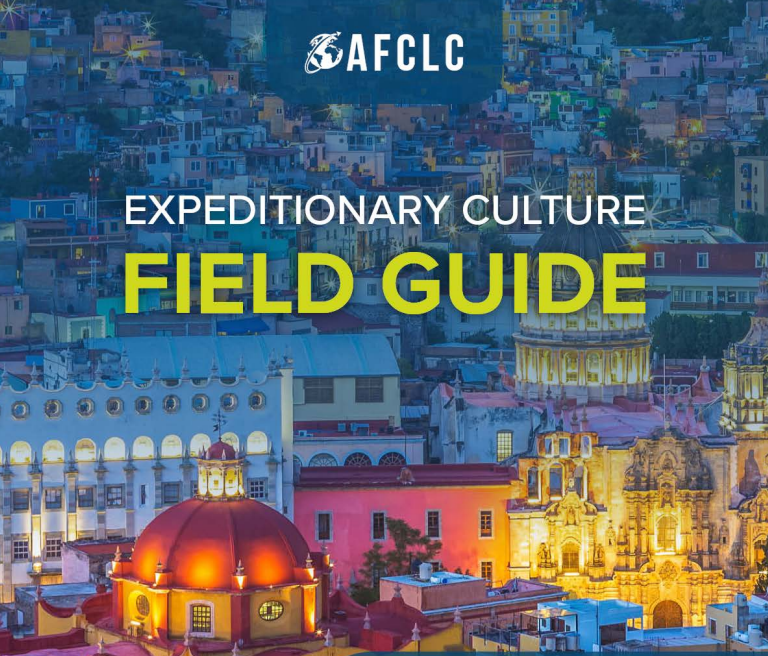
AFCLC

EXPEDITIONARY CULTURE

FIELD GUIDE



Mexico

U.S. AIR FORCE

About this Guide

This guide is designed to prepare you to deploy to culturally complex environments and achieve mission objectives. The fundamental information contained within will help you understand the cultural dimension of your assigned location and gain skills necessary for success.

The guide consists of two parts:

Part 1 is the "Culture General" section, which provides the foundational knowledge you need to operate effectively in any global environment with a focus on the major regions of Mexico.

Part 2 is the "Culture Specific" section, which describes unique cultural features of Mexican society. It applies culture-general concepts to help increase your knowledge of your assigned deployment location. This section is designed to complement other pre-deployment training.

For further information, contact the AFCLC Region Team at AFCLC.Region@us.af.mil or visit the AFCLC website at https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/.

Note: Some maps in this guide will reflect the Gulf of America as "Gulf of Mexico" as the maps held within may have been created prior to the January 2025 renaming of the Gulf.

PART 1 – CULTURE GENERAL

What is Culture?

Fundamental to all aspects of human existence, culture shapes the way humans view life and functions as a tool we use to adapt to our social and physical environments. A culture is the sum of all the beliefs, values, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning for a society. All human beings have culture, and individuals within a culture share a general set of beliefs and values.

Members of a culture also usually assign the same meanings to the symbols in that culture. A symbol is when one thing – an image, word, object, idea, or story – represents another thing. For example, the American flag is a physical and visual symbol of a core American value – freedom. At the same time, the story of George Washington admitting to having chopped down a cherry tree is also symbolic because it represents the premium Americans place on personal honesty and leadership integrity.

Force Multiplier

The military services have learned through experience the importance of understanding other cultures. Unlike the 20th-century bipolar world order that dominated US strategy for nearly half a century, today the US military is operating in what we classify as asymmetric or irregular conflict zones, where the notion of cross-cultural interactions is on the leading edge of our engagement strategies.

We have come to view the people themselves, rather than the political system or physical environment, as the decisive feature in conflict areas. Our primary objective hinges on influencing constructive change through peaceful means where possible. We achieve this endeavor by encouraging local nationals to

focus on developing stable political, social, and economic institutions that reflect their cultural beliefs and traditions.

Therefore, understanding the basic concepts of culture serves as a force multiplier. Achieving an awareness and respect of a society's values and beliefs enables deploying forces to build relationships with people from other cultures, positively influence their actions, and ultimately achieve mission success.

Cultural Domains

Culture is not just represented by the beliefs we carry internally, but also by our behaviors and by the systems members of a culture create to organize their lives. These systems, such as political or educational institutions, help us to live in a manner that is appropriate to our culture and encourages us to perpetuate that culture into the future.

We can organize behaviors and systems into categories – what the Air Force refers to as "cultural domains" – to better understand the primary values and characteristics of a society. A cross-culturally competent military member can use these domains – which include kinship, language and communication, and social and political systems and others (see chart on next page) – as tools for understanding and adapting to any culture. For example, by understanding the way a culture defines family and kinship, a US military member operating overseas can more effectively interact with members of that culture.

Social Behaviors Across Cultures

While humankind shares basic behaviors, various groups enact or even group those behaviors differently across cultural boundaries. For example, all societies obtain food for survival,

although agrarian societies generally produce their own food for limited consumption using very basic techniques.

Conversely, industrialized nations have more complex market economies, producing foodstuffs for universal consumption. Likewise, all cultures value history and tradition, although they represent these concepts through a variety of unique forms of symbolism. While the dominant world religions share the belief in one God, their worship practices vary with their traditional historical development. Similarly, in many kin-based cultures where familial bonds are foundational to social identity, it is customary for family or friends to serve as godparents, while for other societies this practice is nearly non-existent.

Worldview

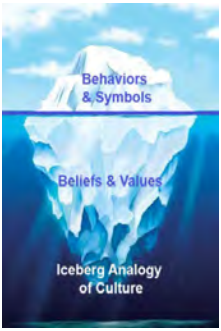
One of our most basic human behaviors is the tendency to classify others as similar or different based on our cultural standards. As depicted in the chart below, we can apply the 12 cultural domains to help us compare similarities and differences across cultures. We evaluate others' behavior to determine if they are "people like me" or "people not like me." Usually, we assume that those in the "like me" category share our perspectives and values.

This collective perspective forms our worldview – how we see the world and understand our place in it. Your worldview functions as a lens through which you see and understand the world. It helps you to interpret your experiences and the values and behaviors of other people who you encounter. Consider your worldview as a way of framing behavior, providing an accountability standard for actions and a logical explanation of why we individually or collectively act in a certain manner.

Cultural Belief System

An important component of a worldview is our belief system. A community's belief system assigns meaning, sets its universal standards of what is good and bad, defines right and wrong behavior, and assigns a value of meaningful or meaningless. Our beliefs form the fundamental values we hold to be true – regardless of whether there is evidence to support these ideas. Beliefs are a central aspect of human culture. They are shared views about world order and how the universe was physically and socially constructed.

While all people have beliefs, their specific components tend to vary depending upon respective world views. What people classify as good or bad, right or wrong depends on our deeply held beliefs we started developing early in life that have helped shape our characters. Likewise, these values are ingrained in our personalities and shape our behavior patterns and our self-identities. Because cultural beliefs are intensely held, they are difficult, though not impossible, to change.



Core Beliefs

Core beliefs shape and influence certain behaviors and also serve to rationalize those behaviors. Therefore, knowledge of individual or group beliefs can be useful in comprehending or making sense of their activities. We will use the iceberg model for classifying culture to illustrate two levels of meaning, as depicted.

Beliefs and values, portrayed by the deeper and greater level of the submerged iceberg, are seldom visible, but are indicated / hinted at / referenced by our behaviors and symbols (top level). It is important to recognize, though, that the parts of culture that are not visible (under the waterline) are informing and shaping what is being made visible (above the waterline).

In many cases, different worldviews may present behaviors that are contrary to our own beliefs, particularly in many regions where US forces deploy. Your ability to suspend judgment to understand another perspective is essential to establishing relationships with your host-nation counterparts. The ability to withhold your opinion and strive to understand a culture from a member of that culture's perspective is known as cultural relativism. It often involves taking an alternate perspective when interpreting others' behaviors and is critical to your ability to achieve mission success.

As you travel through Mexico, you will encounter cultural patterns of meaning that are common across the country, while others vary by region. What follows is a general description of 12 cultural domains which are used to frame those commonalities and differences.

CULTURAL DOMAINS

1. History and Myth

History and myth are related concepts. History is a record of the past that is based on verifiable facts and events. Myth can act as a type of historical record, although it is usually a story which members of a culture use to explain community origins or important events that are not verifiable, or which occurred prior to written language.

Mexico comprises the vast territory between the Pacific Ocean, Gulf of America (Mexico), and Caribbean Sea. The northernmost country in Latin America, Mexico connects the US with Central America. This guide separates the country into four major regions: North, West, Central-South, and Yucatán. While these regions are divided by common human, physical, cultural, social, and economic aspects, significant diversity also exists within each region.

Archeological evidence from the Chiquihuite cave in Zacatecas, in the West, indicates that humans may have occupied the region as early as 33,000 years ago. Indigenous Mexican peoples included nomadic hunter-gatherers, coastal fishermen, and early farmers. By 1000 BC, many groups had settled across Mesoamerica in increasingly densely populated communities with complex social structures.

Mexico was home to some of the Western Hemisphere's most advanced early societies. In the Central-South and Yucatán, the Olmec peoples became highly skilled craftsmen and created monumental art between 1200-400 BC. To the southwest of the Olmecs, the Zapotecs emerged around 700 BC and remained autonomous until other groups conquered their territories around 1500 AD. As early as 1500 BC, the forebears of the Maya arose in Yucatán. They developed a sophisticated writing system and astrological calendars between 300 BC-100 AD, before completely dominating the region by 200 AD. In the West and

Central-South, the vast and influential Teotihuacán civilization developed about 2,000 years ago, reaching its height around 500 AD before collapsing some 250 years later.

By 900 AD, the Toltec Empire had become prominent in the Central-South and spread its culture across much of present-day Mexico during the following 2 centuries. The nomadic Chichimec people of the North eventually defeated the Toltecs in the 12th century, allowing for a dominant Chichimec group –the Aztecs (or Mexica) – to establish themselves in the region. Over the next 4 centuries, the Aztecs conquered wide swaths of territory, primarily in the Central-South, ruling some six million people at the height of their power.

Spanish ***conquistadores*** (conquerors), seeking land and wealth for the Spanish Crown, arrived in present-day Mexico from their Caribbean colonies in 1519. Their leader, Hernán Cortés, allied with various indigenous groups to defeat the Aztec Empire, which already had been weakened from the spread of European diseases, by 1521. The Spaniards quickly extended their rule over present-day Mexico, establishing the Viceroyalty of New Spain in 1525.

Over the next 3 centuries, New Spain experienced a cultural blossoming, becoming an artistic, commercial, literary, and religious center for Spain's colonies in the Americas. Nevertheless, much of the wealth generated in Mexico was concentrated among the colonial elite, with the ***mestizos*** (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent), indigenous, and enslaved Africans largely cast to society's lower classes.

As the Spanish Empire began to decline in the 17th century, independence movements started to take hold in Mexico. Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a local priest in the West, called for self-rule in 1810, spurring armed uprisings against Spanish forces that lasted until Mexico gained independence in 1821. The first years of Mexican self-rule were volatile, with political infighting and armed revolts marking much of the 19th century. Further, during

the Mexican-American War (1846-48), Mexico lost territory in the North comprising much of present-day Texas, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico, Arizona, Nevada, California, and other states.

Also in the 19th century, a process of reform occurred despite continued conflicts, as various figures, like politician Benito Juárez, attempted to remove the remnants of Mexico's colonial system. Nevertheless, a French invasion and occupation (1862-67) temporarily interrupted these efforts and corresponded with significant financial difficulties in the latter half of the century.

Porfirio Díaz, a military strongman who ruled Mexico from 1884-1911, centralized the Mexican state. With the help of technocrats and the threat of force, he provided stability that enabled growth and development. However, rural leaders demanding more democratic forms of government launched uprisings, resulting in the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). In the North, Pancho Villa led a group of rebels, while in the Central-South, Emiliano Zapata organized a rebellion demanding greater indigenous rights. The Revolution ousted Díaz and led to a new Constitution in 1917.

While the new Constitution included reforms meant to improve the lives of average Mexicans, implementation was slow. In 1929, the political party that would become the ***Partido Revolucionario Institucional*** (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) took control of the government and instituted single-party rule. The economic growth and urbanization that took place between 1940-60 benefitted many, cementing the PRI's hold on power. Nevertheless, in the 1960s and 70s, the PRI targeted students and activists who advocated democratic reforms, killing and torturing thousands.

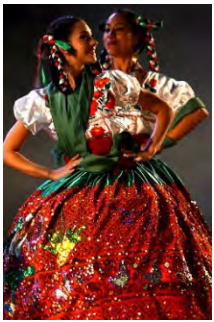
Economic instability marked the end of the 20th century. An oil boom and bust led Mexico to default on its debt, and the signing of the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) with the US and Canada undercut Mexico's agricultural sector. NAFTA caused the flooding of local markets with subsidized foreign products, particularly corn, resulting in hardships that led to largescale migration to the US. Likewise,

the rapid devaluation of the peso (Mexico's currency) in the 1990s impacted many poor Mexicans, who moved to the North to work in ***maquilas*** (or ***maquiladoras***, factories).

While the 21st century brought increased economic stability and the end of uncontested PRI rule in favor of democracy, violence spurred by confrontations between drug cartels and the military became more frequent after the 2006 declaration of the "war on drugs." Mexico has made significant progress in recent years by reducing poverty and becoming an upper-middle income nation. Nevertheless, corruption and violence related to drug and arms trafficking plague Mexico, which remains highly unequal, with power and wealth largely concentrated among the urban elite.

2. Political and Social Relations

Political relations are the ways in which members of a community organize leadership, power, and authority. Social relations are all the ways in which individuals are linked to others in their community. Spanish conquest and colonial rule considerably changed Mexican society and its numerous indigenous populations.



The import of enslaved Africans and arrival of European and other immigrants in the 19th-20th centuries also altered the country's ethnic and racial makeup, which tends to vary by major region and individual locale.

Mexican society is ethnically and culturally diverse. While many Mexicans are of mixed heritage, unique immigration patterns and prominent indigenous communities influence the ethnic makeup of each region. Although the North is home to *mestizos* and some indigenous communities, most indigenous Mexicans live in Yucatán and the Central-South, the most diverse region that also has numerous immigrant groups. For example, Mexico City is home to large American, Arab, and Chinese communities, among others. In addition, the coastal areas of the West and Central-South are home to some of the descendants of enslaved Africans, who were forced to work on plantations in these regions.

Mexico is a federal presidential republic. In recent years, politics have been characterized by competition among the populist, left-leaning ***Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional*** (National Regeneration Movement, or MORENA) and opposition parties. These include the right-wing ***Partido de Acción Nacional*** (National Action Party, or PAN), left-wing ***Partido de la Revolución Democrática*** (Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD), and centrist PRI. Politics also have become more polarized, with support for the PAN, PRI, and PRD largely coming from urban residents and upper- and middle-class voters, while MORENA remains popular among rural and working-class Mexicans.

Mexico faces major internal security challenges, notably illicit drug and arms trafficking, corruption, and violence. In 2020, the newly established National Guard acquired increased law enforcement jurisdiction, such as the power to detain civilians, which has led to human rights abuses in some cases.

The military, police, and organized crime groups are often responsible for the disappearance of thousands of people annually. Other issues, such as arbitrary arrests, torture, and kidnapping, persist.

Mexico maintains positive relations with nearly all countries in the region and further afield. It actively cultivates relations with the US as its largest trading partner. Mexico also belongs to the United Nations and various other international and regional organizations through which it pursues foreign policy objectives that often depend on the ideology of the government in power.

3. Religion and Spirituality

Religion is a cultural belief system that provides meaning to members of a community. Religious and spiritual beliefs help preserve the social order by defining proper behavior. They also create social unity by defining shared identity, offer individuals peace of mind, and explain the causes of events in a society.

Many of Mexico's early inhabitants led rich spiritual lives. As different cultures emerged in the region, various tribes often worshipped gods from their neighbors or predecessors, leading to some commonalities among the religious practices of many indigenous Mexicans. The Maya, Teotihuacán, and Aztecs shared major deities like ***Tlaloc*** (or ***Chac***, god of rain) and ***Quetzalcóatl*** (or ***Kukulcán***, god of wind and vegetation).

Spanish conquerors introduced Christianity in the early 16th century. As Roman Catholicism spread, the Catholic Church became entrenched in colonial life. After independence in 1821, the Mexican government was often in open conflict with the Catholic Church, competing for control of educational systems, land, and civil institutions. Despite longtime government antagonism, Roman Catholicism has remained an important part of Mexican culture and provides various social services, giving it robust political and social power.

Today, Mexico is one of the world's most Catholic countries. Although Roman Catholicism remains the dominant religion, Protestantism has grown rapidly in recent years. Large communities of Mennonites and Latter-Day Saints (Mormons) live in the North, Seventh-day Adventists in the Central-South, and Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the country. Secularism has also grown in Mexico, which is home to other Christian sects, Muslims, Jews, and other religious groups.

Some Mexicans practice syncretic (mixed) forms of religion, whereby believers incorporate native beliefs or folk figures into other, often Roman Catholic, practices. This development has resulted in the veneration of figures like ***La Santa Muerte*** (Holy Death) and the celebration of holidays like ***Día de Muertos*** (Day of the Dead) among many Mexicans throughout the country.

4. Family and Kinship

The domain of family and kinship refers to groups of people related through blood ties, marriage, or through strong emotional bonds that influence them to treat each other like family members (often called "fictive kin").

Family life and relationships are fundamental elements of Mexican society. Mexicans tend to maintain close connections with family members, supporting them emotionally and financially, while providing care for elderly or ailing kin. Although residence patterns differ somewhat by region and social class, multiple generations often reside together in one household or live in close proximity.

Urbanization and migration have changed life in many areas. As both men and women take advantage of the enhanced educational and employment opportunities available in cities, family structures have become more diverse. Over 80% of residents live in urban areas, with nearly one-fifth of the total population living in Mexico City. While many residents in cities and coastal towns tend to be socially progressive, those in rural areas, some of which are known as ***patrias chicas*** (small homelands), often maintain more conservative traditions that vary by region.

Although close family ties mean relatives have some influence over children's choice of spouses, they generally choose their own partners. Roman Catholic traditions value marriage as an institution and discourage divorce. Nevertheless, divorce rates have risen in recent years, as women have gained more social and economic independence.

5. Sex and Gender

Sex refers to the biological/reproductive differences between males and females, while gender is a more flexible concept that refers to a culture's categorizing of masculine and feminine behaviors, symbols, and social roles.

Mexican culture traditionally privileges men's roles as provider and leader. ***Machismo***, or masculine behavior and pride, is an important element of male identity, while women traditionally occupy subordinate domestic roles. Women have acquired equal rights under the law but social, economic, and political inequalities remain, especially in rural areas.

Progress towards gender equality has been slow and uneven. Women actively participate in national-level politics, especially compared to the US and regional averages. On the other hand, Mexico has one of the world's highest rates of femicide (murder of a woman based on her gender), which has increased since 2015.

Despite laws supporting gender equality, women continue to face challenges to their participation in the workforce. Many still assume the traditional roles of wives and mothers, often balancing both domestic duties and employment. Moreover, many women face gender discrimination in hiring and access to resources. Women are more likely than men to participate in the informal labor market and provide unpaid domestic and care work.

Women also encounter significant healthcare challenges. While the Supreme Court decriminalized abortion in 2023, some states still have not removed various abortion penalties that have disproportionately affected lower-income, rural women for years. Violence persists against women and homosexual people, especially transgender individuals. Nevertheless, public opinion has recently shifted in support of homosexuality rights, which has translated into policy. Mexico has passed legislation legalizing gay marriage in every state. Some areas, such as Mexico City and Michoacán in the West, also recognize gender transitions.

6. Language and Communication

Language is a system for sharing information symbolically, whereby words are used to represent ideas. Communication is defined as the cultural practice of sharing meaning in interaction, both verbally and non-verbally.

A legacy of Spanish colonialism, Spanish is Mexico's national language. Spanish dialects and accents vary by location. Some residents in the Central-South speak a dialect similar to Central American Spanish variations, whereas some coastal accents exhibit Caribbean-style intonations. Despite the prominence of

Spanish, the country is linguistically diverse and home to nearly 300 indigenous languages, of which the government recognizes over 60. Over one million inhabitants in the West and Central-South speak Nahuatl, a language belonging to the Uto-Aztecan family. Another common indigenous language is Yucatec Maya, mainly spoken in Yucatán.

Though varying by region and individual, Mexicans are generally expressive communicators. They tend to complement speech with touch, often to convey emotions such as concern or happiness. Mexicans also typically consider greetings and goodbyes important, requiring significant time to express. Social status and regional background tend to affect communication patterns. Generally, Mexicans from the North are less expressive communicators and require more personal space during conversation than those from other regions. Likewise, the use of formal terms, conversational etiquette, and eye contact depend on social status, gender, situation, and various other factors.

