



THE 1988 MEXICAN ELECTIONS

PEAMUN XII | November 8, 2020





Letter from Your Chair

It is my pleasure to welcome you all to this crisis committee. My name is Arya Nistane and I'm a junior at Phillips Exeter Academy and a proud member of the Exeter MUN team. Outside of MUN, I enjoy learning math concepts and studying computer science. I also love playing frisbee, spikeball, and running for the cross country team.

The 1988 election is an exciting topic because of its climactic timing. The PRI, the ruling Mexican political party, has reached an all-time low in terms of popularity. The Mexican economy is staggering from foreign and domestic forces. The election is a possible turning point for the entirety of Mexico, and I am excited to see how you all use your government and personal powers as well as public opinion to shape this critical moment.

Due to COVID-19, we were forced to hold an online conference this year. I know many of you are dreading the prospect of an online conference. How will it work? How will we communicate with each other? Rest assured, our team is working tirelessly to recreate the authentic Model UN feel: quick and easy communication channels, numerous crisis updates you will have to respond to swiftly and decisively.

Fiery speeches, diplomacy, and a willingness to think on your feet are some things I hope you all will bring to the table. Whether you are a first or second-timer, or a MUN veteran, this is the committee for you!

Sincerely,

Arya Nistane

anistane@exeter.edu



Letters from Your Crisis Staff

Phil:

Hi everyone! My name is Phil Horrigan and I am going to be one of your crisis staffers for this committee. I am a Senior from Washington, DC, and have been doing Model UN for six years. Outside of MUN, I run cross country and winter track, row crew, and do a bunch of other nerdy stuff (like taking Latin and Greek). This is my fourth and final PEAMUN, so let's make it a good one. For the last two years, I have been the chair of crisis committees, but now I get to do the fun stuff (messaging with you all). Crisis committees, in my opinion, are by far the best part of MUN. There's so much involved that I can't describe how great they are without writing more than I'm supposed to for this little introduction letter.

I can fit in, though, that I want to make this committee as good as it can be and that, to me, that means helping all of you through the process as much as I can. If, at any point, you need some advice on your character or some research tips or you're confused about how crisis committees work or anything else, don't hesitate to reach out. My email is phorrigan@exeter.edu.

Sam:

Hi Everyone! My name is Sam Creelan and I'm a lower from New York. This is my first PEAMUN and I'm really looking forward to this committee. Personally, I've been fascinated by this event for a little while and I'm really excited to see how it turns out. Even though this is my first PEAMUN, I'm here to support you so if you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to reach out at any time. My email is screelan@exeter.edu.



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Background

The 1988 Mexican election, held on July 6th, should have been no different than any other Mexican election. A popular candidate from the Industrial Revolutionary Party (PRI) would run for president, along with one or two underdogs. The PRI would win, just as they had in every other gubernatorial and presidential election since 1929, continuing their supremacy over Mexican politics. In reality, despite the party's victory, allegations of election fraud would bring opposition parties and the public to unify against the PRI like never before in Mexican history, an event many mark as a downturn of the ruling party. There were seven primary parties in Mexico: the PRI, the FDN (primary opposition party), PAN (right-leaning party in support of PRI), PRT (labor party), PDM (ultra-right catholic party). Beneath the facade of the PRI's popularity lay deep economic and social issues as a result of government policies, intimidation tactics, and widespread institutional fraud that could no longer go unnoticed.

Campaign Tactics, Voter Suppression, and Fraud

The 1988 elections utilized a new electronic voting system and an independent election verification system known as Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT). Under this new method, the vote was reported from each electoral district to the Secretariat of the Interior, where it was compiled using a central system that could display results in real-time. Despite Salinas's (PRI candidate and establishment choice) pledges to move away from the idea of a "clean sweep" and hold fair elections, which he attempted to satisfy through the PVT system, fraud was rampant. The PRI's influence over the Federal Electoral Commission (CFE), the institution that controlled elections, allowed for fraud at every level: voter registration, vote tabulation, and vote collection.



