

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION AND A NEW POLITICAL MODEL FOR MEXICO

THE MEXICAN REVOLUTION

What were the causes of the Mexican Revolution of 1910?

Historians have argued for a century about which were the most important causes of the Mexican Revolution. Although each historian ranks different causes as more or less important, there is little disagreement about what explanations should be on everyone's list. The importance of those explanations varies according to the geographic region being examined and the social class background of the individual participant. Regardless of the reason given, the most important of these causes are represented in the fundamental articles of the 1917 Constitution. Many of the Mexicans who lived in northern Mexico and participated in the revolution did so due to their experiences with foreigners who owned mines, large properties, and railroads. Working-class Mexicans who were employed in foreign-owned companies typically viewed themselves as second-class citizens. For example, in the railroads they were not given the skilled, engineering positions, but instead were assigned to the unskilled positions. One of the goals of mining engineers graduating from the National School of Engineering as late as the 1940s was to occupy all of the professional engineering positions in every foreign-owned

mine in Mexico. This antiforeign sentiment is reflected in the fact that the Constitution assigned subsoil rights to the nation, rather than viewing them as private property.

A second fundamental cause of the revolution, from the point of view of working Mexicans, was labor rights. During the Porfiriato from 1884 to 1911, strikes were not permitted. The Díaz administration was renowned for suppressing labor strikes, particularly during the last decade of his administration. Two such occurrences include the Cananea Mining demonstration in Sonora in 1906, where Arizona Rangers crossed the border as strikebreakers, and the notorious Río Blanco Mill strike in Puebla in 1909, where dozens of workers lost their lives. These and other labor activities and strikes led to numerous demands for improved working conditions for all Mexicans, including maximum hours per day, minimum percentages of Mexican workers in foreign-owned plants, and minimum wages. The most important principle, which became Article 123 of the Constitution, was granting labor the right to strike. For rural workers, both mestizo and indigenous, who were typically even more exploited than their urban counterparts, the revolution meant land for peasants who wanted their own farms. Land was a central issue for the men and women who supported Emiliano Zapata, a leader who emerged from Morelos. Such abuses as debt servitude and the use of company stores (stores owned by the landowner) were also prohibited in the revolutionary articles incorporated in the Constitution.

Additionally, middle-class Mexicans, professional people, and intellectuals were strongly interested in political change, either because they desired a democratic polity ideologically or because they harbored political ambitions themselves and were hopeful for more upward political mobility as a consequence of civil violence. The most important political principles, advocated strongly by Francisco I. Madero, who had opposed Díaz in the 1910 presidential election, were effective suffrage and no reelection. The phrase "Effective

Suffrage and No Reelection," appeared at the bottom of every official correspondence from the federal government until well into the 1970s, indicative of its symbolic importance to the post-revolutionary leadership. Many politicized Mexicans also wanted municipal autonomy, having experienced the intervention of authoritarian state or federal entities.

Who was Francisco I. Madero?

Francisco Madero, born in 1873, was a wealthy landowner from Coahuila, a northern border state below Texas. The son of a prominent industrialist and businessman, he and many of his relatives opposed Díaz's authoritarian regime. Madero was not a radical revolutionary, but an individual with a social conscience who wanted to change how Mexico was led politically and the direction it pursued socially. He treated his own employees humanely, providing them with health benefits, access to schools for their children, and an adequate salary. In 1905, he began his anti-reelectionist activities and founded the Benito Juárez Anti-reelectionist Club to oppose Porfirio Díaz's continued reelection as president. In 1908, he published an influential book titled *The Presidential Succession of 1910*, in which he laid out some of his basic principles and criticized the president for his antidemocratic practices. That same year, President Díaz, in an interview with an American journalist, made the statement that the 1910 election would be democratic, opening the door for an opposition candidate. Madero took him at his word and eventually became the candidate of the Anti-reelectionist Party, running on the motto of "Effective Suffrage and No Reelection." He conducted a national campaign, but in the final stages, he was arrested and imprisoned in San Luis Potosí. Díaz declared himself the winner in a fraudulent election. Madero was able to leave Mexico and go to San Antonio, Texas, where he issued his famous Plan of San Luis Potosi, which contains many of his prominent principles.

Madero ultimately crossed back into Mexico in 1911 and led a revolution in the northern states. Using a victory over the federal army in Ciudad Juárez led by Pancho Villa and Pascual Orozco as leverage, he forced Díaz and his vice president to resign in May 1911. Madero did not seize the presidency; instead he allowed an interim president, while he ran for and won the presidency in a new election in late 1911, taking office in November. Madero and his vice president, José María Pino Suárez, governed for two years, during which time he faced considerable opposition from former supporters of Díaz, as well as from more radical revolutionaries such as Emiliano Zapata, who were interested in land reform and other socially radical policies. Madero did not provide the strong leadership necessary to weaken his political enemies, who instead, led by General Victoriano Huerta, a career federal officer under Díaz, overthrew Madero and murdered both him and his vice president on February 18, 1913. Madero's murder provided the catalyst for the truly violent and radical phase of the Mexican Revolution, from 1913 to 1916. This period determined the major revolutionary principles found in the 1917 Constitution and the violence until 1920 and beyond. The U.S. ambassador's complicity in allowing Madero to be overthrown and murdered also contributed significantly to Mexicans' nationalistic views of and distrust toward the United States.