7. Learning and Knowledge

All cultures require that the older generation transmit important information to the younger generation. This information can be strictly factual (for example, how to fulfill subsistence and health requirements) or culturally traditional (the beliefs, behaviors, and symbols that have meaning to the community). This knowledge transfer may occur through structured, formalized systems such as schools or through informal learning by watching adults or peers.

Several early Mexican indigenous communities developed formal educational systems, largely for training priests and preparing noble children for roles in government. Mayan and Aztec children attended school regularly, with the latter making formal education mandatory for all, regardless of gender or social status. After the arrival of Spanish colonists, Roman Catholic orders' religious schooling dominated the educational landscape. Mexican independence and subsequent reforms

reversed this trend, as education became secular and mandatory for all.

Educational quality and attainment have improved in recent years, though major challenges persist. Private primary and secondary schools tend to offer better education than free public schools, though the public ***Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*** (National Autonomous University of Mexico) is the country's best, making admittance extremely competitive. Educational outcomes in the Central-South and Yucatán tend to be significantly worse than those in urban areas and the North. Further, many rural areas are underserved, as secondary schools and other educational institutions tend to concentrate in large towns and cities.

Governmental expenditure on education has risen since 1990, though it declined between 2014-18 to some 4.3% of GDP, on par with the average of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Likewise, between 1980-2020, the literacy rate rose from 83-95%, a rate that is equal to the LAC average.

8. Time and Space

In every society, people occupy space and time in ways that are not directly linked to physical survival. In most Western cultures, people tend to be preoccupied with strict time management, devoting less effort to relationship-building. While the pace of life in Mexico's North and large urban areas is somewhat faster than in the other regions, establishing and maintaining relationships often take precedence over meeting deadlines, punctuality, or accomplishing a task in the most efficient manner. The workday runs on a schedule similar to the US, though some businesses may pause for a mid-day break or open and close on a delayed schedule to accommodate urban traffic.

Businesses in Mexico are typically hierarchical, and some follow traditional, conservative customs, particularly in the North. Although Mexico City is cosmopolitan and home to many global companies, personal connections remain vital to business transactions across the country.

While concepts of personal space tend to vary by region, Mexicans generally maintain less personal space than Americans, often sitting or standing close together in public and private spaces. Compared to Americans, family and friends typically touch more often, as a sign of their close personal relationships. The rhythm of daily life changes during international soccer matches and national holidays, many reflecting Christian or indigenous traditions and historical events. Communities throughout Mexico celebrate and take time off work for the Guadalupe-Reyes Marathon, a term referring to a series of religious holidays and festivities between December 12-January 6 that mark the end of one year and start of the next.

9. Aesthetics and Recreation

Every culture has its own forms of creative expression that are guided by aesthetic principles of imagination, beauty, skill, and style. Most of Mexico's art, clothing, sport, dance, music, poetry, and pastimes reflect its Roman Catholic heritage and European, indigenous, and African influences. While dress varies by region and ethnic group, many Mexicans follow recent US fashion trends or mix global and local styles, wearing traditional attire only for holidays, special occasions, or ceremonies, if at all. By contrast, some indigenous Mexicans dress in traditional clothing every day.

Dance and music infuse daily life in Mexico, with many musical styles that vary by region. ***Mariachi***, group music from Jalisco in the West, is known for its performers' ***charro*** suits and is often accompanied by the ***jarabe tapatío*** folk dance. Veracruz in the Central-South is a center of Mexican music and dance, where notable ***sones*** (tunes) like ***la bamba***, ***colás***, and ***la bruja*** originated. ***Ranchera*** songs developed on rural Mexican ranches and became popular during the Mexican Revolution. *Ranchera* songs incorporate various styles, like polka, waltz, and ***bolero***. Other popular styles are ***banda***, ***corrido***, ***norteño***, and ***cumbia***. Regardless of the genre, a fusion of African,

European, and indigenous instruments and rhythms influence many of Mexico's musical and dance styles.

The most competitive sport across Mexico is ***fútbol*** (soccer). Other popular sports and games are bullfighting, boxing, wrestling, basketball, baseball, volleyball, and tennis. Mexico's national sport, ***charrería***, is similar to rodeo and includes various events, such as horse and bull riding. Locations along the coast are popular for surfing, swimming, and diving, while mountainous regions are notable for hiking. For leisure, many Mexicans socialize with friends and family; watch ***telenovelas*** (soap operas), movies, and soccer games; and take day trips or vacations. Traditional handicrafts, such as textiles, silverwork, embroidery, ceramics, and figurines, vary by region and are prevalent in many Mexicans' daily lives.

Generally, early Mexican literature dates to the oral narration and pictographic writings of stories, myths, and legends from the Zapotecs, Maya, Aztecs, and others. Beginning in the Spanish colonial era, Catholic priests transcribed much of the region's indigenous folklore. Mexico's rich tradition of written literature shifted after independence and the Mexican Revolution. Octavio Paz is one of Mexico's most prolific writers. His poem ***Entre la piedra y la flor*** (Between the Stone and the Flower) described the relationship between landlords and peasants. Paz is the only Mexican author to have won the Nobel Prize for Literature.

10. Sustenance and Health

Societies have different methods of transforming natural resources into food. These methods can shape residence patterns, family structures, and economics. Theories of disease and healing practices exist in all cultures and serve as adaptive responses to disease and illness.

Cuisine varies across Mexico based on local products, tastes, and customs, though common staple ingredients are avocados, beans, beef, chicken, chiles, onions, squash, tomatoes, and starches like corn, wheat, and rice. The extent of indigenous and

European influences varies by region. Cuisine in the North reflects the region's arid climate and animal husbandry sector, with prominent ingredients like beef, cheese, cream, and wheat. Coastal communities in the West often feature seafood as important staples instead of livestock. In the Central-South and Yucatán, many dishes highlight more tropical ingredients like cacao and citrus.

Health in Mexico has improved in recent decades as evidenced by decreased infant mortality rates and longer life expectancies. Nevertheless, health indicators and outcomes vary by region. Generally, rural residents in the Central-South and Yucatán tend to suffer the worst health outcomes, while city dwellers in Mexico City and the North have better access to quality healthcare. Residents of the Central-South and Yucatán are up to four times likelier to have reduced access to healthcare compared to their counterparts in the North, despite state efforts to bridge this gap.

Noncommunicable diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular and chronic respiratory diseases, and cancer cause most deaths in Mexico. Interpersonal violence has been a leading cause of death, particularly among men. Homicide rates are often higher than the LAC average and have remained above 20 murders per 100,000 people for much of the past decade. Communicable diseases, namely dengue and hepatitis A, are widespread in the country, particularly in Yucatán.

11. Economics and Resources

This domain refers to beliefs regarding appropriate ways for a society to produce, distribute, and consume goods and services. It details how countries allocate their resources by sector, trade with other countries, give or receive aid, and pay for goods and services within their borders.

Prior to colonization, most inhabitants subsisted on farming, fishing, and trade. Under Spanish control, some indigenous land stayed in the hands of local communities, though many residents were forced to work in the country's silver mines. For years after

independence, much of Mexico's wealth was concentrated in the hands of large landowners or the merchant elite, who employed a landless peasant class to toil without significant financial gain.

A series of economic shocks in the 1980s and 90s led to a debt default, currency devaluation, and the undermining of local agriculture. In recent years, Mexico's economy has stabilized and is one of the world's largest economies. Its economic institutions have improved markedly, and the country has a large manufacturing base linked to North American and global supply chains. Nevertheless, the COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted Mexico's economy in 2020, particularly Mexico's manufacturing and services sectors, which caused an economic contraction like that of the 1990s. While the economy has since recovered, it is currently at risk of a renewed slowdown due to global volatility, but especially in the US, which is Mexico's main trading partner.

Today, Mexico's economy is diverse and complex. In the North, large ranching operations, *maquilas*, and industrial mining prevail, while Yucatán's northern coast is where most of Mexico's oil deposits are located. In the West and Central-South, automobile manufacturing plants account for a large portion of the economy, as do services, concentrated in large cities like Mexico City and Puebla. In areas of Yucatán and the southern states, tourism is a valuable subsector in a region otherwise characterized by low industrialization and small-scale agriculture. ***Remesas*** (remittances) from Mexicans abroad, but particularly in the US, are also vital to the economy.

12. Technology and Material

Societies use technology to transform their physical world, and culture heavily influences the development and use of technology. Despite having one of LAC's largest economies and populations, Mexico's physical infrastructure lags behind many other countries in the region. Roads form the primary transport infrastructure, though quality tends to deteriorate in rural areas. Although the Mexico City metro and commuter rail system allows

increased intra-city passenger transportation in the country's largest metropolitan area, most of Mexico's railways primarily transport freight rather than passengers. The country has many air, river, and seaports that facilitate trade and transit across Mexico and to global destinations.

Mexico generates most of its electricity from natural gas, along with other fossil fuels, hydroelectric power, solar, wind, and other sources. The country also produces, consumes, and exports large quantities of oil, overseen by the state-owned corporation ***Petróleos Mexicanos*** (Mexican Petroleum, or PEMEX). Mexico has two nuclear power plants in Alto Lucero, Yucatán, on the Gulf of America (Mexico). Although the country has invested in renewable energy sources like hydropower, wind, and solar energy in recent years, their share of overall energy consumption remains negligible.

Media independence and press freedom have declined in recent years. Media ownership concentrates among a few companies, with the largest headquartered in Mexico City. Government coercion, online harassment, and violence against journalists are common. Journalists covering topics like rural corruption and drug trafficking are especially vulnerable. Telecommunications infrastructure has improved in recent years, as most Mexicans have access to mobile networks and broadband. As of 2023, about 86% of urban and 66% of rural homes had Internet access, and some 98% of Mexicans owned a mobile phone.

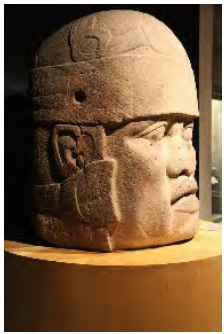
Now that we have introduced general concepts that characterize Mexican society at large through the lens of its major regions, we will focus on specific features of society in Mexico.

PART 2 – CULTURE SPECIFIC

1. HISTORY AND MYTH

Overview

Located between the US and Central America, Mexico was home to the expansive Aztec Empire and several other well-established indigenous cultures prior to becoming a colony in Spain's global empire. After gaining independence in 1821, Mexico struggled with routine political upheavals and fraught attempts to establish democracy. In the 20th century, Mexico achieved political stability under single-party rule, which ended in 2000. Today, Mexico maintains a stable economy and democracy, though violence and narcotics trafficking remain a concern.



Early History

Archaeological evidence from the Chiquihuite cave in Zacatecas, in the West, suggests that humans may have inhabited present-day Mexico as early as 33,000 years ago. Scholars believe these early inhabitants lived as nomads for millennia, primarily hunting game and foraging for food. By 7000 BC, semipermanent settlements appeared in the Tehuacán Valley, and crude agrarian practices emerged. As agriculture developed across Mesoamerica, various communities achieved increasing complexity and scale (see *Economics and Resources*).

The Olmec peoples of the fertile southern Gulf Coast established some of the earliest urban centers in the region at San Lorenzo (1150 BC) and La Venta (800 BC). From these sites, the Olmecs developed extensive trade networks, dispersing their complex artistic culture, notable for its large stone head sculptures, to other people across the region, such as the Mokaya and Tlatilco. Around that time, the earliest Mayan settlements, organized

around maize cultivation, appeared in the Yucatán lowlands. As early as 300 BC, Mayan chroniclers developed a sophisticated writing system and remarkably accurate astrological calendar.

The most important early city, Teotihuacán, in the Central-South, became prominent around 100 BC. By its peak in the 6th century AD, the city had sprawled to an area of about 8 sq mi and housed around 150,000 inhabitants. Scholars are unsure whether Teotihuacán was the seat of a vast, political empire or if its expansive influence was primarily religious and economic in nature. Regardless, the city maintained enormous cultural relevance, even after its decline around 750 AD, and featured prominently in the mythologies of subsequent cultures.

As Teotihuacán flourished, so too did the enduring Maya, and a degree of cultural exchange and trade existed between these societies. Following the Maya's collapse around the turn of the 9th century, successive empires – the Toltecs of central Mexico and then the northern Chichimec – dominated Mexico through the 12th century.

The Aztec Empire

The Nahuatl-speaking Aztec people arrived in Central Mexico during the 13th century, amidst a period of regional unrest and political upheaval among small city states. In 1325, the Aztecs (also known as the Mexica, a term that gave Mexico its name) settled on an island in Lake Texcoco, constructing the first temples and homes in what would become Tenochtitlán. The city grew rapidly, fueled by the construction of artificial islands that eventually increased its land area to about 5 sq mi.

Tenochtitlán came under control of the neighboring Tepanec Empire, which extracted tribute from and exploited its Aztec inhabitants. In 1428, the Aztec ***tlatoani*** (ruler) Itzcoatl forged an alliance with other Tepanec cities and won a decisive victory in the Tepanec capital, Azcapotzalco. Thereafter, he joined forces with the rulers of the Texcoco and Tlacopan city states, forming the Triple Alliance. This event set the stage for Aztec expansion, which successive *tlatoani* fulfilled through the late 15th century.

By the time Montezuma II inherited control of the empire in 1502, Aztec dominion included hundreds of tribute cities and stretched over much of Mexico's Central-South. The Aztecs managed their territory and subjects with an adeptly organized bureaucracy. As trade flourished, the Aztecs' commercial networks enabled the spread of useful knowledge of hostile territory, making military campaigns more effective. Aztec religion (see *Religion and Spirituality*), which required blood offerings from captured enemy warriors, helped mold a warlike society with expansionist ambitions. The result was a vast New World empire rivaled only by the Incas in Peru.

Spanish Conquest

Spanish incursions began in 1518, when Governor of Cuba Diego Velazquez commissioned Hernán Cortés to investigate rumors of impressive wealth in Mexico. Despite disagreements with Velazquez, Cortés arrived in what is now Veracruz on the southern Gulf Coast in 1519. There, he established a ***cabildo*** (city council), and his soldiers elected him as its chief justice. This formality gave Cortés the legal authority to conquer the Mexican mainland on behalf of the Spanish Crown, consent of which Velazquez had previously denied him.

Cortés and his force of some 500 ***conquistadores*** (conquerors, the explorer-soldiers of the Spanish Empire) advanced swiftly inland from the coast, forging alliances with subjects of the Aztec Empire. Pivotal to this effort was Malintzin (also known as la Malinche), an educated Nahua woman who served as strategic advisor, translator, and consort. She aided Cortés and helped to forge many indigenous alliances. Consequently, Cortés arrived at Tenochtitlán in 1520. After a failed bid to subdue the Aztecs by taking Montezuma II hostage, Cortés and his men, most of whom were indigenous allies, laid siege to the city, razing it to the ground. In August 1521, with less than a third of Tenochtitlán still standing, the Aztecs surrendered. Atop the ruins began the construction of Mexico City, the new colonial capital.

The Viceroyalty of New Spain

After 1521, the Spaniards swept rapidly southward, annexing territory as distant as present-day Guatemala and Honduras. Northward expansion, by contrast, proceeded more slowly. In 1546, Spanish explorers moved into Zacatecas, where they discovered large silver deposits. This discovery, along with persistent rumors of wealthy indigenous cities, invigorated Spanish interest in northern Mexico, though occupation of this region did not occur until the late 16th century.

Roman Catholic friars did much to expand Spanish influence in Mexico. In many instances, they were the first to venture into new territories. Charged with converting millions of native Mexicans to Christianity in the name of the Spanish Crown, these missionaries erected churches, studied native populations and languages, and proselytized (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Meanwhile, during the early colonial period, the introduction of foreign diseases killed many indigenous Mexicans, causing the population to plummet.

In 1535, the Spaniards organized their colony into the ***Virreinato de Nueva España*** (Viceroyalty of New Spain), to be ruled by a royally appointed Viceroy. The Viceroyalty included all Spanish-controlled territory north of Panama and later expanded to include Spanish possessions in Florida, California, the Caribbean, and the Philippines. At its greatest extent, New Spain occupied an area three and a half times larger than modern Mexico. The northern border notably remained in flux until 1819, when the Adams-Onís Treaty between the US and Spain established Spanish control of much of the territory ranging from present-day Texas to California.

Colonial Life and Economy: Through extensive mining and agricultural efforts, New Spain became wealthy, and a class-conscious society emerged. Spaniards, called ***peninsulares***, wielded most economic, social, and political power. Beneath them were the ***criollos*** (Spanish people born in the Americas), and then ***mestizos*** (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous

descent). Indigenous Mexicans and enslaved Africans occupied the lowest social stations (see *Political and Social Relations*). The ***encomienda*** system (forced indigenous labor) reinforced this social structure. Throughout the colonial era, Mexico's vast economic resources benefitted primarily the Spaniards. Colonial authorities shipped most of the silver mined in Mexico to Spain, though Spain gave ***intendentes*** (royally appointed governors) some economic autonomy, which resulted in some educational, social, and technological advancement.

Rebellion and Independence

Emergent political liberalism inspired by the American and French revolutions and an increasingly armed *criollo* population made New Spain ripe for rebellion. Sporadic revolts occurred from 1810-15, the most notable led by Catholic priest Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla. On September 16, 1810, (the date now celebrated as Mexican Independence Day – see *Time and Space*), Hidalgo issued his famous ***Grito de Dolores*** (Cry of Dolores), which called for the end of Spanish rule, land redistribution, and racial equality. Though his rebel Army was defeated in early 1811 and Hidalgo later executed, the cause persisted. Between 1812-15, José María Morelos took over the movement and led a small Army that overcame royalist forces to win territory across southern Mexico. Morelos established a constituent congress but was killed by Spanish forces in 1815. The revolutionaries then splintered into small guerilla groups.

In 1820, as Spain underwent a liberal rebellion, conservatives in Mexico organized around the independence cause, hoping to prevent an onset of liberalism. Conservative leader Agustín de Iturbide formed an unlikely coalition with remaining republican forces that seized most of Mexico from the Spaniards and royalists. Mexico formally won independence on August 24, 1821, when Spain signed the Treaty of Córdoba, stipulating the end of New Spain's dependence on Old Spain, naming the new nation the Mexican Empire, and establishing a congress.

The Mexican Empire

The peace that the independence cause had sewn between conservative and liberal elements in Mexican society became fractious. In 1822, military groups in Mexico City named Iturbide the emperor of the new nation. Assuming the title Agustín I, he dissolved congress to rule by military junta, prompting revolt. Revolutionaries led by General Antonio López de Santa Anna forced his abdication, proclaiming a new republic. The Mexican Empire was short-lived, lasting only until 1823. Despite its brevity, this period marked the first time that the US recognized Mexico as an independent nation, establishing a relationship of enduring importance (see *Political and Social Relations*).

The Early Republic

In 1824, Mexico adopted a republican Constitution, which divided the nation into 19 states, 4 territories, and the Mexico City federal district. It also established Catholicism as the state religion, provided freedom of speech and press, and abolished the special status of indigenous people. Two factions – Centralists and Federalists – competed for political control of the republic. The Centralists were conservative, favoring a strong central government and the exclusive status of Roman Catholicism as the state religion. The Federalists preferred limited government and stood in staunch opposition to the special status of the military and clergy. The Presidency alternated between Centralist and Federalist control five times between 1824-36.

Conflict in Texas: When General Santa Anna assumed the Presidency in 1834, Mexico faced unresolved difficulties to the north. Protestant, English-speaking American settlers in Texas (then part of Mexico) clashed with the few Mexican Catholics living in the area. In 1835, the American settlers formed a provisional government of Texas, and Santa Anna moved to regain control of the region. Leading some 6,000 troops north, he laid siege to and slaughtered the Texan rebels at a Franciscan mission called the Alamo in San Antonio. After Mexican forces achieved another

victory in Goliad, the American public stirred to support the Texans. A reinvigorated Texan Army, assisted by American volunteers, resolutely defeated the Mexicans. Santa Anna signed the Treaties of Velasco on May 14, 1836, giving rise to the independent Republic of Texas.

The Mexican-American War

The US annexed Texas in 1845. US President James Polk also laid broad claim to Mexican territory west of the historic footprint of Texas (then known as Alta California and Nuevo Mexico) and sought to purchase more land in the sparsely settled present-day American Southwest, sending a representative to negotiate in Mexico City. An enraged Mexican government refused to discuss the matter. Polk responded by sending troops to occupy the disputed territory. In April-May 1846, skirmishes broke out between US and Mexican patrols, prompting Polk to request that Congress declare war, which it did on May 13.