The PRI's well-developed and tested methods, which stemmed from their absolute control over all parts of government, started from the media. One main TV network, the government-owned Imevision refused to cover all non-PRI candidates throughout the election. The other network, Televisa, started by the son of the PRI's founder, dedicated 90% of its airtime to Salinas. Yet again, Salinas broke his promises for a clean election. Despite his vow to abstain from using public sector resources for campaign spending, the PRI organized "rallies" using thousands of government workers to march in the big cities with signs, balloons, horns, etc. They also paid for professional murals to be painted in public spaces, and newspaper ads. The ratio of campaign spending between Salinas and Cardenas (opposition left-leaning candidate) was reported to be around 1000:1. This vast difference in advertising is best shown by a Gallup poll conducted in late May, where civilians were asked to identify the presidential candidates and their parties. Almost all respondents could identify Salinas. However, only half could identify Cardenas, who had to rely on relatively slow road tours across Mexico to advertise his campaign.

Because of this, many Mexicans didn't even *know* a significant opposition to Salinas existed and decided it was no use voting anyways. Using this to their advantage, the Electoral Commission, controlled by the PRI, closed voter registration 6 months before the election for no valid reason, despite the outrage of all four other major political parties.

The PRI was also in possession of complete voter lists, and denied opposition parties access to them. During the election, voting centers systematically denied entry to voters who hadn't voted for the PRI in previous elections, saying they were never registered to vote. The mayor of the federal district had 72 people listed in his home, where only four resided. This



constituted voter fraud, as the mayor clearly wanted to stuff more PRI voters into his district. To demonstrate the widespread nature of this phenomenon, researchers at the National University (UNAM) found that an average of 23% of voters were underage, dead, counted more than once, residing at a different address, or did not exist at all.

In the days before the election, pre marked ballots in favor of Salines were discovered in the capital and several other cities. Government workers were to swap their “dirty” ballots in for clean ones, then return the clean ones to government officials to be recycled. In an operation uncovered by the weekly magazine, *Proceso*, dozens of ballots disguised as singles were folded and dropped into ballot boxes. Some ballot boxes were discovered already filled with ballots. This level of fraud required organization, cooperation, and testing. Indeed, many past elections on the local, regional, and national level were won using fraudulent tactics similar to those described above. Most recently, the PRI used fraud in the 1986 governor’s election of Chihuahua to ensure they wouldn’t lose their monopoly on the governor’s position. However, opposition and public outcry had never been as pointed and united as it was in 1988. To understand why this election was different, we need to observe the slow but steady downfall of Mexico’s economy and government policies up until 1988.

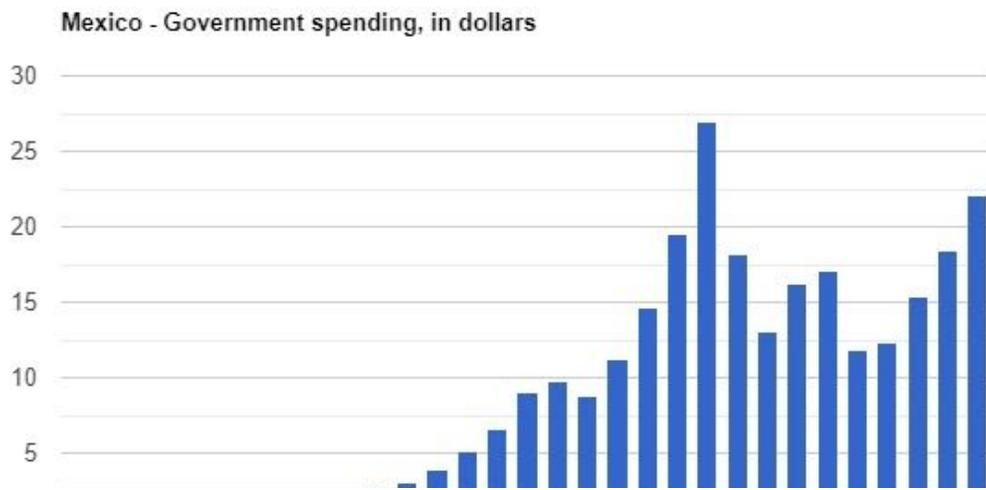
The PRI’s Decline: Economic Distress & Social Changes

The PRI was founded on a base laid down by Lazaro Cardenas, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas’s father, in the late 1930s. Truly a man of the people, Lazaro made numerous changes to further his goal of a democracy where common workers had power. In pursuit of this goal, he centered his policies around labor organizing, land grants, and vocational public education for the masses,