Who really was Pancho Villa?

Born (José) Doroteo Arango (Arámbula) in 1878, Pancho (Francisco) Villa was the son of poor peasants who worked on one of the largest landholdings in the state of Durango. He helped support his brothers and sister when his father died, eventually becoming a member of a bandit gang, after which he left the state in 1902 and settled in Chihuahua. He continued his illegal activities and joined Pascual Orozco, with other riders that he recruited, in a revolt against Díaz in 1911. Villa

participated in the victorious attack on Ciudad Juárez, which gave Madero a decisive victory over federal troops and the ability to force Díaz to resign. President Madero saved Villa from a firing squad, after which Villa escaped from prison. When General Victoriano Huerta led a military coup against Madero and had him murdered in 1913, he also killed Abraham González, a friend of Villa's, who originally recruited Villa to Madero's cause in 1910. Villa gathered up a force of supporters and declared his support for the Constitutionalist Army led by Venustiano Carranza. This army was composed of Mexicans who wanted to restore constitutional government and defeat the reactionary forces aligned with Huerta. Briefly provisional governor of Chihuahua in 1913–14, Villa implemented radical policies in seizing property from large landholders and converting numerous privately owned buildings into schools.

Villa was very popular in Chihuahua and was able to recruit large numbers of men to join his army. He seized cattle and traded it for arms across the border in the United States. He became one of the most effective generals in the Constitutionalist Army of the North. Villa commandeered trains to carry his cavalry. He used the railroad system effectively to create a highly mobile force. In 1914, he defeated the federal army in the Battle of Zacatecas, a decisive victory in ousting Huerta. The victorious generals joined together in the Convention of Aguascalientes, proposing some radical solutions to Mexico's economic and social problems, but their views were opposed by Carranza. Villa, Emiliano Zapata, and others chose to oppose Carranza and his allies, most notably General Álvaro Obregón, which initiated another phase of the civil war from 1914–1916. Villa and his army were ultimately defeated by Obregón in the Battle of Celaya, 1915, with Obregón using modern battle techniques developed for World War I to destroy Villa's cavalry charges. Villa, who lost the support of the United States and was deprived of access to additional weapons, sent his troops across the border to attack

the U.S. cavalry garrison at Columbus, New Mexico, on March 9, 1916. This attack led to the Pershing Expedition, headed by General John "Black Jack" Pershing, who unsuccessfully pursued Villa's forces in northern Mexico. Unable to defeat Carranza's troops, Villa eventually settled for a large ranch from the government for his men and their families, but was assassinated in 1923, with the complicity of government officials. Today, he remains a major figure in Mexican popular culture.

Who benefited most from the Mexican Revolution?

Historians have never fully agreed whether or not Mexico underwent a truly social revolution. Regardless of the depth or definition of its revolution, the cost in human lives and property destruction was devastating. Mexico, similar to most countries which have undergone significant revolutions, went through multiple phases between 1910 and 1920. The incumbent regime was easily eliminated without much bloodshed by 1911, but the initial, moderate victors who governed from 1911 to 1913 were removed violently by a counterrevolution. That counterrevolution produced the first truly violent phase of the revolution, won by the revolutionaries in 1914. But the revolutionaries themselves, again similar to those found in other historic revolutions, including that of the Soviet Union, had a falling out over the path the revolution should take. Essentially, those favoring more radical solutions to the maldistribution of land and other social and economic ills were defeated by those revolutionaries who favored more modest reforms. The moderates, under Venustiano Carranza, took control of the government in 1916. But at the end of the decade, General Álvaro Obregón, Carranza's leading general in defeating the more radical revolutionary forces, wanted to pursue more socially reformist policies, placing himself ideologically somewhere between Carranza and the revolutionaries he himself had defeated in 1914-15.

An examination of the beneficiaries of the Mexican Revolution makes clear that those most favored politically were members of the rising middle class. Generally speaking, these individuals, who held political posts after 1920, were members of an educated, professional class, most of whom had not actively participated in the revolution. The most adversely affected individuals were Mexicans from wealthy entrepreneurial and landholding families, whose representation in the political class was nearly eliminated altogether. Those Mexicans who had fought in the revolution, typically coming from modest, working-class rural families, dominated leadership during the revolutionary years, especially from 1914 to 1920, but not during the institutionalized post-revolutionary period. Except for the revolutionary generals who became presidents for most of the period from 1920 to 1946, the majority of national figures were civilians. It took numerous decades after 1920 before the standard of living of large groups of poorer Mexicans improved. This improvement occurred typically during the 1950s and 1960s, which witnessed the largest increase in the size of the middle class and the longest era of economic growth, and therefore resulted in a concomitant decrease in the percentage of Mexicans falling into the working class.