unlimited power of the president it is only natural and unavoidable that it be exercised personally and not institutionally. Further, he argues that our political system fosters a personal against an institutional “style” of governance (pp. 8 and 12).
Among the legal sources of power a distinction is drawn between those that pertain to the economic sphere and those that are essentially political in character. Economic sources of power are great and varied but what distinguishes the Mexican executive from other very strong executives is its power over property and property rights. Article 27 states that the Nation —represented by the state and thus by the executive— has the right to impose on private property the modes that public interest may require. This means that the state is the “source” of property rights and that while private property may be recognised at any one moment the state may also judge, at any time, that it goes against the public interest, at which point the state has the right and means to expropriate. This power is so great that the landowning class that dominated Mexican society before the revolution was effectively dismantled (Córdoa, 1972, pp. 19-20; Calderón, 1972, pp. 150-166).

This right is accompanied by others that are explicitly stated either in the Constitution or in secondary laws like The Law on the Executive’s Power in Economic Matters issued in 1950. These allow the executive to intervene in a highly discretionary way in each and every aspect of the economic process: production, distribution and consumption. The impact of these powers on the economy —effected through its control over a large public sector composed of hundreds of public enterprises in both production and services, regulatory authority and discretionary and unregulated recourse to public resources— is a fact pointed out by all analysts (Cosío Villegas, 1973, p. 30; Carpizo, 1978, ch. XII; Camacho, 1977, p. 184).

Powers granted by the Constitution on the political sphere are also great and varied. Among them article 123 is stressed for it empowers the chief executive to act as an arbiter in labour disputes. This authority together with that derived from article 27 are pointed out as the two main sources for the system’s ability to transform social organisations of peasants and labour into social forces that have backed and legitimated all post-revolutionary governments (Córdoa, 1972, pp. 19-34; Calderón, 1972, pp. 179-219) However as Córdoa (1972, p. 20) rightly points out, these powers would not have had that effect if they had not been accompanied by an early reformist policy.

Other sources of power vested by the Constitution in the chief executive are: appointive powers, control of the media, of electoral matters, of foreign policy and of the capital city (Carpizo, 1978; Hansen, 1971; Adler, 1978; Córdoa, 1972; Needler, 1971; Furtak, 1974).

These powers already make a very powerful executive. However they are coupled with what has been termed “extra-constitutional” or “meta-constitutional” powers, those that derive from the political system or political practice. Again, there is wide consensus regarding both the existence and the extra- legality of these powers. Among them, the three most widely recognised are the president’s status as chief and leader of the official party; the “right” to choose his successor; and that of appointing and dismissing not only his closest collaborators but most elective posts: deputies,
senators, governors, municipal presidents (mayors), party officials. These powers have the consequence of nullifying the autonomy of the institutions that formally make up the supposedly federalist, representative and democratic Mexican republic.

If most analysts agree on the obvious primacy of the executive over the other two branches of power and on the extension and extra-legal character of many of its powers, there is no such consensus regarding its limits. In fact, many authors tend either to disregard the issue or simply to point out that the only real limits to an all-powerful president is time, the six year period stated in the Constitution.

Some authors, however, present a rather more complex picture in which the Mexican president, like any other president in a complex society, is subject to the pressure of different social forces that severely curtail the image of a president powerful enough to literally do as he pleases or deems right.

Apart from the few constraints provided for in the Constitution --most of which are rendered ineffectual by the dependent character of Congress and the judiciary-- two other limits are mentioned. Those imposed by pressure groups and those of international forces. The latter is simply mentioned and said to derive from Mexico's dependent status and thus from its vulnerability towards the developed world, particularly the USA. The general argument is that external economic decisions such as credit reductions or imposition of trade barriers, may seriously damage the workings of the economy with an ensuing political impact. In consequence, all presidents must keep an eye on probable international reactions when formulating policies in any sphere.

Limits imposed by domestic pressure groups are much more widely discussed. Some authors admit that labour organisations constitute (or have at some point constituted) a power capable of limiting presidential power (Needler, 1971, p. 43; González Graf, 1975, p. 24; Zaid, 1975, p. 52). Some others maintain that only those labour and peasant groupings that have managed to escape the officially controlled organisations or those that have never been included within the corporate structure of the system are able to constrain the executive (Reyna, 1976, p. 91; Carpizo, 1978, p. 219).

However, most authors will endorse the view that only some groups of the business community have enough power and autonomy to limit presidential will and action in any real sense (Camacho 1977:191, Lerner y Ralski 1976:10-12, Cosío Villegas 1973:72).

Moving away from these general observations, studies on the decision making process and particular policy decisions have proved to be some of the most illuminating analyses of the limits on presidential power (Kaufman, 1975; Purcell and Kaufman, 1976; Grindle, 1978). By identifying the manner in which priorities for national concern are established; the mobilisation of support for policy options; the factors which intervene in reaching a policy option of national goals; and the variables
that influence the allocation of public resources (Grindle, 1978, p. 1) these studies shed light on the actual limits on presidentialism.

