



The Mexican Revolution

By Alejandro Quintana (adapted by Bennett Sherry)

The Mexican Revolution overthrew a dictator in just six months, but for the next ten years, Mexican revolutionaries fought each other to determine the outcome of the revolution.

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Two revolutions for the price of one

The Mexican Revolution began in 1910. From the start, Mexico's revolutionaries disagreed about their own revolution. That's because the revolution was really two revolutions in one. It was a political revolution. But it was also a social revolution. The difference between the two divided Mexico. It led to years of fighting.

What is the difference between political and social revolutions? Political revolutions aim to change the political system. Social revolution aims to reshape the social order. Social revolutions change property rights and who controls a nation's wealth. Political revolutions only change a country's political system. They leave social and economic systems in place.

Liberal democracy and the spark of revolution, 1910-1913

The Mexican Revolution began in 1910. It was kicked off by the eighth re-election of President Porfirio Diaz, who had ruled since 1876. Under Diaz, Mexico did hold regular presidential elections. But these elections were not fair at all.¹ Diaz was more like a dictator than a president.

Diaz opened Mexico to foreign businesses. By the start of the revolution, a quarter of all land in Mexico was owned by American companies. In Mexico's countryside, rich landowners and foreign businessmen bought up native lands. They then forced villagers to farm crops for them. Diaz supported this system. He used the army and police to put down any peasants or natives who resisted.

Diaz claimed he had a right to rule Mexico because he was making the country richer. For years, he did create a strong economy. But in the early 1900s, the economy began to slide. Soon, most Mexicans were struggling to get by. Meanwhile, the country was hit by a series of droughts. Mexico became ripe for revolution.

When Diaz ran for re-election in 1910, Francisco Madero decided he had had enough. Madero belonged to one of the wealthiest families in Mexico. He spoke out against Diaz's government and founded the Anti-Re-electionist Party.



President Porfirio Diaz, in 1910. He was a general in the Mexican army during the Second Franco-Mexican War, which helps explain all the medals. Public domain.

¹ On paper, most Mexican men had the right to vote. However, Diaz introduced several anti-democratic laws. These ensured victory for himself and his supporters.

Muchas calles se adornan con flores
Consultados con nobles escudos;
Te saludan con silbos fulgores,
Y labriegos en trabajos rudos.

Una Marcha triunfal te recibe,
Todo el pueblo con noble emoción;
Y con páginas de oro se excita
¡Oh Madero! tu gran convicción.

Recepciones se te hacen con gusto
Cuando llegas aquí á Buenavista,
Venerado ha sido tu Busto,
Coahuilense, grandioso y altruista.

Teherento, hortencia, amaranto,
B gambili, azucena y violas,
A tus plantas te sirven de manto
Con las lirás de todos los Puetas.

**El néosotio y bello agapándo
Toda bella aromática flor,
A tu paso te vayan dejándo
El cariño, la paz y el amor.**

**Don Francisco I. Madero
TRIUNFANTE.**

— CANCIÓN INÉDITA para ponerle música.

Entra Madero por Buenavista
Con su brillante Caballería,
La Infantería pasa muy lista
Con otro cuerpo de Artillería.

Los Oficiales con sus galones
Los veteranos de ardiente lucha,
De todo el pueblo exclamaciones
Por su camino siempre se escuchá

Los estudiantes, los artesanos,
Los periodistas de convicción,
Unidos todos buenos hermanos,
Los poetas nobles con su expresión
Ante tus plantas te tributamos
Nuestro cariño de corazón.

Los estudiantes le forman valla
Las señoritas le riegan flores,
Mas un torrente de gusto estalla,
Y el sol derrama vivos fulgores.

Muchos carruajes se precipitan
De los ríachos de la Nación;
Pero es más bello cuándo se juntan
Obreros nobles de corazón.

Un banquete se ofrece á tu honor;
Y con Mirros y blancos azahares,
Con estrellas de vivo fulgor,
Se te rinde el cariño á millares.

Razgue el cielo su comba azulada
Y asteróides albeantes te rieguen,
Porque tú eres el alma inspirada
Que confió tu cariño mantiene.

Te reciben de hacienda en hacienda
Tus amigos, tus nobles hermanos,
Porque fuistes en ruda contienda
El Dios santo de los Mexicanos.

Se engalanan por todo tu paso
Estaciones de bellos mirajes,
De cariño te dán un abrazo
Los Nereidas de blancos ropajes.

¡De Madero su grande figura
Se revela su acción y nobleza!
Ciudadano de grande cultura,
Hombre estético de viva firmeza.

¡Redentor de mi Patria adorada!
Tú sublime serás en la historia,
Porque siempre tu ardiente mirada
Será ejemplo de viva memoria.

Juan Flores del Campo.

Imp de Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, 2a. Sta Teresa núm 43 México Junio de 1911.

**ENTRADA TRIUNFANTE
DEL CAUDILLO DE LA REVOLUCION
Sr. D. Francisco I. Madero
A la Capital de la República.**



¡ Ven ¡oh Patria! ¡oh Patria! grandiosa
Que tus hijos se abrigan á ti;
Pues que tú eres del pueblo la Diosa,
Que te adora con gran frenesí.