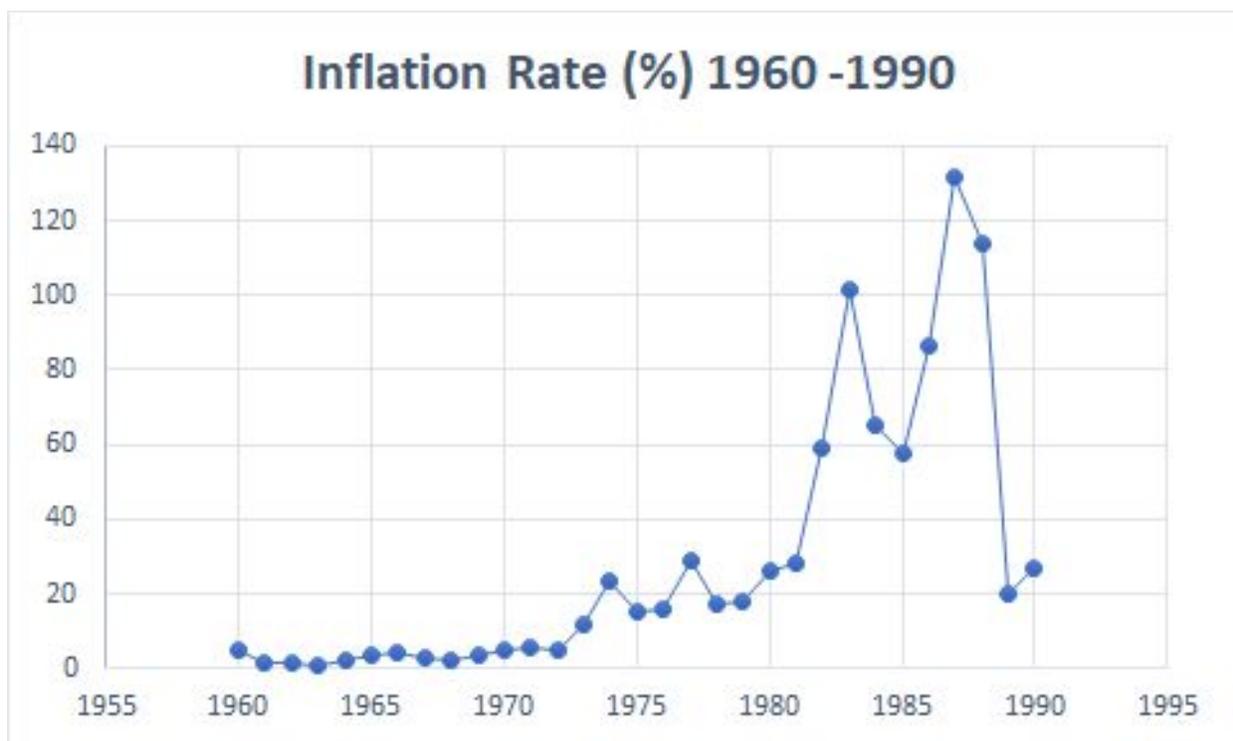
while also nationalizing the oil industry and railways systems. He created a corporatist structure – a structure in which subgroups of the population are controlled and politically represented by corporations. In this case, the three main groups were workers, peasants, and government employees. Each was controlled by their respective union: National Peasant Confederation, Confederation of Mexican Workers, and the National Confederation of Popular Organizations. They were created to mobilize the poor and middle class to implement social change.

Lazaro’s successors, however, preferred supporting large private companies. Agricultural investments were made to build mass irrigation systems and farming machinery, to the benefit of large landlords who commanded thousands of acres. Furthermore, nationalized rail and oil were provided to the private sector for cheap transport through government subsidies. Despite some presidents establishing welfare systems to help the poor, the top 1% got richer, while the poor became poorer. A lack of tax reform also exacerbated this divide, as well as the government’s inability to recuperate the investment it had made into private sector subsidies. Despite these efforts to support corporations, Mexican companies did not stay competitive abroad. Efforts to weaken the Mexican currency to keep Mexican exports competitive resulted in a series of riots across the country, of which a few had to be quelled by military intervention. The government’s answer to the weak demand for goods and discontent was simple: increased government spending.