According to Purcell and Kaufman (1976, pp. 229-30), the analysis of a set of policy decisions and their fate during the Echeverría administration, constitutes a good starting point to question the “popular notion” that the Mexican political system is a plain authoritarian regime, one characterised by a very strong executive and a limited autonomy of the private interest groups, one in which the state is capable of implementing those policies deemed necessary by the executive in spite of and against the opposition of, important groups of society (pp. 229-230). In this sense, they claim that policy decision analysis is a good way of proving the limits imposed on presidential reformist purposes.

By considering three variables in the study of five presidential policy decisions --the degree of unity that exists within government regarding the convenience and methods of introducing a reform, the scope and type of support and opposition to it and, the strategies adopted by governmental agencies in order to implement it-- the authors reach the following conclusions. First, that although all Mexican interest groups do have limits to their autonomy, other interest groups, those acting within the governmental apparatuses, are clearly more important than was thought. Second, that although the Mexican political system is an example of a regime in which initiative and authority follow a vertical top to bottom pattern, the mere interest and support of the president for a policy is not enough for that policy to reach the implementation stage (Purcell and Kaufman, 1976, p. 250). Similar conclusions regarding the complexity and importance of bureaucratic struggle follow from Grindle's (1978, pp. 98-101) study. Thus, for the first time the high bureaucracy is not viewed merely as an instrument of the executive and is recognised as a power factor that limits presidential power.

Analysis in the 80's: the Need for a Reformed Presidentialism

By the end of Echeverría's term in office in 1976, it was an established truth that the Mexican “miracle” had come to an end and that the most likely political development to expect was one of enhanced authoritarianism. López Portillo's administration was in a very difficult position when it came to office. Not only did he receive a country in the middle of an economic crisis not experienced since the late thirties but also a disaffected business community that had been hit by land expropriation, by what it judged an unwarranted state economic expansionism and a dangerous populist rhetoric. This same community had “politicised” itself and started to make demands on
a field that up to then had been considered a domain of government: open --as opposed to behind the scene-- politics. If the business community had been alienated, the same could be said of other sectors of society. The middle classes were hit by inflation and the closing of expectations; the working class experienced a loss in wages and employment; peasants remained the most impoverished and backward sector; and opposition parties were far from satisfied with the “democratic opening” initiated in Echeverría's term.

Luck seemed to be on the government side. The oil boom situated México in a favourable position not only to resume growth but reconstitute the broken relation with business and keep up with the tradition of distributing wealth and favours to gain political compliance from all disaffected groups. If to some this sudden stroke of luck was a blessing, for most, with the benefit of hindsight, it had the effect of postponing the need to reform the economy and losing precious time to modernise the country. Although economic and political analysts did not go as far as to claim that the Mexican miracle was on its way again, everybody seemed pleased with the growth perspectives.\(^9\)

On the political side the bleak future of more authoritarianism was replaced by an optimistic view opened up by the 1978 political reform that, for the first time, brought a larger minority into Congress and made the idea of having a modern party system and competitive elections a realisable aim.

But things did not end well. On the last year of López Portillo's term (1982), oil prices began to fall and credits stopped flowing. México had increased its foreign debt to unmanageable levels, output contracted by 0.6%, inflation rose to 98.8%, foreign currency reserves fell to U.S.$1.8 billions (about one month's worth of 1982 total imports), public sector borrowing requirements as percent of GDP reached 16.9% (Lustig, 1992, pp. 25-26).

On top of all this, in what was judged a last minute personal decision, the President resolved to nationalise (expropriate) the banks and establish full exchange controls over capital flows.

Political analysis in the 80s was marked by what is held to be one of the most disastrous end-of-term periods México has ever seen and by the ensuing attempts to face a deep economic crisis from a standpoint which was far removed from Mexico's statist and “nationalist” tradition. It was also marked by what some authors have termed the appearance of a democratic claim by the citizenry.

Interpretation of the Mexican system changed both in its scope and in its priorities. Although class analysis and its relation to the state did not disappear, even a hasty survey of the literature will readily show that the range of issues brought into the analysis of the political system grew substantially by introducing concerns that had not been hitherto taken into account, notably, parties and elections, but other political

\(^9\) An analysis of different aspects of López Portillo’s administration can be found in Cordera y Tello (1987).
actors and processes too: the church, the international factor and regionalism. Another landmark was that research was couched in terms of or by reference to a democratising principle. This is, all political actors and processes were analysed from the viewpoint of the role they were playing or could play in promoting democracy.

The conception of the Mexican political system or state remained unaltered: presidentialist, interventionist, centralist, corporatist, electorally non-competitive. But in contrast to the dominant view of the 70's in which political institutions and processes of political domination were judged to be resilient to any reformist attempt and the only outcome envisaged was more authoritarianism, in the 80's the analysis turned to the obvious cracks in the system, to the growing pressures on it and to the feasibility of a peaceful and piecemeal transition. Transition was, in fact, the catch-all word in discussion of the political system.

