

LAND MEXICO



Pic. 1: Mexico

FACTS

Surface:	1.972.550 sqkm
Capital:	Mexico D.F.
Form of government:	federal republic
Inhabitants:	106,2 Mio.
Population Density:	50,5/km ²
Average Income:	GNI per Capita: US\$ 5,910/Year
Life Expectancy:	72,42 (M)/78,1 (W)
Language:	Spanish, various Mayan, Nahuatl, and other indigenous languages
Religion:	Roman Catholic 89%, Protestant 6% other 5%

INTRODUCTION

Mexico, as a culturally, politically and economically very diverse country, is undergoing rapid changes such as broad and intensive urbanisation, open-market policies, and free-trade links with the United States and other countries throughout the Americas.

As the site of advanced Amerindian civilizations, Mexico came under Spanish rule for three centuries before achieving independence early in the 19th century. A devaluation of the peso in late 1994 threw Mexico into economic turmoil, triggering the worst recession in over half a century.

Although the nation continues to recover, there exist serious economic and social concerns including low real wages, underemployment for a large part of the population, inequitable income distribution, and few advancement opportunities for the largely indigenous population in the impoverished southern states.

HISTORY

In Mexico the first major Mesoamerican civilization was established by the Olmec, who flourished between about 1500 and 600BC. The Maya culture reached its peak about the 6th century AD. Between the 3rd and 6th century the Empire of the Toltecs came into being. The warlike Toltec migrated from the north, and in the 10th century they established an empire in the Valley of Mexico. In the 12th century the Toltec were vanquished and dispersed by the Chichimeca, who took over the Toltec civilization.

In 1325 the Aztec, or Mexica, emerged from the Toltec and Chichimeca civilization and founded a settlement named Tenochtitlán in an area surrounded by marshes in Texcoco, one of the valley lakes. Under *Itzcoatl*, the first Aztec emperor (1360-1440), the Aztec extended their influence through the entire Valley of Mexico, becoming the dominant power in central and southern Mexico by the 15th century.



Pic. 2: Hernán Cortés Landing in Veracruz

Between 1518 and 1521 Spain conquered the Empire of the Aztekes, and during 1535 to 1821, known as the Spanish colonial period, military and exploratory expeditions made present-day Texas, New Mexico and California part of New Spain.

Distinguishing characteristics of colonial Mexico were the exploitation of the Indians and the position and power of the Roman Catholic Church. Franciscans, Augustinian, Dominican, and Jesuit missionaries entered the country with the conquistadores. The Mexican church grew very wealthy through gifts and bequests in the colonial years. It owned one-third of all property and land when church holdings were

nationalized in 1859.

Between 1810 and 1821 there were insurrections against Spain and independence was declared. In 1822 Mexico became independent as the Mexican Empire, also including the Central-American states of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua as well as large parts of what is now the United States. After a rebellion Mexico became a federal republic under the name United Mexican States. During this time the Central-American states seceded from Mexico. In 1836 Texas followed, later joining the United States. In the upcoming years Mexico lost northern territories to the United States.



Pic. 3/4: Impressions of the Mexican Revolution 1910 to 20

Mexico's severe social and economic problems erupted in a revolution that lasted from 1910 to 20 and gave rise to the 1917 constitution. After the resignation of Porfirio Díaz in 1911 as a result of a revolution, F. I. Madero González of the liberal *Partido Constitucional Progressista* was elected president in 1912. His assassination in 1913 led to a further revolution and a civil war. Prominent leaders in this period were Francisco Pancho Villa, Victoriano Huerta and Emiliano Zapata.

Alvaro Obregón Salido of the *Partido Constitucionalista* became constitutional president in 1920. He was succeeded in 1924 by Plutarco E. Calles, which brought the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario PNR* to power. In 1946 PNR was renamed to *Partido Revolucionario Institucional PRI* and held the presidency until 2000.

In 2000 the first non-PRI president, Vicente Fox Quesada of the conservative *Partido Acción Nacional PAN* was elected.