Unfortunately, this coincided with a rise in international interest rates and declining oil prices in the late 1970s into the '80s. The government came to rely upon foreign loans to bolster the economy and fund its unregulated spending. In 1982, 37.2% of Mexico's GDP went towards wages, which dropped to 24.2% in 1987. Meanwhile, as a result of the PRI's economic policies, capital earnings rose from 46.9 to 55.2% from 1977 - 1987. As the rich protected their wealth through large interest rates, the main burden of paying off foreign debt fell to the middle and lower classes. Additionally, rising international interest rates, growing debt, and devaluation of the peso caused inflation to skyrocket in the 1980s (refer to chart). This is one of many crises delegates will have to deal with.



Source: *macrotrends.net*



In an effort to control the population, the government found it easy and effective to murder, excessively police, and oppress anyone who opposed them. Military groups marched over the countryside, terrorizing anyone who dared to oppose the government. The Mexican Dirty War, a conflict between students/guerilla groups and the government, climaxed in El Halconazo, a massacre of student demonstrators in which 120 students were killed. Under Miguel de la Madrid's presidency, dozens of journalists who pried into government affairs were assassinated. On July 2nd, 1987, the electoral coordinators of Cardenas's campaign were shot in Mexico City, and another four were killed a month later. As a result, Mexico lost its seat on the Inter-American Human Rights Commission in 1987.

Throughout the mid 19th century during PRI rule, the Mexican population rapidly changed as people became more educated and flocked to urban centers. The PRI's inability to cope with these changes furthered the disconnect with their constituents. University education was easier to obtain than ever before, and half a million university graduates lived in the capital of Mexico City alone. In pre-election polls, Cardenas outnumbered Salinas by three to one among this demographic. In addition, a new social class had grown: the poor urban dwellers who were no longer peasantry yet too unskilled to work in the industrialized urban cities. In slum areas such as these, Cardenas also outnumbered Salinas in pre-election polls. The PRI's rigid corporatist structure, now an instrument of population control rather than social reform, could not account for these new emerging groups.

The 1988 Mexican election was a culmination of the PRI's decline, a party once dominant and popular, but now only clinging on to power using whatever means to meet the ends. Their economic policies in the two decades before had widened income inequality and



weakened the Mexican economy. Meanwhile, they had grown farther from their voter base and the newly emerging Mexican middle-class.

The Event

The period after the 1988 Mexican Election leading up to 1992, when Carlos Enrique Cervantes de Gortari (a cousin of Carlos Salinas) and Magdalena Ruiz Pelayo (who worked for Carlos's father) were convicted of drug trafficking charges in the US, remains one of the most tumultuous in Mexican history. The convictions marked the beginning of a public reckoning with corruption and cartel control within the Mexican government that lasted until the PRI's one-party dominance ended in 2012. The PRI employed drastic voter suppression and voter control methods during the 1988 presidential election, but after the fact, in those short four years, their practices were arguably more outrageous than during the actual election process.

In the immediate aftermath of the election, Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas rejected the results of the election in a speech he made to 200,000 people in Mexico City. The capital was a hotbed of support for Cardenas, and the goal of the speech was to force a recount by popular demand. He was joined in his call for a recount by the PAN candidate, Manuel Clouthier, who publicly agreed that the elections had been rigged despite the vast ideological differences between him and Cardenas.

On August 15, 1988, the final results of the election were ratified by members of the National Congress, who were sitting as the electoral college (the government branch that is responsible for the ratification of election results). The results were ratified despite criminal charges filed on behalf of Cardenas against the minister of the interior, Manuel Bartlett Diaz, and



the massive rallies that were held by the FDN and PAN in response to the election results. Additionally, Francisco Ovando and Roman Gil Hernandez were assassinated for their roles in reporting PRI voter fraud. They were both senior aides to Cardenas.

Meanwhile, the Mexican economy was in turmoil. In the period of instability between the ratification of the election results and the swearing-in of Salinas, the de la Madrid administration announced efforts to curb inflation. These included a wage and price freeze through the beginning of Salinas' presidency, ensuring that he would come into office with favorable inflation rates to work with. The efforts were successful and reduced the inflation rate of 14.5 percent to a mere 1 percent. Additionally, a thirty percent tax cut was imposed on the poorest of Mexican workers.

