

KEY

Rebuilding the Nation

1934

Lázaro Cárdenas, another former revolutionary general, is elected president. He revives the revolutionary-era social revolution and carries out an extensive series of agrarian reforms, distributing nearly twice as much land to peasants as had all of his predecessors combined. In 1938, Cárdenas nationalizes the country's oil industry, expropriating the extensive properties of foreign-own companies and creating a government agency to administer the oil industry. He remains an influential figure in government throughout the next three decades.

1940

Elected in 1940, Cárdenas' more conservative successor, Manuel Ávila Camacho, forges a friendlier relationship with the U.S., which leads Mexico to declare war on the Axis powers after the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. During World War II, Mexican pilots fight against Japanese forces in the Philippines, serving alongside the U.S. Air Force. In 1944, Mexico agrees to pay U.S. oil companies \$24 million, plus interest, for properties expropriated in 1938. The following year, Mexico joins the newly created United Nations.

1946

Miguel Alemán becomes the first civilian president of Mexico since Francisco Madero in 1911. In the post-World War II years, Mexico undergoes great industrial and economic growth, even as the gap continues to grow between the richest and poorest segments of the population. The ruling government party, founded in 1929, is renamed the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), and will continue its dominance for the next 50 years.

PRI in Power

1968

As a symbol of its growing international status, Mexico City is chosen to host the Olympic Games. Over the course of the year, student protesters stage a number of demonstrations in an attempt to draw international attention to what they see as a lack of social justice and democracy in Mexico under the PRI government and its current president, Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. On October 2, ten days before the Games were to open, Mexican security forces and military troops surround a demonstration at the historic Tlatelolco Plaza and open fire. Though the resulting death and injury toll is concealed by the Mexican government (and their allies in Washington), at least 100 people are killed and many others wounded. The Games go ahead as planned.

1976

Huge oil reserves are discovered in the Bay of Campeche, off the shores of the states of Campeche, Tabasco and Veracruz, at the southernmost end of the Gulf of Mexico. The Cantarell oil field established there becomes one of the largest in the world, producing more than 1 million barrels per day by 1981. Jose López Portillo, elected in 1976, promises to use the oil money to fund a campaign of industrial expansion, social welfare and high-yield agriculture. To do this, his government borrows huge sums of foreign money at high interest rates, only to discover that the oil is generally of low grade. These policies leave Mexico with the world's largest foreign debt.

1985

By the mid-1980s, Mexico is in financial crisis. On September 19, 1985, an earthquake in Mexico City kills nearly 10,000 people and causes heavy damage. The displaced residents, dissatisfied with the government's response to their situation, form grassroots organizations that will blossom into a full-fledged human rights and civic action movement during the late 1980s and 1990s. The country's problems are exacerbated by continuing accusations of electoral fraud against the PRI and the devastation caused in the Yucatán by a massive hurricane in 1988.

December 17, 1992

President Carlos Salinas joins George H.W. Bush of the U.S. and Prime Minister Brian Mulroney of Canada in signing the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which goes into effect January 1, 1994. The agreement calls for a phasing out of the longstanding trade barriers between the three nations. Salinas pushes it through over the opposition of the media and the academic communities and of the leftist Partido Revolucionario Democrático (PRD), which begins to win growing support among the electorate. Salinas' government is plagued by accusations of corruption, and in 1995 the former president is forced into exile.

1994

The latest PRI candidate, Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon, is elected president and immediately faces a banking crisis when the value of the Mexican peso plunges on international markets. The United States loans Mexico \$20 billion, which, along with a plan of economic austerity, helps stabilize its currency.

Mexico Today

1997

The corruption-plagued PRI suffers a shocking defeat, losing the mayoralty of Mexico City (also known as the Distrito Federal, or DF) to PRD candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, son of former president Lázaro Cárdenas, by an overwhelming margin.

2000

Vicente Fox, of the opposition Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) wins election to the Mexican presidency, ending more than 70 years of PRI rule. Parliamentary elections also see the PAN emerge victorious, beating the PRI by a slight margin. A former Coca-Cola executive, Fox enters office as a conservative reformer, focusing his early efforts on improving trade relations with the United States, calming civil unrest in areas such as Chiapas and reducing corruption, crime and drug trafficking. Fox also strives to improve the status of millions of illegal Mexican immigrants living in the United States, but his efforts stall after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. With reforms slowing and his opponents gaining ground, Fox also faces large-scale protests by farmers frustrated with the inequalities of the NAFTA system.

2006

In the July presidential election, the PAN's Felipe Calderón apparently wins by less than one percentage point over the PRD's Andrés Manuel López Obrador, with the PRI in third place. With the country strongly divided along class lines-López Obrador aims to represent Mexico's poor, while Calderón promises to continue the country's business and technological development-López Obrador and his supporters reject the results as fraudulent and stage mass protests. On September 5, a federal elections board officially declares Calderón the winner. He is inaugurated in December, as more than 100,000 protesters in Mexico City-in addition to PRD legislators-rally around López Obrador, who refuses to concede defeat. In his first months in office, Calderón moves away from the pro-business, free-trade promises of his campaign, expressing his desire to address some of the issues of poverty and social injustice championed by the PRD.

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