

10 Mexico

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Official Name: United Mexican States (Estados Unidos Mexicanos)

Location: Southern North America

Capital City: Mexico City

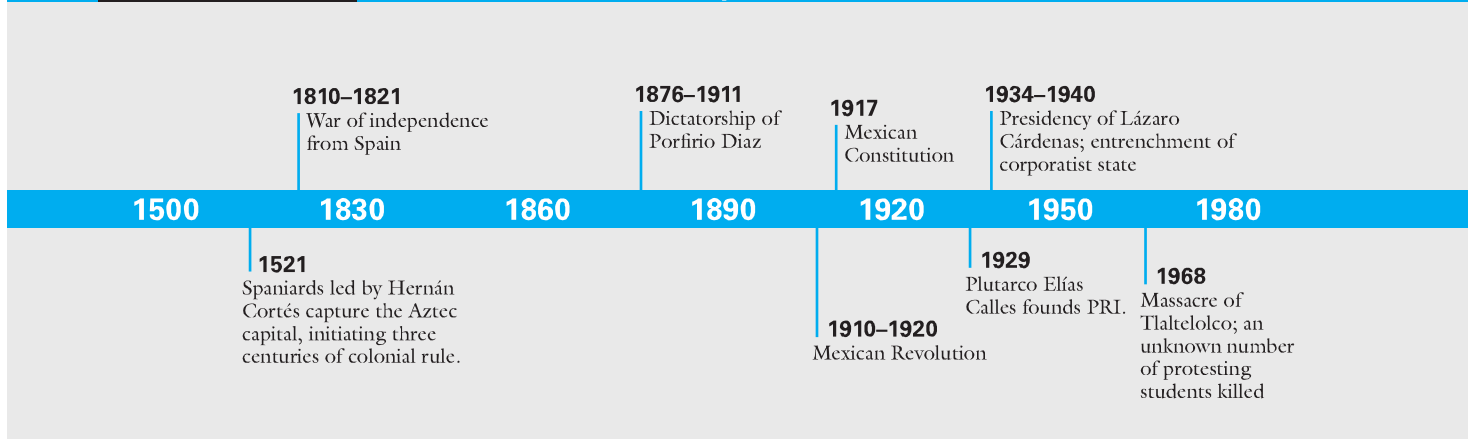
Population (2010): 112.5 million

Size: 1,972,550 sq. km.; slightly less than three times the size of Texas



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CHRONOLOGY of Mexico's Political Development



SECTION 1

THE MAKING OF THE MODERN MEXICAN STATE

Focus Questions

In what ways have the critical junctures of Mexican history grown out of the country's relations with other countries, especially the United States?

How did the Revolution of 1910 shape Mexico's development? A century later, is the Revolution still relevant to Mexican politics today?

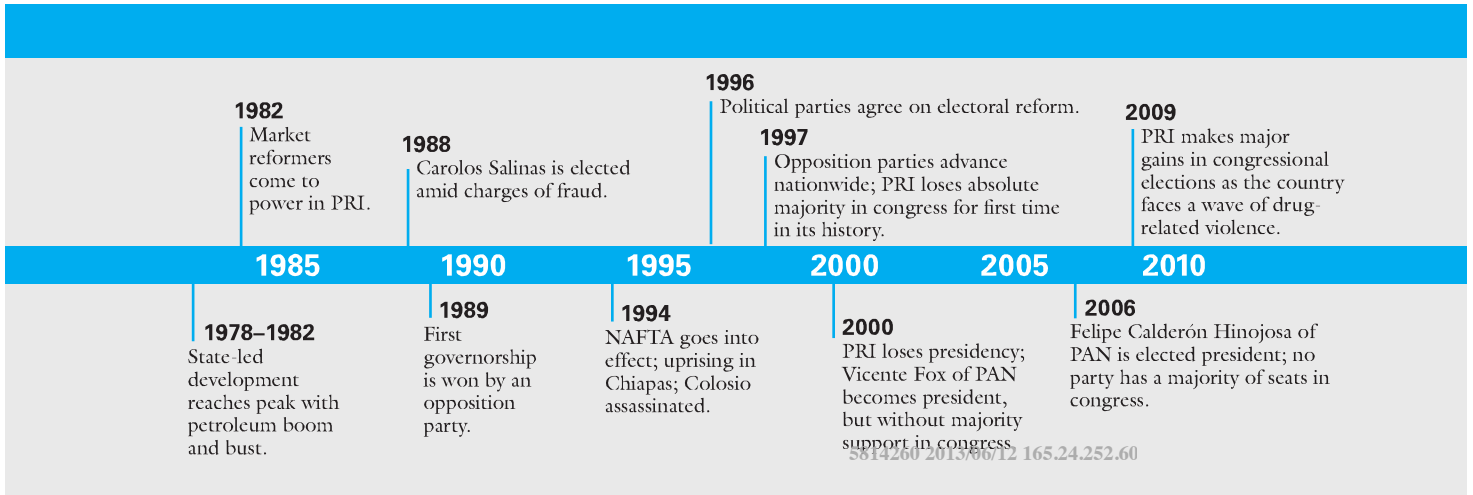
What were the bases of political stability in Mexico through most of the twentieth century? What factors contributed to Mexico's democratic transition at the end of the century?