These efforts may seem like progressive attempts at easing the vast economic burden cast on Mexico's poorest citizens, but in reality, they were just temporary solutions to the fundamental problems of the Mexican economy. Salinas had run on a campaign of privatization and modernization. These efforts would end up hurting those workers that the tax cuts seemed to benefit both in the short and long term.

During this period, the price of oil also continued to drop. Thus, on October 17, 1988, the US announced a 3.5 billion dollar loan to the Mexican government to combat the oil crisis. Technically, this was a bridge loan, designed to pay out until Mexico could reach a deal with the IMF and World Bank. Many critics in both America and Mexico claimed that this deal was politically motivated, as Salinas had visited with presidential candidates like George Bush and members of the US congress. Many of these same critics speculated that because of Salinas'



connections in Washington, those in power felt a need to shore up Mexico's crumbling economy in exchange for long-lasting political support from their Southern neighbor.

On December 1, 1988, Salinas was sworn in as President of Mexico. In his inaugural speech, Salinas promised to make the economy his focus and spoke about balancing the national debt that Mexico was accruing. During the inauguration ceremony, members of both the FDN and PAN silently protested, still demanding justice.

Like Salinas had promised, the economy became his first priority, and he immediately repealed the economic freeze that de la Madrid had put in place. Instead, he instituted modest wage decreases and a gradual devaluation of the peso. As part of his plan to open Mexico to globalization and modernize various industries, Salinas supported the plan to enter Mexico into the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) created by his predecessor. Membership had dwindled since the plan was first proposed though, and 1988 ended up being a year with little economic growth for the stagnant economy.

Nevertheless, Salinas continued to push for international trade, suggesting the idea of free trade between Mexico and the US to President Bush as a way to accelerate the modernization of Mexico's industries. This would have been an extension of agreements already put in place that facilitated free trade in industries like automobiles and textiles. The US was supportive of these



efforts, and after significant investment in areas like privatization and foreign investment, the US felt that a free trade agreement was the next step to



make. So, the legislatures of Canada, the US, and Mexico all approved a free trade agreement known today as NAFTA. Additionally, a year before, the US passed the Brady Plan, a transnational effort to reduce Mexico's national debt through a system of loans. All of these agreements were major victories for Salinas and significantly increased popular support for the Mexican President.

Before these international trade agreements, Salinas' support was dwindling, and the PRI had to concede a loss in the state of Baja California Norte to a PAN candidate. However, through more voter fraud and suppression, the PRI managed to hold onto the gubernatorial seat in Michoacan, the home state of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. In 1992, an alliance between the PRI and PAN approved the burning of all ballots from the contested 1988 election, thus destroying all hard evidence of the voter fraud that occurred.

In short, the 1988 Mexican Presidential Election and its aftermath remain one of, if not the most blatant example of widespread voter fraud in democracy throughout history. Even with the economic reforms Salinas managed to make, by 1994, the economy was in the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression, and the actions of the PRI during this time significantly eroded their support throughout Mexico.

Topics to Consider

This committee will begin at the end of the day on July 6, 1988. Not to spoil the surprise, but the first crisis update may or may not be the announcement that Carlos Salinas de Gortari has won the election. This is when this committee, made up of influential members of Mexican society, will begin addressing the greater issue at hand. While much of your planning will be



centered around voter fraud, remember that this particular scandal is not the only important topic that we will cover. Each of the characters in the committee relies on public support to some extent, and the people must not be forgotten as you or your political party seek power.

During the committee, the crisis room will be sending out frequent updates on two key metrics: population happiness, which will be an important indication of potential protests or riots, and PRI control, which will signal the amount of power that the PRI has to achieve their agenda. Hint: many of you would like high public happiness and low PRI power, but that's not how the committee will start. Should there be an election, the back room will also release constant polling numbers, even though the results of an election will be decided by a vote of the committee.

While the committee will begin by dealing with the alleged voter fraud, other crises that could be brought up include but are not limited to: the rising Mexican national debt, poverty in suburban areas, the increasing prominence of drug cartels, and the mass imprisonment or murder of activists. You do not have to plan for every possible crisis that could include these issues, but keep them in mind. No issue is isolated. If you have any questions along the way do not hesitate to reach out to one of the PEAMUN staff working on this committee -- we would love to help.

