



Mexican Revolution | Causes And Battles

The Mexican Revolution



Mexican Revolution (1910 – 1920)

The Mexican Revolution commonly refers to around ten years, from 1910 to 1920, in which Mexico transitioned from Porfirio Diaz's corrupt dictatorship to a constitutional republic.

The revolution that took place was both political and social. It involved the complex interplay of several factional groups. It was extremely violent and bloody and is the



source of many themes around what it means to be Mexican today, especially considering the idolization of revolutionaries such as Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa. As with any study of a revolution, it pays to examine the causes, concerns, and events that were the catalysts for change. There is often a correlation between the causes and the shape and nature of the revolution itself.

The dictatorship of Diaz, though officially operating within a constitution, effectively ruled in an autocratic manner. He was re-elected to the presidency seven times, though again, these were mostly unchallenged, uncontested victories. A former military general, Diaz is emblematic of the classic strongman in Latin American politics.

He secured loyalty by dividing and conquering Mexico's different factions, offering incentives to those who would follow him, and ruthlessly eradicating any opposition that surfaced. His authority was based on the platform that he was improving the economy – he was a friend to Mexico's middle classes who gained considerable wealth during his time in office.

He facilitated wealthy landowners and foreign investors to buy up Mexico's land, take communal spaces from the poor and indigenous peasantry, and force these villagers to farm cash crops. Foreign investors were invited to snap up deals for Mexico's land rights for oil fields and mines, so much so that by the start of the revolution, around a quarter of Mexico's land was in the hands of foreign investors. A convergence of crises brought about the downfall of Diaz. First, a series of economic issues bred resentment in rural areas.

The price of corn doubled at the beginning of the 20th century, causing terrible hardship among the agrarian classes. Droughts worsened the circumstances. There was a growing awareness that Diaz's authority based on economic prosperity benefitted a select few and seemed to fail more generally as American companies began to be wary of their investments. Oppositional elements were also growing impatient with Diaz's heavy-handed oppressive political tactics.



The Rise of Francisco Madero



Francisco Madero

In 1908, Diaz spoke in an interview of a return to democracy yet turned his back on the comments as he sought reelection in 1910. This prompted Francisco Madero, one of Mexico's richest men, to denounce the regime and found the Anti-re-elections Party. Diaz imprisoned Madero, and though general outcry led to his release, the whole event served to steel Madero's resolve.



He called for a revolution to be held on November 20th at precisely 6 pm in the name of land reform and political freedom. It didn't manifest, but a growing emergence of revolutionary pressure from various socioeconomic classes across the country eventually led to Diaz heading for exile in Paris. Diaz had been toppled, and Madero was declared President, but this was just the beginning of the revolution.

Madero's initial call had failed, but Diaz had left by spring 1911. This had been brought about by fierce fighting in rural areas in the north and south. Pascual Orozco and Pancho Villa raided government garrisons in the north after mobilizing their bands into more significant forces. Emiliano Zapata waged a violent class war against the caciques (or local bosses) in the south. After taking Ciudad Juarez on the Mexican-US border, these revolutionary forces declared Madero president. However, all would not go smoothly from here.

Madero believed in a return to political liberty but did not endorse the kind of sweeping social and land reforms that other revolutionary forces now sought. Zapata and Villa were both champions of peasant and indigenous communities and wanted a radical redistribution of land from the wealthy landowners to the villagers themselves.

A wealthy landowner himself – Madero would not go as far as this. Leading a broad cross-class coalition, Madero's early reform attempts proved too radical for conservatives – but not extreme enough for revolutionaries. He was overthrown after 15 months during the ten tragic days of February 1913 and was executed. He had been betrayed by a general named Huerta, who declared himself a military dictator backed by the [United States](#).

Going back to the Diaz days, the US had plenty of commercial interest invested in the outcome of Mexico's political intrigues. A running theme through Mexico's progress as a nation – and many other Latin American countries – was the constant need to consider their relationship with the US amid interventionism. In this case, US investors, wary of revolutionary claims to redistribute land they were heavily invested in, sought to address the situation.



The Presidency of Madero to his Assassination



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The deal for Huerta to conspire with other factions to overthrow Madero is known as “The Pact of the Embassy” because it was signed in the office of the US Ambassador, Henry Lane Wilson. If revolutionaries like Zapata and Villa were uninspired by Madero, they found a figure to unite against Huerta. His despotic rule only lasted for a year as rebel forces converged on Mexico City in the summer of 1914.

From here, the revolutionary cause split into in-fighting and disagreements over who should take power and the direction that the revolution should take. Conventionistas –



including Zapata and Villa – persisted with ambitious aims to redistribute land. On the other side, Constitutionistas led by Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón believed in the primacy of liberal reforms with no real zeal for widespread changes in the country's social structure.

Over the next few years, historians talk about the war to define what the revolution stood for – this was, in fact, a civil war that led to the death of at least a million Mexican – showing this disagreement went far beyond a polite discourse.

A significant event within this civil war was the bloody battle in April 1915 at Celaya, in which Obregon's forces routed Villa. Villa blamed his defeat on Woodrow Wilson's support for Carranza and Obregon's faction. Thereafter, Villa began a vendetta against Americans in the border region – executing some 17 US citizens in January of 1916 at Santa Isabel and even raiding New Mexico at Columbus.

Villa's actions prompted Wilson to send General John J. Pershing with a small force into the Mexican hills to pursue Villa's bandits. It's this image of Villa that many find romantic. At this point, he is cornered, has experienced defeat, and his case seems lost. Yet, he fights on, dedicated, to a small group of desperados, engaging in guerrilla warfare and unwilling to give in. He had shown cruelty to Americans through some of his tactics, but the fugitive's heroic image dubbed "the centaur of the north" is one that endures.