How has recent drug-related violence in Mexico affected the country's politics?

Politics in Action

On June 28, 2010, just days before state elections were due to be held in many parts of Mexico, gunmen intercepted and opened fire on the motorcade in which the leading candidate for the governorship of Tamaulipas was traveling, killing the candidate, Rodolfo Torre Cantú of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and six of his aides. Though the motive behind the attack was unclear, the shocking incident took place in a state strategically located on the country's Gulf coast, south of the border with Texas, an area that has been wracked by violence between competing drug trafficking organizations and between those organizations and Mexican authorities, especially since President Felipe Calderón launched an effort to crack down on organized crime shortly after taking office in December 2006. The assassination was part of a wave of violence that is reckoned to have claimed some 35,000 lives in less than five years, and it raised fears that the fight against drug cartels could have a profoundly destabilizing effect on the nation's politics.

The bloodshed in Tamaulipas and elsewhere has been an alarming development in a country that had experienced decades of stability under PRI administrations during the second half of the twentieth century. Moreover, for a nation that optimistically embraced the transition to a more pluralistic, more democratic political system after an opposition victory in the 2000 presidential election brought an end to the PRI regime, the violence, political stalemate, and economic stagnation of recent years have been deeply discouraging. More than a decade after the fall of the PRI's "perfect dictatorship"—so-called because of its ability to perpetuate itself, generally without having to resort to overt repression—Mexico and its 112 million people are facing the challenges of institutional reform, economic development, and integration into complex global networks, even as they continue to adjust to new and evolving political realities.



The results of the elections that followed Torre's assassination gave an indication of some of the ways in which the Mexican political landscape continues to shift. Voters in twelve of Mexico's thirty-one states went to the polls on July 4, 2010, to elect new governors (re-election is not permitted in the Mexican political system). In Tamaulipas, Egidio Torres Cantú took the place of his murdered brother on the ballot and became one of nine PRI candidates to win election, highlighting the continuing viability and nationwide presence of a party that many had dismissed as a discredited and spent political force after it lost the presidency in 2000. In three other states, however, coalitions of parties opposed to the PRI captured the governorship. These political alliances were remarkable in that they brought together the right-of-center National Action Party (PAN) and the left-of-center Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), which were bitter rivals during the 2006 presidential campaign. Indeed, the PRD's candidate that year, Andres Manuel López Obrador, refused to concede defeat to Felipe Calderón of the PAN, claiming that he had been the victim of electoral fraud and proclaiming himself the "legitimate" president of Mexico. The willingness of these two parties to cooperate in state elections in 2010, despite their ideological differences, reflected their shared fear of a comeback by the PRI. In the most closely watched contest of the day, the poor southern state of Oaxaca, which had been governed for decades by a ruthlessly effective PRI political machine, opted for the opposition candidate for the governorship by a narrow margin, giving the PAN and the PRD cause for celebration.