The US won quick victories in northeastern Mexico while the Mexican government was embroiled in contentious presidential politics. When Santa Anna finally regained the Presidency in September 1846, he turned his attention to the war. His forces initially fought American elements to a stalemate at Buena Vista in Coahuila before retreating in February 1847. Shortly thereafter, US forces marched on Mexico City, overcoming some 1,000 Mexican soldiers and young cadets, today known as ***Niños Héroes*** (heroic children), at Chapultepec Castle. Santa Anna retreated, and the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo ended the war in early 1848, stipulating that Mexico cede its territories from California to Texas and bringing the northern border close to its current form. The boundary was settled in 1853, when the Gadsden Purchase gave the US nearly 30,000 sq mi of territory in present-day Arizona and New Mexico.

Las Leyes de Reforma (The Reform Laws)

Between 1854-76, Mexico underwent a period of sweeping liberal reform championed by Benito Juárez. In 1855, the Liberal

Party came to power, and Juárez became Justice Minister. He began a campaign of reform by passing the ***Ley Juárez*** (Juárez Law), which abolished ***fueros*** (special privileges granted to certain elements of Mexican society) and limited clerical and military influence. In 1857, the reformers drafted a new Constitution, which, among other measures, codified Mexico as a representative, democratic, republican country.

In 1858, Conservative forces (whose interests largely aligned with those of the earlier Centralists) mounted a rebellion against the Liberal congress in a conflict known as the Reform War. After 3 years of conflict, during which Juárez assumed the Presidency while in exile, the Liberal Army overcame the rebels. Juárez was elected President again in 1861, but his rule was interrupted in 1862, when a joint effort between French forces and Mexican Conservatives deposed him, resulting in the short-lived Second Mexican Empire (1864-67). With US military aid, the republic was restored in 1867. Juárez then won a third term as President, marking the start of a relatively stable period in Mexican politics.

Pax Porfiriana

In 1876, General Porfirio Díaz successfully mounted a coup to remove Benito Juárez's Liberal successor from the Presidency. During the subsequent 35 years, Díaz would come to dominate Mexican politics. Popular with the middle class, Díaz maintained constitutional appearances while consolidating the state's political power for himself. He implemented liberal reforms with militant fervor, and life in Porfirian Mexico became defined by the sacrifice of civil rights for increased prosperity. In this context, a ***Pax Porfiriana*** (Latin for "Porfirian Peace") emerged.

Consequently, Mexico was stable but repressed. While Díaz bought off rival factions, commerce grew, and the budget was balanced. This stability attracted foreign investment. European and US firms began building infrastructure, notably railways (see *Economics and Resources*). However, women's rights and education stagnated (see *Learning and Knowledge*), and foreign

dependency was entrenched. Foreign firms almost entirely controlled the country's mining and emergent oil sectors. Hunger, poverty, and poor labor conditions were rampant, contributing to a steady growth of immigration to the US. These negative effects of ***Porfiriato*** (Díaz-era) policies caused surging opposition. In 1907-08, rising inflation and a shrinking US economy resulted in a recession in Mexico that alienated Díaz's elite supporters. To retain control during the 1910 election, he imprisoned his most popular challenger, Francisco Madero. Without serious opposition, Díaz won the election but heralded a revolution.

The Revolution of 1910

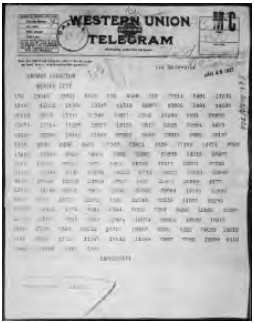
On November 20, 1910, Francisco Madero declared himself the provisional President of Mexico from exile in San Antonio, Texas. Calling for Mexicans to revolt against Porfirian tyranny, he returned to Mexico in 1911 to take command of the revolutionary movement. Facing a debilitated Federalist Army, and with a corps of adept ***caudillo*** (warlord) officers, such as guerilla leader Pancho Villa, the revolution mounted swiftly. On May 25, Díaz resigned and fled to Europe. The revolutionaries largely agreed to disband, but some, like Emiliano Zapata, who for years had led guerilla armies to expropriate land from powerful landowners in the South, resisted demobilization.

Meanwhile, Madero won the 1911 presidential election but could not maintain control of the government. A coup ousted Madero in early 1913, and General Victoriano Huerta seized the Presidency. Refusing to recognize Huerta's authority, revolutionary leader Venustiano Carranza forged a coalition with Pancho Villa and others, calling for national elections. This force successfully removed Huerta from his leadership position in 1914. With the Presidency again vacated, Villa broke ties with Carranza and formed a North-South alliance with Emiliano Zapata, occupying Mexico City. At the Battle of Celaya in 1915, Carranza-aligned groups under the leadership of General Álvaro

Obregón handed Villa and Zapata a decisive defeat, though fighting would continue sporadically until 1920.

Carranza and the Constitution of 1917: Aiming to legitimize his political reform movement by converting it into a formal government, Carranza convened a constituent congress in 1917 to update the Constitution of 1857. While Carranza sought to make minor changes, others wanted the Constitution to contain revolutionary ideas. Against his wishes, the congress introduced then-radical additions that adjusted labor, agrarian, resource, and clerical rights, for which Obregón had advocated. However, having organized the body responsible for Mexico's new Constitution, Carranza was elected President in the same year.

Meanwhile, Mexico had remained officially neutral during World War I (WWI) and refused to participate in an embargo against Germany. Notably, in 1917, the German Foreign Office issued the Zimmerman Telegram, a secret cable proposing a military alliance between Germany and Mexico, whose relations with the US had hitherto deteriorated. Carranza ultimately denied the proposition, which had influenced the US decision to enter WWI.


WESTERN UNION
TELEGRAM

Nevertheless, having spent his popularity on a wasteful expedition in search of Pancho Villa, the President was exiled at the end of his term and later assassinated.

The Obregón and Calles Years

Ending the revolution, Obregón was elected President in 1920 and began a campaign of unification and reform. He granted amnesty to all revolutionary factions, appointed former rivals to his government, and redistributed land. When his term ended in 1924, Obregón did not seek reelection. Instead, he stepped aside, allowing for Mexico's first peaceful transition of power in nearly 50 years. Plutarco Elías Calles was elected President and quickly implemented liberal anticlerical measures, which prompted conservative Catholics in western Mexico to rebel in what became known as the Cristero War (1926-29). With US support, the government subdued the uprising.

Calles continued many of Obregón's reforms, prioritizing land redistribution and irrigation, and pressuring foreign oil firms to return concessions granted during the Díaz era. To preserve power after 1928 election reforms barred consecutive reelection, Calles established the ***Partido Nacional Revolucionario*** (National Revolutionary Party, or PNR). Composed primarily of labor organizers and military leaders, the party took control of the state. Later renamed the ***Partido Revolucionario Institucional*** (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI), it would dominate Mexican politics for the rest of the 20th century.

Cárdenas and the Nationalization of Mexican Oil

In 1934, the PNR selected as President former revolutionary Lázaro Cárdenas, who came into immediate conflict with Calles. When tensions peaked, Calles was exiled, and Cárdenas took control. In 1938, he nationalized Mexican oil by expropriating foreign holdings and establishing ***Petróleos Mexicanos*** (Mexican Petroleum, or PEMEX) to manage the newly consolidated oil industry (see *Economics and Resources*).

World War II (WWII)

Mexico formally entered WWII in 1942 after Nazi Germany sank two of its tankers. Though its military involvement was minimal, its role as a supplier of raw materials and labor to the US made it a crucial player, and wartime Mexico experienced an industrial boom. Further, the Bracero Program (1942-64), which temporarily sent Mexican rail and farmhands to work in the US, mitigated US labor shortages caused by the draft. In the wake of the program, which limited the number of contracted laborers allowed to enter the US, unauthorized migrants increasingly entered the US from Mexico and would become criminalized as "illegal aliens" in subsequent decades.

PRI Control

Near complete PRI control of politics defined the second half of the 20th century in Mexico. From 1946, when President Miguel Alemán was elected President, until 2000, an unbroken line of

civilian PRI Presidents held office. PRI continuity yielded a long period of economic growth that persisted through the 1970s, though loans and major oil discoveries in Tabasco and Chiapas states financed much of this expansion. Politically, the PRI took some steps to liberalize. In 1953, President Adolfo Ruiz Cortines expanded voting rights to women (though they did not vote in a presidential election until 1958 – see *Sex and Gender*).

Simultaneously, however, the party exacted authoritarian control over Mexico's electoral institutions through clientelism (the distribution of private goods in exchange for votes and political support), censorship, and violence against opposition leaders. To quell mounting public protests, the PRI initiated a "dirty war" by secretly murdering dissidents. This repression and violence coincided with Mexico's newfound global status. Just 10 days before the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City, thousands of student protestors gathered in the city's Tlatelolco Plaza, demanding an end to state-sanctioned violence. In response, the military surrounded the plaza and opened fire, killing hundreds.

Despite PRI authoritarianism, opposition parties arose, evolved, and sometimes won seats in local elections. However, for most of the PRI era, only the conservative ***Partido de Acción Nacional*** (National Action Party, or PAN, founded in 1939) was able to mount any serious challenge. Meanwhile, by the 1980s, foreign debt had mounted. Unemployment, an unfavorable trade balance, and high inflation made the situation worse. Major crises occurred in 1982, when Mexico defaulted on its debt, and again in 1987 (see *Economics and Resources*). Economic crisis and repression contributed to powerful anti-PRI sentiment. By the 1990s, a second major opposition party, the leftist ***Partido de la Revolución Democrática*** (Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD) had become an important political force.

Emergent Democracy

Calls for free and fair elections began to mount in the 1990s, and particularly in 1994, after implementation of the North American

Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). This accord established free trade with the US and Canada, eroding many of the country's longstanding protectionist policies (see *Economics and Resources*). On the day of its implementation, some 2,000 Maya took up arms in Chiapas as the ***Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*** (Zapatista National Liberation Army, or EZLN). Arguing that NAFTA would undermine indigenous labor by forcing it to compete with more efficient foreign producers, the EZLN demanded land, improved democracy, and ethnic equality (see *Political and Social Relations*). It leveraged Catholic social networks to recruit members and fought the government for years, drawing sympathy from Mexicans who resented the PRI. NAFTA also caused vast social reverberations, shrinking labor demand and contributing to a sharp increase in Mexican immigration, both legal and illegal, to the US (see *Political and Social Relations*).

The galvanizing effect of the Zapatista uprising, which became a national symbol of resistance, combined with other political currents that led to the end of PRI rule. When PRI President Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de León came to power in 1994, he recognized a necessity for political cooperation and appointed opposition figures to his cabinet. Non-PRI candidates won seats in the 1997 national election. The rising tide of opposition finally overcame the PRI in 2000, when PAN candidate Vicente Fox was elected President, marking the end of 71 years of PRI control in Mexico.

Calderón and the Narcotics Threat

In the contentious 2006 presidential election, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón narrowly defeated PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO). Both candidates claimed victory, but the Electoral Tribunal confirmed Calderón as President (see *Political and Social Relations*), while AMLO unsuccessfully sought to establish a parallel government.

Efforts to mitigate escalating violence by drug cartels (members of which are commonly known as ***narcos***) defined Calderón's

Presidency as he initiated a "war on drugs." He sought to subdue the cartels with widespread security operations designed to capture and kill their leaders. This "kingpin" strategy prompted retaliatory violence from the cartels. Five dominant organizations splintered into more than 200 organized crime groups. Homicide rates soared, peaking in 2011 at 24 people per 100,000. Today, nine major groups, including the Sinaloa Cartel, Jalisco New Generation Cartel, Gulf Cartel, and others control vast swaths of territory, profit handsomely from the drug trade, and exact heavy human tolls (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Calderón's disastrous management of the cartel issue and his partial privatization of PEMEX in 2008 destroyed his popularity and caused widespread dissatisfaction with the PAN. Consequently, PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto was elected President in 2012. His platform centered around the drug war and economy, which was slow to recover after the 2007-09 global financial crisis.

Peña Nieto's campaign outlined a reformist "Pact for Mexico" that he would implement through a PRI-PAN-PRD coalition. This pact was initially successful but eventually caused disagreement among PRD members, who split over the issue of collaborating with the PRI. Thus, AMLO broke ties with the PRD, founding the ***Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional*** (National Renovation Movement, or MORENA) party. Peña Nieto's Presidency was characterized by high-profile successes, like the capture of Joaquín ("El Chapo") Guzmán Loera, head of the Sinaloa Cartel. It was also marked by corruption, a sharp increase in the homicide rate (which reached 30 in 2018), and other failures.

AMLO and MORENA

Mexico's 2018 presidential election was contested by somewhat volatile party coalitions. Propelled by MORENA, AMLO became the first leftist President in Mexico's recent history, winning by a historic margin. His administration prioritized anti-corruption efforts, educational reform, and statist economic policies. Some

analysts argue, though, that AMLO has undermined Mexican democracy by silencing critics, politicizing judicial investigations and prosecutions, and reducing fiscal transparency. In 2024, his term expired. The 2024 election featured MORENA candidate Claudia Sheinbaum, Mexico City's former mayor, who ran against Xóchitl Gálvez, who represents a broad PAN-PRI-PRD coalition. Sheinbaum won the election with 59% of the vote. Observers expect Mexico to maintain a stable economy and democracy, while facing persistent issues like the *narco* threat, poverty, inequality, and corruption.

Myth Overview

In contrast to history, which is supposed to be objective record of the past based on verifiable facts, myths embody a culture's values and often explain the origins of humans and the natural world. Myths are important because they provide a sense of unique heritage and identity. Mythical beliefs in early Mexico were closely linked to a calendar of ritual cycles, through which a pantheon of deities organized cosmic events.

Aztec Myths: The Nahua (Aztec) *Myth of the Suns*, a narrative of creation and destruction through successive world ages, follows this cyclical pattern, and each age ends in catastrophe. The contemporary age (at the time of Aztec society) arose when the gods assembled at Teotihuacán. There, it is recorded, two gods sacrificed themselves in a large fire, becoming the moon and the sun.

Another myth explains the initial settlement of Tenochtitlán. During the Aztecs' long pilgrimage into the Central-South, the god of sun and war, ***Huitzilopochtli***, ordered that they settle at a site to be revealed by the visage of an eagle perched on a cactus with a serpent in its beak. Elders spotted such a bird on an island in Lake Texcoco and set to work constructing what would become the city of Tenochtitlán. The modern flag of Mexico – with its eagle, serpent, and cactus – celebrates this legend (see *Political and Social Relations*).

2. POLITICAL AND SOCIAL RELATIONS

Official Name
United Mexican States (Mexico)
Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Spanish)

Political Borders
US: 1,960 mi
Belize: 171 mi
Guatemala: 595 mi
Coastline: 5,797 mi

Capital
Mexico City

Demographics
Mexico's population of about 131 million is growing at an annual rate of 0.72%. Some 82% of the population lives in urban areas, with more than 22 million people residing in Mexico's and North America's largest city, Mexico City (***Ciudad de Mexico***, also known as CDMX). Generally, the population concentrates in the Central-South, with a quarter of the nation's inhabitants residing in and around Mexico City.

Flag
Officially adopted in 1968, Mexico's flag has been in use since 1821, when the country gained its independence from Spain (see *History and Myth*). The flag consists of three equal vertical bands of green (hoist side), white (center), and red (right). Green signifies hope, joy, and love; red symbolizes hardiness, bravery, strength, and valor; and white represents peace and honesty. Centered in the white panel is Mexico's coat of arms, an image derived from a legend that claims the Aztec people settled where they saw an eagle on a cactus eating a snake (see *History and Myth*).

Geography
Located in southern North America, Mexico borders the US to the north; Gulf of America (Mexico) to the east; Caribbean Sea,

Belize, and Guatemala to the southeast; and the North Pacific Ocean to the south and west. Slightly less than three times the size of Texas and spanning four time zones (see *Time and Space*), Mexico's total land area is over 750,561 sq mi, making it the world's 14th-largest country.

Mexico's varied landscape is due to its vast size and geographic diversity. It divides into nine major physiographic regions that range from dry plains to coastal lowlands, tropical forests, harsh deserts, and highlands dominated by mountain ranges and volcanoes.

Mexico's highest point is Pico de Orizaba (18,491 ft), also known as Citlaltépetl, a volcano located to the southeast of Mexico City. The Río Bravo (Rio Grande in the US) is Mexico's longest river (1,896 mi). It originates in Colorado, ends in the Gulf of America, and serves as part of the Mexico-US border. Mexico also has some of the world's longest cave and underwater cave systems, located in the Yucatán Peninsula.

Climate

Mexico's climate varies considerably with its terrain, from hot and dry in the North near the two main deserts, the Sonoran and Chihuahuan, to the humid temperate zones in central Mexico. The tropical regions in southern and southeastern Mexico are the country's wettest.

In the dry North, the climate is hot in the summer and cooler in the winter, with temperatures that fall rapidly at night and can drop below freezing. The central and southern regions are warm during the day, cool at night, and colder in the winter months. In Mexico City, the average lows and highs are 44 °F in December and January, and 80 °F in May. Generally, the rainy season is from June-September, when it rains on average once per day.

Natural Hazards

Mexico is vulnerable to tsunamis along the Pacific coast, volcanoes and earthquakes in its central and southern regions, and hurricanes along all its maritime coasts. Bordering Mexico's

Pacific coast, the Ring of Fire is a belt of active volcanoes that accounts for 75% of volcanic eruptions and 90% of earthquakes around the world. Mexico is one of the world's most seismically active regions and experiences frequent earthquakes. On September 19, 1985, Mexico suffered a devastating 8.1 magnitude earthquake that caused widespread damage in Mexico City and killed around 9,500 people. On the same day in 2017, Mexico experienced a 7.1 magnitude earthquake, causing over 360 deaths and extensive damage to buildings. Hurricanes are also devastating and unpredictable threats. In 2023, a category 5 storm hit Acapulco, killing at least 27 people.

Environmental Issues

Human practices and related climate change have impacted Mexico's natural environment. Limited hazardous waste disposal facilities; rural-to-urban migration resulting in poor, overcrowded communities; air, water, sewage, and industrial pollution; and deforestation have led to detrimental environmental impacts. The government considers the lack of clean, accessible water and deforestation threats to national security. Some causes of the water crisis are climate change, shifting weather patterns, mismanagement of natural resources, government failure to support a growing and mobile populace, decaying infrastructure, and overdevelopment.

Government

Mexico is a federal republic that divides into 31 ***estados*** (states) and the ***Distrito Federal*** (Federal District, or DF – Mexico City). Each state elects a governor and congress, and the DF has a ***Jefe de Gobierno*** (Head of Government), similar to a mayor. Governors and the *Jefe de Gobierno* serve 6-year terms and are not eligible for reelection. The states subdivide into over 2,000 ***municipios*** (municipalities), each led by an elected ***presidente municipal*** (municipal president), who serves a 3-year term and is eligible for reelection once.

The current Constitution, adopted in 1917 following a revolution (see *History and Myth*), guarantees personal freedoms, civil

liberties, and establishes economic and political principles. Like in the US, each state establishes its own Constitution following the model of the federal Constitution.

Executive Branch

Succeeding AMLO, the current President, Claudia Sheinbaum, won the Presidency and took office in 2024 (see *History and Myth*). The President can serve only a single 6-year term. President Sheinbaum will remain in office until the end of her term in December 2030. The President is the head-of-state and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and has the right to issue ***reglamentos*** (executive decrees) that have the effect of the law. Some other responsibilities are appointing a cabinet, Attorney General, diplomats, high-ranking military officers, and nominating Supreme Court Magistrates.

Mexico has no position of Vice President, meaning that in the case of death, incapacity, or other reason the President vacates their position, the legislature designates a provisional successor.

Legislative Branch

The two-chamber ***Congreso de la Unión*** (Congress of the Union) consists of a 128-seat Senate and 500-seat Chamber of Deputies. Senators, who comprise 96 members elected by majority vote and 32 by proportional representation vote, serve 6-year terms that run concurrently with that of the President. Of the 500 Deputies, 300 are elected in single-seat constituencies by majority vote and 200 in a single nationwide constituency by proportional representation. All Deputies serve 3-year terms. As of the 2018 election, Senators are eligible for one second term and Deputies up to four consecutive terms.

After decades of power concentrating in the executive, Congress gained power since Mexico shifted from single-party rule in 2000 (see *History and Myth*). Congress can pass laws, impose taxes, declare war, and ratify diplomatic appointments. It also approves the budget, international treaties and conventions, and Supreme Court Magistrates nominated by the President.

Judicial Branch

The judiciary includes the ***Suprema Corte de Justicia de la Nación*** (Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation, or SCJN), the Federal Electoral Tribunal, Federal Judicial Council, and several circuit and district courts.

