

Fifth, the system was essentially one of **single party rule**. As previously mentioned, the PRI was founded to internalize conflict within a single, broad-based ruling coalition. There was little separation of party and state; the two were virtually one and the same. A limited degree of party pluralism was condoned for the sake of appearances, but the PRI seldom lost. The system's real pluralism was found within the PRI itself, where rival political groups, corporatist sectors and ideological factions vied for power.

Sixth, external challenges to the party's dominance were successfully countered by an elaborate **system of cooptation**. Through systematic use of bureaucratic and political appointments and generous pay-offs, "autonomous" protest movements that posed any perceived threat to the interests of the PRI-government soon found themselves robbed of their leaders or compromised. While this cooptation process left a persistent leadership vacuum among grassroots organizations and opposition parties, it helped to rejuvenate continually the PRI-government with new, creative, energetic individuals with proven leadership skills.¹⁵

Finally, as one of its more authoritarian traits, the system depended on **control of the mass means of communication**. Open, public criticism of the government was seldom permitted, especially on radio and television.

3.2 The Rules of the Game

Alongside its cornerstones mentioned above, the Mexican post-revolutionary political system also developed a strongly institutionalized set of rules by which all actors within the PRI-government abided. The highly institutionalized character of Mexico's regime distinguished it from many neighbouring Latin American countries, where political turmoil and frequent regime change prevailed.¹⁶ Four such rules are identified here:

¹⁵Sergio Zermeno calls this twin process of rejuvenating the PRI-government and creating a leadership vacuum among the opposition "bureaupolitics". See Sergio Zermeno, "Crisis, Neoliberalism, and Disorder," in **Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico**, eds., Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig (Boulder, CO.: Lynne Rienner, 1990), 160-80.

¹⁶See Dan A. Cothran, **Political Stability and Democracy in Mexico: The "Perfect Dictatorship"?** (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1994); Laurence Whitehead, "Prospects for a Transition from Authoritarian Rule in Mexico," in **The Politics of Economic Restructuring: State-Society Relations and Regime Change in Mexico**, eds., María Lorena Cook, Kevin J. Middlebrook and Juan Molinar Horcasitas (La Jolla, CA.: Centre for U.S.-Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1994), 327-46.