

# Partido revolucionario institucional essay

[History](#), [Revolution](#)



The PRI, or Partido Revolucionario Institucional, was Mexico's dominant ruling party for 71 years, after which it was defeated at the polls by the National Action Party (PAN).

The PAN presidential candidate, Vicente Fox, beat the PRI candidate, Francisco Labastida, in the presidential election to become the first President that came from a party other than the PRI in Mexico's modern history. The PRI is considered one of the most singular political phenomena of the twentieth century, and a cornerstone of presidential power for more than 6 decades. It was founded as an organ of the Mexican state in 1929 by the incumbent office-holders, and dominated Mexico's political life and system, which was once characterized by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas-Llosa as "the perfect dictatorship". Unlike most other political parties in the world, the PRI was not created nor functioned as an orthodox political party which aims to control governance.

Rather, the PRI was formed to help keep a leadership in power, within which successors to current Presidents are selected internally. This will be further discussed in detail later. Since its inception, it has had three avatars, namely the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (1928-38), Partido de la Revolucion Mexicana, (1938-1946) and the present-day PRI. Since its name change in 1946, the PRI's candidates have won in all nine presidential elections, never once losing the majority in the Mexican legislature, despite an increasingly strong opposition, until its defeat at the hands of Vicente Fox and PAN. Before that, it governed virtually unchallenged in regular six year cycles and regularly won in excess of 85 percent of the total vote. In addition, before

1988, the PRI had never lost a gubernatorial or federal senatorial race it had contested since the formation of the PNR in 1929.

As such, the Mexico of the 1960s and 1970s was often called a hegemonic party system, distinct from the single party states of the communist former Soviet bloc, since opposition parties existed legally and politically, although they were crippled and ineffective. As the PRI was built by victorious revolutionaries and viewed as the party (as a singular entity together with the PRM and PNR) that brought land reform, labor rights and economic development, the PRI possessed a strong revolutionary heritage, which contributed significantly to its continued hegemony. Exercising a monopoly on the elected executive positions at the federal, state and local levels, the PRI had easy access to government resources that made clientelism (personal relationships that link patrons and clients together in a system in which jobs, favors and protection are exchanged for labor, support and loyalty) relatively easy, particularly in a state with an extensive bureaucracy. Formally launched on the 18th to the 20th of January, 1946, during the second national assembly of the PRM, it evolved as the PRM moved to assume a new name and platform after numerous attacks following the electoral fraud of 1940 under the administration of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-46).

There was considerable continuity between the PRM and the PRI during the transition. Both parties maintained a “double” structure, namely the direct, horizontal or territorial structure, which encompassed the various municipal, state and national party organizations, and the indirect, sectoral or

corporatist structure, encompassing the agrarian, worker and “popular” sectors of the party which was the main powerbase for the PRI. There were hardly any major changes after the shift from the PRM to the PRI. The PRI was presented as a less centralized party than the PRM, but only in rhetoric. The Comité Central Ejecutivo, or the Central Executive Committee, continued to maintain almost absolute control over the party, with the president of the CCE given broad powers within the committee.

Furthermore, the concept behind the formation of the original PNR party, which was to be known as the “party of the president”, strengthened the PRI members acceptance of the President’s power over all aspects of the party as necessary, with the argument that a democratic party structure would only divide and weaken the party. This influence of presidentialism was strengthened when it was institutionalized in 1946, and since then in the PRI, it has become absolute. Consequently, the PRI has been the main support base of a regime in which the head of state has broad constitutional power. This power, brought about within the PRI, is based on 3 party mechanism – there is no democratic structure within the PRI, the bureaucracy (of the PRI) puts party discipline before individual conscience, and presidents are able to decide the future course of all political careers within the PRI.

The president is also allowed to dominate federal and state legislators, together with state governors and municipal presidents. This virtually makes the president the sole governing force in the PRI, which is apt for “the president party”. One of the more remarkable features of the PRI is the president power to choose and designate his successor, or known as el

dedazo, “ the fingering” . The chosen successor is imposed as the PRI’s candidate, and is ensured a win in the national elections through electoral fraud, including the notorious fracas in 1988 against Cardenas. The national convention of the PRI, which is officially in charge of designating a candidate, is relegated to the role of rubber stamping the president choice. The president anointed successor is always presented as the party choice of the PRI as a whole to the public to affect a united front, however.

The PRI has been lacking in democratic structures and practices since it’s inception, which undoubtedly weakened the PRI as a whole, but strengthened the office of the Mexican President in turn. The President could impose his policies without opposition or dissent from his own party as a result. However, there have been various attempts to democratize the PRI. The PRI president Carlos A. Madrazo led one of the most significant attempts towards democratization in 1964-1965. He publicized a plan to democratize the electoral process for municipal candidates, among other things, which was fiercely opposed by PRI members.

Later on, he was forced to resign from the PRI, and his attempt at democratization became a memory. However, during the Salinas administration, attempts at democratization became more intense and succeeded partially, Salinas tried to “ modernize” the PRI, one aspect of which involved fostering a more democratic image for the party. He used presidential power to get PRI candidates to resign after they claimed victory in gubernatorial races marked by electoral fraud. However, this image he tried to foster was much tarnished by the massive fraud committed by the

PRI in its contests with opposition parties, particularly the PAN, in northern states from 1985 onwards and in the controversial elections against Cardenas in 1988. Threatened by the demonstrated strength of the left in 1988, Salinas also permitted the PRI to use fraud and intimidation against the PRD while encouraging the PRI to recognize opposition victories. Lately, the PRI has been rocked by crisis after crisis.

One of the more controversial crises involved the murder of the PRI's presidential candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, in Tijuana, on the 23rd of March, 1994. This was not the end, for on the 28th of September, 1994, the secretary general of the PRI, Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, was assassinated as well, in Mexico City. To make things worst, the former president brother, Raul Salinas de Gortari, was accused of planning the murders, and there is widespread public suspicion that a hard-line faction within the PRI government apparatus was responsible. Finally, in the 2000 national elections, the PRI lost to Vicente Fox, which was a historic opposition victory which ended more than 70 years of PRI rule.

The PRI and PAN each won two fifths of the seats in the lower house of the congress, but the PRI kept nearly half the seats in the senate. Moving forward, the PAN lost more than 50 seats in the lower house, which exacerbated the situation in which the Congress has become an independent power within the government, causing difficult relations between Fox and the Congress. In conclusion, the PRI has been tremendously successful over the past century, being an unique political party in the global political community, with its innate credibility and solid powerbase as an organ of the

ruling government, and its established stranglehold over power, which has been unbroken until recently by Vicente Fox. It has been fighting hard since to reinvent itself and rejuvenate its powerbase.

Will it be able to overcome widespread perceptions of corruption and accusations of electoral fraud? Only the next presidential elections will tell.