Perhaps the most remarkable aspect of the July 4 election results, however, was the fact that so many of both the PRI and the PAN-PRD victories represented a defeat for the incumbent party in states where elections were held that day. PRI candidates unseated one PRD and two PAN administrations, and all three PAN-PRD victories came in states governed by the PRI. These outcomes can be interpreted as a reflection of Mexicans' disillusionment with many of their leaders but also as an encouraging sign that voters in what was until recently an authoritarian state have come to see alternation in power and peaceful transitions between parties as a natural and desirable part of the political process. As Mexicans turn their attention to what is expected to be a fiercely contested presidential election in 2012, these democratic values will surely influence their choice of the candidate who is, in their view, best equipped to meet the daunting challenges that the country faces: restoring a sense of security in a society that has been scarred by violence, establishing the rule of law and combating impunity in a country whose police forces and criminal justice system are undergoing a difficult process of reform, reducing inequality in a nation that is home to both the

world's richest man and to millions who live in extreme poverty, and creating jobs and opportunities in an economy that has found growing integration into global markets to be both a blessing and a curse.

Geographic Setting

Mexico includes coastal plains, high plateaus, fertile valleys, rain forests, and deserts within an area slightly less than three times the size of Texas. Two imposing mountain ranges run the length of Mexico: the Sierra Madre Occidental to the west and the Sierra Madre Oriental to the east. Mexico's geography has made communication and transportation between regions difficult and infrastructure expensive. Mountainous terrain limits large-scale commercial agriculture to irrigated fields in the north, while the center and south produce a wide variety of crops on small farms. The country is rich in oil, silver, and other natural resources, but it has long struggled to manage those resources wisely. (See Figure 10.1 for the Mexican nation at a glance.)

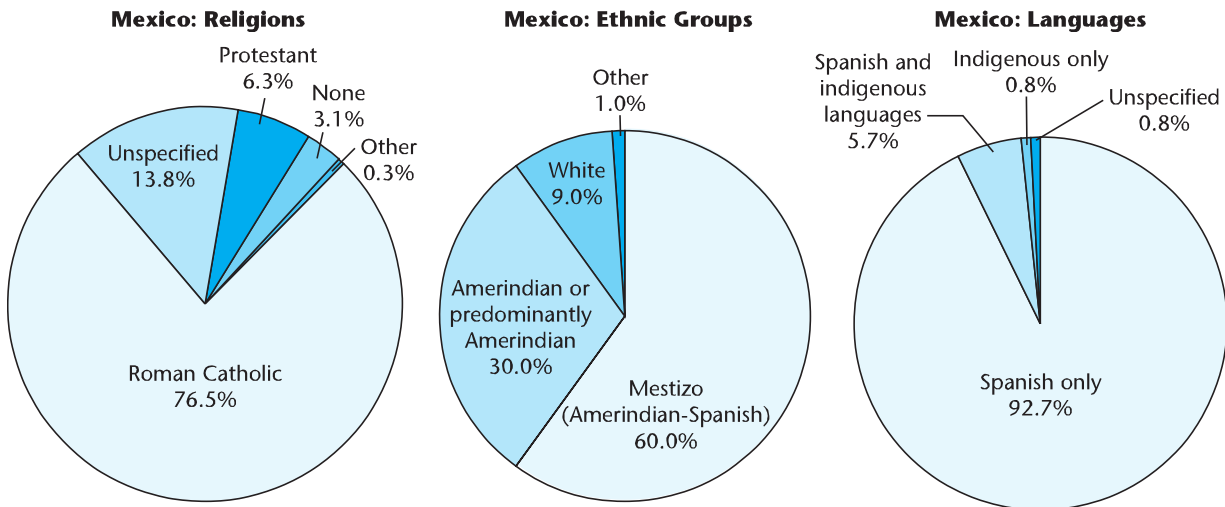
Mexico is the second-largest nation in Latin America after Portuguese-speaking Brazil and the largest Spanish-speaking nation in the world. Sixty percent of the population is *mestizo*, or people of mixed **Amerindian** and Spanish descent. About 30 percent of the population claims Amerindian descent, although only 6 percent

mestizo

A person of mixed white, indigenous (Amerindian), and sometimes African descent.

Amerindian

Original peoples of North and South America; indigenous people.