The dominant tone of the literature is that since 1968 (the date in which most authors fix the beginning of México's long transition) the system has been increasingly ineffectual in coping with the many threats it has had to confront. These threats can be seen in that each "sexenio" has ended in a disaster of one kind or another. Díaz Ordaz (1964-1970) ended with wide repression, Echeverría (1970-1976) and López Portillo (1976-1982) with economic crisis, last minute expropriations and alienation of most social forces and De la Madrid (1982-1988) with recession, a split in the Revolutionary family and the most troubled elections of modern México. In each of these last four administrations a new social force has been able to contest governmental authority circumventing traditional means of control and forcing responses that, in the absence of threat, were not likely to appear (Aguilar Camín, 1988, p. 121; Philip, 1992, pp. 178-180).

Two broad concerns dominated the debate, interventionism and democracy or, as most authors put it, state/market and state/society relations. A new equilibrium seemed to be appearing and analysts discussed how such equilibrium had worked in the past and how it was being reconstituted.

The state/market debate can be well documented in México at least since the mid 70's when the business community launched a public opinion campaign against what was considered the excesses of state interventionism in economic life exemplified in the growth of public sector enterprises, in the expansion of public spending and borrowing and in its unaccountability over policy decisions. But attacks on economic intervention were by no means limited to the business community. The public sector bureaucracy was divided between those who favoured state-led development and those that wanted to promote the establishment of a more market-oriented model. Organised labour echoed this debate and aligned themselves with the
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statists. Left opposition parties sided with the labour movement while the right opposition Acción Nacional supported the business community.¹⁰

What matters here is that for the first time, one of the uncontested principles of the post-revolutionary consensus was being called into question. With the consensus broken, the search for presidential power entailed not only a struggle between members of the revolutionary family but one between alternative projects. The idea of an interventionist state with the right and responsibility to further economic growth and development by any means judged necessary began to give way to one in which society and market forces should take preeminence over the public sector. By the time De la Madrid assumed power in 1982 the winning side was clear. This was a national reality as much as an international one to which it is doubtful Mexico could have, had it chosen to, shielded itself. From the mid-80s a new model was to be attempted, one in which the tendency is for the market to replace regulation, private ownership to replace public ownership and competition to replace protection (Lustig, 1992, p. 1).

The state/society debate was marked by what many authors consider the evident contradiction between traditional and modern sectors of society and by traditional and modern ways of political action that coexist in a rather tense fashion. This viewpoint is shared by analysts of diverse schools of thought and all political preferences. Authors recover González Casanova's analysis of participant and marginal sectors of society in both political and economic terms but push it further and distinguish, within the participant segments, old and new, traditional and modern ways of doing politics, of relating to the state and of organising themselves. Zermeño (1983) speaks of two logics in the socio-political structure, A "modernising" or "democratic" logic articulated either by the citizenry or by classes acquiring independent institutionalisation, and a "popular-mass" logic that tends to forms of representation and intermediation that are populist, patrimonialist and caudillist. Zaid (1985, pp. 15-19) states that the system combines premodern and modern elements that coexist in a growingly uneasy fashion. Thus the system is premodern because it is based more on concessions than on rights; it is patrimonialist (the public function is the property of the public servant); it is "cortesan" rather than meritocratic; the political process is not public and open, it depends on the vote "from above"; politicians owe their posts not to electoral votes but to a vote from above. However it is modern because the property of public posts is not permanent nor attached to any particular person; there is certain order to attain public office; the "modern" population is growing fast and demanding a state of law, clean elections and modern forms of acquiring power. Similar arguments are put forward by Aguilar Camín (1988 and 1993) and Reyes Heroles (1991, pp. 9-10).

¹⁰ A discussion on the diverse points of view of these different economic and political actors can be found in Casar and Peres (1989). For more substantive discussion on the content and implications of the two positions see Cordera and Tello (1982) and Basañez (1981).
In part as a reflection of this tension between state and society, every constituent part of the political system is seen as being in crisis: the presidential institution, the official party, corporatist structures, the party system, electoral laws and Congress. Additionally, other groups are seen as reemerging in the political arena and increasing the pressures to which the system is being exposed, notably church and army.

Apart from presidentialism with which I will deal extensively below, the other central piece of the Mexican political system and its long stability, the PRI, is also perceived as going through a profound crisis. This crisis is expressed in a series of trends that show diminishing efficiency in performing some of the functions it had assumed in the past. The most obvious of these is that of getting votes. Over the past 20 years the official percentage of votes in national (federal) elections declined from 86.3% (1964) to 50.3% (1988). The loss is significant and can be magnified by introducing other elements into the analysis. In the first place the above figures are the official ones and fraud is not taken into account. Second, we are speaking of an average loss of 36%, but the loss was greater than the average in many urban districts. The case of Mexico City, although not representative gives an idea of the vertiginous fall in PRI's appeal. In the 1985 mid-term elections it won 42.6% of the votes and in the 1988 election only 27.3%. Third, electoral figures show that PRI maintains its control in rural areas but has increasing difficulties in urban centres where the opposition is able to present candidates and exercise the necessary surveillance to reduce or prevent fraud (Molinar, 1991, pp. 158-170; and Aguilar Camin, 1988, pp. 138-141). To this electoral trend one must add that PRI no longer holds electoral credibility. In this sense the PRI not only has to win but make credible its claim of having won.