In the inter-factional struggles, the Constitutionistas ultimately won out, and Carranza was elected President. In 1917, he brought in a new constitution that gave the government the right to confiscate land from wealthy landowners, guaranteed workers' rights, and limited the [Roman Catholic Church's](#) rights.

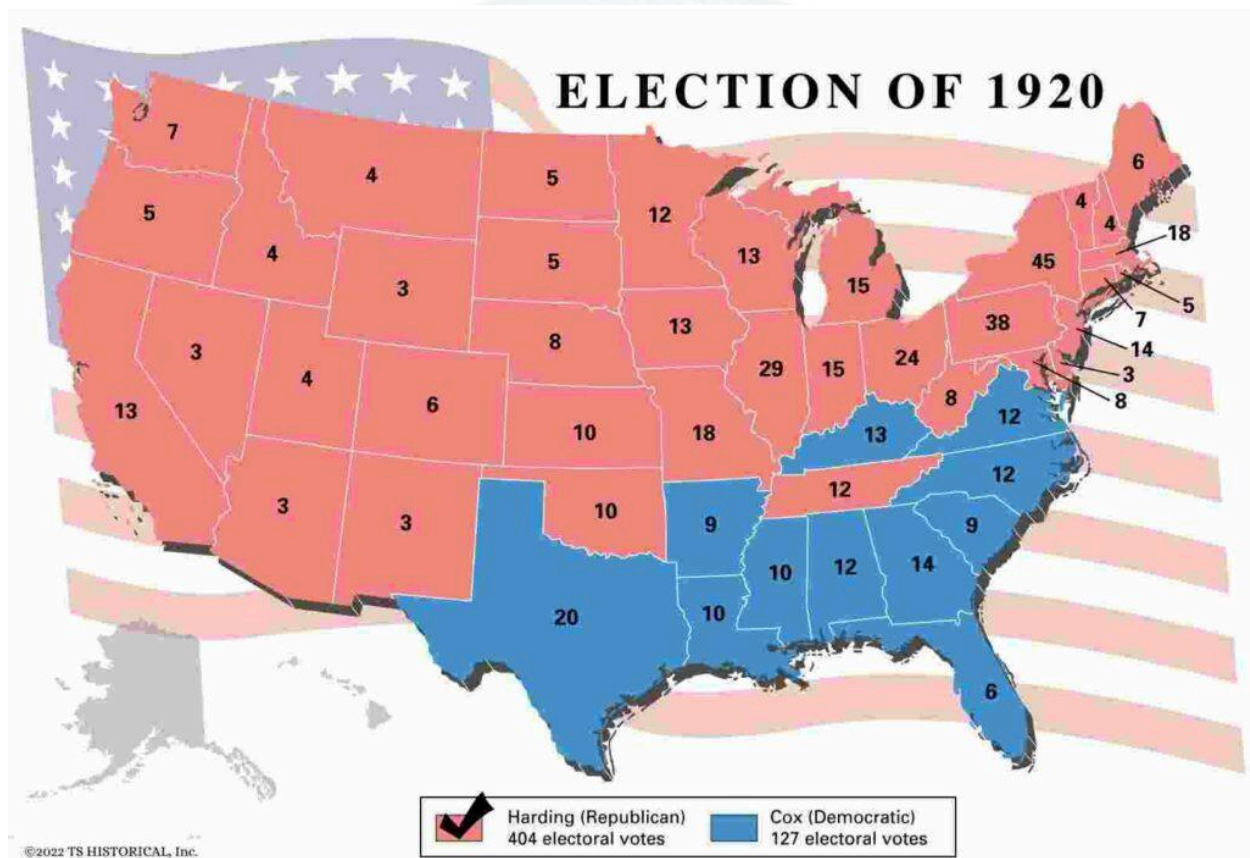
However, it did confer dictatorial powers to the President. An extraordinary document that gave scope for widespread change was just a framework allowing for future developments and not immediately binding. Many of the innovative and ground-breaking policies laid out in the constitution simply weren't enacted upon.

Many of those promises in the 1917 constitution weren't carried out until Lazaro Cardenas came into office in 1934, 17 years after the initial revolutionary document and



24 years after Madero had called for his revolution in 1910. Cardenas strengthened labor unions, nationalized Mexico's oil industry, and redistributed over 70,000 square miles of land. In the intervening years, Zapata had been assassinated in 1919, Carranza fell to the same fate soon after, and Villa was murdered.

Presidential Election of 1920



In 1923. In every election throughout the 1920s, there was uprising and contention in the struggle to define the revolutionary legacy. So, how do we define the revolutionary legacy? It ended the dictatorship that went before, and to this day, the reworked constitution does not allow elected officials to run for a second term.



The revolutionary constitution itself enshrined many workers' rights and initiated many social and political reforms, though perhaps not achieving Villa and Zapata's lofty ambitions, and did reduce the power of the Catholic Church.

Many historians point to the Mexican Revolution as having a significant influence on other revolutions to follow in other Latin American countries in the 20th century – and more widely revered transformations in [Russia](#) and [China](#). Historians speculate that the Mexican revolutionaries had no real desire to export their ideals, perhaps explaining the lack of broader historical significance given to this transitional period in the country's past.

Mexico's PRI, Institutional Revolutionary Party, has dominated Mexican politics to the present day, gaining political authority by evoking the national myths founded in the revolutionary period.

The revolution's icons are still revered, with national monuments celebrating many figures, including Villa, Zapata, Madero, and Carranza – uniting these revolutionaries in national memory despite their contemporary disagreements. Therefore, in the search for the meaning of the revolution's events, as ever, it may be more important to see what it means to Mexicans today.