Mexican Currency

Peso (\$)
 International Designation: MXN
 Exchange Rate (2010): US\$1 = 12.69 MXN
 100 Peso Note Design: Nezahualcoyotl (1402–1472), pre-Columbian ruler and poet



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FIGURE 10.1 The Mexican Nation at a Glance

Table 10.1 Political Organization	
Political System	Federal republic
Regime History	Current form of government since 1917
Administrative Structure	Federal system with thirty-one states and a federal district (Mexico City)
Executive	President, elected by direct election with a six-year term of office; reelection not permitted
Legislature	Bicameral Congress. Senate (upper house) and Chamber of Deputies (lower house); elections held every three years. There are 128 senators, 3 from each of the thirty-one states, 3 from the federal (capital) district, and 32 elected nationally by proportional representation for six-year terms. The 500 members of the Chamber of Deputies are elected for three-year terms from 300 electoral districts, 300 by simple majority vote and 200 by proportional representation.
Judiciary	Independent federal and state court system headed by a Supreme Court with eleven justices appointed by the president and approved by the Senate.
Party System	Multiparty system. One-party dominant (Institutional Revolutionary Party) system from 1929 until 2000. Major parties: National Action Party, Institutional Revolutionary Party, and the Party of the Democratic Revolution.

speaks an indigenous language rather than Spanish. The largest **indigenous groups** are the Maya in the south and the Náhuatl in the central regions, with well over 1 million members each. Although Mexicans pride themselves on their Amerindian heritage, issues of race and class divide society.

Mexico became a largely urban country in the second half of the twentieth century. Mexico City, in fact, is one of the world's largest metropolitan areas, with about 20 million inhabitants. Migration both within and beyond Mexico's borders has become a major issue. Greater economic opportunities in the industrial cities of the north lead many men and women to seek work there in the *maquiladoras*, or assembly industries. Many job seekers continue on to the United States. On Mexico's southern border, many thousands of Central Americans look for better prospects in Mexico and beyond.

indigenous groups

Population of Amerindian heritage in Mexico.

maquiladoras

Factories that produce goods for export, often located along the U.S.–Mexican border.

Critical Junctures

Independence and Instability (1810–1876)

After a small band of Spanish forces led by Hernán Cortés toppled the Aztec Empire in 1521, Spain ruled Mexico for three centuries. Colonial policy was designed to extract wealth from the territory, ensuring that economic benefits flowed to the mother country. The rulers of New Spain, as the colony was known, sought to



maintain a commitment to the Roman Catholic religion and the subordination of the Amerindian population.

In 1810, a parish priest in central Mexico named Miguel Hidalgo began the first of a series of wars for independence. Although independence was gained in 1821, Mexico struggled to create a stable and legitimate government for decades afterward. Liberals and conservatives, monarchists and republicans, federalists and centralists, and those who sought to expand the power of the church and those who sought to curtail it were all engaged in the battle. Between 1833 and 1855, thirty-six presidential administrations came to power.

During the disorganized period after independence, Mexico lost half its territory. Central America (with the exception of what is today the Mexican state of Chiapas) rejected rule from Mexico City in 1823, and the northern territory of Texas won independence in a war ending in 1836. After Texas became a U.S. state in 1845, a border dispute led the United States to declare war on Mexico in 1846. U.S. forces invaded the port city of Veracruz, and with considerable loss of civilian lives, they marched toward Mexico City, where they fought the final battle of the war at Chapultepec Castle. An 1848 treaty recognized the loss of Texas and gave the United States title to what later became the states of New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Arizona, California, and part of Colorado for about \$18 million, leaving a legacy of deep resentment toward the United States.

After the war, liberals and conservatives continued their struggle over issues of political and economic order and, in particular, the power of the Catholic Church. The Constitution of 1857 incorporated many of the goals of the liberals, such as a somewhat democratic government, a bill of rights, and limitations on the power of the church. In 1861, Spain, Great Britain, and France occupied Veracruz to collect debts owed by Mexico. The French army continued on to Mexico City, where it subdued

the weak government, and installed a European prince as the Emperor Maximilian (1864–1867). Conservatives welcomed this respite from liberal rule. Benito Juárez returned to the presidency in 1867 after defeating and executing Maximilian. Juárez is still hailed in Mexico today as an early proponent of more democratic government.