Ya penetra triunfante Madero,
De la ruda campaña que tuvo;
Y en sus leyes se vé que es sincero
Y su noble estandarte sostuvo.

¡De Madero su grande figura
Se revela su acción y nobleza!
Ciudadano de grande cultura,
Hombre estético de viva firmeza.

A broadside celebrating the election of President Francisco Madero in 1911. Below an image of the president, rhyming text proclaims his virtues and describes Mexico City's streets decorated with flowers and banners. By Antonio Vanegas Arroyo, from the Library of Congress. Public domain.

Diaz quickly threw Madero in jail. However, Madero managed to escape to the United States. From Texas, Madero called for a revolution. He set the date for November 20, 1910. Supporters of all types sprang up across Mexico. Diaz was unable to contain them. On May 25, 1911, Diaz fled the country. Madero was then elected president in a landslide.

Ten tragic days, February 1913

Madero's main aim was to change Mexico politically. He wanted to turn Mexico into more of a real democracy. He was not interested in large-scale social change. But many of his followers had different aims. Among them were social revolutionaries like Pancho Villa and Emiliano Zapata. Villa and Zapata fought for peasant and native communities. They believed in radically changing Mexican society by redistributing land from rich landowners to peasants and native groups. In other words, they wanted to seize land owned by the rich and give it to the poor. Both Zapata and Villa led their own revolutionary armies.

Madero's presidency was brief. He went too far for conservatives and not far enough for social revolutionaries. For example, he was very slow to follow through on land reform, which angered the social revolutionaries. After fifteen months in office, Madero was overthrown. He was executed on February 1913.

General Victoriano Huerta then seized power and declared himself military dictator. The army now ruled Mexico and there was no more democracy. Huerta had the support of the U.S. government. The U.S. government wanted to prevent land redistribution, because so much Mexican land was owned by Americans.

The fight to define the Revolution, 1913-1920

Mexican revolutionaries had certainly been angered by Madero's presidency. However, they hated Huerta much more. This brought all the revolutionaries together for a time. Together, they defeated Huerta in July 1914. But soon after their victory, the revolutionaries again split into opposed camps.

On one side were the Conventionistas, a group that included Pancho Villa and Zapata. They wanted big economic and social reforms. On the other side were the Constitutionistas, led by Venustiano Carranza and Álvaro Obregón. They wanted to create a liberal democracy. They were less willing to return land to peasants and natives. The two sides were unable to settle their differences. Soon, a civil war broke out. This was the revolution's bloodiest period. From 1915 to 1917, one million people died in the fighting.

In the end, the Constitutionistas won out. They passed a constitution and elected Carranza president. The Mexican Constitution of 1917 laid out legal and political rights. It also promised land reform, more workers' rights, and other social and economic changes. However, most of these promises were not delivered.



Pancho Villa (center) and Emiliano Zapata (with the large sombrero) in 1914. Public domain

Consolidating the Revolution, 1920-1940

The Mexican Revolution came to an end with the election of President Álvaro Obregón in 1920. By then, Zapata was dead. In 1919 he had been assassinated on the orders of Carranza. Soon after, Carranza himself was killed. Pancho Villa retired in 1920. Three years later, he too was assassinated.

Plutarco Calles became president after Obregón. He founded the National Revolutionary Party. That party won every presidential election from 1928 to 2000.

In 1934, Lázaro Cárdenas became Mexico's forty-fourth president. Cárdenas finally introduced some of the social and economic changes promised by the 1917 constitution. Cárdenas strengthened workers' rights. He declared that Mexico's oil belonged to the Mexican people, not private companies. He redistributed over 70,000 square miles of land.

Revolutionary legacy

The revolution caused the deaths of over a million people. However, it brought many positive changes to Mexico. The dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz was ended, and since 1928, Mexican presidents have not been allowed to run for a second term. The 1917 constitution guaranteed various political rights. It also limited the power of the Catholic church. In time, the revolution brought education for all. It brought labor rights and land reform.

But change was limited, and not everyone benefited equally. Women gained some new rights after 1917. However, they did not win the right to vote until 1953. Rich landowners continued to control the economy. Even after land reform, most peasants remained poor.



[The Monumento a la Revolución in Mexico City](#). By Haakon S. Krohn, CC BY-SA 3.0.

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President Porfirio Diaz, in 1910. Public domain. https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Porfirio_diaz.jpg

A broadside celebrating the election of President Francisco Madero in 1911. Public domain. <https://www.loc.gov/item/99615849/>

Pancho Villa (center) and **Emiliano Zapata** (with the large sombrero) in 1914. Public domain. [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gral._Urbina,_Gral._Villa,_Gral._Emiliano_Zapata._Mexico._12-6-14_\(29803803913\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Gral._Urbina,_Gral._Villa,_Gral._Emiliano_Zapata._Mexico._12-6-14_(29803803913).jpg)

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