As the highest court, the SCJN is responsible for defending the Constitution, keeping the balance among different government institutions through judicial resolutions, and solving important public matters. The SCJN's 11 Magistrates, known as Ministers of the Court, are appointed by the President and confirmed by the Senate or Permanent Committee. They serve 15-year terms and vote among themselves to designate the President of the Court. The Electoral Tribunal oversees elections and has seven judges, including the Court President. The judges are nominated by the SCJN and elected by the Senate. The Court President is elected by the six other judges for a 4-year term.

Political Climate

Mexico went through a series of political transitions and conflict that led to single-party rule by what became the ***Partido Revolucionario Institucional*** (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) from 1929-2000 (see *History and Myth*). While democratic today, Mexico's political environment has become polarized as a result of differing approaches to address economic inequality (see *Economics and Resources*) and hostility among politicians due to accusations of corruption. While Mexico's criminal code prohibits bribery of public officials and representatives, corruption is widespread. In a 2024 corruption perceptions index, Mexico ranked 140 of 180 countries, higher than Guatemala.

While the PRI's power weakened in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, partly due to charges of corruption and an economic crisis (see *Economics and Resources*), it remained influential. After the ***Partido de Acción Nacional*** (National Action Party, or PAN) won the presidential election in 2000, the PRI, PAN, and

Partido de la Revolución Democrática (Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD) were the main political parties until AMLO founded the ***Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional*** (National Regeneration Movement, or MORENA), a left-wing, anti-neoliberal, populist party in 2014.

During the election in 2018, election-related violence resulted in over 100 deaths, making it the most violent in Mexico's recent history. AMLO won by appealing to voters' frustrations with traditional political parties and promised to address inequality, poverty, corruption, and violence. After proving less progressive in office, AMLO has lost the support of some middle-class and young voters, though he remains popular among many lower-class Mexicans. During AMLO's time in office, some observers criticized his response to Mexico's organized crime-fueled homicide epidemic (see "Security Issues" below) and his plan to build a costly oil refinery even though existing refineries operate unprofitably (see *Economics and Resources*).

The most recent presidential election occurred in June 2024, and the primary candidates were women. Claudia Sheinbaum won the election, becoming the country's first female President (see *Sex and Gender*). AMLO supported political ally Sheinbaum, the former *Jefa de Gobierno* of Mexico City and MORENA nominee. With PRI and PRD support, the PAN nominee was former Senator Xóchitl Gálvez. The candidates' campaigns focused on crime, corruption, and other issues. Mexico has universal suffrage with compulsory voting for people aged 18 and older.

Defense

The ***Fuerzas Armadas de México*** (Mexican Armed Forces) comprise the Secretariat of National Defense, which consists of ground, air, and national guard forces, and the Secretariat of the Navy, consisting of maritime branches, with a joint strength of 287,000 active-duty troops and 136,900 gendarmerie and paramilitary. Military operations emphasize internal security,

combatting organized crime, and maintaining a close defense relationship with the US. Male and female 18-year-olds, and 16-year-olds with parental consent, are eligible for voluntary enlistment into the military. At 18-years-old, men must register for compulsory 12-month military service determined by lottery. Those selected serve in the National Military Service Battalion and remain in reserve status until age 40.

Army: Mexico's Army consists of about 186,000 active-duty troops organized into 12 regions, consisting of 3 special forces brigades; 150+ maneuver brigades, regiments, battalions, and convoys (including reconnaissance, light, and air maneuver); and a combat support regiment.

Navy: Mexico's Navy is composed of some 71,000 personnel organized into Gulf and Pacific fleet commands. Naval Aviation consists of 1,250 personnel, 22 fleets (including maritime patrol; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR); transport; training; search and rescue helicopter; and transport helicopter), a VIP transport squadron, and a training squadron. The Marines, comprising 21,500 troops, consists of 3 special forces units, 39 maneuver (light, air maneuver, amphibious, and other) battalions and brigades, and 2 combat service support battalions.

Air Force: Composed of around 30,000 active-duty personnel, the Air Force comprises the following squadrons: 1 fighter; 5 ground attack/ISR; an ISR/airborne early warning; and 9 transport, 8 transport helicopter, and 3 training. The Air Force also has the following groups: presidential transport, VIP transport, and an ISR unmanned aerial vehicle unit.

Gendarmerie and Paramilitary: Comprising about 136,900 personnel, Mexico's gendarmerie and paramilitary forces organize into the Federal Ministerial Police, comprising 4,500 personnel; the National Guard, comprising 115,000 personnel and composed of 12 maneuver brigades; and the Rural Defense Militia composed of 17,400 personnel and 26 light maneuver units.

MEXICO

Air Force Rank Insignia

Major General

Brigadier General

Colonel

Lieutenant Colonel

Major

Senior Captain

Captain

Lieutenant

2nd Lieutenant

1st Sergeant

Sergeant

Corporal

Private

Security Issues

Narcotics Trafficking: Mexican drug cartels are leading traffickers of narcotics like cocaine, heroin, methamphetamines (meth), and fentanyl (a synthetic opioid up to 50 times more potent than heroin) to the US. While Mexican suppliers are mainly responsible for producing heroin and meth, South American organizations primarily produce cocaine, which Mexican cartels transport. Chinese suppliers provide chemicals that Mexican cartels use to make fentanyl, which is a main contributor to the deadliest-ever US drug epidemic, accounting for over 74,700 fatalities in the US in 2023.

Of Mexico's nine main drug-trafficking organizations (DTOs), the ***Cártel de Sinaloa*** (Sinaloa Cartel), ***Cártel de Jalisco Nueva Generación*** (Jalisco New Generation Cartel), and ***Cártel del Golfo*** (Gulf Cartel) are the most prominent. These cartels have established a presence across the country and engage in violent turf wars. All the DTOs are effective organizations that take over regions and local economies. Different cartels use various methods – violence and extortion, political influence, and protecting local businesses and people – to control territories. Cartels use coercion, intimidation, and terror to ensure that the results of some local and federal elections are in their favor. In 2021, the cartels denied some citizens secrecy in voting booths, and some candidates withdrew from races due to death threats.

In addition to drug trafficking, DTOs contribute to Mexico's high homicide rate (between 30-50% of all homicides in Mexico are related to organized crime – see *Sustenance and Health*), kidnappings, and arms trafficking. Studies suggest that 70% of gun crimes in Mexico involve US-bought weapons, likely due in part to arms trafficking. In its response to drug-related activity, the government has committed human rights violations such as torture, extrajudicial killings, and forced disappearances against the DTOs. However, in many cases, DTOs work with a network of corrupt government officials, enabling them to gain distribution

rights, market access, and protection. Official corruption has played a role in more than 79,000 disappearances since 2006. The most notorious case occurred in 2014, when police and servicemen, who were secretly working for a DTO, abducted and killed 43 students from Ayotzinapa Rural Teachers' College in Iguala, Guerrero. The case remains unsolved.

Mexican Presidents have addressed the threat cartels pose to democracy with different strategies. In 2006, President Felipe Calderón declared war on DTOs, and both Calderón and his successor, Enrique Peña Nieto, approached the cartels with a militarized crackdown. AMLO's strategy, "hugs, not bullets," seeks to address the socioeconomic causes of organized crime by creating job opportunities, introducing poverty alleviation programs, legalizing marijuana, and creating new sentencing guidelines for drug traffickers. While AMLO's strategy originally promoted a decrease of military force, in 2019, he created the ***Guardia Nacional*** (National Guard), which mirrored his predecessors' military-forward tactics. Although homicide rates have declined from an all-time high of 30 per 100,000 people in 2018, Mexico still reports over 30,000 crime-related deaths per year.

Migration Crisis: In recent years, the number of migrants that travel to the US through Central America and Mexico has risen significantly. Many migrants and refugees, especially vulnerable groups like children, women, the elderly, disabled, and homosexuals, face bureaucratic barriers and extortion, suffer from injuries, endure violence, disappear, or are separated from their families.

Although many of the migrants arriving in Mexico from Central and South America qualify as refugees under Mexican law, the government struggles to meet the demand to accommodate them. In 2023, Mexico received a record number of requests for refuge – a 31% increase from 2022. In 2018, AMLO pledged to adopt a humanitarian approach to migration, though while in office, his government has increased migrant apprehension and

restricted access to humanitarian visas. This policy has driven migrants to take riskier routes and rely on human smugglers known as coyotes, who profit from the multi-billion-dollar enterprise of human trafficking.

Foreign Relations

Mexico is a member of international organizations like the United Nations (UN), Group of 20 (G20, comprising 20 of the world's largest economies), World Trade Organization, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Mexico's first major contribution to UN peacekeeping was in 1992, and the country has participated in 12 total operations.

Mexico has historically played a minor role in international affairs and instead focused more on domestic issues. For example, since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2014 and 2022, Mexico has sought a neutral role, neither sending arms to Ukraine nor imposing sanctions on Russia. Mexico has taken a similar stance on the 2023-25 Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza, avoiding a formal position and remaining neutral.

Regional Relations: Mexico is a member of various political and economic regional organizations, such as the Organization of American States, Pacific Alliance, and Community of Latin American and Caribbean States.

For over 40 years, Mexico has worked with neighboring Belize to facilitate a productive and friendly relationship by cooperating on efforts related to agricultural development, trade, tourism, narcotics trafficking, health, education, and more. In 2022, the countries began the Sowing Life project, a joint agricultural effort that aims to contribute to food security and job creation. Mexico has had formal relations with its other southeastern neighbor, Guatemala, since 1838. Guatemalan migrants recently have accounted for more than any other nationality at the US-Mexico border. To address the regional migration crisis, Mexico and Guatemala cooperate through the Comprehensive Development

Plan for Central America, which strives to boost economic growth and alleviate the social factors driving migration.

Mexico also coordinates closely with its northern neighbors and hosted the North American Leaders' Summit (NALS) in early 2023, which focused on collaboration with Canada and the US. The nations signed the Declaration of North America, a regional effort focused on building the regional economy and expanding cooperation across the six NALS pillars: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; Climate Change and Environment; Competitiveness; Health; Migration and Development; and Regional Security.

Relations with China: Mexico and China established diplomatic relations in 1972, and both are members of the UN, G20, and APEC. After the 2016 US presidential election, Mexican and Chinese diplomats pledged to strengthen ties due to the strained relations between the US and both countries. Mexico's efforts to lessen its economic dependence on the US led the government to nurture a strategic relationship with China instead. China is Mexico's second largest trading partner after the US (see *Economics and Resources*). China classifies its relations with Mexico as a comprehensive strategic partnership, the highest classification applied to partners in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) region. The countries also collaborate on commercial and digital projects, manufacturing, oil and gas, mining, logistics, electricity, and security, among other areas. For example, in July 2023, a Chinese energy company signed a 20-year purchase agreement with Mexico, enabling it access to Mexico's oil production (see *Technology and Material*).

Relations with the US: In 1822, the US became the first country to recognize Mexican independence from Spain. Mexico and the US broke and reestablished diplomatic relations many times over territorial and political disputes. Historically, relations have been complicated due to the nearly 2,000-mi shared border and political instability in Mexico, which have strained relations that otherwise have remained intact since 1917.

Over 200 years of diplomatic relations have resulted in a bilateral relationship focused on a wide array of topics – some of the most notable are trade, economic development, citizen security, educational exchange, drug and human trafficking, and migration, among others. Migration and security along the US-Mexico border tend to dominate the complex cooperation efforts. Mexico and the US work to address the root causes of irregular migration and are members of the Regional Conference on Migration, which helps coordinate regional migration policies. The US government also funded a UN High Commissioner for Refugees mission with the Mexican Commission for Refugee Assistance to increase its asylum case registration capacity by 400% since 2018. US President Joe Biden signed the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law in 2021 that provided $1.4 billion for construction to improve infrastructure and modernization projects at land ports along the shared border.

Mexico and the US have a robust and crucial trade relationship. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect in 1994 with the goal of eliminating tariffs and trade barriers between the US, Canada, and Mexico. The US-Mexico-Canada Agreement replaced it in 2020. While some scholars dispute NAFTA's overall benefits, the agreement led to Mexico experiencing a dramatic increase in exports, from $60 billion to almost $400 billion between 1994-2013. As of 2024, Mexico and the US are each other's top trading partners. Likewise, as of 2024, Mexico remained the second-largest source of foreign crude oil to the US.

Over the past several decades, Mexican immigration to the US has significantly impacted various aspects of US culture such as cuisine, music, business, sports, labor, and politics. Today, Mexican-Americans represent over 11% of the total US population. In 2023, remittances from the US to Mexico reached record levels and accounted for some 3.7% of Mexico's GDP. Many migrants in the US use some of their earnings to support family members in Mexico, helping them provide their households with food,

clothing, and healthcare, among other goods, services, and benefits.

Ethnic Groups

Most of Mexico's population has a mix of indigenous and European heritage. While Mexico does not collect census data on ethnicity, about 62% of the population is ***mestizo*** (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent), 21% predominantly Amerindian, 7% full Amerindian, and 10% mostly European. Mexico is home to a large foreign-born population. US citizens are the largest group of immigrants. Many others are from LAC countries, such as Venezuela, Honduras, and El Salvador, and a rising number originate from Asia and Africa.

Mexico is home to nearly 17 million indigenous people, the largest population in the Americas, who comprise about 68 language groups (see *Language and Communication*). The largest indigenous groups are the Nahuatl, Maya, Zapoteco, and Mixteco. Concentrated in the Central-South and Yucatán, almost 80% of indigenous language speakers live in 8 of Mexico's 31 states, with the most residing in Oaxaca, Chiapas, Veracruz, and Puebla.

The ancestors of Mexicans of African descent (Afro-Mexicans) were forced into slavery beginning in the 16th century. During the Spanish conquest (see *History and Myth*), an estimated 200,000 or more enslaved Africans were brought to Mexico. By 1810, the last year data was collected on the African descendant population, the number of Africans in Mexico outnumbered the Spaniards. As of 2020, an estimated 2.6 million people of African descent live throughout the country, though many concentrate along the Gulf Coast and in the Costa Chica region along southern Mexico's Pacific coast.

Social Relations

Like in other Spanish colonies in the LAC region, early Mexico had a strict hierarchal class- and race-based system, called the ***Sistema de Castas*** (Society of Castes), that continues to

influence society. Today, Mexican society divides along rural-urban, rich-poor, and ethnic group lines. Generally, indigenous Mexicans are more likely to be poor and working class, often toiling in the industrial or services sectors in cities or as peasants in the countryside. Conversely, Mexicans of European descent and lighter-skinned residents occupy a wide range of social and economic positions, largely as a result of racial discrimination.

Mexican society also divides by income and educational level, with a small upper class and larger middle and lower classes. Upper-class Mexicans are wealthy, well-educated elites, often referred to as "peso billionaires." In many areas, but particularly the northern half of the country, upper-class landholders form an agricultural elite that controls extensive resources and receives a huge proportion of the income generated from agriculture (see *Economics and Resources*).

The middle and upper classes account for about 38% of the population, while the lower class comprises most of society. Nevertheless, determining the actual size of the middle class is complicated, due to the multidimensional measurements used to determine it and the belief held by some 79% of Mexicans that they are middle-class. Regardless, members of the middle class tend to hold jobs as commercial and industrial workers, professionals, and public officials, though job type is not always relative to social class. Some Mexicans with higher paying jobs or advanced education still struggle to escape systemic poverty.

Between 2018-22 the proportion of Mexicans living in poverty fell from about 50% to 36%. Those living below the poverty line often endure inadequate living conditions (see *Family and Kinship*). Poverty rates vary by region but are highest in southern Mexico, which is where indigenous and Afro-Mexican minorities primarily concentrate. Further, this inequality accompanies often dramatic differences in access to education, health services, housing, safety, and other basic necessities that contribute to stark differences in Mexicans' quality of life.

3. RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

Overview

Mexico's population is predominantly Christian. According to a 2020 government survey, some 78% of residents identify as Roman Catholic, 10% Protestant, 8% non-religious (including those who identify as atheist and agnostic), and less than 2% follow other religious traditions, such as Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and others.

Mexico's Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) declares the country a secular state, guarantees freedom of worship, and prohibits religious discrimination. Nevertheless, the Catholic Church has greatly influenced Mexican culture, attitudes, and history.

Early Religion

Before the arrival of European ***conquistadores*** (conquerors, see *History and Myth*), Mexico's indigenous peoples (see *Political and Social Relations*) led rich spiritual lives. Scholars believe the Maya, primarily based in the Yucatán Peninsula and Guatemala (see *History and Myth*), recognized several spirits and gods, who they believed constructed the universe, created the earth and humans, and influenced daily life. The Maya worshipped nature gods, such as those controlling the sun, moon, rain, and animals, and practiced numerous rituals based on an elaborate 260-day sacred calendar. Believing in the cyclical nature of creation and destruction, the Maya meticulously timed religious rituals and ceremonies according to their complex calendrical system to honor both gods and ancestors. An order of priests conducted all religious rites, which included bloodletting, sacrifices, and other rituals.

The Maya notably adopted many rituals and practices from the Olmecs, the first major civilization in Mesoamerica, as indicated by archeological evidence of early ceremonial tools (see *History*

and Myth). The Olmecs are also renowned for their sculptures of volcanic stone and jade, which often depicted religious imagery. Subsequent groups, like the Teotihuacán, Toltec, Aztec, and Zapotec peoples (see *History and Myth*), held similar religious beliefs and constructed large temple complexes with detailed artistic depictions of deities and spirits.

Aztec Religion: Like the earlier civilizations, the Aztecs believed in multiple gods. Two important Aztec deities were ***Huitzilopochtli***, the god of sun and war, and ***Tlaloc***, the god of rain. The Aztecs followed ***tonalpohualli***, a 260-day ritual calendar, to celebrate their deities with offerings such as fine art and animals bred for sacrifice. The Aztecs also offered human sacrifices, believing that *Huitzilopochtli* required human blood to produce sunlight, providing warmth, light, and life. During Emperor Montezuma II's reign, an increase of these human sacrifices, often victims of conquered tribes, caused widespread resentment among many of his subjects. When Spaniard Hernán Cortés arrived in 1519, he made alliances with some of these tribes to aid in the eventual conquering of the Aztecs (see *History and Myth*).

Introduction of Christianity

Spanish conquerors brought Christianity to Mexico in the early 16th century. Hernán Cortés led the *conquistadores* and his indigenous allies to overthrow the Aztec Empire's capital city of Tenochtitlán, present-day Mexico City, in 1521 (see *History and Myth*). A Roman Catholic, Cortés attributed his victories to God and demanded the Aztec temples and idols be destroyed and replaced with Catholic symbols, such as the cross and image of the Virgin Mary, Mother of Jesus Christ. While some indigenous populations accepted the Catholic imagery, many others maintained their traditional beliefs and practices, often in private or in syncretic (mixed) form. Notably, Mexico's national icon is ***La Virgen de Guadalupe*** (The Virgin of Guadalupe), another name for the Virgin Mary. Many Mexicans believe she visited a Nahua peasant, Juan Diego, who then

converted to Christianity on December 9, 1531 (see "Catholicism" below).

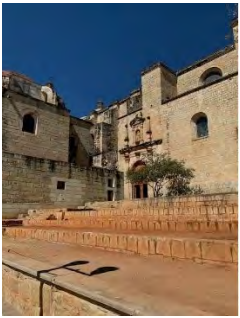
Catholicism During the Colonial Period

Under Spanish colonial rule, the Catholic Church was central to Mexican life, particularly in education, politics, and economics. Catholic friars frequently accompanied *conquistadores* on their expeditions, and government officials entrusted clergymen with leadership positions. In 1572, the Jesuits (a Catholic order) began building ***congregaciones*** (indigenous settlements established by colonial-forced relocation policies). The *congregaciones* were self-sufficient communities where indigenous people could live shielded from the abuses that they suffered under the ***encomienda*** system (forced indigenous labor). The Catholic Church also opened schools, orphanages, and hospitals that provided important social services. However, upon the Spanish King's expulsion of the Jesuits from his empire in 1767, many of these institutions shut down or changed ownership.

Religion in the 19th Century

Mexico began fighting for independence in 1810 (see *History and Myth*). At the time, the Catholic Church was divided into upper and lower clergy. The upper clergy, comprising primarily Spanish priests, held more power and influence, while the lower clergy were typically ***mestizos*** (people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent). Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla, a *mestizo* priest, led his parishioners to revolt against Spanish rule. Although Spanish forces executed Hidalgo in 1811, José María Morelos, a ***mulato pardo*** (mixed person of indigenous and African descent) priest assumed leadership of the movement. In 1813, he declared independence from Spain at the Congress of Chilpancingo and established Catholicism as the state religion in the southern areas under his control. After Mexico gained independence in 1821, its new republican Constitution confirmed Catholicism as the country's state religion in 1824 (see *History and Myth*).