If on the electoral front its record has diminished impressively, so it has on many others. In recent years its capacity to maintain united the revolutionary family has been questioned. If Mexico had experienced no significant split in the unity of its higher ranks since 1952, in 1986-87 it had to face a defection of members that in less than two years were able to pose the greatest electoral threat the contemporary political system has ever encountered.

The opening of the system and the consequent growth of opposition parties has opened up alternative means to gain office. This trend has been coupled with the so called process of technocratization of the governing elite. If in terms of a political career transit through the PRI was seen as a necessary step in the past, this is definitely no longer the case. The administrative career path seems more profitable today.11

Finally, the party has been divested of or lost its capacity as political intermediary between the population and all levels of government. In a very real sense, especially at local levels and in small communities, the party was responsible for

11Camp's studies (1982, 1984 and 1988) demonstrate the transformation that has occurred in elite recruitment patterns and career paths. See also Smith (1986).
bringing to the people the satisfaction of basic needs (building of roads, schools, hospitals, drainage, electricity, credit, legalisation of land titles etc). In time, this task was overtaken by federal bureaucratic agencies which left the PRI with no means of patronage (Aguilar Camín, 1988, pp. 136-138).

The social organisations that made up the corporatist pact of Cárdenas' years have also run into trouble. On the one hand they seem less and less representative of the members they claim to represent. On the other, economic crisis and economic reform have eroded the sources which made possible the transformation of these organisations into effective instruments of political support and control at the same time as lending a popular image to successive governments.\(^{12}\)

Other groups which for different reasons had also been part of the wide social and political support that governments have enjoyed are also perceived as being somewhat estranged. That is the case for entrepreneurs who after the mid-70s took a much more critical stand towards policy and politics and for the middle classes whose growth in number, opportunities, status and wealth suddenly came to a halt and turned them not only into critics of the system but also into an electoral threat.\(^{13}\)

On top of these developments that are putting the political system under great strain, two groups that used to be power factors in politics --church and army-- have reappeared and there has been renewed pressure from what has been called the "american factor". Finally, the topic of regionalism and local states' demands for greater political and economic autonomy are beginning to erode the principle of centralisation that has defined Mexican politics (Aguilar Camín, 1988, p. 123).

Elections, electoral laws and the party system came to the fore as privileged objects of analysis that had long been neglected. In these, as in the analyses of other political agents and processes, the point of reference is democracy and although changes and advances are generally recognised, the transformations are judged insufficient.\(^{14}\)

In sum, there is a shared perception that the different constituent parts and processes of the Mexican political system, as they emerged from the Revolution and consolidated in the 40's, no longer correspond to the circumstances and needs of present day social structure, economic system and international milieu. Analysts seek to show that the conditions that gave birth to these features are no longer in place and they have now turned into fetters that preclude a stable political development. It is


\(^{13}\) Detailed accounts of the business community evolution can be found in Cordero, Santín and Tirado (1983) and Maxfield and Anzaldúa (1987). For the middle classes the best source is Loaeza (1988).

\(^{14}\) The literature on electoral and party topics soared during the 80's. One of the best accounts and most detailed analysis of elections and the party system is Molinar (1991). For the recent evolution of political reform see Woldenberg (1994).
acknowledged that they are undergoing changes which, although still insufficient, in time will amount to a democratic transition.

In the transition process of the Mexican political system, the presidency is seen as the most resilient of all institutions. Although few go to the extreme of claiming that it has remained the same since its institutionalisation in Cárdenas years, its transformation is seen more as a result of changes in other structures and processes than of any purposive action.

The presidential institution caught the attention of political authors far more during the 80's and did so in a radically different and critical perspective than it had in previous decades. In contrast to the prevailing view in the 50's and 60's, progress and stability were no longer seen as depending on a strong executive nor was it accepted the system would be simply unviable without an absolute concentration of power.

However, the presidency is still recognised as the major agent in dictating the orientation of the economy and society and as playing the role of holding together the different threads of the political system (Martínez Assad, 1992, pp. 11-12). Additionally, it is widely accepted that both its transformation and its compliance are essential if a democratic outcome is to be attained.

It is important to make clear that the analysis and critique focus not on the presidentialist system as such but rather on Mexican presidencialismo (Elias Gutiérrez, 1988, pp. 27-28; Garrido, 1990), on what has been called the absolutist presidency in contrast to the constitutional or limited presidency (Carreño, 1987, pp. 33-34).

The discussion of the presidency in this period revolves around four interrelated topics. First, the authors touch upon the historical evolution of the institution. This is not a matter of purely historical interest but rather of being able to show that the conditions that gave birth to the presidency and turned it into a powerful institution are no longer in place. The second line of interest is the process whereby the institution seemed to weaken and lose its prestige and the reasons that lay behind this process. Third, there is a special concern with the basis of presidential power and its consequences for the functioning of the system. Finally research has turned to the impact of recent economic and political transformations on the presidency.

