



COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE

MEXICO



*Catedral Metropolitana, Mexico City
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COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE | MEXICO



TABLE OF CONTENT

Geography

Introduction	6
Physical Terrain and Topographic Features	7
Climate	8
Water Resources	9
Major Cities	10
<i>Mexico City (Distrito Federal)</i>	10
<i>Guadalajara</i>	11
<i>Monterrey</i>	12
<i>Puebla</i>	12
<i>León</i>	13
<i>Mérida</i>	13
<i>Border Towns</i>	14
<i>Coastal Cities</i>	14
Environmental Concerns	15
Natural Hazards	16
Endnotes for Chapter 1: Geography	17
Assessment	23

History

Introduction	24
Ancient Civilizations	25
<i>Early Settlers</i>	25
<i>Preclassic Period (2000 B.C.E.–200 C.E.)</i>	26
<i>Classic Period (200–900 C.E.)</i>	26
<i>Postclassic Period (900–1520 C.E.)</i>	27
Spanish Conquest and Colonization	28
<i>Cortés and Moctezuma</i>	28
<i>Crown and Cross</i>	29
<i>Colonial Economy and Society</i>	29
<i>Resistance</i>	30
Independence	31
<i>Grito de Dolores, the Cry of Independence</i>	31
<i>First Mexican Empire</i>	31
<i>Many Mexicos</i>	32
<i>The Age of Santa Anna</i>	32
<i>Mexican–American War</i>	33

COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE | MEXICO



La Reforma	33
<i>Benito Juárez and the Reform Laws</i>	33
<i>War of Reform and French Intervention</i>	34
<i>The Porfiriato</i>	34
Revolution	35
<i>Aftermath of Revolution</i>	36
One-Party Democracy	36
<i>The Party Rises</i>	36
<i>To the Left</i>	37
<i>To the Right</i>	37
<i>Falling Down</i>	38
Multiparty Democracy	38
<i>Current Events</i>	39
Endnotes for Chapter 2: History	40
Assessment	50

Economy

Introduction	51
Agriculture	52
Industry	53
<i>Energy</i>	54
Natural Resources: Oil	54
Trade	55
Transportation	55
Tourism	56
Banking and Finance	57
<i>Banking and Currency</i>	57
<i>Finance and Investment</i>	57
Standard of Living	58
Employment Trends	59
Public vs. Private Sector	60
Outlook	60
Endnotes for Chapter 3: Economy	62
Assessment	69

Society

Introduction	71
Ethnic Groups and Languages	72
<i>Indigenous Peoples (Indios) and Indigenismo</i>	72
<i>Mestizos and Mestizaje</i>	73

COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE | MEXICO



<i>Languages</i>	74
Religion.....	75
<i>Catholicism</i>	75
<i>Other Religions</i>	75
Cuisine.....	76
Traditional Dress.....	77
Gender Issues.....	79
Machismo.....	79
<i>Discrimination</i>	79
<i>Violence against Women</i>	80
Arts.....	81
<i>Pre-Columbian Traditions</i>	81
<i>Colonial Architecture and Arts</i>	81
<i>National Traditions</i>	82
<i>Popular Culture</i>	83
Sports and Recreation.....	84
Endnotes for Chapter 4: Society	85
Assessment	93

Security

Introduction	95
U.S.-Mexico Relations	96
Relations with Neighboring Countries.....	97
<i>Belize</i>	97
<i>Guatemala</i>	98
Police Forces	99
<i>Reform, Abuse, and Corruption</i>	100
Military Armed Forces of Mexico (<i>Fuerzas Armadas de México</i>).....	101
<i>Army (Ejército Mexicano)</i>	102
<i>Navy (Armada de México)</i>	102
<i>Air Force (Fuerza Aérea Mexicana: FAM)</i>	103
Issues Affecting Stability	103
<i>Social Unrest</i>	104
Water Security.....	104
Outlook	105
Assessment	113

COUNTRY IN PERSPECTIVE | MEXICO



Further Readings and Resources

Books	114
Articles and Websites	115
Film and Video	116

Final Assessment

Final Assessment	117
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*Mexico landscape
Flickr / Lucy Nieto*

Chapter 1 | Mexico In Perspective

Geography

Introduction

Mexico is the southernmost country in North America. It is the northernmost country of both the historical region of Mesoamerica and the cultural area of Latin America, and the 14th largest country in the world.¹ It shares its land borders with only three countries: the United States to the north, Guatemala to the south, and Belize to the southeast. To its east lie the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea. To the west are the Gulf of California and the Pacific Ocean.² Over 80 distinct ecosystems range from alpine permafrost to tropical lowland jungle. Dozens more marine ecosystems line thousands of miles of Atlantic and Pacific coast.^{3, 4, 5}

Mexico is biologically diverse, one of a dozen countries that together are home to up to 70% of the world's known plant and animal species.^{6, 7}

Mexico is the 12th most populous country in the world, home to nearly 122 million people.⁸ It is also the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world, home to roughly a quarter of the world's Spanish speakers.^{9, 10} In 1950, the population was 57% rural; 65 years later in 2015 it was 20% rural.^{11, 12} One of the hemisphere's largest urban areas is the federal district of Mexico City in the center of the country. The 31 states of modern Mexico, administered through 2,440 municipalities, differ greatly in their physical and cultural geographies.^{13, 14}

Physical Terrain and Topographic Features

The rugged landscape of Mexico is the result of tens of millions of years of geologic activity due to its location over the junction of several tectonic plates.^{15, 16} High deserts and scrublands cover the north, including much of Baja California, which is Mexico's northwest peninsula that extends from Tijuana 1,300 km (800 mi) south into the Pacific Ocean. This peninsula creates the Gulf of California on its east coast. Two mainland mountain ranges, the Sierra Madre Oriental and the Sierra Madre Occidental, run north to south along the east and west coasts. With an average altitude of 900-2,400 m (3,000-7,900 ft), the ranges separate the high central plateau from grassy lowlands on the Gulf of Mexico and forested lowlands on the Pacific Ocean. The Sierra Madre Occidental contains the Copper Canyon complex where *Barrancas*, several times the size of Arizona's Grand Canyon, include the deepest canyon in the Western Hemisphere.^{17, 18} At the south end of the central plateau, the Trans-Mexican Volcanic Belt extends east and west across the country.^{19, 20} Among the volcanoes are Pico de Orizaba in the east, Mexico's highest point (5,611 m/18,406 ft); Popocatépetl (5,426 m/17,802 ft), which threatens Mexico City; and Colima (3,850 m/12,631 ft) in the west, Mexico's most active volcano.^{21, 22, 23}



*Popocatepetl Volcano
Flickr / Russ Bowling*

South of the volcanic belt another mountain range, the Sierra Madre del Sur, fills the western half of Mexico's Southern Highlands and gives way to the Chiapas Highlands to the east.

A land bridge between North and South America formed here at the Isthmus of Tehuantepec approximately three million years ago, permitting the species flow between continents that created Mexico's high biological diversity.^{24, 25, 26} East of the isthmus, the jungle lowlands of the Yucatán Peninsula extend north into the Gulf of Mexico and east into the Caribbean Sea. The Chicxulub Crater, a hundred-mile-wide subsurface formation that was discovered near the Yucatán coast during explorations for oil, may be the site of a meteor crash 65 million years ago that led to the extinction of the dinosaurs.^{27, 28, 29}

Climate

Altitude balances latitude in much of Mexico. Elevation defines three climatic temperature zones: *tierra caliente* ("hot land") below 600 m (2,000 ft), where average summer highs may approach 40°C (104°F); *tierra templada* ("temperate land") from 600 m (2,000 ft) to 1,800 m (5,900 ft), where average temperatures range between 10°C (50°F) and 22°C (72°F); and *tierra fria* ("cold land") above 1,800 m (5,900 ft), where average winter lows drop below freezing.^{30, 31}



Baja California Mexico desert
Wikimedia / Tomas Castelazo

The Tropic of Cancer divides Mexico into dry and wet climatic zones. The arid north receives little to no annual rainfall, and is affected by weather systems from Canada and the United States that occasionally bring snow to higher elevations as far south as Mexico City. Humid regions in the south may receive as much as 2,400 mm (95 in) annual rainfall, influenced by trade winds and prone to Pacific tropical storms and Atlantic hurricanes in the summer and fall.^{32, 33} *Las aguas* ("the waters"), the rainy season, lasts from May to October. *La canicula* ("dog days") is a dry spell that often interrupts the summer rainy season in late July or early August. *Las sequias* ("the droughts"), the dry season, runs from October to May, often the hottest time of the year. Occasional heavy rains may interrupt the winter dry season in January in the east and north.^{34, 35, 36}

Residents who can afford multiple homes spend summers in the cooler, more comfortable highlands and move to the lowlands in the less steamy late winter months.

Water Resources

Mexico has close to 150 rivers, about 70% of which empty into the Pacific Ocean. The majority are small regional waterways that are largely unnavigable.³⁷ The Rio Bravo (called the Rio Grande in the United States) marks the northern border with Texas, and is one of the largest and longest rivers in Mexico.³⁸ The Rio Hondo marks the southern border with Belize, and the Usumacinta marks the border with Guatemala.^{39, 40} The Rio Colorado (Colorado River) flows from the United States into the Gulf of California, separating the Baja California Peninsula from the mainland state of Sonora.⁴¹ Most rivers are in the south, and flow from the Sierra Madres to the east and west coasts. Mexico's longest river, the Lerma (2,730 km/1,700 mi), flows inland to Mexico's largest lake, Chapala, supplying water and hydroelectricity to nearby Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city.^{42, 43} Although many Mexican rivers are not navigable, dams provide irrigation for crops, water for settled populations, hydroelectric power, and flood control.^{44, 45} Rivers that run beneath the limestone of the Yucatán Peninsula are famous among divers and explorers.⁴⁶



*Rio Bravo, Mexico-Texas border
Flickr / mlhradio*

Underground water resources currently supply more than a third of the country's needs.^{47, 48} Major aquifers and the watersheds that feed them are shared with the United States, Belize, and Guatemala.^{49, 50} Parts of Mexico City are slowly sinking into depleted aquifers that can no longer meet the region's water needs.⁵¹

Mexico's marine waters are rich fishing grounds, as well as transportation corridors for both legal commerce and illegal smuggling.^{52, 53, 54} The Exclusive Economic Zone of territorial sea that extends 370 km (200 nautical mi) outward from shore spans over 3,000,000 sq km (1,200,000 sq mi).⁵⁵ Major ports include Veracruz and Tampico in the Gulf of Mexico, Lazaro Cardenas and Manzanillo on the mainland Pacific coast, and Ensenada on the west coast of Baja California.^{56, 57}

Major Cities

City	Population
Mexico City	12,294,193 (Federal District) ⁵⁸
Izapaalapa	1,820,888
Ecatepec	1,820,888
Guadalajara	1,640,589
Puebla	1,590,256
Ciudad Juárez	1,512,354
Tijuana	1,376,457
Monterrey	1,122,874

Mexico City (Distrito Federal)

The nation's capital sits 2,200 m (7,200 ft) high in the Valley of Mexico, surrounded by mountains reaching upwards of 5,000 m (16,400 ft), including the active volcano Popocatepetl.⁵⁹ The city was the world's largest city during the 1990s. Today, this urban area is home to nearly 25% of Mexico's total population.⁶⁰ Roughly 12.3 million people live in the city and 22.1 million live in the larger metropolitan region, one of the largest agglomerations in the world.⁶¹ Once the Mexica (better known as the Aztecs), who were seeking the sign of an eagle upon a nopal cactus holding a snake, settled an island in a lake in 1325 (this sign is now a symbol on the national flag). This island became the site of the future Mexico City. When Hernán Cortés arrived in 1519, he found Tenochtitlan, a city of 300,000 Aztec subjects that, at the time, surpassed Spanish cities in size and sophistication.^{62, 63, 64} Spaniards soon built their colonial capital directly upon the ruins of conquered Tenochtitlan using destroyed Aztec palaces and temples as building materials for their new *zócalo* (city plaza) and Roman Catholic cathedral.⁶⁵ In the 1960s, subway engineers excavating the Pino Suárez station discovered and soon built around an Aztec pyramid to the wind god Ehecatl; in the 1970s, electricians working in the city center unearthed the Aztec Templo Mayor, now a museum site of the National Institute of Anthropology and History.^{66, 67}



*Mexico City skyline
Flickr / Marcus Stork*

Mexico City became the seat of the Viceroy of New Spain and has remained the political capital through independence, annexation, and revolution. U.S. troops occupied the city during the Mexican-American War, as did French troops during the rule of Austrian Archduke Maximilian. When the Reform Laws of Benito Juárez divested the Roman Catholic Church of its local real estate (nearly half the buildings in the city), urban patterns began where the rich settled in the hills to the west and the poor in areas to the east.⁶⁸ As landless peasants migrated to the city in growing numbers, their neighborhoods grew, merged, and became distinct municipalities such as Ecatepec and Nezahualcóyotl, now two of Mexico's largest cities.^{69, 70}

The city suffers from ongoing water shortages and air pollution, as well as unpredictable natural disasters.^{71, 72} The 1985 earthquakes killed more than 10,000 people, injured 30,000, and left thousands homeless.^{73, 74}

Guadalajara

South of the Tropic of Cancer and 1,524 m (5,000 ft) high, Guadalajara is a region of “eternal spring.”⁷⁵ Named for the hometown of conquistador Nuño de Guzmán, the Spanish established Guadalajara at its present site in 1542, after a 10-year struggle with local peoples.⁷⁶ It is now the capital of Jalisco state and the cultural center of western Mexico, closely associated with mariachi music.⁷⁷ Business products range from traditional *huaraches* (leather sandals) to information technology electronics and beer. Host to the 2011 Pan American Games and the annual International Book Fair, Guadalajara also claims the largest colony of United States expatriates in Mexico.^{78, 79,}⁸⁰ The Hospicio Cabañas is a UNESCO World Heritage Site that preserves a 19th century Roman Catholic hospital-orphanage-poorhouse. The site is now a state-sponsored cultural institute.⁸¹



Guadalajara at dusk
Flickr / Alejandro Castro

A major transportation hub, Guadalajara is the site of turf wars and other violence from drug cartels.^{82, 83} In 1993, hit men shot and killed Roman Catholic Cardinal Juan Jesús Posadas Ocampo at the Guadalajara International Airport.⁸⁴ In 1994, assailants bombed a Guadalajara hotel trying to kill a rival trafficker.⁸⁵ Recent crime reports describe murders of public officials, kidnappings, and assassinations.⁸⁶