Portfolios:

N.B. Many of these names include diacritical marks (which influence pronunciation) that we have not included here. Nevertheless, members of this committee should do their best to correctly pronounce the names of the characters involved with this crisis.



Cuauhtemoc Cardenas Solorzano

Cuauhtemoc Cardenas Solorzano was born into the world of politics as the son of Mexican General and President Lazaro Cardenas. After a twenty-year career in engineering, Cardenas won his first election and never looked back. During the early years of his political career, while he was a member of the dominant PRI, he began to realize that the party had strayed far from ideals with which his father had led. He believed that the PRI had stopped being the party of the people and was frightened by their use of authoritarian oppression to maintain power. In 1986, Cardenas and a few other PRI members splintered the party and formed the Democratic Current (DC). He ran as the candidate for the DC and several other left-leaning parties.

Manuel Clouthier

Like Cardenas, Manuel Clouthier did not begin his career as a politician, but as a farmer on a large plot of land inherited mostly from his father. As a prominent member of his community, he was elected or appointed to many positions on union boards, councils, and commissions. In the 1970s, Clouthier became more vocally opposed to PRI policies, including the nationalization of banking and the artificial lowering of gas prices in the country. In 1983, Clouthier supported his uncle's candidacy with the National Action Party (PAN). His uncle's election was rigged and Clouthier's outrage caused him to officially join PAN. In 1988, he became their nominee for the presidential election.

Gumersindo Magaña Negrete



Gumersindo Magaña Negrete was a longtime member of the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM), which was extremely right-wing and very pro-Catholic. PAN also identified as a Catholic party but maintained much more moderate policy positions. Magaña was a leader of the movement to put the Catholic church into a more prominent position in Mexican society. Magaña was not a fan of either Communism or Capitalism, believing that both had failed, and his solution was a return to Christian societal thought and structure. The main purpose of his run in 1988 was to regain the popularity that the party had held in the early 80s. He had a militant past and resented always being considered on the fringe of politics.

Rosario Ybarra

The disappearance of her son, Jesus, in 1976 launched Rosario Ybarra's career in activism and eventually politics. She fought tirelessly to get justice for her son and was recognized around the world for her passion and for being such an influential woman in a world dominated by men. The movement that she created to fight against extrajudicial abductions by the Mexican government and PRI were highly successful and helped her gain a loyal following. In the early 1980s, she joined the Revolutionary Worker's Party (PRT) and was the party's candidate for president in 1982 and 1988. The Revolutionary Worker's Party was aligned with Trotskyism, a school of thought that stipulates that the working class must revolt and establish a dictatorship of the proletariat.

Porfirio Muñoz Ledo



Porfirio Muñoz Ledo left the PRI at the same time as Cardenas and was one of the co-founders of the Democratic Current. Muñoz had started his professional life as a teacher and had moved into public life in the early 1970s. From 1979 to 1985 he was Mexico's ambassador to the United Nations and made many connections there. He was a very high ranking member of the PRI when he left after unsuccessfully trying to reform the party. He was a powerful supporter of Cardenas' campaign. In the same election rigged against Cardenas, Muñoz won a senate race.

Juan Francisco Ealy Ortiz

Juan Francisco Ealy Ortiz was the President of *El Universal* from 1969 to 2007. He grew up in a well-connected family and was destined to be successful. His relatives include various politicians and media personnel. *El Universal* had pro-government tendencies and Ortiz only strengthened those connections, knowing that they would be useful for progressing his business interest. However, because of the constant governmental tumult at the time, Ortiz always made sure that neither he nor *El Universal* was completely reliant on the help of the continuous PRI administrations. Outwardly, Ortiz ran the paper to promote ideological pluralism.

Carlos Payan Verver

Carlos Payan Verver founded and became the director of the newspaper *La Jornada* only four years before the 1988 election. He founded the paper to create a truly independent news source for everybody in Mexico. He began his career as an ethical journalist, often exposing government corruption. This work was conducted at *El Machete*, the media wing of the Mexican Communist Party. As a result of his muckraking, Payan was never popular with the PRI, the



group committing many of the humanitarian crimes revealed by Payan and *El Jornada*.

Nevertheless, his elevated status made him difficult to take down.

