



# Government in Mexico: Revolution and Reform

## MAIN IDEA

Through periods of reform and revolution, Mexico struggled to establish a strong democratic national government.

## WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Other countries, such as the United States, are more willing to work as partners with Mexico because its government is democratic.

## TERMS & NAMES

Benito Juárez

Francisco Madero

*hacienda*

Emiliano Zapata

*ejido*

Institutional

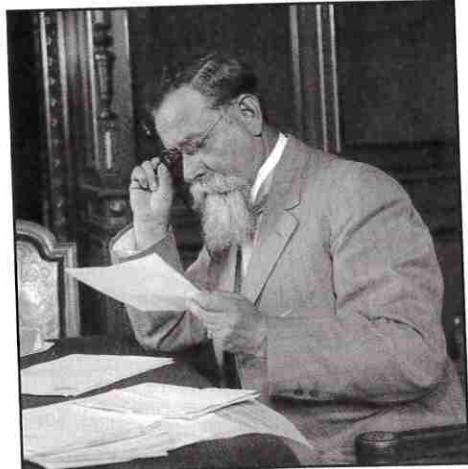
Revolutionary Party

Vicente Fox

## DATELINE

**QUERÉTARO, MEXICO, 1917**—Amid the battles of the Mexican Revolution, politicians today took a step toward reforming the nation. After many weeks of discussion and debate, they produced a new constitution for Mexico. The document presents new approaches to issues such as education, landownership, and religion.

Perhaps this constitution will become a basis for a new and stable Mexican government. For now, though, the constant fighting among sides continues. The potential power of the constitution will be revealed only in time, as the government puts the document into action.



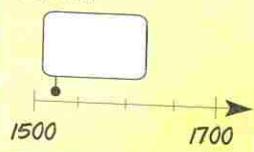
**Location** • President Venustiano Carranza organized the meetings that resulted in the 1917 constitution. ▲

## A Struggle for Power

The constitution of 1917 was written as a response to the struggles of the previous century. During that time, Mexico spent many years fighting wars. In 1821, Mexico won its war for independence from Spain. Two decades later, Mexicans entered into and then lost a war with the United States over Texas, California, and other lands. During all these years, still another struggle was going on—a struggle for power within Mexico.

## TAKING NOTES

Use your time line to take notes about Mexico.



In the years after independence, army leaders often took over Mexico's government. In some parts of the country, bandits attacked travelers. Elsewhere, Mexicans fought with Spanish landowners. Everywhere, a few people enjoyed great wealth, while many suffered in poverty.



**Culture** • Benito Juárez was a Zapotec, one of the many Native American groups in Mexico. He grew up in a mountain village, studied law, and then went into politics. ▲

## Benito Juárez Brings Reform

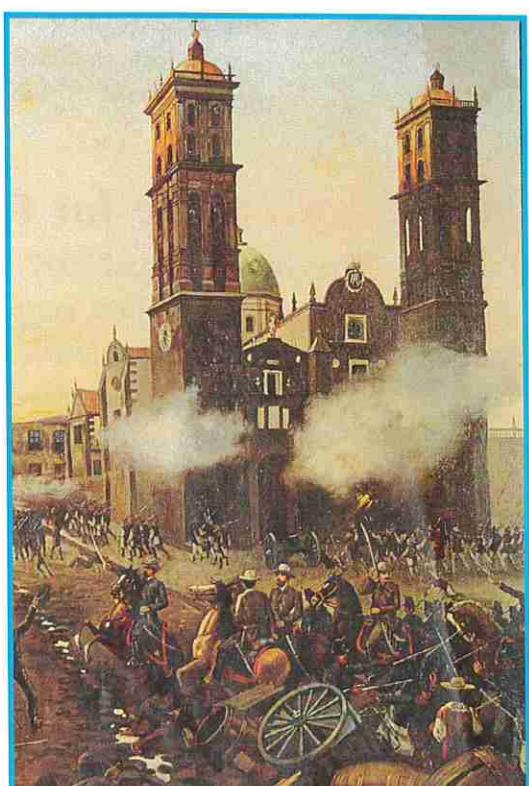
By the 1850s, many Mexicans were eager for reform. They found a leader in **Benito Juárez**, a man who rose from poverty to become president of Mexico and a hero to his people. He became minister of justice in 1855, and he later became chief justice of the Supreme Court. In 1858, he gained the presidency, giving control of the Mexican government to the reformers.

**Response to Reform** The reformers wrote a new constitution for Mexico in 1857. For the first time, Mexicans had a bill of rights, promising them freedom of speech and equality under the law. The constitution of 1857 also ended slavery and forced labor. However, the new constitution did not promise freedom of religion. Nor did it make Catholicism Mexico's official religion, as many church leaders had hoped it would. The reformers also cut back the army's power in the government.

These reforms stirred up a storm of controversy. Church leaders, army leaders, and wealthy landowners were outraged. From 1858 to 1860, the War of Reform raged between the reformers and their opponents.