The Porfiriato (1876–1911)

Over the next few years, a popular retired general named Porfirio Díaz became increasingly dissatisfied with what he thought was a “lot of politics” and “little action.” After several failed attempts to win the presidency, he finally took the office in 1876. He established a dictatorship—known as the *Porfiriato*—that lasted thirty-four years and was at first welcomed by many because it brought sustained stability to the country.

Díaz imposed a highly centralized authoritarian system to create political order and economic progress. Over time, he relied increasingly on a small clique of advisers, known as *científicos* (scientists), who wanted to adopt European technologies and values to modernize the country. Díaz and the *científicos* encouraged foreign investment and amassed huge personal fortunes. During the *Porfiriato*, this small elite group monopolized political power and reserved lucrative economic investments for itself. Economic and political opportunities were closed off for new generations of middle- and upper-class Mexicans, who became increasingly resentful of the greed of the Porfirians and frustrated by their own lack of opportunities.

The Revolution of 1910 and the Sonoran Dynasty (1910–1934)

The legacies of the distant past are still felt, but the most formative event in the country's modern history was the Revolution of 1910, which ended the *Porfiriato* and was the first great social revolution of the twentieth century. The revolution was fought

GLOBAL CONNECTION



Conquest or Encounter?

The year 1519, when the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés arrived on the shores of the Yucatán Peninsula, is often considered the starting point of Mexican political history. The land that was to become New Spain and then Mexico was home to extensive and complex indigenous civilizations that were advanced in agriculture, architecture, and political and economic organization. By 1519, diverse groups had fallen under the power of the militaristic Aztec Empire, which extended throughout what is today central and southern Mexico.

Cortés and the colonial masters who came after him subjected indigenous groups to forced labor; robbed them of gold, silver, and land; and introduced flora and fauna from Europe that destroyed long-existing aqueducts and irrigation systems. They also brought alien forms of property rights and authority relationships, a religion that viewed indigenous practices as the devil's work, and an economy based on mining and cattle—all of which soon overwhelmed existing structures of social and economic organization. Within a century, wars, savage exploitation at the hands of the Spaniards,

and the introduction of European diseases reduced the indigenous population from an estimated 25 million to 1 million or fewer. Even so, the Spanish never constituted more than a small percentage of the total population, and massive racial mixing among the Indians, Europeans, and to a lesser extent Africans produced a new *raza*, or *mestizo* race.

What does it mean to be Mexican? Is one the conquered or the conqueror? While celebrating Amerindian achievements in food, culture, the arts, and ancient civilization, middle-class Mexico has the contradictory sense that to be “Indian” nowadays is to be backward. But perhaps the situation is changing, with the upsurge of indigenous movements from both the grassroots and the international level striving to promote ethnic pride, defend rights, and foster the teaching of Indian languages.

The collision of two worlds still resonates. Is Mexico colonial or modern? Third or First World? Southern or Northern? Is the United States an ally or a conqueror? Many Mexicans at once welcome and fear full integration into the global economy, asking themselves: Is globalization a new form of conquest?

by a variety of forces for a variety of reasons, which made the consolidation of power that followed as significant as the revolution itself.

Díaz had promised an open election for president, and in 1910, Francisco I. Madero presented himself as a candidate. Madero and his reform-minded allies hoped that a new class of politically ambitious citizens would move into positions of power. When this opposition swelled, Díaz jailed Madero and tried to repress growing dissent. But the clamor for change forced Díaz into exile. Madero was elected in 1911, but he was soon using the military to put down revolts by reformers and reactionaries alike. When Madero was assassinated during a **coup d'état** in 1913, political order collapsed.

coup d'état

A forceful, extra-constitutional action resulting in the removal of an existing government.

At the same time that middle-class reformers struggled to displace Díaz, a peasant revolt that focused on land claims erupted in the central and southern states of the country. This revolt had roots in legislation that made it easy for wealthy landowners and ranchers to claim the lands of peasant villagers. Villagers armed themselves and joined forces under a variety of local leaders. The most famous was Emiliano Zapata. His manifesto, the Plan de Ayala, became the cornerstone of the radical agrarian reform that became part of the Constitution of 1917.

