

Former President of Mexico Recalls Underestimating Bush

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MEXICO CITY, Sept. 20 — They were Vicente and Jorge, two cowboys turned presidents, and they held their first summit meeting together at a ranch.

But Vicente Fox, who finished his term as [Mexico](#)'s president last year, pokes fun at the cowboy credentials of President Bush in a new autobiography, recalling the time Mr. Bush turned down an offer to ride Mr. Fox's beloved horse, Dos de Julio.

“He demurred, backing away from the big palomino,” Mr. Fox wrote in “Revolution of Hope,” which is due out by Viking on Oct. 4. “A horse lover can always tell when others don't share our passion for climbing aboard an animal that weighs 500 pounds and doesn't necessarily stop when you put on the brakes.”

Mr. Fox, whose victory in 2000 ended 71 years of single-party rule in Mexico, expresses clear differences with Mr. Bush's unilateralist ways, particularly when it comes to the war in Iraq, which he suggests drew Washington's attention away from Mr. Fox's goal of overhauling American [immigration](#) policy.

But when it comes to Mr. Bush himself, Mr. Fox seems charmed. He labels him “the cockiest guy I have ever met in my life,” a remark clearly meant as a compliment. “Bush evokes the go-getter qualities I've always admired in Americans,” Mr. Fox wrote.

He wrote in the English-language memoir that he had not expected Mr. Bush to go from governor to president, although Mr. Fox explained that was because he was among many of those who underestimated Mr. Bush. “Those who see only the [George W. Bush](#) of the surface — the cocky, simplistic, baseball-loving son of an ex-president who went in six years from never having won a political race to the presidency of the most powerful nation on the planet — miss the core of inner resolve behind those sharp blue eyes,” he wrote.

Although he labeled Mr. Bush's Spanish “grade school level” when they first met in Mr. Bush's governor's office in Texas in 1996 — “Cómo estás, amigo?” Mr. Bush had said — Mr. Fox said it improved over time and was one sign of what he considered Mr. Bush's cultural sensitivity.

The book, weaving anecdotes with his policy prescriptions, is part of Mr. Fox's effort to remake the role of a former Mexican president. Instead of slipping silently away, Mr. Fox is at work on a splashy presidential library at his ranch in San Cristóbal.

“This is new for Mexico, which has a long history of tyranny, one-party rule and ex-presidents who flee into exile rather than leading productive lives as senior statesmen,” Rob Allyn, a former adviser and the co-writer for Mr. Fox's memoirs, said in an e-mail message.

Many Mexicans, however, clearly wish Mr. Fox would be less visible. There was an outcry after he posed with his wife recently in a society magazine showing off the fancy accommodations in their refurbished ranch house. Questions were immediately raised over whether Mr. Fox, mimicking the corrupt ways of some of his predecessors, had used government money on it.

One former Fox ally, Lino Korrodi, called the photo spread “offensive.” Mr. Fox denied any wrongdoing, insisting in a statement that all his spending has been aboveboard.