In 1857, ***Las Leyes de Reforma*** (The Reform Laws – see *History and Myth*) officially separated church and state. Porfirio Díaz, a mestizo military leader, became President in 1876. During his time in office (see *History and Myth*), Díaz sought to mend the conflict between the Catholic Church and government with a "policy of conciliation." Under Díaz's leadership, officials did not enforce the constitutional separation of the church and state. However, increasingly evident class divisions helped foster local religious cults and revolutionary peasant movements, which caused the Catholic Church to believe it was losing the faith of Mexicans. In 1891, Pope Leo XIII (the leader of the Roman Catholic Church in Rome, Italy) called on the Church to become more involved in the lives of the Mexican people.



Religion in the 20th Century

During the Mexican Revolution (1910-20), the Church aligned with the old regime, pitting it against the revolutionaries, who won the protracted struggle (see *History and Myth*). The resultant Constitution of 1917 placed restrictions on the Church by banning public religious ceremonies and Catholic education (see *Learning and Knowledge*) and requiring marriage ceremonies to be civil rather than religious (see *Family and Kinship*).

When he became President in 1924, Plutarco Elías Calles immediately enforced the anti-clerical laws and deported some 200 foreign-born priests. Catholic supporters, known as ***Cristeros*** (Soldiers of Christ) rebelled, as they believed the government was trampling their religious freedoms. Of the approximately 4,500 priests practicing in Mexico before the conflict, only 334 remained by 1934, as the rest had been deported, expelled, assassinated, or stripped of their titles.

Nevertheless, for the next several decades, relations between the Church and state were amicable. Between 1930-50, many Mexicans began migrating to the US to find agricultural and railroad work and to escape political turmoil (see *History and*

Myth). However, the Church opposed migration, fearing it would result in the separation of families, exposure to foreign ideas, and religious conversion. After failing to stem the flow of migrants to the US, by the 1960s, the Church's policy had switched to one of providing aid. The Church denounced the abuse of migrants, and by 1987, Catholic shelters for migrants had emerged in many border cities.

Religion Today

While Mexico's Constitution grants Mexicans religious freedom, and society is largely tolerant of diverse religions, the Roman Catholic Church remains an important historical and cultural institution. In recent years, however, many Catholic Mexicans have converted to Protestantism. The number of residents practicing Protestantism has steadily risen, from just under 5% in 1990 to over 10% today. Despite some variation among sects, Protestantism in Mexico tends to emphasize personal salvation, morality, and has a traditionally less complex relationship with the government, appealing to many people. Nevertheless, Catholicism still influences norms and institutions in Mexico. Although the Church does not retain a privileged status in government, many holidays and rites of passage (see *Time and Space* and *Family and Kinship*) are Catholic.

Catholicism: Today, Catholicism is intertwined with the everyday lives of many Mexicans. Even some of those who identify as non-religious engage in Catholic ceremonies and celebrations. Rites of passage, such as baptism, first communion, and confirmation, are part of Mexican culture. Mexico is also home to various unique Catholic traditions. Every year, millions of pilgrims travel to the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City to pray to the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe that appeared before Juan Diego in 1531. The annual event occurs in early December and has become one of the world's most significant pilgrimages, with attendees hailing not only from Mexico, but around the world.

In recent decades, Mexico has experienced a rise in violence (see *Political and Social Relations*) and consistently ranks as Latin America's most violent country for Roman Catholic priests. The Church's aid of migrants and denunciation of criminal activity has made many of its members targets for organized crime. Priests are often murdered for attempting to help others, such as those seeking refuge in Church buildings.

This violence has led many Mexicans to seek alternative meanings and prayers within the Catholic faith. One such example is ***Nuestra Señora de la Santa Muerte*** (Our Lady of Holy Death), who appears in the form of a skeletal woman wearing a long robe and holding objects such as a scythe, a long agricultural tool with a sharp blade, that represents the severance of life and death. Some Mexicans believe worship of *La Santa Muerte's* image brings healing and protection. This practice is especially popular among some members of the lower class, who often experience significant hardship (see *Political and Social Relations*).

Syncretic (Mixed) Religion: While few Mexicans practice syncretism as their primary religion, many incorporate syncretic beliefs in their spiritual lives. Since the 16th century, Mexicans have combined Aztec symbols with Catholic ideas and imagery. *La Virgen de Guadalupe* has an association with the female Aztec earth deity ***Tonantzin*** (Our Sacred Mother). Many Mexicans view such figures, who are often portrayed as pregnant, as the emergence of the unified Mexican nation, born from the encounter between European and pre-Hispanic civilizations. Likewise, worship of *La Santa Muerte* has an association with the Aztec deity ***Mictlantecuhtli*** (the goddess of death), and both figures represent the association of death with rebirth.

Syncretic faiths in Mexico are not limited to a mix of indigenous and Catholic traditions. In the 1990s, an uprising in the southern state of Chiapas by an armed organization (see *History and*

Myth) brought international attention to the treatment of indigenous people in Mexico. Many of the Tzotzil, who trace their ancestry to the Mayan Empire, have felt oppressed by both the Mexican government and Catholic institutions. Consequently, some have turned to Islam. While most Tzotzil practice Catholicism and traditional beliefs, in recent years, Islam has grown in popularity, and some Tzotzil incorporate traditional beliefs with Islamic customs. For example, some women wear a ***hijab*** (headscarf) made from traditional Mayan shawls, while men wear prayer caps known as ***kufis***.

Other Christian Churches: While Protestant missions have been present in Mexico since the 16th century, few made significant progress converting the local population until the 19th and 20th centuries. In recent years, some Protestant groups, such as Evangelicals and Pentecostals, have experienced a surge in membership. Another group, the Restorationist ***Iglesia de La Luz del Mundo*** (Church of the Light of the World) has also gained widespread popularity. Many recent converts are former Catholics, who are seeking community, a different style of worship, or a more personal connection to God.

In the 1880s, some excommunicated members of the Utah-based Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, also known as Mormons, emigrated to Mexico to escape religious persecution. A US ban on the traditional Mormon practice of polygyny, a man having multiple wives simultaneously, created a branch of fundamentalist Mormons. While polygyny was illegal in Mexico, its government often did not enforce these laws, allowing the fundamentalists to migrate to Mexico and continue practicing polygyny well into the 20th century. In 1983, the first Mormon temple was dedicated in Mexico City. Today, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints counts over 300,000 followers, who worship in 13 temples throughout the country. While some are descendants of the fundamentalists, polygyny is not widely practiced.

Mennonites also moved to Mexico to escape religious persecution. Originally from Switzerland, Mennonites' refusal to participate in infant baptism and other state-mandated policies, believing only in ordinance from God, caused them to seek religious freedom outside of Europe. Many found refuge in Canada until the 1920s, when Canadian laws changed to make public school attendance compulsory. Consequently, many Mennonites sought isolation and land to farm, and eventually settled in the northern state of Chihuahua, where President Álvaro Obregón (1920-24) granted them an exception to Mexican laws like obligatory military service.

Often identified by their simple clothing, Mennonites in Mexico still speak ***Plautdietsch***, a blended German and Dutch dialect, though some have begun speaking Spanish. Many have also integrated Mexican culture into their lives over the past century. Today, Mennonites continue to seek isolation and mostly live in Chihuahua and Durango, which are home to many of Mexico's approximately 100,000 practicing Mennonites. Between 2012-17, Mexico lost some 30,000 Mennonites, many of whom emigrated to escape violence in the northern region.

Other Religions: Various non-Christian religious minorities live in Mexico. Judaism was first practiced by ***conversos*** (crypto-Jews – those practicing Judaism in secret), who were forced to publicly accept Christianity but secretly continued to practice their Jewish faith. Jewish communal life did not begin in Mexico until after 1910 and was not fully accepted until after the ratification of the 1917 Constitution. Today, Mexico is home to about 58,000 practicing Jews, who mostly live in Mexico City. About 90% of Jewish families send their children to one of the country's 16 Jewish day schools.

Mexico's over 7,900 Muslims primarily live in Mexico City. Apart from the Tzotzil and other Mexicans who have adopted Islam, many practicing Muslims are foreign nationals. Other religions that count few practitioners in Mexico are Buddhism, Hinduism, and others, generally practiced by foreign nationals.

4. FAMILY AND KINSHIP

Overview

The family is the center of Mexican life and provides emotional, economic, and social support. Mexican families are typically close-knit and involved in members' life decisions. Marrying and starting a family remain a priority for most young adults. Many families have relatives abroad, mainly in the US.

Residence

Mexico began to urbanize at a rapid rate in the 19th century. As of 2023, around 82% of Mexicans live in cities and about 20% live in the capital, Mexico City. Electricity and indoor plumbing are widely available, and most Mexicans have access to these basic services. However, some residents in lower-income and rural areas lack safe access to drinking water and sewage systems (see *Political and Social Relations*). Due to frequent earthquakes (see *Political and Social Relations*), most houses lack basements, and regulations require buildings to have foundations made from a strong cement mixture and sturdy walls.

Rural: Country dwellings typically are adapted to the local climate and constructed of ***adobe*** (mud) or stone. In some rural areas, urban-style cement and brick homes have become more common. Many rural families live in houses with no lawn but instead grow crops, flowers, or place potted plants outside. Lower-class rural residents typically do not own the land on which they work and depend on limited wages paid by elite agricultural landowners (see *Economics and Resources*).

Urban: City dwellings vary by neighborhood, and both houses and apartments are common. Some urban houses are inspired by indigenous or Spanish architecture and usually lack a lawn. Middle- and upper-class families tend to live in large cities or wealthy suburbs. While many lower-class urban families live in ***vecindades*** (complexes) that contain 10-12 small housing units

connected by a shared courtyard, some impoverished urban families live in makeshift housing. Migration from rural regions to large cities has resulted in the development of ***ciudades perdidas*** (lost cities), or shantytowns, where residents build homes from readily available materials like cardboard or scrap metal. The largest shantytown in Latin America, Neza-Chalco-Itza in the State of Mexico, is home to some four million people, who live on land without formal titles. The government does not provide these settlements with basic services and resources. In some, however, residents build thriving communities with water and electricity.

Family Structure

In Mexican families, the eldest male, often the father, is traditionally the ***jefe de familia*** (male head-of-household), while the mother is responsible for domestic tasks and childcare. Nevertheless, traditional attitudes are changing (see *Sex and Gender*). In middle- and upper-class urban families, men and women increasingly share domestic tasks. While many traditional households consist of multiple generations, young, urban Mexicans more commonly live with just their nuclear (immediate) family. Generally, Mexicans highly regard their elders and tend to be respectful and courteous in their company.

Many children live at home well into adulthood until they get married or a job that requires relocation. Due to high living costs and expenses related to higher education (see *Learning and Knowledge*), many lower- and middle-class rural families do not expect their children to move out of the family home. Although many newlyweds move into their first home together, it also has become common for unmarried couples to cohabitate.

Children

While Mexican families historically had many children, they have fewer today (see *Sex and Gender*). Parents' involvement in their children's lives generally continues into adulthood. Many middle- and upper-class families have maids or nannies, though lower-class mothers and daughters typically assume childcare

responsibilities. Parents tend to be highly protective of their children, especially girls, and children often respect and obey their parents' decisions. Although daughters traditionally learned skills and roles from their mothers and sons from their fathers, this standard has begun to change, in part due to an increase in households led by single or other non-traditional parents.

Birth: A few weeks before a woman's due date, family and friends typically hold a party similar to a baby shower in the US, whereby attendees bring gifts, food, and entertainment to celebrate the arrival of the baby. After birth, grandmothers tend to provide significant support to the family, parents, and baby.

Naming: While naming conventions vary (see *Language and Communication*), many Mexicans name their children after Catholic saints. Typically, people have composite names – one or two first names and no middle name.

Rites of Passage

Many Mexicans observe the Roman Catholic rite of passage of baptizing their children within a few months after birth (see *Religion and Spirituality*). Baptism is an important social ritual, with ***padrinos*** (godparents), family, and friends usually in attendance. Many Mexicans also observe other Catholic traditions that mark milestones in life, like first communion and confirmation. Some Mexican 15-year-old girls have a ***Quinceañera*** (15th birthday party) to celebrate their transition into adulthood. A large party with friends and family typically includes festivities like a religious ceremony, father-daughter dance, food, and music.

Dating and Courtship: Mexicans often meet at school, social events, cafes, or bars, and seek their parents' approval of their partners. While many marry around their mid-20s, the age in rural areas is often younger. Older men generally have an easier time finding partners than older women due to social stigmas.

Weddings: Mexican weddings generally comprise two events – a civil ceremony attended by immediate family and a religious

one at a church following Catholic traditions with both family and other guests. A reception follows the ceremony, can last up to 2 days, and usually includes dancing, games, music, food, drinks, and cake. After the wedding reception, the married couple typically hosts a ***tornaboda*** (wedding after-party), a smaller late-night informal celebration immediately following the reception or held the next day.

Divorce

Legalized in 1917, divorce was traditionally highly stigmatized. Today, uncontested divorce is relatively simple. Mexico has experienced an increase in divorces every year from 2001-21, except for 2020 (likely due to the COVID-19 pandemic). As of 2022, the divorce rate was about 1.3 per 1,000 inhabitants, lower than the US (2.4), but higher than neighboring Guatemala (0.2).

Death

Indigenous and Catholic traditions influence Mexican funeral customs. After death, Mexicans typically hold a wake at a funeral home or in the home of the deceased. During this period, friends and relatives visit to pay their respects. The family typically holds the funeral in a church, and the burial occurs within 2-3 days after the death. A ***novenario*** (9-day prayer) in the home of the deceased takes place following the burial, and a cross on the deceased's grave indicates the prayer is over.

Mexicans have a unique relationship with death – while generally fearful of it, they tend not to avoid discussing the topic. Instead, they celebrate death and respect the deceased. During the traditional ***Día de Muertos*** (Day of the Dead) celebration held every November 1-2 (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*), many Mexicans believe that the deceased's souls visit family and friends. Mexicans decorate ***ofrendas*** (altars with offerings to the dead) in homes, parks, cemeteries, and other locations as an expression of love and remembrance of those who have passed. Families often gather in cemeteries to visit with the dead and consume traditional food like the sugary ***pan de muerto*** (bread of the dead), drink, share stories, and listen to music.

5. SEX AND GENDER

Overview

Traditionally, Mexico has a male-dominated society, whereby ***machismo*** (strong masculine pride) is counterbalanced by ***marianismo*** (female subservience). The Mexican social system is patriarchal, meaning men hold most power and authority. Mexico ranked 33 of 146 countries in a 2024 gender equality index, above the neighboring US (43), Belize (95) and Guatemala (93).

Gender Roles and Work

Domestic Work: Historically, Mexican society maintained a strict division between genders, with women responsible for most household chores and childcare, even if they worked outside the home. Today, in some middle- and upper-class urban households, men increasingly help with domestic work.

Labor Force: In 2024, some 47% of women worked outside the home, a higher rate than Guatemala (40%), but lower than Belize (49%) and the US (57%). Although men tend to dominate skilled and professional positions, women hold about 39% of managerial roles, a similar rate to Guatemala (38%), but lower than Belize (42%). As of 2023, only 15% of CEOs are female. Instead, women account for most informal sector workers (see *Economics and Resources* and *Time and Space*). For example, nearly all the 2.4 million domestic workers in Mexico are women, who typically work long hours for low pay without access to healthcare services or social security.

Gender and the Law

Although labor laws prohibit gender discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, gender-based violence (GBV) and discrimination persist. Mexican legislation requires equal pay for women without clearly defining what that means, which often results in non-compliance. Labor laws do not prohibit employers from inquiring about a woman's family life, partly resulting in

lower employment rates and earnings for mothers as compared to childless women and men. Mexican law guarantees parental leave. While women may take 12 weeks of paid maternity leave, men receive 5 days of paternity leave.

Although the legal marriage age is 18, males over 16 and females over 14 can marry with parental consent. Child marriage is common in Mexico. The 2024 Global Gender Gap Report indicates that nearly 17% of girls marry before they turn 18.

Gender and Politics

While campaigns for women's suffrage began in the early 1900s, women gained the right to vote only in 1953 (see *History and Myth*). Today, Mexico is a global leader of gender equity in politics. As of 2019, the Constitution requires gender parity in all elected positions. Legislation requires that political parties have an equal number of male and female candidates for Congress, governor, municipal government positions, and the Supreme Court. In 2025, women held over 50% of seats in Congress, higher than the US (28%). Mexico is making historic strides toward gender equity in politics. The two main candidates for the next presidential election are women. If elected, one will become the country's first female President (see *Political and Social Relations*). Despite its progress, the gender parity law has contributed to an increase of political violence, against which laws do not adequately protect women.

Gender Based Violence (GBV)

GBV is widespread and became more prevalent due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions (see *Sustenance and Health*). In 2023, Mexico had over 827 reported femicides (murder of a woman based on her gender), which civil society organizations suggest is an underestimate. As of 2023, Mexico has the world's ninth-highest femicide per capita rate. Notably, women in Mexico aged 15-24 experienced the highest proportion of sexual violence compared to other age groups. A 2021 national survey revealed that about 70% of women experienced some form of violence in

their lifetime, some 40% of which was committed by a partner. Moreover, these data are likely underestimates, as reporting is uncommon, partly due to social stigma associated with GBV.

To combat GBV, Mexico passed the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence in 2007 and made femicide a federal crime in 2012. The law stipulates sentences of up to 20 years for rape and 40-70 years for femicide convictions. Various services assist GBV survivors, such as hotlines and emergency centers that provide health, psychological, and legal services.

Sex and Procreation

Between 1960-2024, Mexico's fertility rate decreased from 6.8 births per woman to 1.8, similar to the US (1.8). Largely due to inadequate sexual education and sexual abuse, Mexico's adolescent fertility rate was 60 births per 1,000 girls aged 15-19 in 2023, over three times the US rate (13) but slightly lower than Guatemala (69) and Belize (55). As of 2023, Mexico's Supreme Court decriminalized abortion, removing its federal penalties. Although the ruling protects abortion at federal health institutions, criminal laws still vary by state. As of 2025, only 19 states have decriminalized abortion and 7 have lifted local restrictions making legal abortion easier to access.

Homosexuality in Mexico

Mexico's Supreme Court decriminalized same-sex marriage in 2015, shifting legislative power to the states. As of 2022, same-sex marriage is legal in all 31 states and Mexico City. The rights of legally recognized couples vary by state, and 21 states allow same-sex adoption. As of 2011, the Constitution prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, and in 2023, Mexico began issuing non-binary passports. While Mexico is becoming more accepting, discrimination and violence against homosexuals persist. Mexico has the second-highest rate of transphobic crime in Latin America, and an estimated 90% of crimes go unreported. At this time, the US State Department does not have a Status of Forces Agreement in place for Mexico. Service members will be subject to local laws with regards to this topic.

6. LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION

Language Overview

Mexico does not have an official language. Although Spanish is the *de facto* national and most universally spoken language, the government recognizes indigenous languages as national languages.

Spanish

Spanish conquerors brought their language to the region in the 16th century (see *History and Myth*), and it became a *lingua franca* between the Spaniards and diverse indigenous communities. Today, over 93% of Mexicans speak ***español*** (Spanish), the term commonly used in many other countries in Latin American and the Caribbean (LAC). Spanish uses the same alphabet as English with three additional consonants – ch, ll (usually pronounced like "y" as in yam or "j" as in jam), and ñ (pronounced like the "ny" in the word canyon). The similar alphabet, consistent spelling patterns, and Latin base make Spanish relatively easy for English speakers to learn.

Mexico is home to far more Spanish speakers (some 130 million) than any other country, ahead of the US (57 million), Colombia (52 million), Spain (47 million), and Argentina (47 million). As such, Modern Mexican Spanish is the world's dominant variant of the language. It has some features that distinguish it from European Spanish and that of other LAC countries. Unique words and phrases derive from a history of mixing Spanish and indigenous languages. For example, words like ***popote*** (straw) and ***tianguis*** (street market) derive from Nahuatl. Many place names, like Oaxaca and Tepoztlán, retain indigenous linguistic roots. Some grammatical differences also exist between Mexico, other LAC countries, and Spain. Most Mexicans (except some in Chiapas and in a few coastal areas) use the second-person singular ***tú*** ("you") instead of ***vos***, along with its distinct verb forms. Likewise, Mexicans use the second-person plural ***ustedes*** ("you all"), whereas Spaniards typically use ***vosotros***.

Mexican Spanish also features many slang words and phrases, such as ***güey*** (dude), ***¡qué padre!*** ("how cool!" or "that's great!"), and many others, like ***pedo*** (fart) and ***huevo*** (egg) that have multiple meanings, usually in combination with other words. In part due to Mexico's vast size and ethnic diversity (see *Political and Social Relations*), regional dialects specific to the country, such as Northern, Central, Coastal, and Yucatán, among others, have their own slang and unique pronunciation.