Over the origin of presidentialism most authors point to the fact that in Mexican political history there is a cultural tradition of having and respecting a powerful personal leader at the top of the governmental machine and a reiterated preference for hierarchical authoritarian arrangements (Paz, 1979; Aguilar Camín and Meyer, 1991; Bailey, 1988). This is held to have been true of the pre-Hispanic era, of colonial rule, of the 19th century and of post-revolutionary Mexico. The particular causes for preferring a strong ruler may have varied over time but the argument was

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15 In contrast to other countries in Latin America, the change of regime to a parliamentary or semi-presidential system has not been part of the agenda. Political parties have sometimes mentioned the possibility of a change towards a parliamentary regime but the discussion has never been a salient aspect of the agenda (Delgado, 1988; and Aguilar Villanueva, 1993, pp. 32-38).
always the same: experience showed that the nation could be kept together and ruled
and could progress only in the presence of a leader whose authority was ample and
uncontested.

If the roots of a strong executive figure can be found well back in history, it is
widely agreed that to understand presidentialism we need only go back to the second
half of the 19th century when Juárez was “obliged” to rule above the law in order to
get things done (Meyer, 1988, pp. 27-28). Out of this experience and Díaz’ 30 years-
long regime, the successful revolutionary elite opted for a strong executive legitimated
by the Constitution. In doing so they attempted to avoid past experiences of ruling in
conflict with established legality.16

Although the design of a strong executive had already been present in 1917
when the Constitution was drafted, there is a general recognition that the conditions for
the full exercise of presidential power were not set until the Cárdenas years. Most
interpreters agreed that it took the will and ability of this individual leader to establish
the presidency as the institution on which the whole system and process of government
was built, at the same time as limiting and de-personalising it.

Cárdenas is credited with furthering some of the tasks initiated by Calles and so
enhancing the bases of power of the presidency: the elimination of other power factors
like the army and local caciques and the strengthening of government’s means of
intervening in the economy. Additionally he is recognised as the leader that turned
social organisations into social forces that would articulate and control demands at the
same time as giving support and legitimacy to governments. Finally, he is said to have
given the last push to institutionalisation by stepping out of power, although while
giving up personal continuity he also allegedly established the right of hand-picking
his successor.17

From Cárdenas on, the executive steadily augmented its powers until 1982,
when the presidency came under fire from most sectors of society for what was
perceived as the excessive growth of the public sector, its unaccountability and its
ineffectiveness (Zaid, 1987).

In this historical perspective, Meyer (1988, pp. 27-30) argues that the evolution
of the presidency has not been linear and progressive but has swung between the
extremes of total weakness and overwhelming strength. The pattern is that, after 170
years of independent history it has still to find its equilibrium point, a combination of
strength and respect for constitutional norms.

16 In fact, Cosío Villegas (1973) argued that the Constitutionalists of 1917 were inspired in
Rabasa’s (1912) argument that the limitations imposed on the executive by the 1857 Constitution had
led to an extra-constitutional dictatorship.

17 Although it is generally accepted that Cárdenas established this power as a presidential
right, it is contended that it was not until Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958) that presidents were able to
maintain the succession process under their own tight and undisputed control (Meyer, 1982, pp. 33-
34).
From 1824 to 1867 the presidency was feeble, with no power resources and no capacity to hold together the nation or defend it against foreign threats. After 1867, the pendulum progressively moved to the other end where it stayed for three decades. In this period the whole political system was identified with the presidency and it in turn with its incumbent, Porfirio Díaz.

The outbreak of the Revolution returned the pendulum to its starting point of powerlessness. Again, power fell on revolutionary armies and their leaders. The early post-revolutionary years (1920-1935) saw alternate periods in which at some points the strong leader coincided with the president. However, most of the time was characterised as a diarchy in which presidential power had to be shared with the strong man (Meyer, 1988; Molinar, 1991).

Thereafter, the pendulum started to move again towards strength where it stayed, save for a brief period in which it was weakened only to recover itself after 1988 (Meyer, 1993, pp. 66-67, 72).

The second and third topics that have dominated the debate on presidentialism --the loss of presidential prestige and legitimacy and the consequences of its extended powers-- are closely linked to its more recent evolution. The question is how and why the same presidential institution that was initially judged as the main explanatory factor for all the blessings of Mexico's development --growth, stability and progress-- is now perceived as responsible for all its failures and evils.

The recent evolution of presidentialism (1935-1982) is viewed as one in which each president has enhanced the executive's means of exercising power through expanding the public sector and modifying the Constitution and secondary laws at the same time as "abusing" its informal powers.

However, in the late 60's this growth of presidential powers was increasingly accompanied by two parallel processes: the progressive loss of legitimacy and prestige and the systematic criticism of the institution.