Monterrey

Monterrey is the capital of the state of Nuevo León.⁸⁷ Most of the state's population lives in the Monterrey metropolitan area. Located in the high desert foothills of the Sierra Madre Oriental, the city is both one of the warmest and one of the coldest in Mexico.⁸⁸ Flash floods, particularly during hurricane season, kill pedestrians and vehicle drivers every year.⁸⁹ For most of the 1500s, the area's Chichimeca peoples resisted colonization, but in 1596 the Spanish finally established a permanent settlement at the present site. In 1846, the Battle of Monterrey was the first major conflict of the Mexican-American War. Monterrey developed as a trade nexus between San Antonio, Tampico, and Saltillo and became a city of international commerce, and later heavy industry. Major products are steel, cement, glass, and auto parts.^{90, 91} The Cuauhtémoc Moctezuma brewery also houses Mexico's Baseball Hall of Fame.^{92, 93}



Monterrey cityscape
Flickr / David Sasaki

In 2010, Hurricane Alex hit Monterrey. Several people were killed, thousands were left homeless, and the city is still rebuilding.⁹⁴ Although homicide and crime rates have dropped in the city since their high in 2008, Monterrey is still a relatively dangerous city. Violence attributed to drug cartels continues to plague the city.^{95, 96}

Puebla



Overlooking Puebla
Flickr / Erin Johnson

The Spanish colonial city of Puebla, now capital of the state of Puebla, rests a few miles east of the ancient Olmec city of Cholula. Like Mexico City to its northwest, Puebla is in a high valley (2,200 m/7,200 ft) surrounded by volcanic mountains. Located between Mexico City and Veracruz, Puebla developed as a travel stop and later as a manufacturing center.⁹⁷ Today it is famous for *mole poblano* (a chocolate-tinged chili sauce), Talavera tile and pottery, and production of Volkswagen Beetles.^{98, 99}

Puebla was the site of Mexico's declaration of independence from Spain in 1821. When France invaded in 1862, Mexico won the Battle of Puebla on 5 May; this day is commemorated as Cinco de Mayo. (The French occupied Mexico until 1867.) The historic city center is a UNESCO World Heritage Site for its unique mix of classic and baroque architectural styles and colorful tile-covered buildings.^{100, 101}

León



Plaza Principal, León
Flickr / Lin Mei

León sits in the Sierra Madre Occidental on the west side of the state of Guanajuato. Since 1910, León has been the largest city in the state famous for the *Grito del Dolores* that is celebrated as Mexico's Independence Day.¹⁰² In a place first occupied by the Chupícuaro people thousands of years ago, the Spanish founded León in 1576 as a defensive settlement.¹⁰³ The city experienced violent struggle during the war for independence and the later revolution, and in 1946 members of

the opposition political party National Action Party (PAN) died protesting what they believed were illegitimate elections.¹⁰⁴ Mining was an important colonial industry in the area. Today León is internationally known for shoes and other leather products.¹⁰⁵

Mérida



Mérida, Mexico
Flickr / Lucy Nieto

Mérida, the state capital of Yucatán, lies just above sea level within the Chicxulub crater, 35 km (22 mi) inland from the Gulf of Mexico on the northwest Yucatán Peninsula. The Mayan pyramids of T'ho are incorporated into many of the Spanish colonial buildings that fill the historic city center, and Mayan languages have influenced local Spanish dialects. Through the centuries, peninsula Mayans often ignored or rebelled against Spanish and later Mexican claims of empire.

Henequen rope was Mérida’s main commercial export in the 18th and 19th centuries.

Today, citrus and other fruit trees have largely replaced the fields of henequen agave cactus, and *maquiladoras* (factories that import and assemble duty-free components for export) produce most items for commercial trade.^{106, 107} The contemporary city is now an important commercial and administrative in the region. The city’s livelihood depends largely on manufacturing and tourism.¹⁰⁸ At meetings in the city in March 2007, Presidents Felipe Calderon and George W. Bush began to develop the Mérida Initiative, a plan for U.S. participation in the fight against drugs and arms trafficking and associated financial crimes in Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean.^{109, 110}

Border Towns

The stereotypical sleepy Mexican border town has been largely replaced by the transnational urban sprawl, a populated area where economies, infrastructure, and environment are shared across a political boundary. Their location on the United States border fueled the growth of these cities in the 20th century, as did international economic agreements.¹¹¹ These agreements include the Bracero program (which invited Mexican farmhands to work temporarily in the U.S.) from the 1940s, the Border Industrialization program (which encouraged *maquiladoras* along the border) from the 1960s, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) since 1994. Unfortunately, their location on the U.S. border also makes these cities targets for international criminal activity.¹¹² Juárez suffered an average of nearly nine murders a day in 2010, but the city has become safer in recent years with the end of the violence between the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels.¹¹³ Crime rates and violence remain high, however.¹¹⁴



*El Paso and Juarez
Flickr / David Herrera*

Coastal Cities

Mexico’s high mountains and lack of navigable rivers made coastal settlements historically important sites of travel, trade, and diplomacy. Fishing and petroleum industries propelled the development of modern commercial ports. Recently, Mexico has made itself famous for coastal tourist resorts.



Puerto Vallarta
Flickr / Ted McGrath

In 1518, the Spanish first landed at Veracruz, on the Gulf of Mexico near the Totonac Indian city of Cempoala. A year later, Spaniard Hernán Cortes named the port town for the Catholic holy day of Good Friday when he first landed (in Spanish Good Friday is Veracruz, the day of the “true cross”). Veracruz became a city of plantations and slaves, as well as the port where gold and silver mined throughout the region was loaded onto ships bound for Spain. Today, Veracruz has more than half

a million residents.^{115, 116} Its ports are undergoing expansion to handle the majority of seagoing trade to and from Mexico.¹¹⁷

Nahuatl-speaking people named the city of Acapulco long before the Spanish discovered its bay in 1512. On Mexico’s southern Pacific coast, the town became a transit point for goods from the Philippines, which travelled overland to Veracruz and on to Spain. Slaves also moved through Acapulco on their way to work in silver and gold mines. A paved road from Mexico City built in 1927 began the development of Mexico’s oldest beach resort.^{118, 119, 120} Competition from newer resorts in Mazatlán, Puerto Vallarta, Ixtapa-Zihuatenejo, and Los Cabos, as well as pollution of the bay and criminal activity, has diminished Acapulco’s tourist trade.^{121, 122} Nevertheless, the city remains one of the largest along any coast with well over 700,000 residents.^{123, 124}

Cancun is currently Mexico’s number one tourist destination.¹²⁵ The National Fund for Tourism Development (FONATUR) targeted the isolated area on the northeast tip of the Yucatán Peninsula for development in 1974.¹²⁶ Cancun has also developed crime problems in recent years as a transshipment point for Colombian cocaine, a place for retail drug sales to tourists, and a money laundering center.^{127, 128, 129}

Environmental Concerns

Human population pressures and industrial processes are endangering Mexico's diverse environments. The Mexican government has declared water a national security issue.¹³⁰ Water use is exceeding natural replacement rates, with water quality deteriorating and pollution occurring in the most populated areas.^{131, 132} Unregulated or poorly planned land use including agricultural land-clearing, chemical fertilization, overharvesting, overgrazing has led to deforestation, soil erosion and desertification.^{133, 134} Air pollution is no longer limited to Mexico City, but is a growing concern along the Mexican-U.S. border, as well as other transportation corridors and industrial regions.¹³⁵ Oil extraction practices threaten the marine resources of the Gulf of Mexico.¹³⁶ Environmentally safe waste disposal—from industrial and residential sources, in solid, liquid, electronic, and nuclear forms—has become a challenge as Mexico tries to grow an economy that can support a growing population.^{137, 138}



*Mexico City smog
Flickr / arndw*

Natural Hazards

Natural hazards include active volcanoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, and tsunamis.^{139, 140, 141} Torrential rains can also bring flooding to certain regions of the country.^{142, 143, 144} In December 2015, more than 7,000 families were affected by severe flooding in the southern state of Tabasco.¹⁴⁵ Altitude sickness can affect new arrivals in Mexico City and the high central plateau. Climate hazards range from heat stroke to hypothermia.^{146, 147, 148} Flash floods occur throughout the country and in the south, hurricanes and Pacific storms whip up flying debris.^{149, 150} Mexico is full of plants, insects, and animals that prick, sting, or bite, many causing illness or death. Diseases of concern in 2016 include zika virus, malaria, and Chikungunya.¹⁵¹

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Country In Perspective | Mexico

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Mexico in Perspective

Chapter 1 | Geography

Assessment

1. Mexico is one of the world's most biologically diverse countries
2. The Tropic of Cancer divides Mexico into cold northern and hot southern climates.
3. Because of the rugged mountains in the middle of the country, most Mexicans live along the coastal lowlands.
4. Mexico City's elevation can give some people altitude sickness.
5. Air pollution in Mexico extends beyond Mexico City.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True



*Chichen Itza
Flickr / Daniel Schwen*

Chapter 2 | Mexico in Perspective

History

Introduction

Although some scientists suggest that humans first lived in the Mexico region nearly 40,000 years ago, most agree that humans settled in the area around 9000 B.C.E.¹ At approximately 1000 B.C.E. urban centers developed, and by the first century C.E. art and architecture flourished. These early societies began to decline toward the end of the first century.^{2, 3}

The first Europeans arrived in the early 1500s setting the stage for the colonization of Mexico.^{4, 5} In the 1700s, Spain completed its colonization of Mexico but the seeds of independence remained alive. In 1810, a Mexican priest called for an end to Spanish

rule. Father Hidalgo led a group of rebels against the Spanish but his forces were defeated and he was executed in 1811. This was the first of many wars that would plague Mexico into the next century.⁶

Mexico gained its independence in 1821 and by 1846, the new nation was at war with the United States. With the war's end in 1848, Mexico lost most of its territory north of the Rio Grande.⁷ Internal political battles culminated in the Mexican Revolution from 1910-1911. Yet, the end of the revolution did not bring peace and stability to the embattled nation, and civil war broke out and continued until 1920.⁸

With the end of World War II, Mexico experienced major population growth and industrialization. The military lost its influence and civilian governance became entrenched. By the mid-1970s, Mexico's postwar prosperity had faded. The economy destabilized and political violence became more frequent. Between the 1960s and 1980s, many peasants disappeared under the right-wing government. Human rights abuses were frequent, including torture and execution.^{9, 10}

Various rebel activity and political violence continued. However, it can be argued that the greatest threat came from the increasing power and influence of the Mexican drug cartels.¹¹ In 2006, the government launched its War on Drugs.¹² Cartel violence claimed the lives of 164,000 between 2007 and 2014.¹³ Today, as Mexico tries to find its place on the world stage, it continues to battle with its economy, poverty, rampant corruption, and crime.^{14, 15, 16}

Ancient Civilizations

Early Settlers

The first Mexicans were descendants of nomadic groups who crossed the Bering Land Bridge from Asia at the end of the last Ice Age. Although the exact dates of their migration remain in question, some believe they arrived as early as 40,000 years ago. Experts generally agree that these people camped in central Mexico and butchered mammoths as recently as 9000 B.C.E.¹⁷ As the post-Ice Age environment changed, humans slowly began to domesticate wild



*Teotihuacán pyramid of the moon
Flickr / Gorgo*

plants for food. By 5000 B.C.E., many of the crops typically associated with Mexico were being cultivated, including maize (corn), beans, squash, tomatoes, chiles, cocoa, avocados, and cactus (maguey and nopal). By 2000 B.C.E., farming supported permanent settlements.^{18, 19}

Preclassic Period (2000 B.C.E.–200 C.E.)



Olmec Colossal Head
Flickr / Gary Denness

The Olmecs developed the earliest of Mexico’s ancient civilizations along the Gulf of Mexico, from about 1500 B.C.E. Later groups named these “People of the Rubber Country” after the locally harvested latex that was used to produce balls used in a ritual game played throughout Mesoamerica.²⁰ Other aspects of Mesoamerican culture traceable to the Olmecs include monumental stone structures, human sacrifice, and hieroglyphic writing.^{21, 22} After the unexplained collapse of the Olmecs,

the Zapotecs came to dominate Mexico’s southern highlands, sometimes around 200 B.C.E.^{23, 24} Stone carvings at their capital, Monte Albán, in the valley of Oaxaca show hundreds of slaughtered and dismembered prisoners, suggesting rule by force.^{25, 26} The Zapotecs were succeeded by the Mixtecs, who recorded their military exploits on deerskin codices.^{27, 28} The Zapotecs and Mixtecs are two of more than 60 indigenous groups that live in Mexico today.^{29, 30}

Classic Period (200–900 C.E.)

During Mexico’s classic period, the dominant civilizations were the Maya who settled throughout the Yucatán Peninsula and south into Guatemala, and the rulers of Teotihuacan in the Valley of Mexico. The Mayans, like the Olmecs, lived in many decentralized city-states; thus, they were difficult to conquer.³¹ Archaeologists once believed that the early Mayans were peaceful and abandoned their cities because of environmental disaster or external attack. However, more recent



Mayan building
Pixabay / Jon Toy

archeological discoveries and linguistic breakthroughs suggest that slavery, warfare, and human sacrifice were as common among the Mayans as among other Mesoamerican civilizations.³² Although the ancient civilization collapsed around 900 C.E., Mayans continue to live in the region, often ignoring or opposing the rule of governments from colonial Spain to present-day Mexico.^{33, 34}

In contrast, most of the people of Teotihuacan disappeared in the seventh or eighth century; their origins and fate remain a mystery.^{35, 36, 37} The city ruins that Aztecs named the “Place of the Gods” spread across 20 sq km (7.7 sq mi) north of Mexico City. This area is located above natural caves linking to chambers within huge pyramids where rituals took place, including human sacrifice.³⁸ Around 500 C.E. and at its time of peak influence, the city had 200,000 residents. Society was stratified into four social classes (kings and priests, artisans, farmers, and merchants) and an underclass of slaves. The Mesoamerican god, Quetzalcoatl, first appeared at Teotihuacan.^{39, 40} Murals among the ruins suggest that Aztec society became increasingly militarized in response to threats from external forces.⁴¹

Postclassic Period (900–1520 C.E.)