**Foreign Intervention in Mexico** The War of Reform left Mexico so weak—because of death, debt, and unemployment—that the country was an easy target for foreign takeover. Spain, Britain, and France sent troops into Mexico. In 1863, after more than a year of fighting, the French marched into Mexico City and established themselves in control of the country. They made a European nobleman named Maximilian emperor. Maximilian did not reign long. The Mexicans overthrew Maximilian and executed him in 1867.

**Culture** • Mexican forces fight their way to victory in an early battle against the French in 1862. ▼



**An End to Reform** That same year, Benito Juárez and the reformers returned to power. Juárez remained president until his death in 1872. Unfortunately, his successors cared about reform less than he had. Poverty and lack of education remained problems. A few rich families held most of the political and economic power. Not until the 20th century did a new wave of reform begin.

## The Mexican Revolution

By 1910, the divisions between rich and poor in Mexico were huge. Just 800 families owned more than 90 percent of the farmland. Of Mexico's 15 million people, 10 million owned no land at all.

**A Decade of War** Once again, many Mexicans decided to fight for reforms. And once again, the struggle turned bloody. From 1910 to 1920, Mexico endured the Mexican Revolution.

The Revolution was a fight among many armies. Almost every part of Mexico had an army of rebels and reformers with particular goals. One of the first revolutionary leaders was a wealthy rancher named **Francisco Madero**, who became president in 1911. For Madero and his supporters, the key issue was free, honest elections. For others, however, the most important problem was landownership.

**Region** • During the Revolution, Francisco "Pancho" Villa was a famous leader in the north of Mexico. ▼



**The Problem of Land** Poor farmers wanted land of their own. They believed the government should give each farm family a few acres by breaking up the giant *haciendas*. A *hacienda* is a big farm or ranch, often as large as 40,000 or 50,000 acres. Much of the *hacienda* land had once belonged to village farmers. But a law passed in 1883 allowed some of the wealthiest ranch owners to easily take away land from the village farmers. During the 1880s and 1890s, the ranch owners took over millions of acres of land owned by village farmers, and that land became part of their *haciendas*.

### Reading Social Studies

**A. Analyzing Issues** What sorts of concerns led Mexicans to fight in the Mexican Revolution?

**Region** • Like this one, many of Mexico's *haciendas* were situated on huge pieces of land. ►



**Emiliano Zapata** was a legendary fighter for farmers' rights. With his famous motto—"Land and Liberty!"—Zapata gathered an army in the south of Mexico and urged farmers to join him.

#### A VOICE FROM MEXICO

Join me. . . . We want a much better president. Rise up with us because we don't like what the rich men pay us. It is not enough for us to eat and dress ourselves. I also want for everyone to have his piece of land so that he can plant and harvest corn, beans, and other crops. What do you say? Are you going to join us?

*Emiliano Zapata*

### Connections to Citizenship

**The Mexican Flag** In the middle of Mexico's flag sits an eagle holding a snake in its mouth—a symbol from an Aztec legend about the founding of their capital, Tenochtitlán. The legend says that in the 1100s, the Aztec sun god told the Aztec to build a city on the spot where they saw an eagle with a snake in its mouth. When they saw just such an eagle in the middle of Lake Texcoco, they knew where to build their capital.

Each of the flag's red, white, and green stripes represents one of the "three guarantees" of the Mexican War of Independence. By flying a flag that combines a symbol from Aztec times with one from the period of independence, Mexico shows how important its roots are to its modern identity.



### A Continuing Revolution

Over the course of a decade, dozens of large and small armies fought with one another. In 1913, Madero was murdered. The same fate befell Zapata in 1919. Between 1910 and 1920, more than 1 million Mexicans died in the battles of the Revolution. In 1920, a new government managed to make peace among the many armies. The fighting was over, but the Revolution—the effort to reform Mexico's government and economy—went on.

**Answering Demands for Land** In 1917, a new constitution was written, and one of its promises was to distribute land more equally among the people. Between 1920 and 1940, the government broke up many of the giant *haciendas*. Millions of acres were divided among small farmers or given to *ejidos*. An *ejido* (eh-HEE-daw) is a community farm owned by all the villagers together. Farmers were proud and happy to have their own land once again.

#### Reading Social Studies

**B. Summarizing**  
How did the 1917 constitution respond to concerns about landownership?

**The Revolution in Politics** The idea of the Revolution was so important and popular among new Mexicans that the most powerful political party called itself the party of the Revolution. Its name changed several times, but the word *revolution* was always part of it. Today, it is called the **Institutional Revolutionary Party** (Partido Revolucionario Institucional, or PRI). This party won every presidential election in Mexico from 1929 until 2000, with power passing peacefully from one president to the next.