Signs of loss of prestige can be traced back to Díaz Ordaz' term and particularly to the president's repressive response to the 1968 demonstrators. But until the early 70's critiques focused far more on the presidential figure than on the institution itself. Apart from the centre-right opposition party (Acción Nacional) that from its creation in 1939 had been opposed to Mexican presidentialism, the first systematic and widely publicised criticism came from the entrepreneurs in the mid 70's and did so with renewed force after the nationalisation of the banks when it became clear that the only way to avoid decisions contrary to their interests was to withdraw or check presidential

\[18\] For the growth of state apparatuses see Elias Gutiérrez (1988); political powers conferred on the president through modification of constitutional and secondary laws are analysed in Carpizo (1978) and Molinar (1991).
powers. Simultaneously, opposition parties and other social forces entered the debate. By the 80’s the criticism of presidentialism was almost consensual.19

This sharp turn in perceptions on the presidency was fueled by events in both the economic and political fields. During the 70’s and 80s governmental performance was judged to be far from satisfactory. By the end of De la Madrid's period (1988), one of the main bases of legitimacy of Mexican presidentialism had been eroded: that of its proven ability to maintain growth and generate enough resources to sustain populist policies through which the demands of “participant” Mexico were satisfied (Meyer, 1993, pp. 66-67).20

But the charges against presidentialism did not stop at blaming successive presidents for poor economic results. Presidential policy was characterised as inefficient, incoherent, irresponsible and whimsical and these features were seen as a result of the “absolute sovereignty of Los Pinos” (the presidential residence) (Zaid, 1987).

Thus, as successive sexenios ended in disaster, the criticism shifted from blaming particular chief executives to blaming the institution itself. The idea that what had occurred was less attributable to the failures of particular individuals than to a system that permits such individual failings was widely adopted. The conclusion was that the concentration of too many powers with no constitutional, institutional or social constraints had led Mexico into crisis (Garrido, 1990, p. 418; Krauze, 1985, p. 52).

From a different point of view, it was also held that the overall concentration of power and the confluence in the executive office of all demands and their satisfaction, had led to an overload that could not possibly be managed within the presidential structure. To these domestic developments was added the important fact that the legitimacy of state interventionism had come to an end not only nationally but also internationally.

Political developments themselves also contributed to the change in perceptions of the presidency. As analysts noted, while the socioeconomic structure had been greatly transformed in the last 40 years, few substantive changes had occurred in the political system.21 This transformation is at the basis of the development of new demands (democratic political participation) and new ways of

19 We say almost because the officially organised labour sector in 1987 was still claiming that the presidential system as it stands is vital to the country’s progress and that the presidency is untouchable because if it comes under attack the entire country will collapse (Garrido, 1990, p. 427). A good review of the perspective adopted by different social agents regarding what became known as the democratic claim is found in Cordera, Trejo and Vega (1988).

20 The charge of poor economic performance in terms of growth cannot be sustained for the period 1970-1982 in which the Mexican economy grew at a rate of 6.2%. The corresponding figure for 1982-1989 was of 0.6% (OECD, 1992, p. 17).

21 A good general account of the changes operated in the socioeconomic structure can be found in Aguilar Camín (1988, ch. V, VII and VII).
channeling them (parties and elections). Since these new demands were basically of a democratizing nature and the relative immobilism of the system ignored them, the inevitable result was that the system and in particular the president were made responsible for obviating political accountability to the electorate.

Economic inefficiency and political illegitimacy were thus seen to derive from the structural properties of a regime which by placing all power in the hands of the chief executive provides no corrective mechanisms either inside or outside the system.

This brought the discussion back to the conditions that gave birth to the strong executive, to presidential powers and to the consequences of their exercise.

Although scholars have recognized that the executive was originally and deliberately designed as the strongest of all three powers, this recognition is generally accompanied by two qualifications. First that conditions demanded an executive powerful enough to fulfill the revolutionary mandates (Carreño, 1987, p. 29). Second that it was never foreseen that political development would annul in practice all institutional checks on the presidency. Thus the problem is not so much the extensive powers with which the chief executive was endowed but the absence of institutional (social or political) constraints on their exercise (Krauze, 1985) and the usurpation of powers never legally established.

But if the constitutional concentration of power within the executive was in proportion to the responsibilities that fell on the presidency --pacifying the country, uniting the revolutionary factions, promoting development-- and in accordance with the 1920's social structure, analysts have also pointed out that those conditions no longer hold. Moreover, they remind us that the institution's original powers were substantially augmented over time through constitutional amendments and political practice.

Which then are these powers that have become disfunctional and what their consequences? Following previous studies, the powers have been discussed in terms of two main categories: constitutional and metaconstitutional. The former have been dealt with in a previous chapter and there is little to add except in relation to their consequences. The latter, which Carpizo (1978, p. 191) defined as those that go beyond the constitutional framework and derive from the president being the leader of the PRI, are reinterpreted as powers that distort constitutional mechanisms: acting as a constituent power and chief legislator, establishing the executive as the ultimate authority in electoral matters, designating their successor as well as designating and removing most incumbents of popularly elected posts thereby imposing their authority in both Congress and local government, assuming jurisdiction in judicial matters (Garrido, 1990, pp. 422-23).