From 900, the Toltecs controlled Teotihuacan and sites to the north from their capital Tula. The Toltecs continued to worship Quetzalcoatl, but paired him with the war god Tezcatlipoca.⁴² When Tula fell in the 12th century, several independent city-states arose in central Mexico and interacted with Mayans in Yucatán.^{43, 44}



*Aztec Quetzalcoatl head
Caption / Copyright*

Around this time, nomadic Chichimeca peoples began to move south onto the central plateau. According to tradition, the Méxica left their homeland Aztlán in 1111. They arrived in the Valley of Mexico in the early 1300s and formed alliances, collected tribute, and waged repeated war to expand the Aztec Empire.^{45, 46} Expansion filled the empire with resentful subjects and made enemies of the Tlaxcalans to the east and the Tarascans to the west.⁴⁷ Repeating the patterns of Teotihuacan, Aztec rulers presided over a highly stratified society from a densely populated capital.^{48, 49} To feed their people, they intensified the Mayan agricultural practice of raised fields, called *chinampas* (“floating gardens”).^{50, 51}

To feed their gods, they staged ball games, flower wars, and other rituals that ended in human sacrifice.^{52, 53}

Spanish Conquest and Colonization

Cortés and Moctezuma

In 1519, Hernán Cortés arrived at Veracruz—a veteran of Spanish expeditions to the Caribbean and the Yucatán. Though he lacked royal authority to explore and trade, he was prepared for conquest with cannon, horses, dogs, and soldiers.^{54, 55, 56} As he traveled inland, he met a local woman whom the Spanish came to call Doña Marina (now also known as La Malinche), a former slave who spoke Nahuatl (the lingua franca of the Aztec Empire) and Spanish. When he reached Tlaxcala, he first fought, then allied with the Tlaxcalans against the Aztecs.^{57, 58} (The Tlaxcalans and La Malinche are considered traitors in many Mexican histories for aiding the Spanish conquest of the Aztec Empire.)⁵⁹ As Cortés approached Tenochtitlan, lookouts described him as an incarnation or emissary of the god Quetzalcoatl who had been banished to the east by the god Tezcatlipoca in the time of the Toltecs.⁶⁰



Moctezuma meets Cortez
Flickr / Bancroft Library

Moctezuma II, ninth México ruler of the Aztecs, was as much a philosopher-king as a martial leader.⁶¹ Whether or not he believed Cortés to be divine, he received the Spaniards into Tenochtitlan with diplomatic courtesies.⁶² Cortés arrested him four days later (on reports that Aztecs were fighting Spaniards in Veracruz). When the Spaniards' presence in Tenochtitlan became untenable, they had Moctezuma speak publicly for their safe departure from the city, and he died in the following melee—Aztecs and Spaniards each blamed the other for his death.^{63, 64} The Spanish and their allies fought their way out of Tenochtitlan on the evening of June 1520, losing hundreds as they retreated to Tlaxcala. After smallpox weakened Tenochtitlan in September 1520, the Spanish returned in 1521, laid siege in June, and retook the city in August.⁶⁵

Crown and Cross



Juan de Zumarraga first bishop
Wikimedia Commons

In 1493, colonization of the New World became justifiable when Pope Alexander VI made the Spanish crown responsible for the souls of New Spain.⁶⁶ By 1524, Franciscan friars arrived in Veracruz to begin the work of conversion, claiming 9 million baptisms by 1537. The colony's first bishop, Juan de Zumárraga, arrived in 1528 with the title "Protector of the Indians," a role that placed priests at odds with secular officials for centuries, even as Roman Catholicism became the state religion.^{67, 68, 69}

Similarities between Spanish Catholic and indigenous religious beliefs and practices helped with conversions. A syncretic New World Catholicism emerged, embodied in the story of Juan Diego, a native peasant the Virgin Mary told to build a church on the site of an Aztec goddess's temple. An image of the Virgin that appeared on Juan Diego's cloak as he stood before Bishop Zumárraga became Our Lady of Guadalupe, who is an icon of Mexico to the present day.⁷⁰

Colonial Economy and Society

Spanish colonists brought new plants (wheat, rice, sugar cane), animals (horses, pigs, sheep, cattle), and tools (iron plow, agricultural wheel) to Mexico.^{71, 72} New kinds of economic organization included the *encomienda*, land grants that included control of the people who lived and worked on the land and *repartimiento*, labor allotments that required villagers and townspeople to contribute work and goods to a Spanish-appointed supervisor.^{73, 74} *Encomienda*, *repartimiento*, and later variations like the *hacienda* concentrated economic power into a very few Spanish hands and impoverished countless locals. Spanish officials, both military and civilian, also introduced the practice of selling offices and other corruptible undertakings. Anyone who wanted power and wealth bought positions from those higher up in the bureaucracy—and then used the purchased position to recoup its cost from those below them.⁷⁵ From such kinds of organizations and practices a culture of patronage developed in which the relationship between patron and dependent became the path to survival and success. Patronage also created an environment ripe for the *caudillos* (charismatic military strongmen), who would compete to lead Mexico in the future.⁷⁶



Mestizo 1770
Wikimedia Commons

Ancestry and class stratified colonial society. At the top were Spanish-born *peninsulares* (later called *gachupines*, a pejorative term). Ranked slightly lower were the *criollos*, individuals of Spanish heritage who were born in Mexico. Beneath these elite *españoles* were *mestizos*, individuals of mixed Spanish-indigenous parentage. (La Malinche gave birth to the iconic *mestizo*, Martín Cortés.)⁷⁷ A century after conquest, the number of *mestizos* in Mexico (130,000) roughly equaled that of

españoles (120,000).⁷⁸ By about 1800, the *mestizo* population throughout Mesoamerica had grown to 2 million, while the *criollo* population remained the same.⁷⁹ Below the *mestizo* were the full-blooded *indios*. In the early years of colonization enslavement, disease, and death decimated indigenous populations.⁸⁰ Spanish colonists also imported slaves from Africa and Asia.^{81, 82}

Resistance

New Spain claimed territory from Colorado to Costa Rica, but never fully controlled large parts of Mexico.⁸³ Many indigenous groups resisted colonization, including Puebloans in the northern territories, Chichimecas in north and central Mexico, Zapotecs and Mixtecs in Oaxaca, and Mayans in Chiapas and Yucatán.^{84, 85, 86} Resistance periodically flared into rebellion—from the Mixton War of 1540-1541 in New Galicia (present-day Jalisco, Nayarit, and Zacatecas) to the Tzeltal Revolt of 1712 in Chiapas.^{87, 88}



Chichimeca warrior
Wikimedia Commons

Españoles also resisted Spain's colonial rule. Wealthy and powerful elites resented the crown's actions to limit international trade, protect the Indians, and finance European wars with Mexican silver. Regional *caudillos* increasingly took governance into their own hands. New Spain watched as the United States, France, and Haiti declared independence from royal and colonial rule. When Napoleon invaded Spain in 1808, disagreements over the legitimate ruling body for New Spain set *criollos* against loyalist *gachupines*.^{89, 90}

Independence

Grito de Dolores, the Cry of Independence



Don Miguel Hidalgo
Wikimedia Commons

Father Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla was a freethinking and free-living *criollo* in the town of Dolores, Guanajuato. Fearing arrest for his discussions of independence in literary and social clubs, he gathered his Indian parishioners on September 16, 1810 and exhorted them to action.⁹¹ Shouts of “Long live the Virgin of Guadalupe!” and “Death to bad government!” and “Down with the *gachupines!*” called for independence from Spain and unleashed mass violence against elites, as in the massacre at the Alhóndiga in Guanajuato.^{92, 93} Loyalists captured Hidalgo; the Church excommunicated him. A firing squad executed him in 1811. The heads of Hidalgo and three compatriots were hung in cages at the four corners of the Alhóndiga where they remained on display for 10 years.^{94, 95} The insurgents, now led by

José María Morelos, laid siege to Mexico City in 1814. Morelos wrote a constitution for Mexico, but it failed to gain support. His head joined Hidalgo’s in 1815 and war continued through 1821 at which time a *criollo* loyalist officer, Augustín de Iturbide, turned against a change of monarchy in Spain and joined the insurgents.^{96, 97}

First Mexican Empire

In February 1821, Iturbide announced the *Plan de Iguala*, the first of many plans that aspiring leaders would issue to describe intended changes in the Mexican government. (Successful leaders ensured that the army supported their plans).⁹⁸ The Plan of Iguala proposed independence from Spain, Roman Catholicism as the state religion, and equality for all Mexican citizens (which at the time was understood to mean *criollos* and *peninsulares*).^{99, 100} Iturbide claimed territory from Costa Rica to Oregon for the Empire of Mexico, and in 1822 made himself Emperor. Many historians regard him as Mexico’s first full-fledged *caudillo* and the start of a period of *caudillismo*. The lack of a stable method for the orderly transfer of authority created a system in which violence became the means to hold political power.^{101, 102, 103, 104} Iturbide soon ran out of funds to pay the army; he was exiled in 1823 and shot when he attempted to return in 1824.^{105, 106}

Many Mexicos

Some 50 different governments, 33 different presidents, and several different constitutions marked Mexico's first century of independence.^{107, 108, 109} The 1824 Constitution was modeled on the United States Constitution, defining a federal republic with executive, legislative, and judicial branches, and the significant addition of a Roman Catholic state religion. However, there was little understanding or experience of participation in a republic and many loyalists wished for a return to monarchy.^{110, 111} Other tensions developed in the new nation—centralists (supporters of strong national government) vs. federalists (supporters of strong state governments), church supporters vs. anti-clericalists, free market supporters vs. advocates of protectionist tariffs, and communal land holders vs. individual property owners.¹¹²

The Age of Santa Anna

In the first years of independence, Antonio López de Santa Anna emerged as Mexico's quintessential *caudillo*.^{113, 114} A *criollo* from Veracruz, he began his career as a Spanish loyalist officer. He joined Iturbide in 1821, but turned on the Emperor by proclaiming Mexico a republic in 1823. A nationalist who aligned with whatever political group was useful at the time, he gave the young nation thrilling victories and disastrous defeats. In 1829, he repulsed Spain's attempt to reconquer Mexico (after Mexico had expelled most Spaniards) and soon became president. He would lose and regain the presidency 10 times in the next 30 years.^{115, 116} In 1836, he enforced Mexico's sovereignty over rebels in the territory of *Tejas*. He took no prisoners at the Alamo and Goliad, but was defeated and captured at San Jacinto, where he agreed to acknowledge the independent Republic of Texas in exchange for his freedom. He lost his leg fighting against the French at Veracruz two years later; the severed leg was buried with full honors in Mexico City in 1842. However, his leg was dug up and dragged through the streets in 1844 because he imposed the draft and taxes after learning of United States plans to annex Texas.¹¹⁷ He soon went into exile in Cuba, but returned to Mexico two years before his death.^{118, 119}



Antonio López de Santa Anna
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Mexican–American War

In 1845, the United States annexed the Republic of Texas. The annexation shifted the Mexico-U.S. border from the Rio Nueces south to the Rio Bravo (Rio Grande). This led Mexico to cut diplomatic relations with the United States. Santa Anna returned from exile in 1846 to lead Mexican forces into war.¹²⁰ During the last battle in Mexico City on September 13, 1848, six *niños heroes* (military cadets) leapt to their deaths from the walls of Chapultepec Castle rather than surrender to U.S. forces.¹²¹ Santa Anna resigned two days later and left for Venezuela.^{122, 123} Mexico signed away Texas and all of its northern territories in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo.¹²⁴

In 1853, Santa Anna returned to his final presidency. He approved the Treaty of La Mesilla (Gadsen Purchase), selling southern New Mexico and Arizona to the United States in order to raise funds for his perpetually bankrupt nation, an action that led to his last exit from power.¹²⁵

La Reforma

Benito Juárez and the Reform Laws

In 1854, Benito Juárez and other liberals announced the *Plan de Ayutla*, which called for the end of Santa Anna’s rule and a new constitutional convention. Juárez was a Zapotec orphan who learned Spanish from the Franciscans and later earned a law degree. Governor of Oaxaca during the Mexican-American War, he was national Minister of Justice when *La Reforma* began.¹²⁶ The liberals felt that church and military power were hindering the development of a strong republic. In 1854, *Ley* (“law”) Juárez stripped the church and the military of much of their traditional legal autonomy. In 1855, *Ley Lerdo* ordered the sale of corporate-owned real estate—church property, but also Indian *ejidos* (“common lands”)—into private ownership.¹²⁷ In 1857, a new constitution gave the republic a unicameral legislature; a four-year, single-term presidency; freedoms of speech, press, assembly, and education; *amparo* (similar to *habeas corpus*, the individual’s right to appear before a court); and no state religion.^{128, 129, 130, 131}



Benito Juárez
Wikimedia Commons

War of Reform and French Intervention



Maximilian, Archduke of Austria
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The Church threatened to excommunicate anyone trying to purchase property at auction. A three-year civil war ensued. Conservatives rebelled against the liberal government, taking control from Mexico City. Liberals fled to Veracruz where they organized an opposition government and continued to issue anti-clerical reform laws.¹³² In some places, priests who refused sacraments to liberals were shot. In others, doctors who treated liberal soldiers were killed. Liberal forces finally retook Mexico City in January 1861, and Juárez was elected president later that year.¹³³

Dueling governments and military campaign costs left Mexico bankrupt at the close of the war. President Juárez declared a moratorium on Mexico's repayment of international debts. Europe responded by threatening to occupy Mexico until debts were repaid. At the same time, Mexican conservatives were courting European royalty to resume monarchic rule in Mexico.¹³⁴

The French under Napoleon III pursued colonization of Mexico. Initially rebuffed at Puebla on May 5 (Cinco de Mayo) in 1862, they occupied Mexico City with reinforcements the following year. Maximilian, Archduke of Austria, arrived in 1864 to realize a conservative dream of a Mexican monarchy.¹³⁵ Maximilian unexpectedly upheld liberal policies and attempted to modernize the administration of Mexico. He also decreed that soldiers defending Juárez' government should be shot on sight. Early on, French forces drove Juaristas all the way to Ciudad Juárez.¹³⁶ However, by 1866 republican forces asserted themselves against a weakening French army who were being called home to fight against the Prussians. Maximilian was captured and executed in 1867 and Juárez was reelected the same year. He died in office in 1872.¹³⁷

The Porfiriato

José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz was a Mixtec-Spanish *mestizo* who fought for the liberals during the War of Reform and the reign of Maximilian. In 1876, General Díaz took the presidency with his *Plan de Tuxtepec* using the slogan "Effective Suffrage, No Reelection."^{138, 139} At the end of his chosen successor's term in 1884, Díaz was elected to a new term; it took a revolution to unseat him decades later.