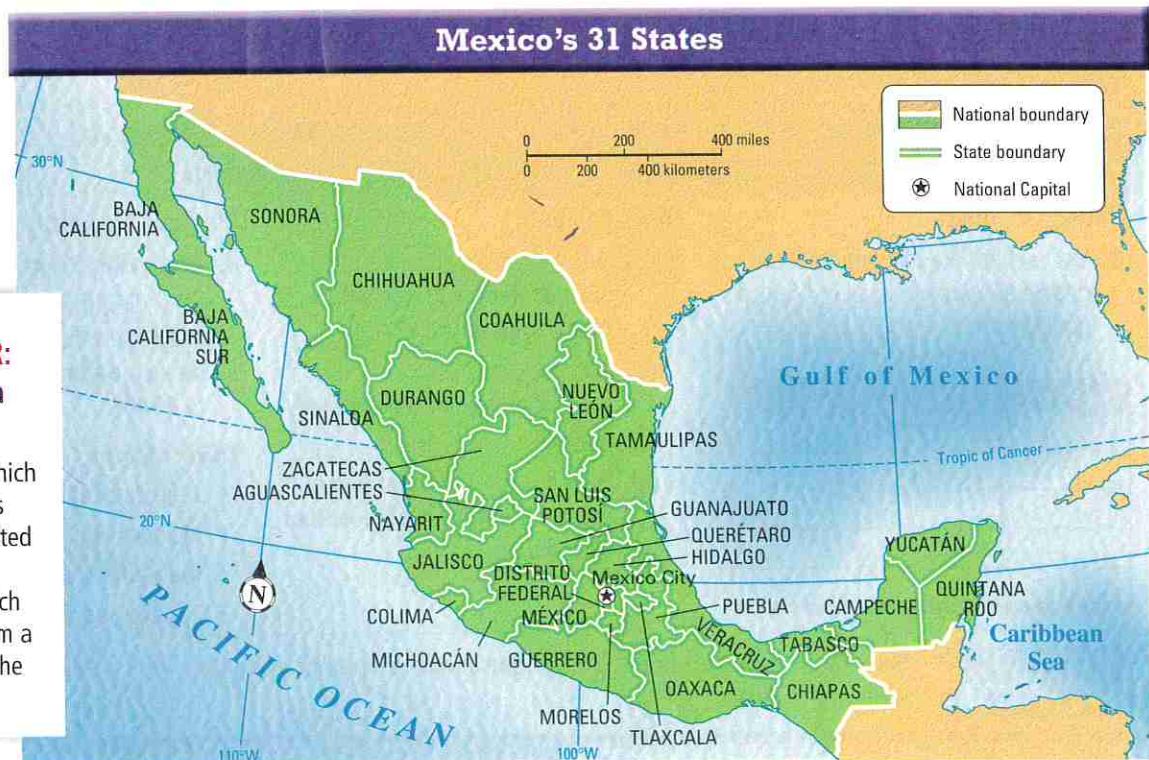
## Mexico's Government Today

December 1, 2000, was a historic occasion in Mexico. On that day, **Vicente Fox** became Mexico's new president. Fox was the first president in more than 70 years who did not belong to the PRI. Instead, he belonged to the National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional, or PAN). The election of a president from a party other than the PRI confirmed that Mexico was entering a time of new political possibilities.

**National Government** Mexico's official name is Estados Unidos Mexicanos, or the United Mexican States. Thirty-one states make up the nation. Mexico is a democracy and a republic. All Mexicans who are 18 or older have the right to vote. The Mexican government has three branches. As in the United States, these branches are the executive, legislative, and judicial.

### GEOGRAPHY SKILLBUILDER: Interpreting a Map

- Location** • Which Mexican states border the United States?
- Region** • Which two states form a peninsula on the Pacific coast?



**State Government** Like the United States, Mexico has a federal system of government, in which power is shared between the national government and state governments. Voters in each state elect a governor. Each state also has its own legislature that makes laws. However, the national government has some control over the state governments. For example, the president and the national Senate together can remove a state governor from office.

**Local Government** Most towns and villages depend on money from the national government. Therefore, a local government has less say in its town's affairs than the national government does. However, local governments do provide essential public services, such as maintaining sewer systems and public safety.

**Region •**  
The Mexican government issues stamps that celebrate its people and achievements. ►



## SECTION 2 ASSESSMENT

### Terms & Names

1. Explain the significance of:

- (a) Benito Juárez
- (b) Francisco Madero
- (c) *hacienda*
- (d) Emiliano Zapata
- (e) *ejido*
- (f) Institutional Revolutionary Party
- (g) Vicente Fox

### Using Graphics

2. Use a chart like this one to record details about each level of Mexico's government.

National	State	Local

### Main Ideas

3. (a) What changes did reformers such as Benito Juárez help bring about in Mexico?

(b) Why was the Mexican Revolution fought among many armies?

(c) How did the Mexican government help farmers gain land of their own?

### Critical Thinking

4. **Analyzing Points of View**

How did different groups view the need for reform and change in Mexico during the years from 1850 to 1940?

### Think About

- ♦ Juárez and the reformers
- ♦ Madero and his supporters
- ♦ the owners of the *haciendas*
- ♦ Zapata and the small farmers

### ACTIVITY -OPTION-

Think about a constitution's bill of rights. Write a speech explaining why a bill of rights is important to citizens.