

# History of Mexico

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## **Origins**

The origin of the inhabitants of Mexico may be traced back to 50,000 B.C. when the first settlers arrived from Asia across the Bering Strait. It is estimated that by 7,000 B.C. agriculture was already established in Mexico.

## **Pre-Hispanic Period 2000 B.C. - 1521 A.D.**

The country was inhabited by many aboriginal groups, most notably the Mayans, who inhabited the southern region, including what is now Yucatan, and neighbouring countries to the south. In the 12th century A.D., the Aztecs arrived from the north and settled in what is known today as Mexico City and surrounding areas. Initially, they were subservient to other indigenous groups in the area, but by the mid-13th century, the Aztecs extended their empire over a large part of present-day Mexico. Despite its imposing appearance, the Aztec empire collapsed within two years of the arrival of the Spaniards in 1519.

## **The Colonial Era 1521 - 1821**

Mexico's colonial administration reserved all government positions for those born in Spain. Local manufacture of even the most basic products was prohibited to ensure a captive market for Spanish goods. These restrictions were increasingly resented by Mexican-born creoles and mestizos who now numbered two million people. The outbreak of civil war in 1810 marked the beginning of the end for Spanish colonial rule.

## **Independence 1821 - 1910**

Mexico formally gained independence in September 1821. At that time, it covered a vast territory stretching from Oregon to Panama. By 1853, however, after a series of wars, Mexico was reduced to the territories that it occupies today, its economy was in ruins, and the conservatives who had led the country were discredited. Benito Juarez, who came to power in 1848, introduced a new constitution and liberal reforms that alarmed the conservatives. They looked abroad to Napoleon III of France for assistance and a French army under Maximilian von Habsburg drove Juarez from power for a time. Ultimately, French intervention failed, Maximilian was executed and Juarez resumed the presidency in 1867. Juarez died in office and was succeeded by Porfirio Diaz whose presidency of thirty years marked the first extended period of peace as well as the onset of industrialization.

## **The Revolution 1910 - 1929**

In 1910, the autocratic Diaz regime was overthrown by a revolution led by Francisco Madero, a moderate democrat. The ineffective Madero was soon overthrown and executed by General Huerta and a bloody civil war raged for seven years during which more than one million Mexicans died. The revolutionary forces finally triumphed in 1917 and introduced a new constitution that reformed land tenure and entrenched the rights of labour unions. The post-revolutionary years, however, were marked by ongoing instability as local warlords refused to submit to the central government.

## **Contemporary Mexico**

In 1929, the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (PNR) was founded as a broad-based organization that drew support from all social groups and regions in Mexico. The PNR became the PRI (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*) and has held federal power to this day. In 1938, President Cardenas nationalized the petroleum industry and the railways, which one year later were turned over to the unions. This initiated a period of economic nationalism, protectionism and state interventionism which lasted until the late 1980s.

The discovery of significant new oil reserves made Mexico one of the world's oil-exporting countries. The new-found wealth led to a boom economy with shallow foundations. Things rapidly turned sour after oil prices collapsed in the early 1980s. Having borrowed on the strength of its oil wealth, the Mexican government found itself increasingly hard pressed to honour its international financial obligations. In 1982, it announced that it could no longer make payments on its debt.

The debt crisis was the most visible sign of a malaise that had spread throughout the Mexican economy. Low productivity, an inefficient state-sector, top-heavy government, and hyperinflation all characterized Mexico in the mid-1980s. Even so, there were signs of change. Under President Miguel de la Madrid, a policy of economic openness was initiated, and Mexico joined the GATT in 1986. Then President Salinas de Gortari came to power in 1988 and began to introduce wide-ranging economic policies to re-privatize industry, liberalize the economic institutions and address needed social reforms.