He achieved his vision of “order and progress” for Mexico through attracting foreign investment in minerals, oil, railroads, and land.¹⁴⁰ The accompanying industrialization of agriculture and manufacturing disenfranchised the working classes. This resulted in the first large wave of emigration from Mexico to the United States, and setting the stage for internal revolt.^{141, 142} Díaz used the *Rurales*, a federal rural police force established by Juárez, to quell unrest and enforce elections.^{143, 144, 145}



José de la Cruz Porfirio Díaz
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Revolution

In the 1910 presidential election, Francisco Madero opposed Díaz. Madero came from a privileged family. He attended the University of California at Berkeley and worked in family business before entering politics.¹⁴⁶ Madero lost the 1910 election, fled the country to avoid arrest by Díaz, and issued the *Plan de San Luis Potosí*, which called Mexicans to revolt.^{147, 148} Regional resistance to the Porfiriato had been developing for some time under the lead of men such as Francisco “Pancho” Villa in the north and Emiliano Zapata in the south.^{149, 150, 151}



Francisco Madero
Wikimedia Commons

Madero was elected president when Díaz resigned and left the country in 1911, but in 1913 he was overthrown and killed. In the following years, the revolutionaries fought for power in their own regions, and struggled unsuccessfully to reunite the nation.^{152, 153} In 1915, the United States recognized Venustiano Carranza as Mexico’s legitimate leader. He produced a constitution that guaranteed rights to the working classes, but could not enforce it.^{154, 155} (The 1917 constitution now stands as the law of the land, incorporating 196 reforms and corrections through 17 August 2011.)¹⁵⁶ In 1919, Carranza ordered the killing of rival Emiliano Zapata.^{157, 158} A year later Carranza himself was killed fleeing violent opposition.^{159, 160}

Aftermath of Revolution

The Revolution cost Mexico close to a million lives (more than 2 million factoring in those who fled north).^{161, 162} It ended officially with the election of Álvaro Obregón to a one-term presidency in 1920, but violence continued for the next decade. In 1923, Obregón ordered Pancho Villa's ambush and killing. A few years later, Obregón himself was killed shortly after engineering constitutional changes to permit his reelection to a presidential term lengthened to six years. Obregón's killer was part of the Cristero Rebellion of 1926-1929, an uprising of conservative, church-loving peasants against the liberal, anti-clerical government policies of the preceding decades.^{163, 164}



Álvaro Obregón
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Mexico's Revolution overlapped with Russia's Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, which gave rise to the Soviet Union. The revolutions seemed to share similar goals of better lives for the peasants and the proletariat; in the early 1930s, Stalin's Five-Year Plans looked more promising than the United States' Great Depression.¹⁶⁵ (The United States encouraged half a million Mexicans to repatriate south during the Depression.)¹⁶⁶ However, Mexico's was a nationalist revolution—in contrast to Soviet international aspirations. The Communist Party of Mexico (PCM) often found itself at odds with either local leftists or Comintern (the international Communist organization).¹⁶⁷ Antagonism between the Soviet Union and the United States further complicated Mexican-Soviet relations throughout the 20th century.^{168, 169}

One-Party Democracy

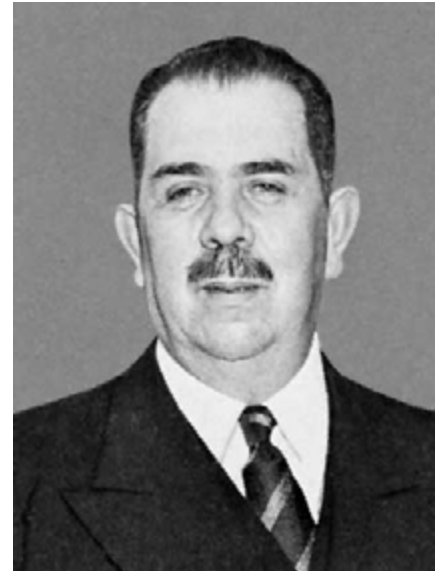
The Party Rises

Obregón's death led his successor Plutarco Elías Calles to unify the many revolutionary factions into a single political organization, the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Party).¹⁷⁰ Reorganized and renamed the *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana* (PRM) in 1938, and the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) in 1946, this group would see its presidential candidates safely into office for 70 years.^{171, 172, 173} The PRI-backed president had extraordinary powers, including *dedazo* ("the finger," which designates his successor).¹⁷⁴

Regionally, the *cacique* (political boss or broker) replaced the military *caudillo* as PRI political control reached into state and municipal government.^{175, 176}

To the Left

Calles was the *jefe maximo* (“maximum chief”) behind short-term presidents until agrarian reformers were able to bring their candidate, Lázaro Cárdenas, to office in 1934.^{177, 178} Cárdenas brought peasants, urban workers, and middle-class professionals into the ruling party with a nationalist agenda of education, land, and economic reforms.¹⁷⁹ His most popular act was the nationalization of the oil industry.^{180, 181} He also granted asylum to refugees from the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939) who became influential in Mexican cultural and intellectual circles, and to Leon Trotsky who was an early leader of the communist revolution exiled by Stalin after Lenin’s death.¹⁸² (A Soviet agent later killed Trotsky in Mexico.)¹⁸³



Lázaro Cárdenas
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To the Right



Manuel Gómez Morín, founder of PAN
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Mexico participated in World War II with an air squadron in the Philippines and 15,000 soldiers in the armed forces of the United States.¹⁸⁴ Industries grew to supply war materiel, and *braceros* (agricultural guest workers) traveled north to keep up agricultural production on the home front. To continue post-war economic development, PRI government policies promoted social modernization (to assimilate indigenous peoples) and domestic industrialization (to replace imports with locally produced items).^{185, 186, 187} In the 1960s, economic nationalization (utilities, auto industry) and internationalization (*maquiladoras*) disproportionately benefitted a wealthy few.¹⁸⁸ Such policies and actions often set the government against peasant farmers and labor unions, and opposition political parties appeared, starting with the *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN) in 1939.

Challenges to government authority were often violently suppressed, from PAN uprisings in Leon (1946) and Tijuana (1959 and 1968) to student demonstrations in the 1960s and the killing of opposition party members in the 1980s.^{189, 190}

Falling Down

An overdependence on future income from oil discovered in the 1970s produced economic debt in the 1980s that the government tried to reduce by floating the peso. Massive falls in the peso (from 12 to the dollar in 1975 to 3000 to the dollar in 1992) led to hyperinflation and a painful bailout from the International Monetary Fund.^{191, 192} Much of Mexico City literally fell to the ground in the 1985 earthquake. From the inadequate government response to the disaster emerged a new grassroots activism that fed into support for political candidates outside the PRI.^{193, 194}



Signing NAFTA trade agreement
Wikimedia Commons

In 1988, PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari almost lost the presidential election to opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (son of past president Lázaro Cárdenas). Salinas signed into law the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), motivating the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) rebellion in Chiapas.¹⁹⁵ While in office, his appointed successor and another PRI official were killed. After he left office, his brother was convicted of the latter killing and of “illegal enrichment” (extortion of fees for access to government leaders) and was linked to drug cartels.¹⁹⁶

Multiparty Democracy

Non-PRI candidates have won local elections since the 1940s, but never in numbers to control the national agenda. In the 1980s, regional elections increasingly went to opposition parties; in 1997 Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, now a member of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), was elected mayor of Mexico City. This ushered in an end to PRI domination.¹⁹⁷ With the 2000 presidential election of PAN candidate Vicente Fox, analysts began to consider Mexico a real democracy. Fox worked to regulate migration, implement government transparency, and modernize the justice system.^{198, 199, 200} In 2006, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón narrowly won the presidency over the populist former mayor of Mexico City, PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador.²⁰¹

Calderón promised to increase jobs and curb crime and the drug cartels which were terrorizing Mexico.

He launched a series of security operations against the cartels, which escalated the violence and led to the deaths of 47,000 people.^{202, 203, 204} By 2012, the drug cartels were firmly entrenched and Mexico's economy was worsening. Mexicans were tired of unfilled PAN promises and elected the former governor of the state of Mexico, PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto as their new president.^{205, 206}



*President Felipe Calderón
Wikimedia / Roosevelt Pinheiro/ABR*

Current Events

Peña Nieto quickly launched a series of reforms and pledged to reduce Mexico's dependence on oil and gasoline. The president also promised to increase foreign investment and bring the drug cartels under control. In 2012, Mexican security forces captured the head of the Sinaloa Cartel, Joaquín Guzmán (a.k.a. "el Chapo").²⁰⁷ Guzmán escaped with the help of prison officials and remained at large until January 2016.^{208, 209, 210}



*President Enrique Peña Nieto
Wikimedia / Sandstein*

Peña Nieto's administration has been marred by violence and allegations of abuse. His educational reforms have sparked massive protests, some of which have erupted in violence.^{211, 212, 213} Additionally, the president was implicated in a number of corruption scandals in 2014 and 2015.^{214, 215, 216} Peña Nieto has been unable to create the strong economic growth he promised. As a result,

the mood among Mexicans is somber. More than seven in ten now feel their nation is going in the wrong direction, the largest number since 2011. Like his predecessors, Peña Nieto has not yet been able to make significant progress on many of the Mexico has faced since 2000: high crime rates, unemployment, corruption and crime.²¹⁷

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Mexico in Perspective

Chapter 2 | History

Assessment

1. The Méxica are the mixed-race people of modern Mexico.
2. The Catholic Church approved, on spiritual grounds, the Spanish conquest of Mexico to convert the New World Indians.
3. Mexican independence began with enslaved peoples who wanted freedom from their masters.
4. The Mexican-American War was engineered by the United States to expand its southwestern territories.
5. The Reform Laws of the 1850s moved to limit the power of the church and the military.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True



Maize processing
Flickr / CIMMYT

Chapter 1 | Mexico In Perspective

Economy

Introduction

Mexico's USD 1.3 million economy is the second largest in Latin America, lagging only behind Brazil.^{1,2} Major economic reforms in the last several years, including an increase in the minimum wage, have helped propel job growth and reduce unemployment to around 4.3%.³ Mexico's economy continues to be tightly bound to the U.S. economy and its fiscal policies often mirror what is happening in the United States.^{4, 5, 6}

Since the North American Free Trade Agreement in 1991, Mexico has been transitioning to a manufacturing based economy.⁷ Agriculture now accounts for around 4% of the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and employs 13% of the labor force.

Industry accounts for roughly 34% of GDP and employ 24% of the workforce.^{8, 9} The services sector accounts for 63% of GDP and employs 62% of the labor force.¹⁰ This formal sector, however, employs only about four in every ten Mexican workers and accounts for only 75% of GDP. Mexico's large informal economy makes up an estimated 26% of the GDP and employs nearly 60% of all Mexicans.^{11, 12, 13} In spite of its size, the informal economy is hampering growth in the formal sector. Mexico's government is working to bring many of the informal businesses and workers into the formal sector in order to spur growth.^{14, 15}

Agriculture

Mexico's primary economic sector is agriculture, which includes farming, ranching, forestry, fishing, and hunting. About 13% of the workforce is in agriculture and contributes roughly 4% of the GDP.^{16, 17} Farming has been a central economic activity in Mexico since the domestication of corn 7,000 years ago. Today, the majority of farmers are subsistence growers, cultivating less than 5 hectares (12 acres) with staple crops of corn and beans.¹⁸ About one-tenth of Mexico is farmland, but only about 20% is irrigated.^{19, 20, 21} Raised field cultivation, practiced continuously in Xochimilco's *chinampas* ("floating gardens") outside Mexico City since pre-Columbian times, has been reintroduced as a sustainable agricultural method for modern peoples.^{22, 23} Much small-scale farming remains outside the formal economy, and apart from international investments to industrialize agriculture. Once self-sufficient in staple food production, Mexico now imports grains.^{24, 25, 26} Corn, beans, wheat, rice, barley, and potatoes are today's staple crops.²⁷ Tomatoes, avocados, sugarcane, coffee, and cotton are major cash crops.^{28, 29} In addition, marijuana and opium poppies are cultivated, particularly in the states of Chihuahua, Guerrero, Jalisco, Durango, Sinaloa, and Oaxaca.³⁰ Mexico sends most of its agricultural exports to the United States, and the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has significantly increased the export of fruit and vegetables.^{31, 32}



Vaquero Jalisco, Mexico
Flickr / Nathan Gibbs

Other important agricultural goods include meat, dairy, fish, and wood products.^{33, 34} Ranching is also an historical economic activity with cultural significance—the vaquero ("cowman") is the ancestor of the American cowboy and cousin to the more elegant charro (horseman).^{35, 36, 37} Livestock production occupies 40% of Mexico's total

land area, and accounts for over half of the agricultural GDP and about one-eighth of the agricultural export trade. As with staple crops, Mexico is now a net importer of meat.^{38, 39, 40, 41} Fishing is a commercial, artisanal, and recreational activity along Mexico's coasts, and like farming, has benefited from NAFTA. Foresters harvest wood for domestic fuel, construction, and paper mills. Some see Mexico's forests as a climate-friendly energy resource, but recent deforestation rates may endanger renewability.⁴² Small communities have traditionally owned and operated forests, as they have farmlands.^{43, 44}

Industry

Mexican workers built the oldest and largest pyramids in the Western Hemisphere, and today construction is part of the industrial economic sector that employs almost one-quarter of the workforce and accounts for roughly 32-34% of the GDP.^{45, 46, 47} Mining, manufacturing, and energy production are also included in this sector. Mining was the most important colonial industry—Mexico produced as much silver as the rest of the world combined in the 18th century, and returned to the position of the world's number one silver producer in 2010, where it remained in 2015.^{48, 49, 50, 51} Other minerals are iron, sulfur, fluorite, zinc, copper, manganese, mercury, bismuth, antimony, cadmium, phosphates, gold and uranium.^{52, 53, 54}



*CEMEX plant Monterrey, Mexico
Flickr / Hector Martinez f*

Manufacturing is dominated by machinery and equipment (especially automobiles), processed agricultural products—mainly edibles (food, beverages, tobacco) but also textiles and clothing, leather and shoes, paper, gum, and natural rubber—and chemical products (including petrochemicals and plastics). Iron and steel, cement, glass, and consumer durables (electronics) are other manufactured products.⁵⁵⁵⁶ The economic reforms of the Salinas presidency privatized state enterprises and created opportunities for foreign participation, transforming the manufacturing subsector.⁵⁷ NAFTA stimulated the productivity of firms that imported materials for the manufacturing process.⁵⁸

Energy

Energy production is considered extractive in the industrial economic sector. Mexico pumps oil and gas, mines coal, and dams up rivers to fuel its electricity plants, and also operates a nuclear power plant at Laguna Verde, near Veracruz. Fossil fuels generate 78% of electricity production and Mexico has become a natural gas net importer.⁵⁹ Recent annual electricity production runs about 258 billion kilowatt-hours. Domestic consumption analyzed by value is less than 25% residential and more than 75% commercial and industrial use. A small amount of electricity is exported and imported across northern and southern borders, primarily in Baja California.⁶⁰ Roughly 99% of Mexico is reportedly on the electric grid.⁶¹

Natural Resources: Oil



PEMEX oil platform off coast
Flickr / Chad Teer

“Black Gold” replaced precious metals as Mexico’s most valuable natural resource following the expansion of the railroads during the rule of Porfirio Díaz. Foreign oil companies became a primary source of government tax revenue during the Revolution. Industry growth slowed after the 1917 Constitution claimed national ownership of all subsurface resources, and reversed for a time after nationalization created PEMEX in 1938.^{62, 63} (Retaliatory boycotts by expropriated oil companies led Mexico to trade oil with Germany and Italy just before World War II.) PEMEX became a symbol of economic nationalism, putting short-term domestic needs ahead of long-term trade potential, and benefitting corrupt management as much as the public good.