Julio Scherer García

Julio Scherer Garcia began his illustrious career in journalism in 1949 with the newspaper *Excelsior*. There, he was promoted to editor and held that position until 1976 when he was forced out by the PRI. Then, he founded the *Proceso* magazine to be a bastion of free speech and governmental accountability. Despite his executive position, he never stopped writing and publishing groundbreaking articles and books. He often focused on humanitarian issues ravaging Mexico and the fact that the government was not helping because of their rampant corruption. His fame earned him worldwide respect and connections within the journalism community.

María Esther Gómez de Aguirre

Maria Esther Gomez de Aguirre was the wife of the founder of Grupo Radio Centro (GRC) and assumed control of the company's Board of Directors when her husband died in 1979. She had a great vision for the company and had the goal of expanding coverage to Spanish speakers in America. GRC began broadcasting to the US in 1983 and gained significant influence from the expansion. She preferred to lead GRC from the shadows but was, without doubt, extremely powerful in Mexico's media landscape. As one of Mexico's elite, Gomez was hesitant to personally support the populous movements gaining support around the country.

Rogelio Azcárraga Madero



Rogelio Azcárraga Madero was the founder of Grupo Fórmula, a radio network that heralded itself on free speech and good journalism. The nephew of a prominent media magnate, Madero got his start in managing radio networks when several radio stations split from his uncle's Radiopolis network. By 1984, this group of stations had become a prominent landmark on the media landscape of Mexico City. After the earthquakes of 1985 which devastated the network's infrastructure, Grupo Formula was relaunched in 1987 under Madero's control. Before that point, he had founded another radio network known as the Federal District in 1968. Grupo Formula was the first radio network to broadcast newscasts on National Radio and thus played a significant role in providing news during the 1988 elections to a wide range of people.

José Ramón García Gomez

Jose Ramon Garcia Gomez was a supporter of Ybarra in the election of 1988, but as soon as it became obvious that the election had been rigged, he became a leader of the massive public outcry. Earlier in 1988, he had been a candidate in a local election for the PRT. For the two decades before the election, Gomez had become increasingly outraged at the corruption and authoritarianism of the PRI. He became a Trotskyist militant in favor of a violent popular revolt and the murder of the elite who he believed were the cause of all of Mexico's crises. He was most known for his unbelievable passion and willingness to go to every length to achieve his goal.

Bishop Arturo Lona Reyes



Bishop Arturo Lona Reyes was the Bishop of Tehuantepec, Oaxaca, and, even with incredible pressure from the Catholic Church and Mexican government, was a loud critic of the humanitarian injustices he witnessed. The foundation of his faith was that one needed political and economic freedom to achieve spiritual freedom. In retaliation, he was accused of many crimes, including murder and gun smuggling, and many of the churches in his diocese were closed by the government. His relentless pursuit of justice in one of the most violent regions of Mexico earned him the respect of the Mexican Catholic community. Reyes' position also yielded connections to the local government.

Types of Documents

Our crisis committee will use the same three basic documents used in most Model UN crisis committees: Directives, Communiques, and Press Releases. As always, Directives are the most important and will be what the committee uses to create things and deploy the resources at the committee's disposal. Notably, this committee is not an officially unified body which means it does not have any direct powers. This is why Communiques and Press Releases will be even more important than normal. You will use communiques to send messages to bodies outside of the committee. This could include other governments, foreign intelligence agencies, and even the United Nations. Press releases will be your way of talking to the people of Mexico and beyond. Note well that at the offset of the committee, this group of people would be useless without the people. For more information about the three types of documents that we'll be using, go to the Crisis Guide under the resources tab of our website.



Position Papers

It is worth saying clearly, and right off the bat, that position papers are not a requirement for receiving awards at PEAMUN XII. However, that does not mean that nobody should write them. Position papers are incredibly useful for organizing research, streamlining arguments, and much more. A good delegate will often refer back to their position paper to make sure that their positions in committee are consistent with their position going into committee. If you submit a position paper to the chair at the beginning of PEAMUN we will look at it and give you feedback. You may also email your paper to your chair (anistane@exeter.edu) or your crisis staff (phorrigan@exeter.edu, screelan@exeter.edu) during the weeks leading up to PEAMUN XII and we will send you notes on how to strengthen it. For information on how to write a position paper, visit our website and look under the resources tab.

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