POLITICAL SITUATION

The political system in Mexico is an authoritarian one, governed by a president, who is elected for one six-year term.

There are currently two major political parties. The governing one is the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional PRI*, which

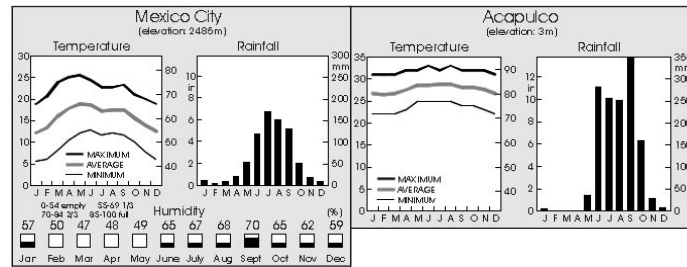
incorporates peasant groups, labor unions, and many middle-class organizations. The largest oppositional party is the conservative *Partido de Acción Nacional PAN*. Politics suffer from corruption and extensive participation by interest groups and labor unions in government and PRI affairs.

The Mexican government has strong relations to the USA. Trade and immigration issues along the shared border are the subjects of continuing negotiations. Mexico is highly dependent on U.S. trade and investment. Wages are much lower than in the U.S., however, and about one-fourth of the Mexican population lives on less than \$2 a day.

The foreign policy is traditionally based on international law and nonintervention as a major principle. Mexico is widely active in hemispheric affairs, including good relations with Cuba. Mexico joined the NAFTA agreement in 1993. Other topics include, i.e. Plan Puebla Panama and indigenous affairs.

CLIMATE

The tropic of Cancer cuts across Mexico north of Mazatlán and Tampico. South of the tropic it is hot and humid along the coastal plains on either side of the country and on the Yucatán Peninsula. Inland, at higher elevations the climate is much more dry and temperate, and the mountain peaks are capped with snow.



Pic. 5: Climate Mexico D.F.

Pic. 6: Climate Acapulco

The hottest months, May to October, are also the wettest for most of the country.

Northwestern Mexico and inland northern areas are drier than the rest of the country. In the east rainfall is particularly high on the eastern slopes of the *Sierra Madre Oriental* and on the northern side of the *Isthmus of Tehuantepec*.

TOPOGRAPHY

Northern and Central Mexico have coastal plains on the east and west and two north-south mountain ranges, the *Sierra*

Madre Oriental and *Sierra Madre Occidental*, framing a group of broad central plateaus known as the *Altiplano Central*.

The *Altiplano Central* and the two *Sierra Madres* end where they meet the *Cordillera Neovolcánica*. The *Cordillera Neovolcánica* is a volcanic mountain range which runs east-west across the middle of Mexico. Part of it are the active volcanoes *Popocatepetl* and *Volcán de Fuego de Colima*, as well as Mexico's highest peaks - *Pico de Orizaba* and *Iztaccíhuatl*.

To the South Pacific lowlands narrow to a thin strip. The main mountain range in the south is the *Sierra Madre del Sur*, which stretches across the states of Guerrero and Oaxaca to the low *Isthmus of Tehuantepec*. The north side of the Isthmus is part of a wide, marshy plain that stretches from Veracruz to the Yucatán Peninsula.

In the southernmost state, Chiapas, the pacific lowlands are backed by the *Sierra Madre de Chiapas*, behind which is the Río Grijalva basin and then the Chiapas highlands. East of these highlands is a tropical rain-forest area stretching into northern Guatemala. The jungle changes into a region of tropical savanna on the flat, low Yucatán peninsula. The tip of the peninsula is arid, desertlike.

Situated atop three of the large tectonic plates that constitute the earth's surface, Mexico is one of the most seismologically active regions on earth. The motion of these plates causes earthquakes and volcanic activity.

VEGETATION

Mexico is one of the most biologically diverse countries on earth. It is home to 1041 bird species, 439 mammals, 989 amphibians and reptiles, and about 26,000 plants. Many Mexican species are endemic, including more than half of its reptiles and amphibians, and 139 of its mammals. The southern state of Chiapas alone has some 10,000 plant species, more than 600 birds and 1200 butterflies.