Despite high international fuel prices, PEMEX posted net losses of USD 3.8 billion in 2010, reflecting decreased production of crude oil.⁶⁴ In 2014, oil production in Mexico was at its lowest point since 1986.⁶⁵ Recent efforts to reform the industry have aimed at cleaning out politicized management, cleaning up environmental damage, and opening up the state monopoly to outside participation.⁶⁶

67, 68, 69, 70

Mexico is consistently among the world’s top producers of crude oil, and was the fourth-largest supplier of oil to the United States in 2015.^{71, 72} Petroleum products, mostly crude oil and natural gas, account for between 33 and 40% of annual government revenues.⁷³ Petroleum sales are also the largest source of foreign revenue

for Mexico.^{74, 75} Mexico has approximately 10 billion barrels of proved oil reserves. The largest concentrations are in the Campeche Basin and off the southern coast.⁷⁶

Trade

Trade has connected Mexico's many indigenous groups to each other for 4,000 years and to the world economic system since the 16th century.⁷⁷ Barter-based markets and street vendors serve local communities and attract tourists as part of the large informal economy that operates beyond government control.⁷⁸ Today, Mexico is the 15-largest export economy in the world but low oil prices have helped create a trade deficit.^{79, 80} About 80% of Mexico's export trade is with the United States. Nearly half of its imports come from the United States followed by China (17%) and Japan (4%).⁸¹



*WTC tower Mexico City
Flickr / Daniel Manrique*

Within the formal economy, annual exports and imports were more than USD 681 billion in 2015.^{82, 83} Oil is still Mexico's top single commodity for both export (crude) and import (refined). However, from automobiles to telecommunications equipment, combined manufactured goods account for over 80% of exports and imports.^{84, 85, 86} With few exceptions, since 1981, Mexico has had a negative balance of trade.⁸⁷ In 2014, imports outpaced exports by roughly USD 35 billion.⁸⁸ In 2015, the deficit declined to approximately USD 13.5 billion.⁸⁹ In Latin America, Mexico's significant trade partners are Brazil, Colombia, Chile, Guatemala, and Peru.^{90, 91} More than 90% of Mexican trade happens through free trade agreements with dozens of countries including Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, the European Free Trade Area, North American Free Trade Region, and Japan.^{92, 93, 94} Mexico also belongs to the World Trade Organization, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, and the G-20.⁹⁵

Transportation

Mexico's geography—mountains, deserts, jungles, non-navigable rivers—made the growth of domestic transportation networks a challenge. Foreign-financed railroads developed in the 19th century and fueled other commercial and industrial development. Today Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey operate metro subways and light rail systems at very reasonable rider prices.^{96, 97, 98}

The most heavily used transportation network in Mexico is 137,544 km (85,466 mi) of paved roads, filled with more than 30 million registered trucks, buses, taxis, and private cars.^{99, 100, 101, 102}

Aiming for future free trade agreements, Mexico's ports move an average 3 million 20-foot container equivalent units (TEU) annually to destinations including "interesting opportunity areas" such as India, Australia, Russia, Turkey, and South Africa.¹⁰³ Domestic airlines serve mostly middle- and upper-class Mexicans; Mexico-based and international airlines fly to most major cities in the United States, Canada, Europe, Japan, and Latin America.¹⁰⁴ Much of Mexico's transportation industry was nationalized for most of the 20th century, and the results of recent privatizations have been mixed.^{105, 106}



*Commuter train Mexico City
Wikimedia / Jujomx*

Tourism



*Acapulco Bay
Flickr / Eneas De Troya*

The leisure class's long history has produced internal tourist destinations from Cuernavaca to Acapulco. The tourist industry in 2014 directly accounted for 6.8% of GDP and its total contribution to 2014 GDP was nearly 15%.¹⁰⁷ Roughly 7% of the labor force is directly employed in tourism but, if indirect employment is counted, 15.7% of Mexican jobs relate to the tourist industry.¹⁰⁸ The vast majority of tourism revenues come from leisure travel (90%), most of which is domestic (89%).¹⁰⁹

In 2014, more than 14 million international tourists arrived in Mexico. The majority (52-57%) were from the United States followed by Canadians (15-20%) and Brazilians (2%).^{110, 111} Medical tourism has produced internationally accredited facilities in more than 12 destinations including Monterrey and Guadalajara.^{112, 113} Ecotourism is growing and has a promising future.^{114, 115, 116}

Banking and Finance

Banking and Currency

Banking has a checkered history in Mexico. Formal financial institutions were rare through the 19th century. (A notable exception is the National Pawnshop, *Monte de Piedad*, established in 1775, which continues to operate as a non-profit loan institution.)¹¹⁷ Private banking began largely as a foreign enterprise—the Bank of London and Mexico, Mexico’s oldest existing private bank, was established in 1864. In 1884, the government tried to control banking by creating a national bank (Banamex), nearly liquidating the Bank of London and Mexico in the process.^{118,}



Central Bank of Mexico
Flickr / Vlad Litvinov

¹¹⁹ (The national responsibilities of Banamex were transferred to a new central bank in 1925.) A century later, government nationalization and reprivatization of banks from 1982-1990 led not to economic stability but to further devaluation of the peso and costly, controversial bailouts.^{120, 121, 122} In 1997, Mexico opened its banking system to foreign competition and allowed foreign banks to purchase Mexican commercial banks.¹²³ In 2013, 74% of the bank assets in Mexico were controlled by foreign entities.¹²⁴ Access to banks and banking services is limited in Mexico. In 2010, an estimated 25% of the population had access to the banking system.¹²⁵

Banco de México, Mexico’s central bank, was established in September 1925. It is charged with establishing and overseeing monetary policy and providing domestic currency.¹²⁶ The official currency, the Mexican New Peso (currency code: MXN), replaced the original Mexican peso in January 1993 following a major devaluation of the old currency.^{127, 128} In February 2016, USD 1 equaled about 18.5 MXN.¹²⁹

Finance and Investment

Mexico’s stock market began as a limited mercantile exchange in the 1880s, and joint stock companies were legalized in 1889. A general lack of company financial reporting and limited access to capital restricted securities investing until well into the 20th century.¹³⁰ From the 1970s, the Mexican stock exchange, Bolsa Mexicana de Valores

(BMV), grew to list shares in approximately 250 companies and a variety of other financial products. The BMV's estimated total market capitalization was USD 530 billion in 2001.^{131, 132, 133} Since 2008, the BMV has been publicly owned and traded.¹³⁴



*Mexican Stock Exchange
Flickr / BORIS G*

Mexico is a preferred choice among international investors ranking 18th in the world and 7th among developing nations as an investment destination in 2013.¹³⁵ In 2014, Mexico received USD 22.6 billion in Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) funds making the nation the 10th largest (FDI) recipient.^{136, 137} FDI dollars are expected to increase to USD 30 billion in 2016.¹³⁸ Although Mexico is open to foreign investment, crime, corruption, and inefficiency have dampened investor enthusiasm.^{139, 140} Investment is greatest

along the border with the United States where many manufacturing centers are located. Most FDI dollars are destined for the finance, automotive, electronics, and energy sectors.¹⁴¹ Mexico's largest investors in 2013 were the United States (30%), Spain (18%), Canada (11%), Germany and the Netherlands (7%), and Japan and Belgium (roughly 6%).¹⁴²

Standard of Living

Mexico's "upper middle developed country" ranking is based on a per capita income of USD 9,870, only one-fifth of the United States average of USD 55,200.¹⁴³ The rankings hide high levels of income inequality and poverty. Mexico has the highest level of inequality among the 34 OECD nations. The richest 1% of the population controls 43% of the national wealth. The richest 10% of the Mexican population earns more than 30 times what the poorest 10% earn. The poorest 20% of the population has an average worth of USD 80. Roughly half of the nation lives below the poverty line.^{144, 145} Average daily wages in December were just MXN 292 (roughly USD 16).^{146, 147} According to the government's well-being standards, USD 175



*Mexican outdoor mall
Flickr / Tim Morgan*

is the minimum amount required for urban dwellers. With the minimum wage paying roughly USD 5 a day, nearly half of all working Mexicans fall below that standard. Even Mexico's middle-class is worse off than their counterparts in other OECD countries. By Mexican standards, the middle class is defined as a household with monthly earnings between USD 219 and 1,177. Health indicators show a lack of access to healthcare for the poorer, rural south. As many as one in four Mexicans reported having no health coverage in 2012. This lack of healthcare has contributed to a nationwide increase in noncommunicable diseases—diabetes is now the most common cause of death.^{148, 149, 150}

Employment Trends



Mexican laborer
Wikimedia / Tomas Castelazo

Over the last two decades, Mexico's economy has become more reliant on manufacturing.¹⁵¹ Mexico's formal economy jobs require skills, and working conditions and benefits are regulated by strict labor laws. The formal economy, though generating roughly three-quarters of the national GDP, employs only 40% of the labor force. On the other hand, Mexico has a large informal economy that, in 2014, accounted for 26% of Mexico's GDP and employed 60% of the labor force.^{152, 153}

Although Mexico's current president, Enrique Peña Nieto, promised to reform the economy, including bringing more workers into the formal economy, his promises have been largely unfilled.¹⁵⁴

Nevertheless, many global companies are interested in investing in Mexico, which will create new jobs for Mexican workers. These companies are projected to create roughly half a million jobs for skilled professionals, a demand Mexico may be unable to meet in the short term.^{155, 156} Many of the new jobs are likely to be in the energy sector but the telecommunications and aerospace industry are also poised for growth. There is currently and will continue to be a demand for medical and healthcare workers.¹⁵⁷ Currently, the Mexican labor force lacks the skills and education to fill many of the new jobs likely to be created in the formal sector. The average Mexican completes only nine years of school. There is a mismatch between the educational curricula, even in vocational schools, and employer needs. Creating better training and addressing the mismatch is necessary for Mexico to take advantage of the new jobs entering the nation.¹⁵⁸

Public vs. Private Sector



International development ProMéxico
Wikimedia / ProMéxico

Mexico has long struggled to balance economic nationalism with private, especially foreign, ownership and investment. In the 1980s, the government ended support for land reform and agricultural subsidies, labor unions, and import substitution industrialization.¹⁵⁹ Privatization and government regulation reform since the 1990s have improved business operations and opportunities, but in some shifts of public-to-private ownership from the state to Mexican

nationals, monopolistic advantages remain.^{160, 161} Since the 2000 election, presidents without guaranteed legislative support are finding it difficult to make changes that benefit the private sector and have immediate public benefits.¹⁶²

Outlook

Mexico's economy lost some steam in the first half of 2015 slowing growth. Nevertheless, the economy is predicted to continue its moderate expansion and to grow between 2 and 3% in 2016 and 2017. Continued low oil prices on the international market, however, could threaten Mexico's growth.^{163, 164, 165} Despite concerns with sluggish growth, however, Mexico is likely to be Latin America's top performing economy in 2016. The recent devaluation of the Mexican peso against



Pesos
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the U.S. dollar is likely to edge inflation up to around 3.3% by the end of 2016 and reduce export revenues.^{166, 167} Mexico's central bank is likely to raise interest rates following the actions of the U.S. Federal Reserve in an effort to reduce pressure on the peso and avoid even greater devaluations.^{168, 169} Mexico also reported that its industrial production has fallen and this slowdown could put pressure on other parts of the economy to make up the shortfall.¹⁷⁰ Although recent structural reforms have positively impacted the economy, Mexico' ability to continue to grow its economy,

however, will depend in no small measure on reducing its informal sector and reducing the widespread corruption that affects the country. The growth of the power and influence of the nation's drug cartels could also be a disincentive for international investors which could slow the building of much needed infrastructure, especially in rural areas.^{171, 172} One final challenge for the economy is Mexico's "brain drain" or the emigration of technically skilled or knowledgeable workers to other countries. In spite of federal efforts to dissuade educated Mexicans from leaving the country, as many as 11,000 Mexican PhD holders have immigrated to the United States. Some estimates suggest that as many as 27% of all Mexicans with PhDs have moved to the United States, depriving Mexico of much needed talent and expertise.^{173, 174, 175}

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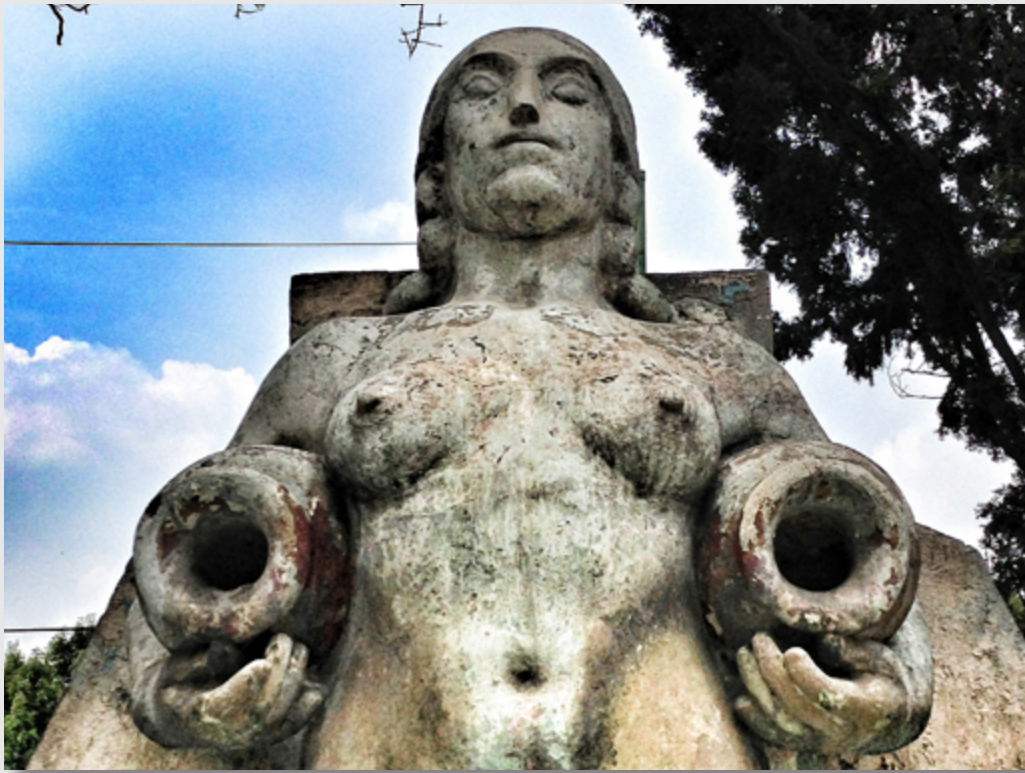
Mexico in Perspective

Chapter 3 Economy

Assessment

1. Mexico, the “tortilla basket” of North America, is self-sufficient in staple foods.
2. Most of the goods Mexico manufactures are traditional items like leather shoes and colorful blankets.
3. Mexico is a major supplier of crude oil to the United States.
4. Silver, not gold, is Mexico’s most valuable natural resource.
5. Most Mexicans have a middle class standard of living in this upper middle developed economy.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False



*Fuente de los Cántaros, symbol of mexicanidad
wikimedia / Keizers*

Chapter 4 | Mexico in Perspective

Society

Introduction

There have always been “Many Mexicos,” wrote Lesley Byrd Simpson in his classic study by that name.¹ Long before the Spanish conquest, peoples living to the north and south of Mexico’s central plateau developed languages and ways of life quite different from (and independent of) Aztec imperial culture and society. The subsequent encounter between the New and Old Worlds extinguished some, but not all of these peoples. It also gave rise to new peoples, who mixed ideas and habits from around the world into many new social conventions and practices. With their declaration of independence, new Mexicans faced the challenge of finding a national identity, *mexicanidad* that would achieve sociocultural integration and support socioeconomic growth.