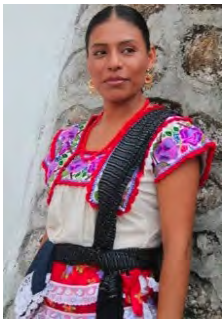
Other Languages

The General Law of Indigenous Peoples' Linguistic Rights, published in 2003, recognizes 68 indigenous languages and Spanish as joint national languages. In total, Mexicans speak some 294 languages or unique dialects from 11 language families. Some of the most spoken indigenous languages are Nahuatl (1,675,000 speakers), Yucatec Maya (800,533), Mixteco (518,178), Zapoteco (500,116), Tzeltal Maya (672,595), Tzotzil Maya (558,489), and Otomí (285,517). Some Mexicans speak foreign languages, such as Chinese, Japanese, Italian, or French, though English is the most common.

English: Around 16 million Mexicans, or about 12% of the population, speak English at some level of proficiency. Though not widely spoken, English is common in large cities, US border towns, and major tourist destinations such as Cancún, Baja California, and Puerto Vallarta. English is also common in many places with large concentrations of English speakers such as San Miguel de Allende in Guanajuato and Ajijic in Jalisco, where many US and Canadian nationals retire. Nevertheless, as of 2024, Mexico ranked 87 of 116 countries in an English proficiency index, much lower than most LAC countries such as Argentina (28), Honduras (33), and Guatemala (58).

Nahuatl: Over 1.67 million residents speak a Nahuatl language, accounting for around 30 dialects. Most speakers live in the Central-South and coastal Mexico. Nahuatl, known informally as Aztec, belongs to

the Uto-Aztecan language family and was once the principal language of the Aztec Empire (see *History and Myth*). Less than 15% of Nahuatl speakers are monolingual, as most also speak Spanish at some level of proficiency.



Classical Nahuatl was a *lingua franca* in the region from the 7th century AD until after the Spanish conquest. The integration of Spanish in Mexico has influenced many Nahuatl dialects, and today, considerable differences among them make only some mutually intelligible. Preconquest, Aztecs recorded the language using pictographs. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the language adopted the Latin alphabet and became a literary language with the integration of Spanish influence. Some English words with Nahuatl origins are avocado, chocolate, coyote, and tomato.

Mayan: Over two million speakers of Mayan languages reside in Mexico, mostly in the Yucatán Peninsula, South, and Gulf Coast regions. Today, some 15 of 32 languages in the Mayan language family are still spoken in Mexico. While the most widely spoken language in this family is K'iche', primarily spoken in Guatemala, the second most spoken Mayan language is Yucatec Maya, also known as ***maaya t'aan***, the most common variant in Mexico. Experts believe that all Mayan languages originate from Proto-Mayan, an ancestral language spoken some 5,000 years ago.

Communication Overview

Communicating in Mexico requires both knowledge of Spanish and the ability to interact effectively using language. This notion of competence includes paralanguage (rate of speech, volume, intonation), nonverbal communication (personal space, touch,

gestures), and interaction management (conversation initiation, turn-taking, and termination). These forms of communication help to ensure that statements are interpreted as intended.

Communication Style

Mexicans tend to be expressive communicators and typically speak with animated gestures, at times interrupting conversation due to their passion or interest in a topic. Conversations are at times loud and emotional, with few moments of long silences, which Mexicans often avoid and perceive as uncomfortable. Many Mexicans rarely express criticism or rejection to avoid negatively impacting a relationship (see *Time and Space*). They often avoid conflict in conversation, tending to speak indirectly and imply an intended meaning to shift the conversation towards preferred topics (see "Conversational Topics" below). Rather than saying "no," Mexicans often provide an explanation and speak in a roundabout way instead.

Nonverbal communication and eye contact are important, the latter of which shows interest and attentiveness while listening and sincerity while speaking. Many Mexicans touch their conversation partner's hand, wrist, arm, or shoulder while talking to convey affection. Mexicans also tend to stand close to each other, as they consider maintaining distance from someone as unfriendly or standoffish (see *Time and Space*).

Greetings

Mexicans value greetings, which they consider welcoming and conveying acknowledgment. Standard greetings vary by region, though the most common is a firm handshake with eye contact, especially when greeting individuals for the first time or in formal settings. In group or social settings, Mexicans expect the person arriving to greet all group members individually before engaging in conversation, typically starting with social superiors and women. Family and close friends often greet each other with an ***abrazo*** (hug), which consists of a handshake and a hug among men and a hug and a kiss on the right cheek among women or

between sexes. Men often pat male friends and family on the back during a handshake.

The most common greetings are the phrases ***hola*** ("hello"), ***buenos días*** ("good day"), ***buenas tardes*** ("good afternoon"), or ***buenas noches*** ("good evening" or "good night"). Mexicans typically make polite inquiries when greeting someone, such as enquiring about their family and health and asking, ***¿cómo estás?*** or ***¿qué tal?*** ("how are you?").

Names

Mexican names consist of one or two first (given) names and one or more last (family) names. Mexican naming customs are unique, and children typically take both their father's and mother's family names. The father's family name is often the child's official surname and comes before the mother's family name. After marriage, women often keep their maiden name or add their husband's surname to the end of theirs, sometimes denoted by adding ***de*** ("of") between surnames.

Forms of Address

Titles depend on age, social status, and relationship but are generally courteous. In many situations, Mexicans use titles of respect such as ***señor*** (Mr.), ***señora*** (Mrs.), and ***señorita*** (for young/unmarried women), sometimes with last name. To demonstrate special deference to elders or those of a higher social class, Mexicans use the honorifics ***Don*** (for males) or ***Doña*** (for females) along with the first name. Professional titles like ***Doctor/a*** (doctor), ***profesor/a*** (teacher), and ***ingeniero/a*** (engineer) often are used with the first or last name(s). Similarly, Mexicans refer to those who have completed a university degree

as ***licenciado/a*** (graduate). Friends and family usually use first names or address one another by a nickname based on a personal characteristic or a shorter form of their first name.

Spanish has different "you" pronouns and verb conjugations depending on the level of formality and respect required. Mexicans tend to use the polite ***Usted*** in formal settings, although some business colleagues prefer the familiar *tú*, typically used with friends, family, and younger people. Foreign nationals should use *Usted* with conversation partners unless directed otherwise.

Conversational Topics

Mexicans typically converse about the health and wellbeing of each other and their families, as well as one's hobbies. Mexican soccer (see *Aesthetics and Recreation*) is also usually a welcome topic. To avoid offense, foreign nationals should not share opinions about politics, poverty, crime, environmental issues, or religion in Mexico. Recent political polarization, particularly after Andrés Manuel López Obrador became President in 2018 (see *Political and Social Relations*), has resulted in some political discussions causing conflicts. Many Mexicans appreciate attempts to speak Spanish, regardless of proficiency.

Gestures

Mexicans use various gestures in conversation to emphasize discussion points. To communicate "yes," they may hold their index finger up and curl it up and down repeatedly and quickly. They may indicate "no" by shaking their hand from side-to-side with the index finger extended and palm facing outward. Unlike in the US, nodding does not always indicate agreement with one's words. Many Mexicans nod out of respect for what one is saying and to indicate attentiveness rather than agreement.

Language Training Resources

Please view the Air Force Culture and Language Center website at www.airuniversity.af.edu/AFCLC/ and click on "Resources" for access to language training and other resources.

Useful Words and Phrases

English	Spanish
Hello	Hola
How are you?	¿Cómo está Usted? (f) / ¿Cómo estás? (inf)
I am well	Estoy bien
Excuse me	Disculpe / Perdón
Yes	Sí
No	No
Please	Por favor
Thank you	Gracias
You are welcome	De nada
I'm sorry	Lo siento
I don't understand	No entiendo
What is your name?	¿Cuál es su nombre? / ¿Cómo se llama?
My name is ___	Me llamo ____
Where are you from?	¿De dónde es Usted?
I am from the US	Yo soy de los Estados Unidos
Goodbye	Adiós
Good morning/day	Buenos días
Good afternoon	Buenas tardes
Good evening	Buenas noches
What does ___ mean?	¿Qué significa ___?
What is this?	¿Qué es esto?
I would like a ___	Quisiera un/a ___
How do you say ___?	¿Cómo se dice ___?
…in English?	... en inglés?
…in Spanish?	…en español?
What do you want?	¿Qué quiere Usted?
What time is it?	¿Qué hora es?
Yesterday	Ayer
Today	Hoy
Tomorrow	Mañana
Where is the doctor?	¿Dónde está el médico?
Who?	¿Quién?
When?	¿Cuándo?
Where?	¿Dónde?
Which?	¿Cuál?
Why?	¿Por qué?
Car	Coche / Carro
Plane	Avión
Bus	Camión / Autobus / Pesero / Colectivo

7. LEARNING AND KNOWLEDGE

Literacy

- Total population over age 15 who can read and write: 95.2%
- Male: 96.1%
- Female: 94.5% (2020 estimate)

Early Education

Before the arrival of Spanish conquerors (see *History and Myth*), indigenous communities transmitted values, beliefs, historical knowledge, and a sense of community to younger generations through stories, proverbs, myths, music, and poetry (see *History and Myth*). While the Maya restricted education to nobility, the Aztecs educated all children. Aztec parents first taught their children ***huehuetlatolli*** (stories from ancestors) and discipline. At the age of 15, boys attended either the ***calmecac*** (school for nobles) or ***telpochcalli*** (school for commoners). The *calmecac* were attached to temples and taught boys to be priests, leaders, or scholars through literacy, history, math, religion, and calendar-making. The *telpochcalli* prepared boys for craft or tradework and focused on agricultural skills, history, military techniques, and religion. Girls attended separate schools to learn household skills, singing, craftwork, religious rituals, and dances.

Spanish Education

In the Spanish colonial era (see *History and Myth*), the primary focus of education was to impart basic literacy and instruction in Roman Catholicism. Various Roman Catholic orders founded schools for the sons of local elites and some indigenous groups (see *Religion and Spirituality*). In 1531, the first hospital-school was built outside of Mexico City to educate indigenous Mexicans. However, because the Spaniards feared that educated peasants would start a revolution, they generally limited their education to the Spanish language and religion. Although the Caridad School for orphaned ***mestizos***

(people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent) opened in 1548 and was the first to educate peasant girls, their education was limited to religion and preparation for domestic life. In 1553, the Royal and Pontifical University of Mexico opened and was one of the Americas' first universities. It was established to prepare ***criollos*** (Spanish people born in the Americas) to become Catholic clergymen.

Education after Independence

Following Mexico's independence in 1821 (see *History and Myth*), the country's educational and political development became closely intertwined. In the early-mid-19th century, a division developed between Liberal and Conservative ideologies (see *History and Myth*). While Conservatives wanted to uphold the Catholic Church's influence in government and education, the Liberals sought to reduce the Church's authority and make education secular. In 1857, ***Las Leyes de Reforma*** (The Reform Laws) established a separation of church and state, eliminating religious instruction in public schools. Benito Juárez's government (1858-72, see *History and Myth*) established education as free, obligatory, and nonreligious, three elements that form the basis of modern-day education in Mexico. During the era of Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911, see *History and Myth*), primary and secondary education expanded, with more emphasis placed on higher education for women and indigenous populations.

Education in the 20th Century

The Mexican Revolution (1910-20, see *History and Myth*) resulted in educational and social benefits for many Mexicans and increased a desire for a national identity with limited foreign influence. In 1917, the government banned religious education from all institutions – including private, primary, and secondary schools, as well as universities like the Royal and Pontifical University, which was renamed the ***Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*** (National Autonomous University of Mexico, or UNAM). The head of

UNAM, José Vasconcelos, became the first appointed Secretary of Public Education in 1920. He sought to lower the country's illiteracy rate, as most Mexicans at that time could not read and write, and many indigenous Mexicans spoke minimal Spanish.

Following the Revolution, educational programs expanded to provide more opportunities for peasant populations, such as training for industrial work, as Mexico's economy began to industrialize (see *Economics and Resources*). In 1922, the government created ***Escuelas Normales Rurales*** (Rural Normal Schools), which were teacher training schools meant to educate the largely illiterate peasant masses. Created in 1936, the ***Instituto Politécnico Nacional*** (National Polytechnic Institute) provided technological and industrial instruction to students in various trades. As producing an educated workforce became the primary focus of education, advancements in the agricultural, commercial, and industrial sectors helped increase employment opportunities and reduce rural isolation.

Jaime Torres Bodet was appointed Secretary of Public Education from 1943-46 and again from 1958-64. Seeking to improve Mexican society by raising educational standards, Torres Bodet oversaw the construction of new classrooms, remodeling of existing buildings, and training of teachers in rural areas. In 1959, the ***Comisión Nacional de Libros de Texto Gratuitos*** (National Commision for Free Textbooks) granted many Mexicans access to free textbooks in an effort to improve equality among different segments of society. Between 1910-60, Mexico's illiteracy rate decreased from about 77% to 38%.

During the 1960s, major anti-government protests occurred on college campuses, disrupting higher education. Students demanded political freedom from the ***Partido Revolutionario Institucional*** (Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI) regime that had been in power since 1929 (see *History and Myth*). In 1968, these protests came to a climax in Tlatelolco, Mexico City, when the

Army opened fire on peaceful protesters, resulting in over 350 deaths, many of whom were university and high school students. Although the PRI retained political control through the rest of the century, the protests brought global attention to its uninterrupted grip on power (see *Political and Social Relations*).

In 1997, the government implemented the ***Progresa*** (Progress) program, renamed ***Oportunidades*** (Opportunities) in 2002 and ***Prospera*** (Prosper) in 2014, which granted extremely poor families cash and nutritional support in exchange for their children's continuous school attendance and health checkups. Despite the program's many successes, such as reducing rural poverty and increasing school enrollment, the government ended *Prospera* in 2019. Criticizing the program as politicized and vulnerable to corruption (see *Political and Social Relations*), the government shifted its priorities to focus instead on a scholarship program and social pensions.

Modern Education System

Today, education in Mexico is free and compulsory for all citizens between the ages of 6-15, although only around 65% of Mexicans over age 25 have completed this obligation. While most students attend free government-run schools, some enroll in private, often religious or bilingual schools. In 2023, about 9% of primary-age students attended private, fee-based schools, similar to the US (10%) and Guatemala (12%), but lower than the average in Latin America and the Caribbean (20%). While all public and many private schools follow the national curriculum, quality of education tends to be higher at private schools. Many rural public schools lack resources, such as textbooks and funding, while urban public schools tend to be only slightly better. All public and religious schools require uniforms, though some private institutions do not.

The Mexican Secretariat of Public Education oversees all school accreditation and is tasked with assuring that educators meet national benchmarks, though each state has its

own administrative rights, such as hiring teachers and adhering to students' needs and interests. While Mexico has improved its educational system in the past 2 decades, many rural and indigenous community schools (see *Political and Social Relations*) suffer from underfunding or overcrowding. States with higher rural populations often have lower graduation rates. For example, in Chiapas, only about 44% of residents over 15 have completed primary school. These trends are heightened at the post-secondary level, where many students in rural areas must travel long distances or relocate to attend. In a 2022 assessment of student performance in reading, math, and science, Mexico ranked below the US, with scores similar to Peru and Mongolia.

Pre-Primary Education: Children under age 6 may attend free public or fee-based private ***preescolar*** (pre-school). Although *preescolar* has been compulsory for students between ages 3-5 since 2002, only about 62% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in pre-primary school in 2022. Mexico mandates *preescolar* to promote academic and socio-emotional benefits in early childhood education. While *preescolar* is a common option for children in cities, where both parents often work (see *Family and Kinship*), a lack of proximity to childcare in rural areas makes this option less common for many rural Mexicans. Although instruction is primarily in Spanish, some courses are taught in English, and the government permits education in Nahuatl or other languages used by local communities (see *Language and Communication*).

Primary Education: ***Primaria*** (primary education) begins at age 6 and comprises grades 1-6. Most schools follow the national curriculum, which covers Spanish, math, physical education, arts, history, geography, and natural sciences. Students are graded on a scale of 0-100 and must earn a 60% in each course to continue to the next grade. A ***certificado de primaria*** (primary school certificate) is granted at the end of grade 6. In 2022, about 99% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in *primaria*.

Secondary Education: This level divides into two stages: mandatory ***secundaria*** (secondary school, grades 7-9) and optional ***preparatoria*** (preparatory school, grades 10-12). The first 3 years of *secundaria* are a continuation of primary school and consist of general education courses. During their optional final 3 years, students may choose between academic or vocational programs, both of which are free and provided by the state. While both programs have core curricula similar to primary school, vocational studies generally dedicate a significant portion of the school day to technical, industrial, or agricultural training. Many *preparatorias* are affiliated with public universities or state-run ***colegios*** (colleges). In 2022, about 92% of children of the appropriate age were enrolled in *secundaria,* 69% in *preparatoria*.

Post-Secondary Education: Mexico has a large network of public universities that offer free tuition for Mexicans. While many interested students complete a general exit exam, such as the Exani-II, during *preparatoria*, post-secondary institutions usually administer their own entrance exams. In 2023, about 18% of the population held a ***licenciatura*** (bachelor's degree) or ***título profesional*** (professional title), awarded after 4-6 years of post-secondary studies. A ***maestría*** (master's degree) is typically awarded 1-2 years after attaining a *licenciatura*, though less than 2% of the population attain one.

Some universities offer certificates and licenses that take less than 4 years. The ***Profesional Asociado*** (Professional Associate) and ***Técnico Superior Universitario*** (University Higher Technician) are degrees awarded after 2 years in fields such as agriculture and sales. Many of the country's top universities, such as UNAM, the ***Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana*** (Metropolitan Autonomous University), and ***El Colegio de México*** (College of Mexico), are in Mexico City. Notable private universities are the ***Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Monterrey*** (Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education) and the ***Universidad de las Américas Puebla*** (University of the Americas – Puebla).

8. TIME AND SPACE

Overview

Mexicans tend to view interpersonal relationships, reputation, and etiquette as vital to conducting business, though attitudes are often more casual in personal settings. Generally, Mexicans' personal space preferences vary by degree of familiarity.

Time and Work

Mexico's statutory workweek is 48 hours and runs from Monday-Saturday. Actual business hours often diverge from this schedule and vary by sector. While banks typically open Monday-Friday from 9am-4pm, government offices open Monday-Friday from 9am-2pm, and consumer businesses tend to operate Monday-Saturday from 10am-8pm, with varying hours on Sunday. About 40% of the Mexican labor force works 6 days-per-week. Throughout the workweek, Mexicans tend to take longer lunches than Americans.

Working Conditions

In addition to the 48-hour workweek, Mexican labor laws establish a federally enforced minimum wage, which varies by region and is higher in northern areas that border the US. Some other benefits are paid vacation, sick leave, maternity and paternity leave (see *Sex and Gender*), severance pay, and the ***aguinaldo*** (a mandatory Christmas bonus equivalent to 15 or more days of pay). Despite these and other benefits and protections, lax enforcement often results in abusive, unsafe working conditions. Further, more than 55% of Mexican workers are engaged in the informal sector (see *Economics and Resources*), whereby labor laws typically do not apply.

Time Zones

Mexico has four standard time zones that mirror those of the US. The ***Zona Centro*** (Central Zone) is the largest and observes US Central Standard Time (CST), which is 6 hours behind

Greenwich Mean Time (GMT). The ***Zona Pacífico*** (Pacific Zone) observes US Mountain Standard Time (MST), the ***Zona Noroeste*** (Northwest Zone) Pacific Standard Time (PST), and the ***Zona Sureste*** (Southeast Zone) Eastern Standard Time (EST). As of 2022, only some municipalities along Mexico's northern border practice Daylight Saving Time.

Date Notation: Like the US, Mexico uses the Western (Gregorian) calendar. Unlike Americans, Mexicans write the day first, followed by the month and year.

National Holidays

- January 1: New Year's Day
- February 5: Constitution Day (see *History and Myth*)
- March: Birthday of Benito Juárez (third Monday, see *History and Myth*)
- May 1: Labor Day
- September 16: Independence Day (see *History and Myth*)
- November: Revolution Day (third Monday, see *History and Myth*)
- December 1: Transmission of the Federal Executive Power (only presidential election years)
- December 25: Christmas Day

Time and Business

In business contexts, Mexicans generally value punctuality and adhere to deadlines, especially when dealing with foreign nationals. Mexicans usually arrive on time (but not early) for professional engagements and often factor in transport delays (see "Driving" below). Meetings frequently begin with substantial polite conversation to establish rapport (see *Language and Communication*), and the pace of business accelerates as one gets to know his counterparts. However, Mexicans tend to have a looser sense of time than Americans, especially in social situations. Mexican businesses are usually organized in a strict hierarchy, and top-level employees make most decisions. Subordinates generally offer input only when asked directly.

Public and Personal Space

As in most societies, personal space in Mexico depends on the nature of the relationship. Mexicans generally stand close to one another during conversation and touch more often than Americans. Some Mexicans perceive maintaining an extended distance from another person as unsociable behavior.

