

# ELITES, REVOLUTION, AND AUTHORITARIANISM: POLITICAL RECRUITMENT IN MEXICO, 1900-1971

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One of the most pervasive phenomena in the modern political world is authoritarianism—regimes characterized by “limited pluralism,” identifiably and analytically distinct from democratic or totalitarian types of rule.<sup>1</sup> Well over a third of the contemporary nation-states, mostly in the developing regions, fall into the authoritarian category<sup>2</sup>—and this fact alone would seem to call for intensive research. Nevertheless, despite the obvious importance of the problem, we know relatively little about the origins, dynamics, and stability (or instability) of such regimes. There is a particularly urgent need for empirical research to test, refine, and amplify hypotheses that now exist.

Toward this end I propose to study the process of political transition in twentieth-century Mexico. The country and the period offer two major advantages. First, Mexico provides an opportunity to explore the creation and operation of a dominant-party authoritarian regime that appears to be both stable and under civilian control—a conspicuous exception to political patterns elsewhere in Latin America, and possibly a prototype for changes in other parts of the world.<sup>3</sup> Second, the Mexican system developed in the aftermath of an extended, violent, ultimately mass-based Revolution (1910-20). It is therefore possible to examine, with considerable perspective, the results of revolution, and thus investigate dynamic processes of change. In sum, my research concentrates on two related themes: (1) The origins and character of authoritarianism, and (2) the political sociology of postrevolutionary society.

The empirical part of my research will focus on a central question: Who rules? If authoritarianism consists of limited pluralism, it then becomes necessary to determine who falls on which side of the limits—who does (and does not) have the functional right to organize and compete for power.<sup>4</sup> A straightforward way of confronting this issue is to examine the structure and composition of dominant elites. Who belongs to the elites? What is the basis of power? And how has the make-up of the elites changed over time? Applying these questions to Mexico, I plan to utilize three distinct analytical strategies: Statistical measurement of trends over time, detailed explication of selected individual careers, and cross-national comparison.

## STRATEGY 1 (STATISTICAL ANALYSIS)

The first approach involves an empirical study of the social background and career patterns of 6,302 people who held national political office in Mexico at any time be-

tween 1900 and 1971. The data, which I gathered in 1969-71 and have since put into machine-readable form, contains (incomplete) information on such items as date of birth, place of birth, level of education, place of education, occupation(s), and the character and sequence of political offices held. I will employ the data in roughly the following fashion:

Q1: What have been the social prerequisites for gaining high political office in Mexico, and how have they changed over time? To pinpoint the chronology of change (if any), I will trace secular trends in the incidence of salient characteristics (e.g., urbanization of birthplace, educational background, occupations) of officeholders under each presidential regime. More important, I will also compare the social attributes of three office-holding cohorts—the “prerevolutionary generation” (1900-10), the “revolutionary generation” (1917-46), and the “post-revolutionary generation” (1946-71)—with the literate adult male population as depicted in appropriate national censuses.

Q2: Among the people who have gained entrance to the national elite, what have been the social correlates of success? Have individuals from certain kinds of backgrounds tended to get higher on the political ladder than others, and has this relationship changed over time? Correlation coefficients and path analysis (an extension of the statistical technique known as multiple regression) should furnish clear evidence here.

Q3: Have political offices been linked into institutional pathways to power, and have the routes to relative prominence changed over time? What have been the modal shapes of political careers? For this problem I plan to study interpositional transition matrices, drawing upon elementary Markov-chain models and probability techniques.