It was a difficult challenge that led to a revolution that raised issues about social equality and economic fairness that are still being negotiated.^{2, 3, 4}

Ethnic Groups and Languages

In Mexico, “ethnicity” is a fluid concept. Consisting of Europeans, Africans, Asians, and dozens of indigenous peoples, the society is stratified and still conscious of race and class. *Mestizaje* (“race mixture,” a synthesis of racial and cultural mixing) and *indigenismo* (the support and promotion of “Indian,” i.e., indigenous cultures) are two organizing principles of ethnicity that identify most people as *mestizo* (“mixed”) or a member of an indigenous community.⁵

The majority (62%) of Mexicans identify as Mestizo. Roughly 21% of the population is predominantly Amerindian with another 10% identified as Amerindian. A small number of Mexicans (10%) claims a European ethnicity—they tend to be light-skinned and upper class.^{6, 7}



Mestizaje, Flor de Piña, Oaxaca
Wikimedia / Jose de Jesus Hernandez

Language serves as a marker of indigenous ethnicity in official statistics. Adopting Spanish is a way to shift one’s ethnic identity from Indian to *mestizo*, as is adopting non-indigenous habits of cuisine or dress.^{8, 9}

Indigenous Peoples (Indios) and Indigenismo



Tarahumara woman weaving at Cusarare Falls
Wikimedia / Ted McGrath

There are about 60 surviving, government-recognized indigenous groups in Mexico.^{10, 11} Collectively, they own or control thousands of hectares of land, mostly in forests and jungles, which includes more than half of Mexico’s recognized biodiversity-supporting lands.¹² The highest population concentrations of indigenous peoples are in the south and east, with pockets to the west in the Huichol country of Nayarit and Durango, and to the north in the Tarahumara region

of Chihuahua.^{13, 14} This distribution pattern is unfortunately mirrored in markers of poverty.^{15, 16}

Indian societies tend to value harmony in human relationships to the cosmos and to each other. This leads to an emphasis on community participation in religious activities that is sometimes characterized as “traditional” behavior, and contrasts with more “modern” behaviors of *mestizos* that Indians view as selfish, aggressive, impatient, and lacking respect for nature.^{17, 18, 19, 20}

Social policies of *indigenismo* have been criticized for isolating *indios* in a romanticized past, or for encouraging *indio* assimilation to a national culture instead of supporting indigenous efforts to retain their cultures. In recent decades some indigenous groups have come together to pursue both social and political recognition of their autonomy government aid and support for their climb out of poverty.²¹

Mestizos and Mestizaje

Mexico’s *mestizo* population stems from the union of Spanish soldiers with indigenous women, who were often taken as servants or slaves. Couplings also occurred between Spanish and Aztec nobility, and indigenous men and Spanish women.²² *Mestizo* was the racial catch-all category for anyone not of “pure” Spanish or Indian blood. Recent scholarship has pointed out how ideas of *mestizaje* evolved to embrace and to obscure the mixing of local peoples and Europeans with Africans, Asians, and other Americans who arrived as slaves and freed slaves, sailors and soldiers, adventurers, or refugees.^{23, 24, 25} By the time of the Revolution in the early 20th century, *mestizaje* was a part of a *mexicanidad* defined by culture and class as much as race.^{26, 27} Analysts have noted Mexicans becoming *mestizo* by changing cultural characteristics such as appearance, language, work habits, or family relationships.^{28, 29} *Mestizos* have also adapted such characteristics in order to gain the wealth and power of the Mexican upper class.^{30, 31}



*Mestizo women Tuxtla Chico, Mexico
Flickr / Ted McGrath*

Languages

Mexico is home to speakers of some 300 languages but only 68 are officially recognized by the government and enjoy coequal national status with Spanish.^{32, 33, 34, 35} About a million speakers of indigenous languages are monolingual, especially among the Mayans in Yucatán and Chiapas.³⁶ Spanish is the first language of 93% of the population, and the shared national language that links Mexico to one of the largest language communities in the world.^{37, 38} A Mexican dialect of Spanish probably began to develop in the 18th century. Among other distinctions, Mexican Spanish is more open to borrowings (from Nahuatl to English) than other international forms. Regional dialects also exist within Mexico. Attitudes toward Spanish have a residue of colonial identity: 84% of Mexicans consider Spanish an important marker of Mexican national identity, but only 29% think Mexico City is home to the ideal Spanish, compared to 39% who look to Madrid.³⁹ Mexican Spanish is likely to dominate the future through mass media—Mexican *telenovelas* (television soap operas) transmit colloquial speech throughout the world.⁴⁰



Languages of Mexico
Pixabay / Rebeca Cruz Galvan

In colonial times, royal policy favored Spanish. However, the friars responsible for educating the indigenous population believed that “true understanding of the word of God could only be achieved in the speaker’s first language.”⁴¹ Nahuatl, Latin, and Spanish were all languages of colonial formal education, and Spanish remained a minority language (spoken by only 10% of the population) until after the War for Independence.⁴² The new government promoted a single, shared language—Spanish—as a means to unify the new nation.^{43, 44} Bilingual education for nonnative Spanish speakers, mostly indigenous peoples, began in the 19th century.⁴⁵ It came to be seen as revolutionary and leftist in opposition to Spanish-only immersion instruction, which was characterized as nationalistic and conservative.⁴⁶

Religion

Catholicism



Basilica of Our Lady of Zapopan
Wikimedia / Iqmann

Between 83 and 87% of Mexicans consider themselves Catholics.^{47, 48} Pre-Columbian religious traditions pervade Mexican Catholicism and underlie the elaborate celebrations of village saint's days, *Semana Santa* (the "Holy Week" leading up to Easter), and *Las Posadas* of the Christmas season.^{49, 50} The rituals surrounding Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead), November 1, entered the UNESCO list of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in 2008.^{51, 52} Our Lady of Guadalupe, the "brown Virgin,"

symbolizes for many a fundamental spiritual *mestizaje* of Mexican identity.^{53, 54, 55} The banner with her image that Father Hidalgo carried into the War of Independence is considered the first flag of Mexico.⁵⁶

Catholicism was introduced to the region by the Spanish around 1519. The new American lands were to be claimed not only in the name of the king, but also in the name of the church. From that time, the Catholic Church has been present and active in the region playing a number of roles. Following independence, the Mexican government actively sought to limit Church influence and established greater secularization throughout the nation. Antagonisms between the Church and government continued on and off through 1940 when both sides settled into an uneasy peace. doctrine.^{57, 58, 59, 60} By the 1980s, however, the Church again demanded a greater role in political activity. Activist priests throughout the country took up the banner of greater rights for the people, mostly the poor, and denounced the government.⁶¹ Continued activism by priests culminated in major constitutional changes in 1992 and a resumption of diplomatic relations with the Vatican after a more than a century of estrangement.^{62, 63}

Other Religions

In spite of the Catholic Church's work with the poor, Mexicans began to turn away from the church toward Christian and evangelical sects.⁶⁴ The growth of Protestantism and evangelical churches has been particularly strong in the poorest states of southeastern Mexico specifically Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, and Quintana Roo.⁶⁵

Today, roughly 8% of the nation is Protestant.⁶⁶ Although traditional Protestant groups such as the Lutherans, Methodists, and Presbyterians had been in Mexico since the 1800s, it was not until the years between 1970 and 1990 that Protestant church growth exploded. Much of the growth was due to active recruitment by non-traditional groups such as the Assemblies of God, Seventh Day Adventists, Mormons, and Jehovah's Witnesses.⁶⁷ Today, Mexico is second only to the United States in the number of Mormons which is estimated to be roughly 1.4 million.⁶⁸



Pentecostales Cancu, Mexico
Wikimedia / Rayttc

Roughly 67,500 Jews live in Mexico, mostly in Mexico City and the state of Mexico. There are also small Jewish communities in the states of Morelos, Nuevo Leon, Oaxaca, Puebla, and Veracruz. Mexico has a small Muslim community numbering around 4,000 mostly concentrated in Mexico City and the state of Mexico.⁶⁹ Some followers of Mayan religions in Chiapas, Oaxaca, and Yucatán have integrated Catholicism into their traditions.⁷⁰ About 5% of the population claims no religious affiliation.^{71, 72}

Cuisine



Mexican Street Food
Wikimedia / Tomas Castelazo

Mexico's cuisine is a fusion of many groups and cooking techniques.⁷³ Corn, the crop that settled and civilized ancient Mexico, is prepared in many ways: roasted on the cob and smeared with mayonnaise and paprika; ground into *masa* for tortillas, tostadas, tamales, and gorditas; lime-soaked into *nixtamal* (hominy) and stirred into *pozole* soup or *atole* drink; and popped.^{74, 75} Wheat and rice, colonial additions were used to make flour tortillas, the cinnamon-spiced rice drink *horchata*, European-style breads (*bolillos*), bakery sweets (*pastel*, *pan dulce*), and *arroz con leche* (similar to rice pudding).^{76, 77, 78, 79} Beans, squash, chilies, tomatoes, and nopal round out the pre-conquest contributions along with wild game and seafood.

Native flavorings include oregano, cilantro, epazote, pumpkin seed, chocolate, and vanilla. Spanish beef, pork, and chicken arrived with new cooking techniques using animal fats (especially frying), and gave rise to meat-based *criollo* dishes such as mole poblano, carnitas, and carne asada, as well as cheese quesadillas and refried beans. Colonial imports including onions, garlic, cinnamon, cane sugar, and citrus flavor many dishes.^{80, 81}

Drinking *pulque*, a fermented, alcoholic drink of the maguey cactus, became common when the Spanish conquest ended Aztec regulations on alcohol consumption.^{82, 83, 84} Aztec nobility preferred the bitter, frothy *xocolatl* prepared from the cocoa bean. The Spanish also applied their distilling techniques to agave to produce tequila, a national product regulated by the Mexican government.^{85, 86, 87} Imported Spanish grapes yield Mexican brandy and wine, and colonial sugar cultivation led to Mexican *aguardiente* and rum, as well as today's sodas. Conquistadors may also have introduced European-style beer to Mexico, although the beer industry started in earnest during the reign of Maximilian.^{88, 89}

After the conquest, food became a marker of class and race. By the 19th century *cientificos* (the elite group of technical experts) claimed that the advancement of Mexican civilization depended upon substituting a wheat and meat diet for corn and beans. After the Revolution, corn reemerged as the basis of a *mestizo* “national cuisine” in cookbooks of the 1940s.⁹⁰ UNESCO recognized traditional Mexican cuisine as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of world significance in 2010.⁹¹

Traditional Dress



Typical Jarocho attire Veracruz, Mexico
Wikimedia / Carlos t

Although Western-style fashions are commonly worn throughout Mexico, it is not uncommon to see traditional indigenous clothing often representing a fusion of indigenous and European styles.⁹² Each group or region developed its own style of clothing which persists today. Traditional clothing was constructed with an eye to protecting people from the sun and heat. Clothing was generally made of natural fibers such as cotton, sisal, palm, wool, and silk. The clothing was generally brightly colored with traditional dyes of yellow, blue, red, purple, orange, and black.^{93, 94, 95}

Men's traditional clothing has changed little over the years. The most well-known and popular pieces throughout the country include five garments. The *sarape*, or brightly colored and fringed garment was worn as a shawl and sometimes doubled as a blanket.^{96, 97}

The *sombrero*, a traditional wide-brimmed hat, was made of straw and worn as protection against the sun.^{98, 99, 100} The *guayabera* shirt can be worn on both formal and informal occasions. The cotton shirt is frequently embroidered with a variety of designs down the front of the garment. The original *guayabera* was white but contemporary garments can now be found in a variety of colors.^{101, 102} The *poncho* is an outer garment worn over the shoulders with a hole in the middle for the head.^{103, 104} Finally, the *charro suit*, typically worn by the Mexican cowboys, is the easily recognized suit with intricate embroidery on the pants and the short jacket. Today, the suit is most often associated with mariachi bands.^{105, 106}

Women's clothing, on the other hand, has changed over the years and reveals a great deal of variety in design and color.¹⁰⁷ Traditional female clothing generally consists of a *huipil* or sleeveless tunic made from cotton or wool worn over a skirt.^{108, 109, 110} Skirt designs reflected wide regional variations and tended to be either knee- or ankle-length. Skirts were made from cotton, wool, or silk and often contained some lace elements. They were frequently decorated with beads and elaborate embroidered designs.^{111, 112} The *quechquémtil* is the female version of the poncho. Resembling a cape, the garment was usually made from bright colored cloth and embroidered.¹¹³ The *rebozo*, a long scarf or shawl-like garment, completed the outfit. The color and patterns of the garment varied by region and group.^{114, 115}



Oaxaca Indigenous_clothing
Pixabay / Rebeca Cruz Galvan

Dress has been an indicator of social status from pre-Columbian times. Aztec nobility lived extravagantly, for example, never wearing the same cloak twice.¹¹⁶ Spanish colonial laws mandated “traditional” dress for the lower classes to maintain the status quo. After independence, dress became an indication of ethnic identity, particularly in the passage from Indian to *mestizo* in the city. With the Revolution, artists such as Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo made indigenous traditional dress fashionable as part of the new national identity.^{117, 118}

Gender Issues

Machismo



Antonio López de Santa Anna
Wikimedia Commons

Mexico is infamous for *machismo*, a cultural construction of exaggerated masculinity with probable roots in both Aztec and Spanish cultures that is now widespread in Latin America.^{119, 120} The *macho* male must exert his power over his sexual partners, his social relationships, and, ultimately, his fear of death.^{121, 122, 123} In his 1950 essay *The Labyrinth of Solitude*, Octavio Paz, Mexico’s Nobel Prize-winning writer, connected machismo with a *mestizo mexicanidad*.¹²⁴ Mexican opinions about

machismo are mixed. There is admiration for the strength to stand up for oneself and take no abuse from others, but there is doubt about the need to display that strength by fathering many children or harming others.^{125, 126}

Machismo implies a complementary femininity that is passive, submissive, and dependent. The ultimate traditional role model for Mexican womanhood has been the Virgin of Guadalupe.¹²⁷ An early challenger of this tradition was Sor Juana Ines de la Cruz, one of the world’s greatest Spanish language authors, who in the 17th century entered the Convent of San Jerónimo in Mexico City to pursue a scholarly life. After defending women’s rights in print, the church pressured her to stop writing and give away her library of 4,000 books.^{128, 129} Women’s societal opportunities and relations with men have changed over the centuries, as the Revolutionary *soldadera* (“camp follower”) and the post-Revolutionary *chica moderna* (“modern girl”) attest.^{130, 131, 132}