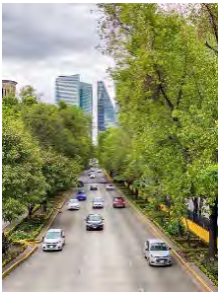
Touch: In formal business settings, Mexicans generally greet with a handshake, which they repeat when saying goodbye. Some women exchange cheek kisses or loosely clasp hands or forearms (see *Language and Communication*). Mexicans usually reserve physical affection for family and friends.

Eye Contact: Direct eye contact is customary in conversation, and Mexicans may maintain eye contact for a prolonged period to indicate sincerity (see *Language and Communication*).

Photographs

Some museums, churches, and military installations limit photography. Foreign nationals should ask permission when photographing Mexicans (especially children and indigenous people).

Driving



Mexicans drive on the right side of the road. In many urban areas, roads tend to be well-lit, maintained, and signposted. Traffic is congested, especially in Mexico City, and drivers often disobey traffic laws. Road conditions in rural areas are generally poor, and little overhead lighting makes driving hazardous, particularly at night. ***Carreteras de cuota*** (toll roads) are usually better maintained and safer than ***carreteras libres*** (non-toll highways). Traffic checkpoints run by the police, Army, and cartels (see *Political and Social Relations*) sometimes stop vehicles, and it can be difficult for drivers to distinguish among these groups. In the event of a breakdown on major roadways, Mexico's ***Ángeles Verdes*** (Green Angels, public roadside mechanics) offer roadside assistance. Mexico's rate of traffic-related deaths in 2021 was 12 per 100,000 people, lower than the US (14) and most other Latin American countries.

9. AESTHETICS AND RECREATION

Overview

Mexican clothing, recreation, sports, and arts tend to reflect the country's rich history and blend of indigenous, Spanish, and African traditions.

Dress and Appearance

Traditional: Mexico's traditional dress is most common in rural areas, especially among indigenous groups (see *Political and Social Relations*). Some Mexicans wear traditional dress on holidays and for special events. Clothing, styles, colors, and patterns typically vary by ethnic group, geographic location, and gender. Some men wear the ***sarape*** (poncho), woven on the backstrap loom (see "Arts and Handicrafts" below), the pattern of which originally symbolized family or social status among some pre-Hispanic civilizations (see *History and Myth*). The ***charro*** (horseman) suit originated during the 17th century and is a national emblem of Mexican pride and history. The suit consists of a ***sombrero*** (wide brimmed hat), embroidered ***chaquetilla*** (bolero, a type of short jacket), ***moño*** (silk bow tie), and embellished trousers or long skirt.

The Tehuana dress, worn by many Zapotec women in the southern state of Oaxaca, is a symbol of national cultural heritage. The Tehuana dress resembles a flower arrangement and consists of a ***huipil*** (sleeveless woven tunic) and long skirt embellished with floral motifs. Likewise, ***rebozos*** (shawls) are national symbols of womanhood that have many uses, such as protection from the elements and carriers for children. The ***quechquémitl*** (short cape) is similar to the *rebozo*, though it is often woven from a thicker fabric, like wool, for colder climates.

Modern: In urban areas, many residents follow the latest Western fashion trends. Men typically wear jeans or pants, shirts, and well-kept shoes. Women often wear jeans or skirts with a blouse or t-shirt, or dresses. Older Mexicans tend to dress

more formally. In business settings, residents typically prefer formal styles, such as dark suits or dresses/pantsuits.

Recreation and Leisure

Mexicans often spend their leisure time with family and friends. Typical activities are sharing meals (see *Sustenance and Health*), gathering for ***fiestas*** ("parties" or "public celebrations"), playing sports, going to bars and dance clubs, and watching movies and television – especially ***telenovelas*** (soap operas). Often broadcast across Latin America, Mexican *telenovelas* provide social and political commentary through their storylines, making them a tool for communicating socio-political issues.

Holidays and Festivals: Mexicans hold a variety of festivals and community celebrations, many reflecting the country's Catholic roots (see *Religion and Spirituality*), indigenous traditions, or historical events.

Día de Muertos (Day of the Dead) is a holiday originating in the pre-Hispanic era that features Spanish Catholic influence. It is a time to honor and reunite with the spirits of deceased loved ones. Today, many Mexicans celebrate *Día de Muertos* by setting up ***ofrendas*** (altars with offerings to the dead, see p. 4 of *Family and Kinship*) that consist of photos, ***flores de cempasúchil*** (marigolds), the deceased relatives' favorite foods, skull figures, water, alcohol, candles, and other items. Many Mexicans believe the *ofrendas* attract deceased family members' spirits back to the land of the living by being bright and fragrant.

Mexico hosts many annual festivals and *fiestas*. ***Los Lunes del Cerro*** (Mondays on the Hill), also called ***la Guelaguetza***, is a celebration held during the last 2 weeks of July in Oaxaca that unites various indigenous communities through sharing regional art, music, and cuisine. At the event, groups of dancers wear ***trajes*** (costumes) and perform with intricate footwork to traditional music that has historical and cultural significance to various regions and communities. Following the performances,

the dancers often hand out candy, fruit, ***tamales*** (corn dough with a meat, vegetable, or sweet filling, steamed in a corn husk or banana leaf), and ***mezcal*** (an alcoholic drink made from the agave plant) (see *Sustenance and Health*).

Some national holidays commemorate important dates in Mexican history. ***Día de la Independencia*** (Independence Day) celebrates Mexico's freedom from Spanish rule (see *History and Myth*). The holiday commemorates Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla's call for independence, known as ***El Grito*** (The Cry), that began a revolution on September 16, 1810. In an associated tradition, the President of Mexico reenacts *El Grito* from the National Palace balcony in Mexico City on the night of September 15.

Sports and Games

Mexicans participate in a wide variety of sports, such as soccer, baseball, boxing, ***lucha libre*** (wrestling), golf, volleyball, and bullfighting. In 1933, President Abelardo Rodríguez declared ***charrería*** (horsemanship) the country's national sport. *Charrería* is similar to rodeo, with various displays of equestrian activities and traditional livestock herding techniques that *charros* perform. *Charros* living on ***haciendas*** (estates, see *Economics and Resources*) originally used *charrería* to manage livestock. Following the Mexican Revolution (see *History and Myth*), Mexicans began to play *charrería* in the West, particularly in Hidalgo and Jalisco.

Mexico participates in many international competitions, such as the Summer and Winter Olympics, FIFA World Cup, ***Copa América*** (America Cup), Pan American Games, and the World Boxing Championship. Mexico accounts for the world's second-most boxing world champions, behind only the US. One notable Mexican athlete is Enriqueta Basilio, a track and field competitor, who was the first woman to light the Olympic Cauldron for the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City. Another is Carlos Gracida Liceaga, a three-time winner of the Polo World Cup in the 1980s and 90s, who many regard as the world's all-time

greatest polo player. More recently, Lorena Ochoa spent nearly 3 years as the world's #1 female golfer before retiring in 2010.

Soccer: ***Fútbol*** (soccer) is Mexico's most popular sport, with youth learning through neighborhood pick-up games, at school, and in amateur leagues. Estadio Azteca, located in Mexico City, is one of the world's largest soccer stadiums and the first venue to have hosted two FIFA World Cup finals, in 1970 and 1986. Three of Mexico's most popular teams – Club América, Cruz Azul, and Pumas UNAM – are based in Mexico City. Along with Guadalajara (nicknamed Chivas), located in Zapopan, Jalisco, they comprise ***Los Cuatro Grandes*** (the Big Four) of Mexican soccer. Notably, Mexico will co-host the 2026 FIFA World Cup with the US and Canada.

The Mexican national football team, nicknamed ***El Tricolor*** (The Tricolor) and sometimes called ***El Tri***, has qualified for 17 World Cups. *El Tri*'s captain and goalkeeper, Guillermo Ochoa, won the Confederation of North, Central America and Caribbean Association Football's Golden Cup Award for best goalkeeper in 2019 and 2023. *Fútbol* player Hugo Sánchez is one of the country's most celebrated athletes and highly regarded as the greatest Mexican player of all time. He participated in three FIFA World Cup tournaments in 1978, 1986, and 1994.

Games: ***Ollamaliztli*** (ballgame) is the world's oldest known game to use a rubber ball, invented by pre-Hispanic civilizations and played by the Maya and Aztecs. Players compete on a large rectangular court with two stone rings through which they must get a large rubber ball with only their elbows, hips, and knees, as the use of hands and feet is prohibited. Few people play *ollamaliztli* today.

Music and Dance

Mexico's rich musical and dance traditions primarily reflect African, Caribbean, European, and indigenous influences. ***Sones Mexicanos*** (Mexican tunes) are a variety of Mexican folk music that varies by region, often consisting of string instruments, such as violins, ***guitarrones***

(six-string bass guitars), and Mexican harps, played by ***conjuntos*** (musical ensembles). In the 19th century, ***corridos*** (traditional Mexican ballads) emerged as narrative songs featuring themes such as history, love, and life. C*orridos* often celebrate historical events and grew in popularity between the Mexican War of Independence and Revolution for their patriotic messages. *Corridos* are typically performed a capella (without instruments) or with stringed instruments to waltz or polka rhythms. Influenced by *corridos*, ***rancheras*** (rancher songs) are usually about nature, love, and patriotism. During the 20th century, José Alfredo Jiménez, a *ranchera*-singing cowboy with a guitar, became a symbol of Mexican identity and cultural pride.

Mariachi: The ***mariachi*** is a musical ensemble that plays harmonized melodies, primarily on stringed instruments, such as acoustic guitars, the ***vihuela*** (five-string guitar), bass, violins, and trumpets. Originating in western Mexico, *mariachi* groups often play *sones* while dressed in traditional *charro* suits and celebrate *charros* as icons of Mexican identity.

Folkloric Dance: Regional ***baile folklórico*** (folkloric dance) is a traditional style of dance influenced by local folklore with ballet characteristics. During the 18th century, ***jarabe*** ("syrup" or "sweet") ***tapatío*** ("hat" or "Guadalajaran citizen") originated in the western state of Jalisco as a courtship dance. *Jarabe tapatío* consists of a man placing his *sombrero* on the floor and performing a carefully choreographed sequence with a woman. The dance ends with their faces united behind the *sombrero*, presumably in a kiss, which has led some foreign observers to call the performance the "Mexican Hat Dance." In the early 19th century, Spanish authorities banned the dance, considering it too provocative. As an expression of rebellion and protest for social freedoms, the *jarabe tapatío* became Mexico's national dance following independence. Other folkloric dances are the Carnival-inspired ***chinelos*** dance of Morelos and Mexico City, the ***danza del venado*** (deer dance) of Sinaloa and Sonora, and traditional ***parachicos*** street dancing from Chiapas.

Concheros: The ***Concheros*** dance is a syncretic (mixed) ritual dance that celebrates indigenous and Catholic traditions. During the dance, a ***mesa*** ("table," or group of dancers) plays ***concheras*** (lutes), stringed instruments that emerged between the 16th-18th centuries, after Spanish conquerors banned the indigenous drums central to ritual dances. *Mesas* are part of an intertribal society, arranged in a hierarchy, and dress in regalia comprising natural elements like feathers and gold or silver jewelry. Unlike many other ritual dance societies, *mesas* admit women. *Concheros* performances often take place on sacred sites to honor patron saints, especially during the celebrations of the Virgin of Guadalupe (see *Religion and Spirituality*).

Other Musical Genres: Today, Mexicans listen to many foreign and Mexican musical styles, like pop, ***reggaetón*** (a Spanish Caribbean-based genre), ***Rock en Español*** (Spanish-language rock), ***Tejano*** (a Texas and Mexico-based genre), ***cumbia*** (a blended style originally from Colombia), classical, electronic, rap, and jazz. Mexican-American Selena Quintanilla-Pérez was a famous Grammy-nominated popstar, who helped make *Tejano* mainstream in the 1990s and ranks among the most influential Latin musicians. More recently, Peso Pluma topped global music charts with his blend of *reggaetón*, *corridos*, and other musical styles.

Cinema

Mexican cinema has a long, rich history. The first public screenings took place in the early 20th century as propaganda for the Mexican Revolution. Between 1930-60, Mexico experienced a "golden age" of cinema, and many films sought to create a sense of Mexican identity. Films such as ***Allá en el Rancho Grande*** (Back at the Big Ranch, 1936) and ***María Candelaria*** (1944) focused on topics like social injustice, poverty, and morality, which resonated with many Mexicans.

During the 1960s-80s, Mexican cinema declined due to funding issues and the rising popularity of Hollywood blockbusters. In the 1990s, however, the government and a new core of filmmakers

sponsored ***Nuevo Cine Mexicano*** (New Mexican Cinema), a rebirth of Mexican cinema that continues today. Guillermo del Toro directed and co-produced *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *The Shape of Water* (2017), and has won seven Academy Awards. Alfonso Cuarón's ***Y tu mamá también*** (And Your Mother Too, 2001) was critically acclaimed, along with his 2018 film *Roma*, which won three Academy Awards.

Literature

With roots in indigenous oral traditions, Mexico has a rich literary history. Early Maya and Aztecs recorded histories, myths, and elements of social and political life through songs, poems, and hymns. The earliest forms of written literature were pictographs and ideographs, the use of pictures and symbols to represent certain words and phrases (see *Language and Communication*). In the 16th century, Spanish Franciscan Friar Sahagún and Nahua elders wrote ***La Historia General de las Cosas de Nueva España*** (The General History of the Things of New Spain), also known as the Florentine Codex, an ethnographic study of Mesoamerica. Around the same time, Jesuit priests (see *Religion and Spirituality*) and immigrants transcribed a compilation of Nahuatl poems, ***Romances de señores de Nueva España*** (Ballads of the Lords of New Spain), that recorded indigenous values and ways of life.

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, a ***criolla*** (Spanish person born in the Americas) woman, wrote plays and poems that helped shape the early *criollo* identity and covered themes like morality, love, and religion. In 1689, she wrote ***El Divino Narciso*** (The Divine Narcissus), a religious drama that highlighted the intersection of Spanish and indigenous cultures through similarities between Aztec beliefs and Catholicism. Her most famous and longest (975 verses) poem was ***Primero sueño*** (First Dream, 1692), which treated topics like human transcendence and intellectual potential. In the early 19th century, literature continued to stress the importance of identity but shifted from *criollo* to Mexican. Many scholars regard ***El Periquillo Sarniento*** (The Mangy

Parrot), published in 1816 by José Joaquín Fernández de Lizardi, as the first novel written and published in Latin America. Characteristic of 19th-century literature, the novel explored social and political themes through humor and morality.

In the 20th century, Mexican authors addressed themes ranging from identity to socio-political commentary. One of the century's most important works was Juan Rulfo's ***Pedro Páramo***. Published in 1955, the novel tells the story of Juan Preciado's search for his father in a town called Comala, only for him to stumble into a journey filled with ghosts and sensory imagery. Carlos Fuentes, a champion for social justice, wrote ***La Muerte de Artemio Cruz*** (The Death of Artemio Cruz) in 1962. Told in flashbacks of a Mexican Revolutionary soldier on his deathbed, the novel highlights the dangers of placing greed above moral values. Octavio Paz wrote portraits of Mexican society, showcasing its diversity. In his essay ***El laberinto de la soledad*** (The Labyrinth of Solitude), published in 1950, Paz examined Mexican identity through tradition, religion, and historic conflict. In 1990, Paz won the Nobel Prize for Literature for the depiction of multiple cultural and historical perspectives on societal issues in his work.

Arts and Handicrafts

Mexico has a rich history of arts and crafts, such as painting, weaving, leatherwork, and ceramics. Indigenous Mexicans created intricately decorated artworks of stone, paper, ceramics, and woven fabrics. The creation of clothing utilizing traditional techniques, such as backstrap weaving, a method of weaving on a loom attached to the waist, is central to some indigenous communities.

In the early 20th century, Mexican artist Frida Kahlo celebrated indigenous and Mexican culture in her self-portrait paintings, among other works. Her husband, Diego Rivera, led the Mexican mural movement that combined art and political activism by portraying events on large-scale paintings, often on public walls.

10. SUSTENANCE AND HEALTH

Sustenance Overview

Meals are often important social events, with family and friends lingering for conversation and companionship. Mexican cuisine reflects the country's geographic diversity, traditions, agriculture, and Spanish and indigenous influences.

Dining Customs

Most Mexicans eat three daily meals and snack throughout the day. Traditionally, breakfast is light, while the early afternoon lunch is the most substantial meal. Many businesses close for 2 hours to allow for an extended mealtime (see *Time and Space*). Dinner is often lighter than lunch and typically served in the late evening, after 8pm. ***Botanas*** (snacks) are usually small, such as salted peanuts or chips and salsa.

When inviting guests to their home for a meal, Mexican hosts do not expect the visitors to bring gifts, though women often bring salad or dessert and men alcohol. Mexicans are generally hospitable and serve their guests, who after eating, usually offer to help clean up. Many Mexicans consider it impolite to refuse refreshments. Instead, they may respond to such an offer by saying, ***ahorita*** (an undefined time in the future), a polite way to suggest "not now, but maybe later." Diners tend to take their time eating and often linger for hours to chat (a custom known as ***la sobremesa***). Mexicans eat some foods with their hands instead of utensils and deem it polite to keep both hands above the table.

Due to Mexico's ethnic and geographic diversity (see *Political and Social Relations*), regional cuisine varies. Many dishes along central Mexico's Pacific Coast maintain Mixtec and Zapotec culinary traditions. Along the central Gulf Coast, indigenous, Spanish, and Afro-Caribbean cultures influence the cuisine. Ranching culture influences northern Mexico's cuisine,

making beef and cheese primary ingredients in many of that region's dishes.

Diet

While varying by region and socioeconomic status, meals tend to highlight animal protein. Beef, chicken, pork, lard, and cheese are popular ingredients in many dishes. Seafood dishes vary by region. Many early indigenous cultures used various fish, shellfish, and other seafood harvested from the extensive coastline. Today, establishments ranging from casual market stalls to upscale restaurants serve a variety of ***mariscos*** (seafood) dishes.

Starches, used for their versatility and relatively low cost, also feature prominently in Mexican cuisine. Corn and wheat tortillas serve as vessels for proteins, vegetables, and salsas at many meals. Other common starches are rice, beans, plantains, ***yuca*** (cassava, a tuberous root vegetable), and to a lesser degree, potatoes and bread. Mexico's varied climate also lends itself to the cultivation of an array of fruits like ***aguacate*** (avocado, the national fruit and a staple in many dishes), mango, ***guayaba*** (guava), papaya, and ***limón*** (lime). Common flavorings are garlic, cilantro, tomato, chiles, onion, ***nopal*** (prickly pear cactus pad), and Mexican oregano (a spice related to lemon verbena with a licorice and citrus flavor).

Meals and Popular Dishes

Breakfast in Mexico is typically small and eaten quickly. The morning meal often features options such as ***pan dulce*** (sweet bread) and coffee, ***atole*** (a thick, warm drink made from corn dough, water, sugar, and cinnamon – see "Beverages" below) and ***tamales*** (corn dough with a sweet or savory filling, steamed in a corn husk or banana leaf), ***molletes*** (bread rolls covered with refried beans and cheese), or fruit. Some heavier options, often eaten on weekends, are ***chilaquiles*** (fried corn tortilla pieces covered with salsa, cream, onion, cilantro, and chicken

or beef) and ***pozole*** (stew made with hominy, dried corn kernels treated with an alkali, pork or chicken, and various seasonings).

For lunch, dishes are heavier and more elaborate. A popular meal is ***tacos al pastor*** (thin strips of pork sliced off a spit, on a corn tortilla with onions, cilantro, pineapple, and salsa). ***Mole poblano*** is a thick sauce or marinade usually served over turkey or chicken, which many Mexicans consider their national dish. *Mole*, a word for sauce derived from the Nahuatl language (see *Language and Communication*), typically contains many ingredients such as fruits, nuts, chiles, and spices. Some other options are *tamales*, *pozole* or ***tortas*** (sandwiches on soft rolls with meat, cheese, avocado, beans, and other toppings).

Dinner features similar dishes to lunch. For special occasions like Christmas, roasted or smoked ***pavo*** (turkey) is popular. *Mole*, ***barbacoa*** (beef or goat cooked in an underground oven until tender), ***carnitas*** (shredded pork, braised or simmered for hours with seasonings and lard), and ***chiles rellenos*** (stuffed poblano peppers) are other options.

For dessert, ***flan*** (a custard of milk and caramel), ***churros*** (fried sweet dough coated with cinnamon sugar), ***plátanos fritos*** (fried plantains) drizzled with condensed milk, fruit, and chocolate are popular dishes. ***Paletas*** (popsicles, often with fruits, cream, nuts, or spices) are another common option.