Pic. 7-8 Various types of vegetation

Northern Mexico is dominated by two deserts: the *Desierto Sonorense* west of the *Sierra Madre Occidental*, and the *Desierto*

Chihuahuense occupying much of the *Altiplano Central*. The deserts are sparsely vegetated with cacti, agaves, and short grasses. Between the *Desierto Chihuahuense* and the *Sierra Madre Occidental / Oriental*, and also in the northeast of Mexico, a lot of land has been turned over to irrigation or grazing, or has become wasteland.

The *Sierra Madre Occidental* and *Oriental*, the *Cordillera Neovolcánica*, and the *Sierra Madre del Sur* still have some big stretches of pine forest and oak forest, though much of the forest around the valleys is gone to due human settlements.

On the western side of mainland Mexico (the western slopes of the *Sierra Madre Occidental*, the western and southern portions of the *Cordillera Neovolcánica*, and much of the southern states of Oaxaca and Chiapas) there is deciduous and semi-deciduous tropical forest, which is less varied than the eastern tropical forests. Much of this land has been turned into ranches and cropland.



Pic. 9-10: Various types of vegetation

The natural vegetation of much of low-lying southeast Mexico, from southern Veracruz to eastern Chiapas and on to Quintana Roo, is evergreen tropical forest. The forest is dense and diverse. The *Selva Lacandona* in eastern Chiapas is the largest remaining tropical forest area in the country. The Yucatán Peninsula changes from rain forest in the south to dry thorny forest in the north.

Mexico has to deal with a number of serious environmental issues. These include scarcity of fresh water resources, deforestation, widespread erosion, desertification and deteriorating agricultural lands.

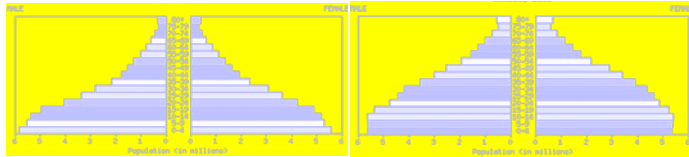
Due to the immense rural to urban migration cities especially Mexico City and the towns along the Mexican border have to deal with serious water and air pollution and lack of waste disposal facilities.

SOCIETY

The Mexican population is composed of three main groups: the people of Spanish descent, the Indians, and the people of mixed Spanish and Indian ancestry, or mestizos. Of these groups, the mestizos are by far the largest, constituting about

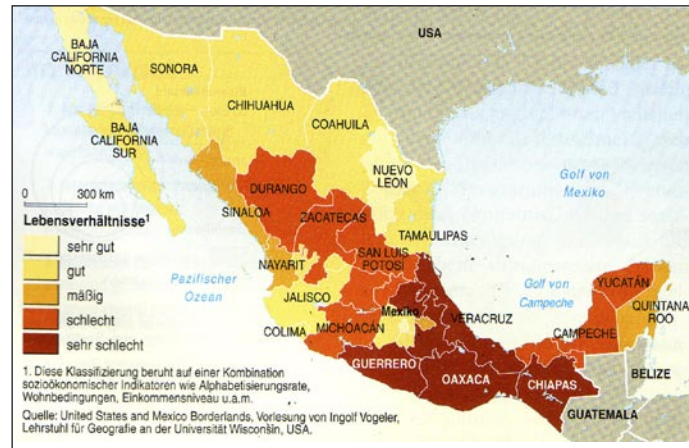
60% of the population. The Indians total about 30%. Rural areas are populated by Indians, descendants of the highly developed societies of the Maya, Aztec, and Toltecs, and by Spanish and mestizo farmers and laborers; each of these heritages has enriched the regional culture. In the cities both European, particularly Spanish and French, and North American influences are evident.

The biggest indigenous group is the Nahuatl, descendants of the Aztecs. They are spread around central Mexico, mainly Puebla, Veracruz and Guerrero. Mayan groups live mainly on the Yucatán Peninsula, and Zapotecs, Mixtecs, Mixe and many others live in Oaxaca.