Discrimination

Yet today girls and women continue to be unequal at home, at school, and at work.^{133, 134, 135} Local practice may ignore state or federal mandates—for example, some indigenous communities do not allow women to vote or hold office.^{136, 137} Women also face discrimination at work where they are paid, on average 22% less than their male counterparts.¹³⁸ Some other agencies place that figure as high as 43%.¹³⁹ Women are frequently victims of sexual harassment in the workplace. In one of the most blatant and publicized examples in 2015, a Mexican female TV host, sexually harassed

on-air by her male co-host, was pressured to call the incident a hoax.^{140, 141} In another 2015 case, female workers at a Mexican auto factory were fired after complaining their supervisor repeatedly harassed them.¹⁴² Women are sometimes subjected to pre-employment pregnancy tests before they can get a job in spite of the fact that such a requirement is illegal. Most recent reports suggest that 14% of women were subjected to such tests.¹⁴³



Mayan woman souvenir maker
Flickr / Laslovarga

Violence against Women



Protesters demanding justice
Wikimedia / lose

Domestic violence against is rampant in Mexico which ranks in the top 20 nations for worst violence against women.^{144, 145, 146} In 2011, Mexico's national household survey reported rates of domestic (partner) violence against women at 46%, but more recent estimates run as high as 67%.^{147, 148} Violence against women outside the home is equally troubling, particularly that attributed to drug cartels.^{149, 150, 151} In 2015, the federal government found violence against women to be so egregious that it issued a "gender alert" as a response to high numbers of murders and disappearance among Mexican women.¹⁵² Emergency measures have been implemented to protect women and guard against the violence in Mexico. The area of Edomex, on the northern fringe of the city, has been declared the most dangerous place to be a woman in all of Mexico.^{153, 154}

Arts

Pre-Columbian Traditions

Mexico's ancient cultures made art to last for millennia. Massive stonework, carved and painted with bright colors, recorded their myths and histories.¹⁵⁵ The national government has preserved pre-Columbian art in world-famous museums, and duplicated it in modern constructions such as the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in Mexico City.^{156, 157} Traditions of pottery, featherwork, and textile production continue as do unique ritual performances such as the *voladores* of Veracruz.¹⁵⁸ In a fertility ritual, these “flying men” fling themselves from the top of a tall pole. Tied to the pole with long ropes, they circle the pole, spinning through the air as if flying.^{159, 160} Ancient art influences modern artists as well. The *Ballet Folklórico de México* performs re-imagined Aztec dances, and the recent film *Eréndira Ikikunari* tells the Purepecha legend of a young princess who resisted the Spanish conquistadors. Both productions draw inspiration from 16th century illustrated codices.¹⁶¹



Voladores in Papantla, Veracruz, Mexico
Flickr / Hugo Arciniega

Colonial Architecture and Arts



Milagrosa altar in Mexico City
Wikimedia / Px-lga

Mexico has more than a dozen UNESCO World Heritage Sites that testify to the importance of colonial architecture, including the entire historic center of Mexico City.¹⁶² Many of these are religious buildings and preserve the “Indocrisiano” art of early converts to Catholicism.¹⁶³ Catholic influence also made its way into traditional arts with clay figurines of the Virgin, metal *retablos* (devotional paintings) and *milagros* (healing charms), and streamers of *papel picado* (hand cut

paper) that decorate religious festivities.^{164, 165}

The traditional dancing of community fiestas took on a Catholic purpose in the celebration of saints' days, and a colonial appearance in the European features of dancers' masks.^{166, 167}

National Traditions

Mexican visual art is most famously represented in the Muralist movement of Diego Rivera, David Alfaro Siqueiros, and Jose Clemente Orozco. Siqueiros wrote: "Art must no longer be the expression of individual satisfaction (which) it is today, but should aim to become a fighting educative art for all."¹⁶⁸ Mexican murals appear throughout North America in public buildings such as the Detroit Institute of the Arts and the Pacific Stock Exchange in San Francisco.^{169, 170, 171} Mexico City's



*Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City
Flickr / Mario Alejandro Sánchez Martínez*

Palacio de Bellas Artes is an architectural expression of Mexican *mestizaje*, combining neoclassical, art nouveau, and art deco styles with pre-Hispanic motifs and modern murals. The stage curtain in the main hall is a million-piece Tiffany glass rendering of the volcanoes Popocatepetl and Ixtaccihuatl.^{172, 173, 174}

Mexico has a rich literary tradition and an active intellectual scene. Octavio Paz is as famous for resigning his government post in protest of the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre as for his essays and poetry.¹⁷⁵ Author, diplomat, and social critic Carlos Fuentes similarly resigned his ambassadorship. The narrator of his 2011 novel, *Destiny and Desire*, is a severed head considering the corrupt politics, drug violence, and telecom monopoly in Mexico.¹⁷⁶ Elena Poniatowska wrote key works on the Tlatelolco massacre (in which her brother was killed) and the Mexico City earthquake, and continues to work as a journalist and a fiction writer.^{177, 178} The National Commission for the Development of Indigenous Peoples (CDI) supports literary productions in indigenous languages.¹⁷⁹

In the performing arts, early 20th century educators taught a “national canon” of regional music and dance. By mid-century the *Ballet Folklorico de Mexico* was touring internationally with these expressions of *mexicanidad*. Dances include the *jarabe tapatio* (“Mexican Hat Dance”), and musical styles include the string and brass mariachi music of Jalisco, the Afro-Cuban influenced harp sounds of *son jarocho* from Veracruz, and the marimba bands of Oaxaca. Nineteenth century German immigrants contributed the button accordion and polka beat to dance and song of the *norteña* music style.^{180, 181, 182}



Jarabe Tapatio
Flickr / Gildardo Sánchez

Popular Culture



Huasteca trio at Watercolor Museum
Flickr / Alejandro Linares Garcia

Mexican popular culture often makes fun of the government and the upper class, and resists those authorities who try to censor or absorb it. *Corridos* are a musical example—songs that comment on events from the point of view of local, often “marginal” communities.^{183, 184} *Corridos* of the Revolution applauded the outlaw Pancho Villa and the rebel Emiliano Zapata. Recent *narcocorridos* cast drug lords as outlaw heroes, or criticize the “narcoculture” that fuels international drug trafficking.^{185, 186, 187} In print, populist engraver Jose Guadalupe Posada produced satirical *calaveras* (skeletons) of the Mexican society of his time that still have artistic and political appeal.^{188, 189, 190}

Official attempts to influence popular culture sometimes succeed. Films of the “golden age” contributed archetypes for national consumption such as the swaggering, singing *charro* and the virtuous, religious woman.¹⁹¹ When the “bad language” and “naked ladies” of early *historietas* (comic books) led to a government censorship office, religious and educational *historietas* soon appeared.¹⁹² However, Mexican authorities trying to outlaw *narcocorridos* are finding that the demand north of the border for these songs (as well as narcotics) makes enforcement difficult.¹⁹³

Sports and Recreation

The Mesoamerican ritual ball game may be the world’s oldest organized sport, played with the world’s first rubber ball. The game required a playing court and protective equipment, and the consequence of losing was sometimes death. Spanish friars suppressed the game as a pagan ritual, although a group of people from Sinaloa, a northwestern Mexican state, still play a team game with a small rubber ball and are trying to renew interest in it.^{194, 195, 196} Other indigenous athletic activities include the “flying” of the *voladores* in Veracruz, the long-distance running of the Tarahumara in the Copper Canyon area, and diving off cliffs, and into Yucatán *cenotes* (well or sinkhole).^{197, 198, 199} With horses and cattle from Spain came bullfighting—the *Plaza México* in Mexico City claims to be the largest bullfighting ring in the world—and the horse-handling contests of the *charreada*, the Mexican-style rodeo. Baseball and soccer are popular international sports.^{200, 201}

Lucha libre (“free fight”), the Mexican version of professional wrestling, is less brutal than the U.S. version, but more acrobatic and just as eccentric. Cultural observers see the Mexican political system reflected in this spectator sport where the competitors are masked, the rules are inconsistently enforced, the referees can be bribed, the outcome is fixed, and participants risk injury or death when the system breaks down.^{202, 203} *Lucha libre* gave rise to the Mexican “superhero” *El Santo*, who played the role of the “little guy” in the wrestling arena, fighting against the cheating *los rudos* (“bad guys”), and went on to star in magazines and movies.²⁰⁴ Until recently *lucha libre* avoided referencing drug violence in its performances.²⁰⁵



Lucha libre
Flickr / Pete Danksy

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Mexico in Perspective

Chapter 4 | Society

Assessment

1. The term mestizaje describes the mixed race of most Mexicans.
2. The largest numbers of the growing Protestant population are in the northern states near the border with the United States.
3. Since achieving its independence, the Mexican government has generally tried to reduce the influence of the Catholic Church.
4. In Mexico, men who display machismo are universally admired.
5. Ethnic identity can change depending on language and clothing.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True



*The Three Amigos meeting in Ottawa
Flickr / Presidencia de la República Mexicana*

Chapter 5 | Mexico in Perspective

Security

Introduction

Historically, Mexico's foreign policy focused on relations with the United States, but that focus has shifted in recent years.¹ Since the election of Enrique Peña Nieto as president in 2012, Mexico has sought to strengthen its position on the international stage. Domestic structural reforms are informing Mexico's foreign policy initiatives. Mexico's current foreign policy appears broadly concerned with three dimensions: geographical location, economic situation, and multilateral interests.^{2, 3} Mexico is expanding its relations with its Caribbean neighbors, particularly in the areas of trade, tourism and climate change. Similar interests are strengthening its relations with its other Latin American neighbors.⁴ Economic interests have prompted Mexico

to expand its Pacific Rim participation and build stronger relations with Japan and China. It recently joined the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP). Mexico is also a member of the G-20. Mexico is especially looking to expanded cooperation with Europe to help rebuild both social and economic infrastructure.⁵ Arguably, Mexico's most significant foreign relations are with the United States. Nearly one million people cross the border each day, more than one million dollars in trade occurs between the two countries every minute, and security concerns regarding illegal drugs and illegal immigration have long concerned the two countries.^{6, 7}

Mexico has significant internal security concerns as well. Violence has been a hallmark of life in Mexico since 2006 when Mexico's then-president, Felipe Calderón, declared war on the drug cartels.^{8, 9} Current-president, Peña Nieto, has made restoring peace and security a major item in his reform agenda. He has stressed the role of state police forces in bringing crime and violence under control but has met with mixed results.^{10, 11} In 2014, 43 students went missing in the state of Guerrero sparking massive protests and highlighting the government's failure to stem corruption or protect its citizens.¹² Corruption remains rife within the security forces and the police as evidenced by the escape of Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzmán from a federal prison in 2015.^{13, 14} Accusations of corruption continue to dog the Peña Nieto administration and the president himself, as well as his wife.^{15, 16, 17, 18}

U.S.-Mexico Relations

For the last 30-40 years, Mexico's relations with the United States have centered on economic ties. Since the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, Mexico has become the United States' second-largest trading partner. Many U.S. factories have relocated to Mexico creating dissension between the two countries. Ironically, the increased trade that resulted from NAFTA has generated commercial disputes.¹⁹



*USA/Mexico border Nogales, AZ
Flickr / Ryan Bavetta*

A persistent point of contention between the United States and Mexico is the issue of immigration. The number of Mexicans illegally crossing into the United States has dropped in recent years. In 2014, data revealed that more Mexican immigrants are returning to Mexico rather than coming to the United States, yet, illegal immigration

remains a divisive issue in the United States.^{20, 21, 22, 23} President Peña Nieto has angrily protested the U.S. deportation of illegal Mexican immigrants and stronger immigration laws aimed at reducing the flow of illegals into the United States.^{24, 25, 26} In 2014, Mexico and the United States agreed to work toward stemming the large migrant flow from Mexico.²⁷

Drugs and drug related crime continues to be a major issue. U.S. demand for illegal drugs has supported their production in and transit through Mexico for over a hundred years.²⁸ In 2018, the two governments signed the Mérida Initiative aimed at reducing drug crimes and enhancing border security. Between 2008 and 2014, the U.S. supplied USD 2.4 billion to fight Mexico's drug cartels.^{29, 30} These efforts, however, have contributed to the rise in violence in some states where vigilante groups are on the rise leading to an increase in lawlessness.^{31, 32} Both countries blame each other for some of the violence within their own borders in recent years.^{33, 34, 35, 36}

Water rights and environmental issues are sources of cooperation and tensions between the two nations.^{37, 38} Agreement among local, state, and federal agencies from both Mexico and the U.S. is difficult to achieve.^{39, 40} Water is only one of many environmental issues that have generated collaborative attempts.⁴¹ Environmental efforts have spawned cooperation on issues related to air pollution and solid waste.^{42,}

43

Relations with Neighboring Countries

Belize

Belize lies south of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, on the east coast of the Yucatán Peninsula facing the Caribbean Sea.⁴⁴ The Belize-Mexico border follows the Rio Hondo, which flows northeast into Chetumal Bay. Belize's Ambergris Cays extend south from Mexico's Xcalak peninsula to separate the bay from the Caribbean Sea. In the 1890s, Britain, as administrator of then-British Honduras, granted Mexico maritime transit rights in perpetuity from the port of Chetumal through Belizean waters to the open seas.^{45, 46}



*Chetumal Bay border crossing
Flickr / CarlosVanVegas*

Recently, Mexico has built the bridges at the international border crossings linking the two countries.⁴⁷ Respecting Belizean autonomy, Mexico supported negotiation to resolve the 200-year old border dispute between Belize and Guatemala which has recently been handed to the World Court.^{48, 49}

Both countries have expressed an interest in expanding their trade relations. In 2015, both nations signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to expand trade and investment relations.^{50, 51, 52} Belize's exports to Mexico rose 100% in 2014. In that year, Belize was the third-largest exporter to Mexico, which also provides educational and natural disaster assistance to Belize.^{53, 54, 55} In 2014, Belize was Mexico's third largest export destination.⁵⁶ The countries' Binational Commission coordinates shared work in many spheres, including environmental cleanup and security issues. Among the most concerning security issues are illegal weapons smuggling, the emergence of Mexican cartels in Belize, and human trafficking.^{57, 58, 59}

Guatemala



Mexico-Guatemala border
Wikimedia / Joachim Pietsch

Guatemala lies southeast of Mexico, at the political divide between North and Central America.⁶⁰ Guatemala considered the Mexican state of Chiapas part of its territory until 1883, when it signed a treaty recognizing Chiapas as part of Mexico.⁶¹ Today, the 958 km (595 mi) Guatemala-Mexico border is partly defined by the Usumacinta River, which flows northwest from Guatemalan highlands to the Bay of Campeche in the Gulf of Mexico.⁶² Though much shorter than the Mexico-U.S. border, the jungle climate and volcanic terrain make it a more difficult border to manage. Several Mexican cartels have crossed into Guatemala threatening security in the region.^{63, 64, 65, 66}

