



'We will make policy with our faces toward the future that we want and the challenges we have in front of us': Salinas in triumph AP

Mexico's New Generation

Presidential nominee Salinas is under pressure to reform a one-party system

Next July some 25 million Mexican voters will go to the polls and choose as their next president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, a career bureaucrat who is making his first run for political office.

At first blush, the 39-year-old Salinas boasts a rather unenviable record. During the last five years as Mexico's planning and budget secretary, he helped orchestrate an unpopular austerity program and economic restructuring that cost millions of Mexicans dearly. A sharp devaluation of the peso drove up the price of imports, while the failure to reduce a gaping budget deficit boosted inflation into triple digits. Unemployment is up, real wages have fallen, consumption of such staples as milk, meat and eggs is down and malnutrition is on the rise. That's a load of political baggage to carry into any campaign, but Salinas can be confident: as the nominee of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), he knows even before the votes are counted that he will be the man Mexicans pick to lead the country into the 1990s.

That's the way it still works in Mexico, where the PRI is enjoying its 58th year of uninterrupted rule—a record unmatched in the noncommunist world. Resisting all

genuine calls for democratic reform, the redoubtable party has held on to power since 1929 with a savvy mix of populism, patronage, payoffs and—when it had to—outright fraud. Now, through the magic of the *dedazo*—the pointing of the finger—the mantle of authority is set to pass to Salinas. Barring calamity, the Harvard-educated economist will succeed President Miguel de la Madrid Hurtado for a single, six-year term beginning Dec. 1, 1988. PRI president Jorge de la Vega Domínguez announced the nomination to a cheering throng Sunday morning, Oct. 4, but as tradition dictated, the choice was de la Madrid's alone, a final privilege accorded every outgoing president.

Pliant legislature: Salinas will inherit a remarkably unfettered presidency. Few nations entrust their executives with as much power as Mexico grants to the man in the presidential residence at Los Pinos. Over the decades Mexican presidents have nationalized industries, expropriated land and devalued the currency—all virtually by decree. The system contains few checks and balances, and the legislature, dominated as it is by the PRI, is little more than a rubber stamp. Its members barely squawked when former president José Ló-

pez Portillo nationalized the country's banks in 1982, and they were equally pliant when his successor, de la Madrid, decided just three months later to sell back a 34 percent stake to the private sector. The Supreme Court routinely dismisses constitutional challenges to the government's edicts. And the military—the bane of civilian rule throughout much of the rest of Latin America—was long ago defanged, depoliticized and put securely under civilian control.

With Salinas, Mexico is about to witness the passing of power to a new generation. He will be the nation's youngest president in more than 50 years. Salinas carries no personal memories of the nation's postrevolutionary trauma, nor of its pivotal transition after World War II when the center-right government of Miguel Alemán (1946-52) set the country on a probusiness course. To him, PRI's past is a lesson best learned in the history books; he depicts himself as a man for the future. During his acceptance speech Salinas repeatedly invoked the watchword "modernization." "I belong to a new generation, the one that is modernizing Mexico," Salinas declared minutes after at the PRI headquarters following his nomination. "We will make