Q4: Once people gain access to the political elites, how long have they stayed? Has the rate of continuity changed over time? There are various ways of measuring continuity—most simply, perhaps, by the percentage of people in specific elites who had appeared in previous elite cohorts. I have already utilized this method.<sup>5</sup>

#### STRATEGY 2 (INDIVIDUAL CAREERS)

In view of the unexpectedly weak connection between social background and success in achieving high office and the ambiguous relationship between interpositional mobility and high office (already documented for the post-1946 generation),<sup>6</sup> I suspect that an understanding of the means to power requires a different form of analysis—specifically, intensive examination of the background and careers of selected individuals who appear to represent major political types (the typology as yet to be constructed). This way I would hope to uncover the factors of political mobility which lie outside the realm of my statistical data, discern the varied bases of political authority (or success), and explore the mechanisms of political ascent. I intend to survey the varied and changing roles of several crucial elements: Friendships, real or fictive kinship networks, marital patterns, economic ties, non-elite support, and the multiple uses of violence (or threats of violence). This is a new phase of research, not yet begun, and I expect to rely on diverse sources: Biographies, memoirs, newspapers, and, if I am able to make a trip to Mexico, personal interviews with active and retired politicians.

## STRATEGY 3 (CROSS-NATIONAL COMPARISON)

With the findings on Mexico in hand, I plan to make some cross-national comparisons in order to isolate, and hopefully explain, similarities and differences in the processes of political recruitment and promotion. Does Mexico represent a truly "unique" case, as some observers have implied? Do political elites in Mexico share common characteristics with dominant groups in other authoritarian regimes? How do recruitment and promotion processes in authoritarian polities differ from those in democratic and totalitarian systems?

In keeping with the conceptual intent of my proposal, I plan to locate cases for comparison along two separate dimensions: The occurrence of a modern, popular revolution and the type of political system. Aside from Mexico, my tentative choices include: The twentieth-century United States; Spain under Franco; Argentina since 1930; Turkey, primarily under Ataturk; postwar Yugoslavia; and the Soviet Union, especially during the Stalinist era. The rationale for selection is set forth in the following table:

Type of System	Popular Revolution	
	No	Yes
Democratic	USA	—
Authoritarian	Spain	Mexico
	Argentina	Turkey
Totalitarian	—	Yugoslavia
		USSR

Of course the categorization is crude, and there is room for disagreement on the location of individual countries. (Spain's Civil War might have been tantamount to "revolution." Turkey has moved from one-party rule to a multi-party system with many "democratic" features; but why Turkey and not Mexico?) The resulting comparisons would not provide rigorous controls on all likely intervening variables, and it may prove necessary to reduce the number of countries, in which case I would probably pick Turkey and Spain. Despite these and other difficulties, however, I firmly believe the attempt should be made; it could become the most important part of my project.

Like Strategy 2, this phase of the research would be entirely new. I have begun to build up a bibliography in this area, and the amount of available literature is impressive.

## NOTES

1. See Juan J. Linz, "An Authoritarian Regime: Spain," most easily consulted in *Mass Politics: Studies in Political Sociology*, ed. Erik Allardt and Stein Rokkan (New York: The Free Press, 1970), pp. 251-83 and 374-81.
2. According to Jean Blondel, who does not follow Linz's definitions, about 30 percent of the world's political systems were "authoritarian" as of 1972—and another 30 percent were "populist" (including Mexico). Blondel, *Comparing Political Systems* (New York: Praeger, 1972), Appendix.
3. See Melvin Croan, "Is Mexico the Future of East Europe: Institutional Adaptability and Political Change in Comparative Perspective," in *Authoritarian Politics in Modern Society: The Dynamics of Established One-Party Systems*, ed. Samuel P. Huntington and Clement H. Moore (New York: Basic Books, 1970), pp. 451-83.

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4. Juan Linz has based a typology of authoritarian regimes upon this same question. Linz, "Notes Toward a Typology of Authoritarian Regimes," (Paper presented at the 1972 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, D.C.).
5. Peter H. Smith, "Continuity and Turnover within the Mexican Political Elite," (Paper presented at the IV International Congress of Mexican Studies, Santa Monica, California, October 1973).
6. Peter H. Smith, "Making It in Mexico: Aspects of Political Mobility since 1946," (Paper presented at the 1974 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, Ill.).