Many migrants from other Central American countries transit through Guatemala into Mexico on their way to the United States. The Mexican government, in 2014, agreed to issue "Regional Visitor Cards" to the migrants allowing them to remain in Mexico indefinitely until they cross into the United States.⁶⁷

Guatemala and Mexico (and Honduras and El Salvador) finalized a new free trade agreement in 2013.⁶⁸ Guatemala is Mexico's largest Central American trade partner,

although the trade dollars are marginal to Mexico's economy.^{69, 70} Between 2010 and 2012, the total trade between the countries averaged USD 2.27 million. Mexico is Guatemala's fifth-largest export market and second-largest provider of imports, a move that angered some in the United States.⁷¹ In response to pressures from the U.S. to staunch the flow of illegal Central American immigration, Mexico deported more than 105,000 Central Americans, mostly from Guatemala in 2014 and continued their efforts into 2015.^{72, 73} Mexico has stepped up its security efforts to thwart human trafficking from Guatemala. In September 2015, for example, Mexico, in coordination with the United States, Guatemala, and El Salvador, arrested 36 human traffickers, known locally as "coyotes."^{74, 75}

Police Forces

Mexican police forces are estimated to be between 410,000 and 544,000 strong. Each of Mexico's approximately 2,457 municipalities has its own force. The National Public Security System (SNSP), established in 1995, aids in the coordination and distribution of public security affairs between municipalities and the federal government.⁷⁶ The municipal police forces constitute the largest percentage of police in the nation.⁷⁷ The quality of the police forces across Mexico's 31 states is highly variable. In some states, corruption and incompetence among the police force is rife. In other states, forces compare favorably with those in developed Western nations.^{78, 79} The *policía preventiva* maintain public order, while the *policía judicial* investigate crime.^{80, 81} The Federal Police, which replaced the Federal Preventative Police (PFP) in 2009, are responsible for handling federal crimes, including drug trafficking.^{82, 83} In 2013, President Enrique Peña Nieto announced plans to reform the security forces. His plan replaced the federal police and put them under the control of the Ministry of the Interior. He also created a national gendarmerie which began operation in 2014 with 5,000 officers.^{84, 85, 86, 87}



Mexico City riot police
Flickr / Daniel Case

Reform, Abuse, and Corruption

For nearly four decades, police reform has occupied the attention of every Mexican president.⁸⁸ In recent reforms, federal police forces were reorganized in attempts to reduce corruption and increase effectiveness against transnational criminal threats. In 1999, federal highway, fiscal, and immigration forces merged with a brigade of military police into the Federal Preventive Police, which handles serious crimes such as kidnapping and trafficking in humans, arms, and drugs.⁸⁹



*Mexican Federal Police
Wikimedia / VidalJuan*

In 2001, on the order of President Vicente Fox, the Federal Attorney General's Office (PGR) replaced the Federal Judicial Police with the Federal Agency of Investigation (AFI), which investigates and prosecutes federal crimes.⁹⁰

In spite of reforms, however, corruption and allegations of human rights violations by the police persist. Recent cases of abuse suggest that the reforms have not been effective in ending corruption and abuse.^{91, 92} In 2014, 43 students in the state of Guerrero disappeared, allegedly killed by police, allegedly on orders from the local mayor who was in cahoots with criminal elements.^{93, 94} In October 2015, more than fifty civilians died in extrajudicial killings by the federal police in the state of Michoacán.⁹⁵ Efforts to end corruption have not fared any better. In 2012, the entire police force in the coastal city of Veracruz was disbanded in an anticorruption operation.⁹⁶ In 2014, 18,000 municipal officers failed vetting tests. Most were concentrated in 10 states including Baja California Sur, Guerrero, Jalisco, Oaxaca, Sinaloa, and Veracruz. Low salaries and low levels of education are major contributing factors to police corruption.⁹⁷ Mexicans have traditionally believed the federal police to be less corruptible than state and local forces. When they, too, are suspected of dishonesty, the president turns to the military.^{98, 99, 100}

Military Armed Forces of Mexico (Fuerzas Armadas de México)

The Mexican Military has between 270,000 and 276,000 active members and supplemented with an estimated 76,500 to 93,000 reserve forces.^{101, 102} The largest branch is the Army with approximately 203,000 active personnel, followed by the Navy (36,200), the Marines (24,100) and Air Force (12,700).¹⁰³ Mexico's military has constitutional authority to defend the integrity of Mexico's territory against external aggression; defend against internal disruption; and defend the civilian population during natural disasters or other emergencies.^{104, 105} Recently, defense against internal aggression has moved to the forefront, as witnessed by operations against guerillas in Chiapas and Guerrero states since the 1990s and against transnational crime organizations (TCOs) in 10 Mexican states since 2006.^{106, 107} As a result, conventional fighting capabilities have suffered. Today's military is dependent on obsolete equipment and armor. There is no indication that this situation will change radically in the near future.^{108, 109, 110}



Military Armed Forces of Mexico
Wikimedia / Master Sgt. Adam M. Stump

Under the President as Commander-in-Chief, the army's top general heads the Ministry of National Defense, which is responsible for the Army and Air Force. The navy's top admiral heads the Ministry of the Navy, responsible for the Navy and the Marines.¹¹¹ Joint operations across different army, air force, and navy protocols have proven problematic.¹¹² According to the constitution, Mexican troops cannot be deployed outside of Mexico although President Peña Nieto announced that Mexico would participate in U.N. peacekeeping missions beginning in 2014.¹¹³ Mexico operates an all-volunteer army but Mexico requires registration for an annual lottery that selects young men for a year of once-a-week reserves training. Registration is voluntary for females.^{114, 115}

Army (*Ejército Mexicano*)

Mexico's army is a light infantry force. The focus on internal security has compromised conventional fighting capacity. Nearly 30,000 troops are deployed to assist with conventional law enforcement activities, mostly against drug cartels. In addition to the three infantry brigades, two armored brigades, and one paratroop brigade, there is also a Disaster Case Reaction Force capable of deploying within 72 hours to assist with natural disasters.¹¹⁶ The country is divided into 12 military regions further subdivided in 46 military zones. Each of these zones has at least one cavalry regiment and infantry battalion.¹¹⁷ Morale among the soldiers in Mexico's army is low but has been increasing among non-commissioned officer ranks in recent years. To increase morale, the government enacted a number of measures including pay raises, expanded healthcare, and better training. Professionalism within the army is among the highest in Latin America.¹¹⁸



Mexican Army
Wikimedia / BSMFBSMF

Navy (*Armada de México*)



Mexican Navy
Wikimedia / Stan Shebs

Mexico's navy, which includes a force of roughly 24,000 marines, is an efficient coastal patrol force with approximately 143 naval craft including 6 frigates, 2 destroyers, 21 coastal defense craft, 2 missile-armed corvettes, and 11 mine warfare vessels.^{119, 120} The navy is in the process of updating and expanding its fleet including the recent purchase of three new patrol vessels.^{121, 122} The navy also has three Special Forces Units with a high state of readiness. One force is present on the Pacific coast, one on the Gulf coast and the third in Mexico City.¹²³ The navy is concerned mainly with fighting organized crime within the country including interdicting illegal drug shipments and intelligence gathering. Conventional forces and capabilities are minimal.¹²⁴

Although the constitution prohibits deployment outside of the nation, the Mexican navy took part in relief operations in Haiti, Indonesia, Central America, and the United States.¹²⁵ Recent recruitment have centered on attracting skilled personnel into the force. Both males and females are eligible to enlist in the volunteer force. Morale in the navy is much higher than in the other forces. The navy is a highly professional force that has remained largely untouched by the corruption and scandals in other branches of the security forces. This untarnished reputation makes the Marines the preferred forces for any counter-cartel operations inside Mexico.^{126, 127}

Air Force (Fuerza Aérea Mexicana: FAM)

Mexico's Air Force is equipped with a total of roughly 400 aircraft including 6 fighter/interceptor craft, 42 fixed-wing attack craft, 189 helicopters, and 239 transport aircraft.¹²⁸ FAM has some, but incomplete, autonomy from the army. The force is efficient and well trained with a mission largely confined to anti-narcotics operations and natural disaster response.¹²⁹ The force is largely male but in 2008, the first female aviator graduated from aviator training in 2011. The FAM has some trouble recruiting personnel. Morale within FAM is typically low and desertions have impacted force readiness and operations. The Air Force increased its pay and benefits in an effort to counter this trend. The efforts have been somewhat successful as desertions since 2010 have declined somewhat.¹³⁰



Mexican Air Force F-5 Tiger
Wikimedia / Secretaria de la Defensa Nacional

Issues Affecting Stability

According to A.M. Best, Mexico is at moderate risk for political instability but those risks remain largely internal.^{131, 132} In spite of President Peña Nieto's campaign promises to improve security, reduce crime, and eliminate corruption, those promises remain unfilled in 2016. Economic problems, scandals, dissatisfaction with the government and drug violence have sparked numerous protests throughout the nation, some of which have turned violent.^{133, 134, 135} Arguably, the major threat in 2016 emanates from drug cartels.^{136, 137} Mexico's drug violence has spawned the growth of vigilante forces known as "*autodefensas*" which formed to protect civilians against the cartels.

Yet, these self-defense forces have increased the violence in some parts of the nation.^{138, 139, 140} The states most affected by current cartel violence include Guerrero, Jalisco, Michoacán, and Tamaulipas. In addition, organized crime groups are on the rise in the states of Hidalgo, Puebla, Sinaloa, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz.¹⁴¹

Social Unrest



*Yo Soy 123 protests in Mexico City
Wikimedia / Protoplasmakid*

Social unrest is likely to increase in the near term. The government's increasing unpopularity, combined with economic problems and growing inequality will fuel many such protests. Historically, protests have been confined to blockades, disrupting traffic, and minor vandalism but that could change. Anti-mining movements, unions, and landowners are growing more powerful and have staged protests against some natural resource companies. These can cause expensive disruptions to the

affected companies, which have the potential to affect economic growth in Mexico. The strong teacher's union is particularly militant and is likely to continue with large protests and demonstrations in the coming years. Other unions may join the protest over poor working conditions, pay, and other labor violations.^{142, 143, 144} Growing anger over rising poverty and inequality could spark protests that may weaken the national economic agenda. Mexico's high rates of inequality have also been correlated with increasing rates of violence in the nation.^{145, 146}

Another economic risk is the depleting reserves of Mexican oil on which much of the economy depends. Current proven reserves of between 9.7 and 9.9 billion barrels could be exhausted in 10 years at an extraction rate of 3 million barrels per day.^{147, 148, 149} Decreases in oil revenues will have a negative impact on the national budget and international trade balance if alternative income sources are not generated. To help find new oil sources, the government opened up oil exploration contracts.^{150, 151}

Water Security

Mexico is running out of water and polluting its dwindling supplies.^{152, 153, 154} Mexico is overdrawing more water than is replaced each year. Current levels of water use are unsustainable and without change to policies and infrastructure, Mexico could face

severe shortages in 15 years.¹⁵⁵

Mexico's 20th century population growth and agricultural "greening" of arid lands is no longer sustainable.^{156, 157, 158} Water shortages are creating conflicts internally—for example, between the State of Mexico and the Federal District over depleted aquifers. An international conflict exists between Mexico and the United States over the Colorado River. Disruptive protest—blocking roads, occupying public spaces, etc.—has a long tradition in Mexico, and water issues have motivated both local and international actions in recent years.^{159, 160}



*Untreated sewage flowing into lake
Wikispaces / TES Teach*

Outlook



*Chihuahua Mexico
Wikimedia / Ted McGrath*

Mexico's short-term security outlook is unsettled but not at serious risk of government failure. To secure its stability the current government needs to implement effective legislation aimed at improving human development, economic growth and employment opportunities, and improve the rule of law in the nation.¹⁶¹ The ability of the current government to continue depends on its ability to maintain key alliances with smaller political parties. President Peña Nieto will have to continue to rely on a coalition government to pass legislation and address constitutional changes. This may become more difficult as his popularity, already the lowest in Mexico's history, continues to decline.^{162, 163, 164, 165} There are signs, however, that the president may lose his slim majority in the Congress as minority parties reconsider their alliance. Nevertheless, it is unlikely that the ruling PRI party will lose power until the next election in 2018.¹⁶⁶ The growing strength of emerging cartels such as the New Generation Jalisco Cartel are likely to stymie any real success at ending organized crime and corruption throughout local governments. Threats of assassination remain a real risk for local mayors. In January 2016, a local mayor in the state of Morelos was murdered by armed gunmen who seized her from her home.^{167, 168}

Country in Perspective | Mexico

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Mexico in Perspective

Chapter 5 | Security

Assessment

1. Mexico's foreign policy is guided almost exclusively by economic relations.
2. Mexico's relations with the United States are primarily economic in nature.
3. Guatemala's historical claim to the Mexican state of Chiapas continues to cause diplomatic tensions between the two nations.
4. Major reforms in the police forces in Mexico have substantially limited corruption.
5. Mexico's navy has been relative unscathed by the scandals that have tarnished other branches of the military.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True

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Further Readings and Resources

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Mexico in Perspective

Final Assessment

1. Most Mexicans are rural peasants.
2. Mexico is home to active volcanoes.
3. Mexico City is home to the country's largest community of expatriates from the United States.
4. Government policies from the 20th century discouraged economic cooperation across the Mexican-U.S border.
5. People are using up Mexico's water supplies faster than nature can replenish them.
6. The Olmecs, Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Mayans, and people of Teotihuacan had disappeared by the time of the Spanish conquest.
7. Success in Spanish colonial society required the sponsorship of a personal patron.
8. The Spanish subjugated all the local peoples and achieved firm control throughout New Spain.
9. The Mexican Revolution was a communist revolution that made Mexico a socialist state.

10. Mexico has been a multi-party democracy since the end of the revolution.
11. The United States is Mexico's most important trade partner.
12. Most Mexicans are farmers.
13. Approximately six in ten Mexicans work in the informal economy.
14. Mexico is one of the world's largest recipients of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) dollars.
15. Due to economic nationalism, Mexican banks must be domestically owned.
16. Rates of violence against women in Mexico are among the highest in the world.
17. In creations such as corridos and lucha libre, Mexicans poke fun at political and social problems.
18. Traditional Mexican clothing is usually reserved for folk festivals.
19. Most of the Mexican population are indigenous peoples.
20. Mexican national cuisine is a mix of regional native dishes and colonial imports. chiles, and cactus remain basic ingredients of most dishes.

21. Roughly one million people a day cross the international border between the United States and Mexico.
22. The United States financial aid to Mexico has contributed to a decrease in violence throughout Mexico.
23. Belize is Mexico's largest trading partner in Latin America.
24. Water is a long-standing source of contention between Mexico and the United States.
25. The shorter border between Guatemala and Mexico is relatively easy to police.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True; 6. False; 7. True; 8. False; 9. False; 10. False; 11. True; 12. False; 13. True; 14. True; 15. False; 16. True; 17. True; 18. False; 19. False; 20. True; 21. True; 22. False; 23. False; 24. True; 25. False.