

### ***How did Carranza try to undermine support for Zapata?***

Another one of Carranza's generals, Pablo Gonzalez, launched a campaign to defeat Zapata in 1916. For three years, his troops burned and pillaged Zapata's home state of Morelos in a brutal attempt to undercut the guerrilla leader's support. The peasants of Morelos, however, remained loyal to Zapata and continued to fight back against Gonzalez. Zapata was finally killed in 1919 when Gonzalez tricked him into an ambush.

Apart from the main military confrontations, Mexico was also plagued by lawless violence from 1911 to 1920. Small bands of armed men roamed the countryside, often killing and looting in the name of the revolution. At least 1 million Mexicans died before order was restored.

### **Bringing Order to Chaos**

A first step toward stability took place in 1917, when a new constitution was proclaimed. The document reflected the long-standing desire for land reform, wider economic opportunity, and responsible government.

The constitution's authors—mostly teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats, engineers, and other members of the middle class—were determined to wrest power away from large landowners, foreign businessmen, and the church. They wanted to prevent another dictator from re-emerging, yet recognized that Mexico needed a strong central government. To address both concerns, the constitution's authors concentrated authority in the hands of the president, but prohibited re-election.

As expected, Carranza was elected president under the new constitution in 1917. Most Mexican politicians assumed that he would endorse Obregon as his successor in 1920. Carranza, however, nominated Mexico's ambassador to the United States, Ignacio Bonillas, to run for the presidency. Obregon rebelled, chasing a panicked Carranza from Mexico City. Carranza was assassinated on the way to Veracruz in May 1920.

### ***What was the result of Obregon's election to the presidency?***

With the election of Obregon in 1920, Mexico finally had a strongman capable of imposing order. Over the next four years, Obregon put down several rebellions, built a new consensus among the leading forces of the revolution, and patched up relations with the United States. He also turned over power to his successor, Plutarco Elias Calles, on friendly terms.

### ***How did Calles attempt to speed up modernization?***

Calles, who like Obregon had served as a revolutionary general under Carranza, sped up the program of modernization. He established Mexico's first income tax to raise money for education, health care, and economic development. He also took a harsh stance toward the Catholic Church. When Calles required in 1926 that priests be licensed by the government, a Catholic rebellion erupted. The rebels fought under the rallying cry "Long Live Christ the King!" Calles responded ruthlessly, ordering the army to massacre the rebels and hang priests. Churches were not allowed to re-open until 1929.

Calles amended the constitution to extend the presidential term to six years and permit his ally Obregon to again run for office in 1928. Obregon was elected, but a few days later was assassinated by a Catholic militant while celebrating his victory. Calles left the presidency at the end of his term, but he continued to exercise dictatorial control over Mexico until 1935 from his mansion in Cuernavaca.

### ***What was Calles' main instrument of power?***

Calles' main instrument of power was the National Revolutionary Party. Calles created the party in 1929 to unite the hundreds of political movements that had arisen during the revolution. All those associated with government, from cabinet ministers to state governors to low-level bureaucrats, were brought in as members. To seal the marriage between party and state, the National Revolutionary Party

adopted the green, white, and red colors of the Mexican flag as its symbol.

**“Freedom, equality, justice, effective suffrage, no re-election, separation of power, free municipalities, sovereignty of the state, international independence...words, words, words.”**

—Luis Cabrera, leading contributor to the Mexican Constitution

### **How did Lazaro Cardenas affect Mexican politics?**

Frustration with Calles' heavy-handed tactics was growing when the National Revolutionary Party held its convention in 1933. Sensing the need for change, Calles picked the governor of Michoacan, Lazaro Cardenas, to run for the presidency. Calles hoped that Cardenas' youth and energy would revive the party. The “*jefe maximo*” (big boss), however, got more than he bargained for.

Cardenas was a man of high moral character and unbreakable will. During the revolution, he was an effective, disciplined military commander. He later gained notice for turning down bribes while serving in Mexico's oil fields. During the presidential campaign, Cardenas toured Mexico's poorest areas, often travelling to remote villages by horseback. After his election, he moved out of the lavish presidential residence in Chapultepec Palace.

Calles assumed that he would be able to dominate Cardenas as he had dominated previous presidents. Instead, Cardenas set his own course. When a showdown with Mexico's strongman came, Cardenas replaced top officials and military commanders loyal to Calles. In 1936, he sent Calles into exile aboard a plane bound for Texas.

### **Why is Cardenas remembered for his land reform program?**

Cardenas is remembered most for his land reform program. Article 27 of the 1917 constitution asserted the right of Mexico's peasants to land. The issue, however, had been largely

neglected until Cardenas' presidency. Under Cardenas' reforms, 46 million acres of land (12 percent of Mexico's total territory) were redistributed. Cardenas created 180,000 *ejidos*, or farming communities based on the agricultural traditions of the Indians. The state owned the land of the *ejidos* but gave peasants the right to use it.

**“The Nation shall at all times have the right to impose on private property such limitation as the public interest may demand...to ensure a more equitable distribution of public wealth. Necessary measures shall be taken to divide up large landed estates; to develop small landed holdings....”**

—Article 27, Mexican Constitution

Cardenas also took on foreign companies in Mexico. In 1937 he imposed state ownership over foreign railroad companies. More important, Cardenas nationalized Mexico's oil industry, which was mainly in North American and British hands. Oil had long been a focus of Mexican nationalism. At the peak of output in 1921, Mexico produced one-quarter of the world's oil, yet the industry was run almost completely by foreign companies.