Beverages

Throughout the day, Mexicans drink coffee and ***aguas frescas*** (fresh fruit juices or flavored drinks), like ***agua de jamaica*** (a tart hibiscus flower tea with sugar). ***Horchata*** is a popular sweet, creamy drink of rice milk with cinnamon, vanilla, and sugar, traditionally drank cold. Another traditional drink is ***tepache***, made from fermented pineapple and brown sugar. ***Tequila***, an alcohol derived from the blue agave plant, is Mexico's most popular spirit and used in classic cocktails like margaritas. Another popular spirit is ***mezcal***, often made from different types of agave, the taste of which is similar to *tequila*

but with a smokier flavor. Mexicans traditionally sip *mezcal* as a standalone beverage or with a beer. ***Cerveza*** (beer) is another option, served cold or as a ***michelada*** (beer with lime juice or ***clamato***, tomato and clam juice, and a variety of spices), which is one of the country's most popular alcoholic beverages.

Eating Out

Restaurants in urban centers like Mexico City and Tijuana range from upscale establishments specializing in international and local cuisine to inexpensive food stalls. Street food is popular, with stalls selling tacos (usually meat-based), ***quesadillas*** (folded tortillas with cheese, potato, mushroom, or *chorizo* fillings), *tamales*, *tortas*, or ***elotes*** (boiled or grilled corn-on-the-cob with mayonnaise, lime, spices, and cheese). Although many restaurants add a service charge to the bill for big groups, 10-20% is the standard tipping amount.

Health Overview

While the overall heath of Mexicans has improved in recent decades, they continue to face high rates of non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases and other serious health challenges. Between 2000-19, life expectancy at birth increased from about 74 to 76 years, similar to the average in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) (75) but lower than the US (79). As of 2024, life expectancy has fluctuated in Mexico, LAC, and the US (to 75, 74, and 81 years, respectively), largely due to the COVID-19 pandemic and other factors, such as rising violence and drug overdoses. Nevertheless, between 2000-24, infant mortality (the proportion of infants who die before age 1) declined from about 24 deaths per 1,000 live births to 12, a figure slightly lower than the LAC average (14) but higher than the US rate (5).

Traditional Medicine

This treatment method consists of the knowledge, practices, and skills that are derived from a native population's beliefs, experiences, and theories. Traditional Mexican medicine relies on prayer and herbal treatments to identify and cure the causes of physical, emotional, and spiritual illness. Today, Mexicans use

traditional medicinal practices, not only in rural and indigenous communities, but in the public hospital system. Many Mexican hospitals lack specialized doctors, especially in rural or high-violence areas, so healers, many of whom do not have professional licenses, use ancestral knowledge to treat patients. ***Curanderos*** (non-licensed healers) and ***parteras*** (midwives) use herbs, smoke, alcohol, and prayer, among other traditional practices, in an attempt to draw the sickness out of their patients.

Healthcare System

In 1943, the government established the ***Secretaría de Salud*** (Secretariat of Health) and ***Instituto Mexicano del Seguro Social*** (Mexican Institute of Social Security, or IMSS), expanding the Mexican public healthcare system. Since 1983, Mexico's Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) has included protection of citizen health as a universal right, though compliance is an issue. The government bases healthcare coverage on employment, and access depends on whether a person, parent, or spouse works for the public or private sector and as a formal or informal employee. While public healthcare covers most medical services and prescription drugs, the quality of services varies. Those who do not qualify for public healthcare may opt for private insurance.

In 2023, some 51% of Mexicans utilize public healthcare, around 1% private insurance, and the remaining 49% access neither. Mexico's private healthcare network traditionally caters to wealthy Mexicans and foreign nationals. More expensive, private healthcare has grown in recent years, as a result of increasing disposable incomes, medical tourism, and demand for higher quality healthcare.

Although public healthcare in Mexico continues to evolve and grow, some segments of society still have limited access to quality healthcare. The government programs ***Seguro Popular*** (Popular Health Insurance) and the ***Instituto de Salud para el Bienestar*** (Institute of Health for Welfare, or INSABI) were inefficient, corrupt, and eliminated in recent years. ***IMSS-***

Bienestar (run by the IMSS) is the latest public health program that the Mexican government has implemented and replaced INSABI by 2024 to increase care access and quality. In 2023, Mexico spent just over 6% of its GDP on healthcare, nearly equal to Guatemala (7%) and Belize (5%) but below the US (17%).

Healthcare Challenges

The leading causes of death in Mexico are non-communicable "lifestyle" diseases, which accounted for about 75% of total deaths in 2022. Of these, cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, diabetes, and cancer are the most common. Preventable and "external causes" of death, such as interpersonal violence, road injuries, falls, and suicide, resulted in some 49% of all injury deaths in 2022. Interpersonal violence is among the leading cause of death for Mexicans, especially men (see *Political and Social Relations*). In 2023, the country had some 25 intentional homicides per 100,000 people, lower than the rate in neighboring Belize (28), but much higher than the US (6).

Public health experts underscore Mexico's lack of coordination among health entities and deficient insurance coverage as major challenges for effective and equitable care. Patients covered by one organization are typically unable to receive services from another, a complication that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic. Most services and medical professionals focus on urban areas. Consequently, some rural Mexicans have difficulty accessing quality and timely care. Likewise, working-class urban Mexicans, particularly those living in informal settlements (see *Family and Kinship*), often encounter more difficulty accessing care than their counterparts in wealthier parts of the same cities.

As of 2025, the Mexican government confirmed over 7.6 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in nearly 335,000 deaths. Mexico implemented minimal restrictions during much of the pandemic. As of early 2023, some 76% of Mexicans received at least one dose and 64% all recommended doses of a COVID-19 vaccine.

11. ECONOMICS AND RESOURCES

Overview

Initially surviving as nomadic hunter-gatherers, early Mexicans eventually settled in subsistence-based agrarian communities. As these early settlements developed into urbanized societies, beginning with Olmec cities around 1150 BC (see *History and Myth*), complex trade networks emerged. Olmecs from the Gulf Coast region traded rubber and luxury goods, such as jade and turquoise, across Mexico and into Central America. Between 250-900 AD, lowland Maya peoples (see *History and Myth*) traded obsidian, glass formed from quickly cooled lava and associated with the religious and political elite.

Successive regional hegemons – the Teotihuacán (beginning in the 6th century), Toltecs (10th-12th centuries), Tepanecs (13th-14th centuries), and Aztecs (15th century) – exploited their subject states for tribute goods (see *History and Myth*). Such exchanges were motivated by politics instead of profit and primarily benefitted the elite. This tributary exchange was far-reaching: Toltec archeological sites reveal shells from both coasts, and Aztec ***Pochteca*** (long-distance merchants) obtained gems and feathers from across Mexico.

After defeating the Aztecs in 1521 (see *History and Myth*), Spanish settlers completely changed Mexico's economy. They introduced pastoral agriculture (cattle and sheep herding) and allocated ***haciendas*** or ***latifundios*** (large estates, often comprising land seized from indigenous populations or left vacant due to disease – see *History and Myth*) to certain ***peninsulares*** (Spaniards). These vast estates would become a dominant rural institution, influencing economic and political affairs until the Revolution of 1910 (see *History and Myth*), though some persist today. To the Spaniards, though, Mexico's economic value was primarily in its silver and gold deposits.

During the colonial period, Mexico was the world's leading silver producer, contributing an estimated 1.6 billion ounces of the metal to the world economy. Silver mines fueled economic growth at the expense of non-mining sectors and supported Spain's vast global empire. The Spaniards coerced ***gañánes*** (indigenous laborers) to work on *haciendas* and sometimes in mines through the ***encomienda*** system (forced indigenous labor – see *History and Myth*). Meanwhile, a semi-independent indigenous peasant economy persisted, primarily on ***congregaciones*** (indigenous settlements established by colonial forced relocation policies).

In the early 19th century, Mexico's struggle for independence paralyzed commerce. As peasant rebellions gripped the country from 1810-15 (see *History and Myth*), silver production declined. Additionally, the post-independence flight of Spanish citizens drained much of the country's economic and human capital. Thereafter, Mexico's reputation as an unstable state made borrowing expensive, and national debt rose above the already large sum inherited at independence. Although the following decades yielded stagnation, Reform-era policies (see *History and Myth*) laid the foundation for later economic resurgence. Under Benito Juárez, the ***Ley Lerdo*** (Lerdo Law) privatized corporate land holdings. Mexico also modernized its treasury and suspended its foreign debt service, resulting in a French invasion from 1862-67 (see *History and Myth*).

Under President Porfirio Díaz (1876-1911, see *History and Myth*), Mexico attracted extensive foreign direct investment (FDI). American, British, and French capital supported major infrastructure projects, as foreign firms laid some 15,000 mi of railways; built electric networks, industrial complexes, and port facilities; and improved mines. By 1910, FDI inflows represented around 50% of capital in Mexico, and the petroleum industry, which by 1913 accounted for some 7% of global supply, was under almost exclusive foreign control. Foreign economic

influence diminished during the Mexican Revolution (1910-20). Article 27 of the 1917 Constitution empowered the state to seize private holdings, especially those for minerals and oil. In 1938, President Lázaro Cárdenas nationalized the oil industry, confiscating all foreign petroleum holdings, and established ***Petróleos Mexicanos*** (Mexican Petroleum, or PEMEX) to manage the consolidated sector. Control of domestically produced oil contributed to Mexico's rapid industrialization.

Declining terms of international trade in the wake of the Great Depression prompted Mexico to replace imports with domestically produced goods, strengthening an industrialization process that accelerated during World War II (see *History and Myth*). US wartime demand for Mexican goods and labor led to a direct increase in Mexican output. Simultaneously, Mexico pursued economic self-sufficiency and deepened protectionism. This domestically oriented development strategy yielded a period of sustained economic growth, now known as the "Mexican Miracle," which persisted from the 1940s-60s, though this process also resulted in severe wealth inequality.

Despite continued GDP growth, macroeconomic conditions deteriorated dramatically during the 1970s. Inflation, which had hovered around 5% for years, rose to nearly 24% in 1974. From 1973-81, indebtedness increased from $4-43 billion. In 1976, President Luis Echeverria allowed the peso to float against the US dollar, almost halving its value. Capital fled, threatening Mexico's ability to pay its mounting debts. Nevertheless, federal spending doubled between 1976-79, largely due to the discovery of vast oil deposits in the Gulf of America, as the government expected that future income from oil would help pay off its debt.

By the early 1980s, however, Mexico was plagued by falling oil prices, higher global interest rates, and still-rising inflation. Its total debt service reached $80 billion, and in August 1982, it defaulted. Mexico was slow to recover from this debt crisis, and

another economic disaster, caused by a significant drop in the oil price and the crash of the New York Stock Exchange, affected the country in 1987. That year, inflation reached 159%.

Following these crises, the Mexican economy endured major structural changes. The government prioritized trade liberalization, privatization, and restored openness to FDI. These efforts culminated in the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA, see *History and Myth*), which established free trade with the US and Canada. Forced into international competition, many Mexican producers became more efficient. After NAFTA's implementation, the manufacturing sector achieved double-digit growth rates for more than a decade, but many Mexican laborers lost their livelihoods, unable to match foreign levels of efficiency.

Since 2000, the economy has grown slowly, though Mexico has reduced its dependence on oil and diversified exports. The country suffered during the 2007-09 global financial crisis, given its reliance on the US as an export market, and GDP shrunk by over 6% in 2009. President Felipe Calderón oversaw a recovery program that slowly restored GDP growth. Between 2009-19, Mexico's total exports doubled, and the country reaffirmed its commitment to free trade in 2020, when the US-Mexico-Canada Agreement (largely a continuation of NAFTA) entered into force.

The COVID-19 pandemic caused Mexico's GDP to contract by about 8% in 2020, as the peso depreciated, commodity prices plummeted, and employment declined by 17%. Today, Mexico's economy is the second-largest in Latin America, after Brazil, with GDP of $1.8 trillion as of 2023. Its debt-to-GDP ratio is relatively low, at around 45%. Although poverty and inequality remain prominent, a recent rise in the minimum wage contributed to their overall reduction since 2018. Nevertheless, Mexico has an extensive informal sector, characterized by low productivity and wages. As of 2023, nearly 60% of Mexican employees work in the informal economy (see *Time and Space*).

Services

Comprising around 59% of GDP and 63% of the labor force in 2023, the services sector is the country's largest. Financial and real estate services and tourism are the largest subsectors.

Tourism: According to one index, Mexico is Latin America's most competitive tourist destination. In 2023, some 75 million tourists visited Mexico, flocking to natural sites, like the beaches in Cancún; historical areas, like the Mayan ruins of Chichen Itza; and major cities, like Mexico City and Guadalajara. Income from tourism in 2023 totaled about $30.8 billion. Cancún is the most visited international destination for US tourists.

Industry

The industrial sector accounts for about 32% of GDP and employs some 25% of residents. The major subsectors are oil, manufacturing, and mining.

Oil: As of 2023, Mexico has about 6 billion barrels of proven oil reserves, some 70% of which are located offshore, mainly in the Gulf of America. PEMEX remains the dominant actor in Mexican oil, accounting for about 94% of production in 2022. Privately-funded production has increased from almost nothing to around 6% of output since 2017.

Manufacturing: In 2023, manufacturing accounted for about 20% of GDP. Mexico is the world's seventh-largest passenger vehicle manufacturer, producing some 4 million vehicles annually. American, German, Japanese, and Korean automakers operate in the country, which also has extensive cargo vehicle production. Computer and electronics production, which totaled about $8.84 billion in 2023, accounts for the second-largest percentage of Mexico's manufacturing revenue. Consumables, like beer, for which Mexico is the world's biggest exporter, are also a major component of Mexican manufacturing.

Mining: In 2023, Mexico's total mining output was worth some $16.39 billion. Around 50% of production is in precious metals, and Mexico is the world's largest silver and one of the top gold,

zinc, and copper producers. The mining sector is export oriented, with a trade surplus of some $13.03 billion in 2023.

Agriculture

This sector accounted for about 4% of GDP and employed 12% of Mexican workers in 2023. Over 10% of Mexico's land area is arable, and as of 2023, its total agricultural production was the world's seventh-largest. Mexico owns large and diverse farming, livestock, and fishing agribusinesses, which export huge quantities of goods, especially to the US. It also has many small-scale traditional farmers, particularly in the South. The country is among the world's top 10 beef, pork, and poultry producers.

Farming: Crops account for some 50% of Mexico's agricultural output. Mexico is the world's largest producer of avocados and tomatoes, first domesticated in Mexico. Other important crops are corn, limes, sugarcane, chiles, bananas, and vanilla. While corn, wheat, beans, and sorghum are vital crops for local consumption, coffee and blue agave are high-value exports.

Currency

Adopted in 1992, the modern Mexican peso (MXN) is issued in five coins (1, 2, 5, 10, and 20) and six banknotes (20, 50, 100, 200, 500, and 1,000). A peso divides into 100 ***centavos*** issued in three coins (10, 20, and 50). From 2019-24, US$1 ranged between MXN$16.52-25.34.

Foreign Trade

Exports, worth some $649.3 billion in 2023, consisted of cars, vehicle parts/accessories, and crude petroleum sold to the US (76%), Canada (5%), and China (2%). Imports totaled $674.7 billion and consisted of vehicle parts/accessories, refined petroleum, and integrated circuits from the US (46%), China (20%), and Germany (4%).

Foreign Aid

Mexico is a recipient of foreign aid, primarily for migration assistance and labor law enforcement. In 2023, Mexico received over $429.1 million in official development aid and assistance, some $238.5 million of which was from the US.

12. TECHNOLOGY AND MATERIAL

Overview

In recent decades, Mexico's physical and telecommunications infrastructures have improved considerably but are still lacking in many rural areas. Despite legal protections, Mexico's press faces censorship.

Transportation

Most Mexicans travel by bus in cities and over long distances. Bus fares vary by service type, though local routes are generally inexpensive. Taxis, ***colectivos*** (fixed-route minibuses or taxis), and ridesharing services are common in cities. Mexico City's metro system, Latin America's largest and busiest, comprises 12 lines, 195 stations, and 140 mi of track. It connects to four other transit systems: the Xochimilco ***Tren Ligero*** (Light Rail), ***Metrobús*** and ***Mexibús*** bus rapid transit systems, and ***Ferrocarril Suburbano*** commuter rail. Monterrey and Guadalajara also have metro/rail services. With 430 vehicles per 1,000 people in 2023, Mexico has one of Latin America's highest personal vehicle ownership rates. Travel by foot, bike, and motorbike is also common throughout Mexico.

Roadways: Mexico's roadway network is Latin America's second-largest after Brazil and covers over 517,769 mi, of which about 25% are paved. In a 2019 global assessment, Mexico ranked 22 of 141 countries in road connectivity and 49 in quality of road infrastructure. Few roads cross the Sierra Occidental Mountain Range or the Bolsón de Mapimí Basin, making cross-country (East-West) land travel difficult in the North.

Railways: Freight dominates Mexico's 16,724 mi of railways. Only a recently opened commuter rail in Toluca and three tourist trains (operating in Sinaloa-Chihuahua, Jalisco, and Campeche-Cancún) carry passengers. However, Mexico has committed to expanding passenger service, so in late 2023, the government issued a decree to accommodate new intercity passenger lines.

Ports and Waterways: Mexico has some 1,800 mi of navigable riverways and coastal canals, most of which connect to major seaports on the East Coast. Along this network sit 10 riverports. Much of Mexico's international trade passes through its 38 seaports, of which the largest by trade volume are Manzanillo and Lázaro Cárdenas, both on the Pacific Coast. Mexico's main oil terminals, Cayo Arcas and Dos Bocas, are on the Gulf Coast. Its largest liquified natural gas terminals are Altamira, on the Gulf of America, and Ensenada, in Baja California.

Airways: Only about 243 of Mexico's 1,713 airports have paved runways. Mexico City International Airport (MEX) is Latin America's busiest, handling about 48.4 million passengers in 2023, and the main hub for Mexico's flag carrier, Aeroméxico. Founded in 1921, *Mexicana de Aviación* (recently purchased by the Secretariat of National Defense after its 2014 bankruptcy) is North America's oldest airline in operation. Budget carriers, like Volaris and Viva Aerobus, now account for a large share of the domestic market.

Energy

With proven oil reserves of about six billion barrels as of 2023, Mexico is one of the world's largest oil producers (see *Economics and Resources*). In 2023, Mexico's total oil production was nearly 2.1 million barrels-per-day (b/d), while its refineries processed 792,000 b/d. Mexico imports natural gas, relying on pipelines from Texas to meet its demand of nine billion cu-ft-per-day. In 2024, petroleum products and natural gas each comprised about 69% of Mexico's primary electricity generation, followed by renewables (22%), coal (6%), and nuclear (13%).

Media

Mexican media are highly concentrated: single firms dominate the newspaper (*Organización Editorial Mexicana*), broadcasting (*Televisa*), and telecommunications (*Telmex*) sectors. Although the 1917 Constitution (see *Political and Social Relations*) codified freedom of press into law, the government and criminal actors routinely censor the press. Journalist suppression often

involves physical threats, intimidation, assault, kidnapping, and even murder. Between 2000-22, 163 Mexican journalists were murdered, crimes which often go unpunished. President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has been especially hostile to the press, often criticizing opposition-aligned journalists. In 2025, Mexico ranked 124 of 180 countries in a world press freedom index.

Print Media: Mexico has robust print media that offer many daily, weekly, and monthly publications. *Organización Editorial Mexicana* publishes 37 national and local newspapers. Among Mexico's leading newspapers are *El Universal*, *El Sol de México*, *Reforma*, *La Jornada*, *El Norte, Milenio*, and *El Economista*. *Mexico News Daily* is the primary English-language newspaper.

TV and Radio: Mexican radio penetrates more broadly than television, and most of Mexico's nearly 2,000 radio stations are commercial. Many Mexicans listen to the country's public radio, the ***Instituto Mexicano de la Radio*** (Mexican Radio Institute). Spanish-language broadcasting is most common, though indigenous- and English-language programs are also available (see *Language and Communication*). Mexico has hundreds of TV stations. Prior to reforms in 2013, *Televisa* dominated the market. Today, a broader range of broadcasting groups and foreign satellite and cable operators are available.

Telecommunications

In 2023, Mexico had about 100 mobile subscriptions and 20 landlines per 100 inhabitants, and *Telcel* had 64% of the wireless market share. Coverage is widespread, though large gaps exist in Baja California, along the Sierra Madre Occidental and Sierra Madre del Sur ranges, and in the sparsely populated Bolsón de Mapimí Basin in the North. 5G is available in major cities such as Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Tijuana, and Puebla.

Internet: About 81% of Mexico's population – some 104 million people – were regular Internet consumers in 2023. Despite widespread access to basic Internet services, Mexico had just 21 broadband subscriptions per 100 people in 2023.

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