To these, Garrido adds what he judges to be the anticonstitutional powers, meaning the tacit presidential right to violate the legal order. Finally Meyer (1982:36-37) speaks of the "sociocultural" power factors which, according to him are the indirect
but profound basis of presidentialism: society's weakness and an authoritarian political culture that inhibits the will to resist presidential actions.

The extent and nature of presidential powers is less discussed although not all authors would agree with Garrido's characterisation of presidential powers. More important are the consequences of this concentration in constituting the arguments for demanding a restructuring of the presidential institution.

Apart from the now traditional discourse on the distortions introduced in the economy by government intervention, one of the economic consequences of the concentration of power in the presidency is that it allows no effective way of ordering popular input into government, making it oscillate between extremes of exclusionary repression and bursts of irrational populism which please crowds but do serious economic damage (Philip, 1992, p. 1; Newell and Rubio, 1984; Zaid, 1987). This deep rooted characteristic of the presidential system coupled with the extreme latitude allowed to the president in defining policy is said to preclude the pursuing of coherent policies over time.

Bailey (1988, pp. 67-87) goes further and attempts to show how the logic of presidentialism tends to be incompatible with two of the modernising tasks Mexico has to face: decentralisation and efficiency in directly productive activities. Administrative reforms in any of those fields would translate into diminishing presidential control and reduced means of patronage.

Political consequences of presidentialism are seen as being as destabilising as economic ones. In this case the most worrying one is that by having taken too many prerogatives in electoral matters --from defining the rules of competence to determine who, and with how many votes, won the election-- the legitimacy and even legality of presidential authority which derives from its direct democratic origin no longer accrues to the president (Garrido, 1990, p. 32). In less forceful ways, this argument is repeatedly put forward.22

Second, it is claimed that one of the most widely questioned powers of the president --the right of succession-- is presently yielding more negative consequences. If at one point in history it was viewed and accepted as an efficient way of transmitting power in an orderly way this is no longer the case. The mechanism has failed to perform one of its main functions: that of maintaining the unity of the governing elite. Additionally it is said to preclude the development of personalities with a standing in public opinion in order eventually to advance to more modern ways of transmitting power (Carreño, 1987, p. 33).

Third, the same succession power together with the tendency of the last few presidents to draw appointees from a more homogeneous basis has resulted not only in internal dissension but also in decreasing the scope rotation of elites, thus clogging

22 Aguilar Camín (1993, p. 68) argues that after 1988 the official candidate must win the vote not only of the president who hand-picks him but also of the citizens themselves.
channels of recruitment, piquing social classes' sensitivities and sowing resentment in the "old" political class (Bailey, 1988, pp. 180-81).

Finally, the extreme concentration of powers in the presidency has fostered the image of a president who can act beyond the rule of law (Meyer, 1988, pp. 61-62; Garrido, 1990, p. 418).

The development of these consequences has led to the question of whether the presidential institution itself is in crisis, of how it has changed in the last few years and how it is likely and desirable for it to develop.

That presidentialism has been at least in partial crisis is seen first and foremost in the 1988 electoral results, but also in its incapacity to contain conflict within the political class (Molinar, 1990; Meyer, 1988), in its closing of recruitment patterns (Baliley, 1988, p. 60), in the contempt in which it has come to be held and in the charges of corruption which have been levied against it. However, while some maintain that presidential sources of power have suffered little change and the exercise of presidential power is as authoritarian as ever, others contend that it is successfully transforming itself into a more democratic presidency.

This discussion leads the authors to review the limits of presidentialism as they have evolved in the last decade. In it, there is a general trend to demystify the idea of an all powerful president. Monsivais has explicitly held that the myth of presidentialism fails to take into account the international financial order, North American imperialism, the catholic church interests, national capital, the growing autonomy of the bureaucracy and the independence of the police. There is also a tendency to regard recent economic and political realities as posing constraints on the effective exercise of those powers.

On the social side, Philip (1992, pp. 170-178) has argued that the amount of infrastructural power --defined as the ability to succeed in pursuing defined policy objectives through mobilising resources-- in the hands of civil society has been increasing, thereby imposing limits on presidential powers. This tendency can be seen in that each new president since 1964 (or even maybe since 1958) has seen the emergence of a newly confident and increasingly independent sector of civil society (pp. 176-177). To this development, analysts have added the resurgence of the church as a political actor and of the "american factor" which seeks to influence not only economic direction but also political development.

On the economic side it is argued that material resources available to the president greatly diminished first through economic crisis and then by the initiation of policies that implied a less preponderant role for government in promotion and regulation and greater autonomy for market forces (Bailey, 1988, p. 123; Aguilar Villanueva, 1993, pp. 26-30).

Similarly, the growth of the economic state apparatus and of the state bureaucracy seem to have reached a point in which presidential control is no longer

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21 Quoted in Meyer and Aguilar Camin (1989, pp. 298-299).
possible, thereby giving way to some selective agency autonomy (Bailey, 1988, p. 81 and Aguilar Camín, 1988, p. 122).