**“In how many of the towns close to the petroleum operations is there a hospital, a school, or a social center, or a facility for the supply or purification of water, or a sports field, or an electricity plant...?”**

—President Lazaro Cardenas

Cardenas' popularity soared after the nationalization of the oil industry. The oil companies struck back by boycotting Mexican petroleum products, but U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt ruled out stronger action. Ultimately, the outbreak of World War II in Europe in 1939 drew Mexico closer to the United States and Britain.

### ***How did the Second World War affect Mexico?***

World War II set the stage for a long stretch of economic growth in Mexico. With the United States and its allies hungry for food and raw materials, Mexican exports boomed. At the same time, Mexican industries increased production to replace imports from abroad. The pattern continued after the war, as Mexico joined in a worldwide economic expansion.

From 1940 to 1980, Mexico's economy grew at an average annual rate of over 6 percent. The Mexican government spent heavily on roads, dams, and irrigation projects. Foreign investment, mostly from the United States, poured into the country, encouraged by political stability, tax breaks, low energy prices, and a labor force tightly controlled by the government. General Motors, Ford, and Chrysler became major employers in Mexico, while plants producing Kellogg cereals, Campbell soup, Heinz ketchup, and Coca-Cola transformed Mexican tastes.

### ***How did economic growth change Mexican society?***

The economic changes recast Mexican society. From 1940 to 1980, the portion of Mexicans living in the countryside fell from 65 to 34 percent. The illiteracy rate dropped from 64 to 17 percent, while the number of university graduates rose fifteen times. During the same period, Mexico's population jumped from 20 to 70 million. Mexico City became the largest city in the world, with dangerous levels of air pollution. (The capital's population was over 20 million in 2001.) Serious efforts to lower the birth rate were not introduced until the late 1970s. At the same time, an ecology movement began to raise awareness about the effects of overpopulation and industrialization on Mexico's environment.

Mexican politics during the growth years revolved around sharing the country's new wealth. Under Cardenas, the base of the National Revolutionary Party (renamed the Mexican Revolutionary Party) had been broadened to include peasants, workers, the middle class, and the military. The National Workers

Confederation, the National Peasant Organization, and other groups were formed by the party to manage competing interests.

### ***What was the role of the PRI in Mexico?***

By 1946, when the party was renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party, Mexico's rulers were in charge of a well-oiled political machine. Party officials turned out voters as needed, while political opposition was contained by a combination of favors and threats. Elections were held with precise regularity, but Mexicans understood that victory was guaranteed for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (known in Mexico by its Spanish acronym, PRI).

***“The party [the PRI] was created as a catch-all that counted on members to be united and unanimous.”***

—Santiago Onate, PRI president

Mexico's one-party system also opened the door to increased corruption. Government officials handed out state contracts and monopoly privileges to relatives and political allies. Miguel Aleman Valdes, Mexico's president from 1946 to 1952, himself bought property in Acapulco before government construction projects raised land values in the resort city.

### ***Why are the events of 1968 important?***

Mexico's corruption and authoritarianism clashed with the country's rising educational levels and expanding middle class. The contradiction broke into the open most dramatically in 1968, when Mexico was preparing to become the first developing country to host the Olympics. In the weeks before the summer games were scheduled to open, a mass protest movement sprang up in Mexico City. A government crackdown against student leaders only sparked the participation of hundreds of thousands of middle-class Mexicans. Vowing to end the unrest before the Olympics began, President Gustavo Diaz ordered strong measures. The result was a massacre of 200 to 300 demonstrators in the Plaza of Tlatelolco.

Luis Echeverria, the interior minister responsible for carrying out the massacre, became Mexico's next president in 1970. To the surprise of most, Echeverria's administration took up many of the causes embraced by the student protesters. In foreign policy, Echeverria upset the United States by building closer ties with the communist regime in Cuba. He also spent heavily to reduce poverty.

***How did new discoveries of oil and gas affect the Mexican economy?***

Echeverria set Mexico on a course that plunged the country deep into debt. His successor, Jose Lopez Portillo, was forced to sharply cut back government spending when he came to office in 1976. The change in policy, however, proved temporary. In 1978, new discoveries of oil and gas raised Mexico's energy reserves nearly five times. Energy production more than doubled. At the same time, a revolution in the oil-rich country of Iran sent world oil prices skyrocketing.

Mexico experienced an economic boom. Lopez Portillo put aside measures to reform the economy. Instead, he dumped billions of dollars into government projects, while international bankers were eager to lend him more.

The Mexican economy grew at 8 percent a year from 1978 to 1981.

***“For the first time in our history, in those years 1978 through 1981, we were being courted by the most important people in the world. We thought we were rich. We had oil.”***

—Jesus Silva Herzog, Minister of Finance

Economic trouble surfaced in June 1981, when oil prices slumped. Lopez Portillo continued to borrow from abroad rather than reduce the value of the Mexican peso, which was set by the government. An economic crisis soon followed. Mexicans sold their pesos for dollars and other more stable currencies.

By the time Lopez Portillo devalued the peso in 1982, the Mexican economy was near collapse. The country had run up an \$80 billion foreign debt and was unable to repay its loans. The United States stepped in with a financial rescue package to enable Mexico to meet its interest payments. Nonetheless, severe damage had been done to Mexico's self-confidence. The country's forty-year “economic miracle” was clearly over.