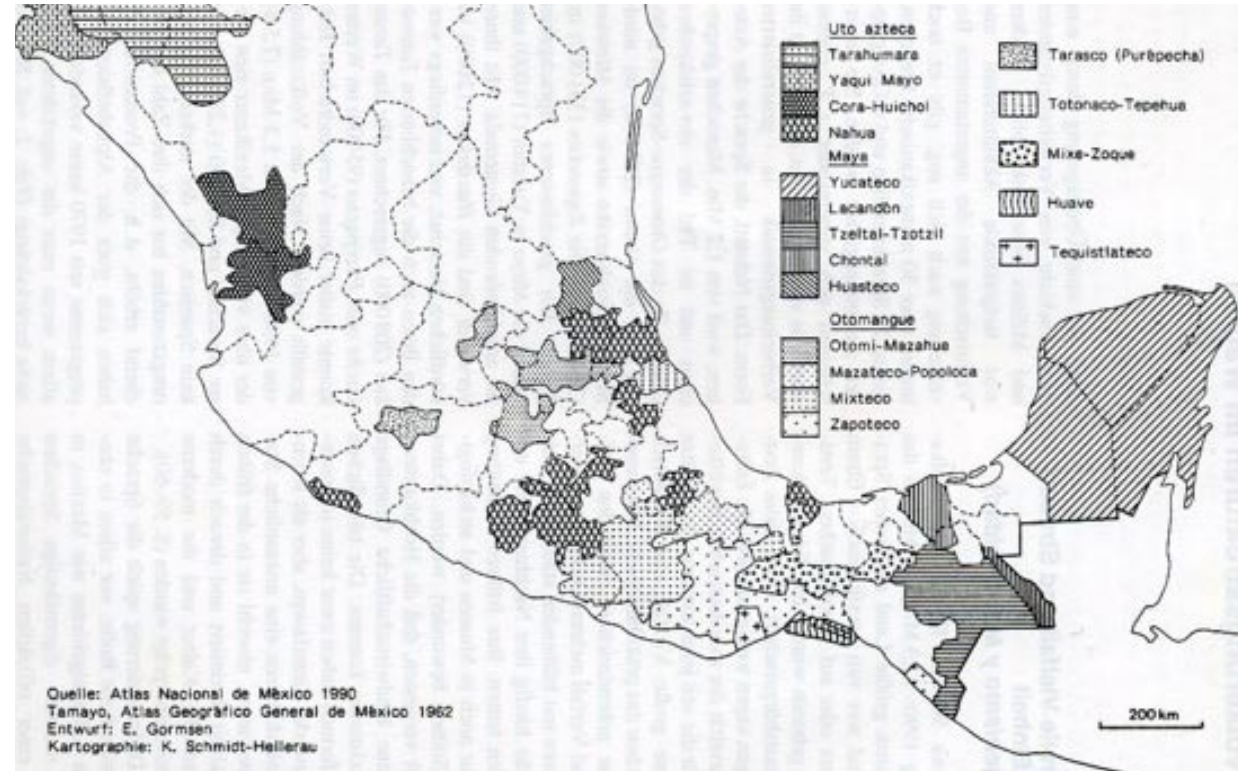


Pic. 11 Population pyramid 1990

Pic. 12 Population pyramid 2005



Pic. 13 Decline in Life quality from North to South



Pic. 14: Ethnic groups

Indigenous people in general remain second-class citizens. They are often restricted to the worst land or forced to city slums or the USA in search for work. Their main wealth is traditional and spiritual, their life organised around communal customs and rituals bound up with nature.

Images:

- Pic.-Nr.1 www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/print/mx.html,
- Pic.-Nr.2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wik/History_of_Mexico,
- Pic.-Nr.3/4 www.historychannel.com, Pic.-Nr.3/4 http://www.inwent.org/v-ez/lis/mexico/ethno_sml.jpg
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