Last, but by no means least, the fact that the Mexican economy has become more closely integrated with the world economy, has had the effect of undermining the presidency's base of power in the national economy (Bailey, 1988, p. 38).

Finally, on the political side, the development of a stronger party system and a more competitive electoral situation also pose limits that the presidency had never faced before. Among them, priority is given to electoral opposition which had the effect of constraining the president in the legislative arena, forcing him to negotiate and build coalitions and limiting his traditional leeway in appointing governors and other minor local government representatives.

The discussion of the limits leads us to the topic of the changes undergone by the presidency in the last few years, particularly in post-1988 Mexico. Here we have two opposing views. One that holds that little has changed either in the institutional framework or in the political practice of the presidency and the other that argues that the last decade has seen a radical transformation.

Proponents of the first view claim that none of the substantive threads of power have left the presidency (Meyer, 1993, p. 61). For Meyer, the 1982 crisis that resulted in weakening the presidency was surmounted in the Salinas term. He gives several examples to show how his power is still uncontested. These go from jailing the highest representatives of both the labour movement and business community to radically amending the Constitution in two of its central norms (church and agrarian property), re-privatising the banking system, and pushing through a free trade agreement (pp. 72-78).

In this version, the president sought and managed to convince the beneficiaries of his policies that the structural economic change that they were demanding could only be pushed through if political pluralism was held in check so as to avoid the weakening of the presidency. In this sense, far from the presidency being transformed in a more democratic direction, it increased its authoritarian traits. Apart from having been able to rebuild if not a wide at least a very powerful basis of support, the recovery of the presidential image soon became evident in the international arena, as well as in the impressive electoral recovery achieved in the 1991 elections. However, and in spite of Salinas having strengthened presidentialism, proponents of this view hold that its legitimacy is, once again, feeble since the distance between the formal democratic framework of the Constitution and the authoritarianism of everyday political life is still

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24 The above is an oversimplification of Bailey's complex analysis of the five functional clusters into which he divides the Mexican public sector. His general argument is that lack of career service and the formation of administrative political teams -- camarillas -- tend to reinforce responsiveness and loyalty to presidential leadership but that agencies in the "development" and "welfare" clusters of the public sector are more difficult to control and show a greater degree of autonomy vis a vis the president.
as wide as ever. Furthermore it is weaker still because this strengthened presidentialism, just as its forerunner, is based on performance rather than on legality, and performance depends on uncertain variables such as the behaviour of the world economy (p. 81).  

In the same fashion Cornelius and Craig (1991, pp. 34-35) argue that Salinas challenged the established conventional wisdom that presidentialism—especially when defined as the ability of the president to take unilateral actions that may be damaging to the interests of key political and economic elites—was dead. For them, a set of actions undertaken by Salinas, proved that the essential powers of Mexican presidentialism were still intact and could be used to effect sweeping political and economic change.

In more extreme versions of this view, Mexico will arrive at the turn of the century with the same political grievance with which Mexican society reached the end of the 19th century: an all too powerful presidency (Reyes Heroles, 1991, p. 10).

In sharp contrast to this version the one that holds that substantial changes have been achieved attracts more adherents. Aguilar Camín (1988, p. 294) claims that 1988 elections had the effect of voters rendering presidential support conditional and of limiting presidential power by making Congress a counterbalancing force. In this way the elections built up a reformed presidentialism, one that will have to fight its way to push through its project, that will be under permanent surveillance by society and compelled to negotiate with opposing forces.

In an even more forceful way Aguilar Villanueva (1993, p. 2) argues that in the last decade there has been a movement towards the democratisation of the system and, in particular, of the presidency. By analysing the set of administrative, institutional and political reforms of the last two presidential terms he seeks to show that, by conviction or under duress and intentionally or not, the last two presidents have introduced very real limits to the presidency. The set of reforms is analysed in two clusters: those that have altered the structure and function of the political regime and those that have been introduced into the policy-making pattern.

After giving a brief review of the recent evolution of politico-electoral transformations Aguilar Villanueva (1993, pp. 19-26) argues that a democratising pattern—one that imposes limits on the presidency—emerges. Similarly, he argues that the change in economic growth pattern has had the inevitable consequence of reducing the power and influence of the presidency in the economy. Just as the presidency must face a political opposition in the electoral and legislative arenas so it will have to face more autonomous economic agents (pp. 27-29).

25 Other proponents of this view are Garrido (1990) and Reyes Heroles (1991).
26 The actions referred to are those against the fiefdoms that had progressively challenged presidential prerogatives during the preceding administrations—oil workers—and those that entailed large political risks—NAFTA—.
However, it seems reasonable to conclude that whatever role Salinas may have played in recovering a positive image of presidentialism (either by the spectacular and unorthodox policies adopted or by the unintended consequences of limiting the president), the majority of analysts and important sectors of society now distinguish between the success of personal leadership and the risks which concentration of powers give rise.
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