In the north, Francisco (Pancho) Villa's forces combined military maneuvers with banditry, looting, and warlordism. In 1916, troops from the United States entered Mexico to punish Villa for an attack on U.S. territory. The presence of U.S. troops on Mexican soil resulted in increased public hostility toward the United States. Feelings against the United States were already running high because of the 1914 occupation of the city of Veracruz by American forces sent by President Woodrow Wilson in response to an incident involving the detention of several U.S. sailors by Mexican authorities.



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In 1914, Pancho Villa met with Emiliano Zapata in Mexico City to discuss the revolution and their separate goals for its outcome.

Source: <http://www.russellmeansfreedom.com/tag/emiliano-zapata/>.

The Mexican Constitution of 1917 was forged out of the diverse and often conflicting interests of the various factions that arose during the 1910 Revolution. It established a formal set of political institutions and guaranteed citizens a range of progressive social and economic rights: agrarian reform, social security, the right to organize in unions, a minimum wage, an eight-hour workday, profit sharing for workers, universal secular education, and adult male suffrage. Despite these socially advanced provisions, the constitution did not provide suffrage for women, who had to wait until 1953 to vote in local elections and 1958 to vote in national elections. To limit the power of foreign investors, only Mexican citizens or the government could own land or rights to water and other natural resources. Numerous articles severely limited the power of the Roman Catholic Church, long a target of liberals who wanted Mexico to be a secular state. Despite such noble sentiments, violence continued as competing leaders sought to assert power and displace their rivals.

Power was gradually consolidated in the hands of a group of revolutionary leaders from the north of the country. Known as the Sonoran Dynasty, after their home state of Sonora, these leaders were committed to a capitalist model of economic development. Eventually, one of the Sonorans, Plutarco Elías Calles, emerged as the *jefe máximo*, or supreme leader. After his presidential term (1924–1928), Calles managed to select and dominate his successors from 1929 to 1934. The consolidation of power under his control was accompanied by extreme **anticlericalism**, which eventually resulted in the outbreak of a violent conflict, known as the *Cristiada*, between the government and devout followers of the Catholic Church's conservative leadership.

In 1929, Calles brought together many of the most powerful contenders for leadership to create a political party. The bargain he offered was simple: Contenders for power would accommodate each other's interests in the expectation that without political violence, the country would prosper and they would be able to reap the benefits of even greater power and economic spoils. For the ~~next seven decades~~, Calles's bargain ensured nonviolent conflict resolution among elites and the uninterrupted rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) in national politics.

Although the revolution that began in 1910 was complex and the interests contending for power in its aftermath were numerous, there were five clear results of this protracted conflict. First, the power of traditional rural landowners was undercut. But in the years after the revolution, wealthy elites would again emerge in rural areas, even though they would never again be so powerful in national politics nor would their power be so unchecked in local areas. Second, the influence of the Catholic Church was strongly curtailed. Third, the power of foreign investors was severely limited. Henceforth, Mexican nationalism would shape economic policy-making. Fourth, a new political elite consolidated power and agreed to resolve conflicts through accommodation and bargaining rather than through violence. And fifth, the new constitution and the new party laid the basis for a strong central government that could assert its power over agricultural, industrial, and social development.

anticlericalism

Opposition to the power of churches or clergy in politics. In some countries, for example, France and Mexico, this opposition has focused on the role of the Catholic Church in politics.

Lázaro Cárdenas, Agrarian Reform, and the Workers (1934–1940)

In 1934, Plutarco Elías Calles handpicked Lázaro Cárdenas as the official candidate for the presidency. He fully anticipated that Cárdenas would go along with his behind-the-scenes management of the country. To his great surprise, Cárdenas executed a virtual coup that established his own supremacy.¹ Even more unexpectedly, Cárdenas mobilized peasants and workers in pursuit of the more radical goals of the 1910 revolution. During his administration, more than 49 million acres of land were distributed, nearly twice as much as had been parceled out by all the previous