



MEXICO

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW®

SECOND EDITION

RODERIC AI CAMP

MEXICO

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Second Edition

RODERIC AI CAMP

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*To the Memory of George Grayson, Who Devoted
His Life to Explaining Mexico*

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When Angela Chnapko, my editor at Oxford University Press, approached me about the new series *What Everyone Needs to Know*, I was struck by the Press's imagination in attempting to reach a broader audience and hopefully educate North Americans and other readers about multiple aspects of specific countries and their citizens. I owe my deep thanks to her for encouraging me to take on the challenge of writing the original work in the midst of three other book projects. I have always pursued the broadest exploration of all things Mexican, from art to intellectuals, during my professional career, and it was worthwhile and rewarding to reeducate myself in many of these areas. Thus, it has been equally valuable to produce a newly revised edition. I also want to thank my wife, Emmy, for reinforcing Angela's enthusiasm for the original project and for agreeing to my pursuit of a new edition in Claremont and Cooper Bay North in the beautiful spring and summer of 2016.



Map 1 Political Map of Mexico

**Political Map of Mexico,
States and Capitals**



INTRODUCTION

Many scholarly friends of my generation who focused on Latin American studies or some other regional specialization have expressed an itch to accomplish two complementary professional, scholarly goals: to write a novel set in their country of expertise and, perhaps even more challenging, to author a textbook. Writing the answers to some one hundred questions about Mexico falls into a similar category. Those of us who are interested in world affairs or the cultures of other countries always have questions we want to ask about them. Thus, it was a welcome invitation to write such a book about Mexico, and I commend Oxford University Press for initiating such a valuable series.

I am into my fifth decade of research on Mexico, having begun my scholarly work in 1966 under the guidance of the late historian Mario Rodríguez, a distinguished Central Americanist. He would have approved of this project, which brings together academic interests from a variety of disciplines. In the first part of the book, I address a series of provocative questions raised implicitly in most recent media accounts, questions that have come up repeatedly in my public speaking engagements among general audiences and students and, surprisingly, in the 2016 Republican presidential primary and during President Donald Trump's first weeks in office. Some of these questions address difficult political and security

issues Mexico faces, issues that naturally affect the United States. Because Mexico and the United States share a nearly two-thousand-mile border and a two-century contentious history that ended in Mexico losing half of its national territory to its northern neighbor, our relationship with Mexico, including the various factors, ranging from cultural to economic, that influence both countries, also receives significant attention.

After touching on much of Mexico's historic, political, social, economic, and cultural development during its colonial era and the formative decades of the nineteenth century, the chapters in the second part of the book focus on the impact of Mexico's decisive revolutionary decade of 1910–20, recognized in numerous bicentennial and centennial celebrations in both countries during 2010. To conclude, I answer numerous questions about how Mexico's democratic transition came about, a transition that lagged behind most other countries in the region. In the final part, I explore a number of questions focusing on where Mexico finds itself today as it undergoes changes in the process of democratic consolidation. It is my hope that readers will find their interest sufficiently piqued by the answers to delve further into Mexico's fascinating culture and history and its impact on the United States. Finally, a brief, highly selective bibliography of English-language publications, including works by numerous Mexican authors, introduces readers to resources offering a wide range of interpretations. Further, throughout the individual entries, readers will find a link (<http://latinamericanhistory.oxfordre.com/page/videos/>) in the text to Oxford's unique *Research Encyclopedia of Latin American History*, which will take them directly to a series of hour-long video-taped interviews of prominent figures who made significant contributions to Mexico's transition to democracy politically, economically, and socially.

As has been the case for other authors in the series, I found it impossible to answer many of the questions without reiterating some of the material that appears in other answers, although I have tried to minimize such duplication.

MEXICO

WHAT EVERYONE NEEDS TO KNOW®

PART I

MAJOR ISSUES FACING

MEXICO TODAY

1

SECURITY AND VIOLENCE IN MEXICO

Why does Mexico have so much drug violence today?

Mexico's drug problems emanate from the insatiable demand for drugs in the United States. Currently, the United States serves as the largest market for drugs in the world. The level of demand by the United States rarely changes in spite of all the measures, successful and unsuccessful, that the US government has taken to prevent drugs from entering the United States. In fact, drug experts suggest that the only likely decline in drug usage in the immediate future will be among cocaine users, not because of a successful government strategy, but because baby boomers represent a disproportionate percentage of cocaine users, and their numbers are declining. The United States has spent most of its antidrug budget on an interdiction strategy, much of which has focused on the border with Mexico. During the Obama administration, increased resources were directed toward reducing demand. As part of the interdiction strategy, the United States has encouraged the Mexican government for years to prevent the shipment of drugs from and through Mexico, and to destroy drug production in Mexico. To make that strategy more effective in Mexico, the US government urged the Mexican government to expand the role of the Mexican Army, given the ineffectiveness and corruption of civilian agencies, both local and national.

When President Vicente Fox was elected in 2000, in spite of campaigning on a promise to withdraw the military from the drug war, he not only maintained the military's role but also increased its presence. He improved the effectiveness of the military through increased cooperation with the attorney general, who in his first cabinet was himself a brigadier general. The improved coordination between civil and military authorities, as well as collaboration with members of the Drug Enforcement Agency and other US officials, increased the number of drug leaders who were killed or captured. Those very successes, however, created a vacuum in the major drug cartels, leading to intense, violent confrontations among the competing cartels for control over territory and new drug routes. By the end of the Fox administration, more than thirty thousand troops were engaged in this mission.

Felipe Calderón became president in 2006. He decided to confront the drug cartels more proactively by assigning roving battalions to those communities or regions where drug-related violence was most pronounced. In the first four years of his administration, he increased the number of troops and officers from both the army and navy to slightly more than fifty thousand to perform this task, hoping to break up the large cartels into much smaller and more easily controlled units. This proactive strategy, though it resulted in the capture of more top traffickers, not only led to much higher levels of intra-cartel violence but also increased the death rate of soldiers, police, prosecutors, and innocent bystanders, contributing to a higher homicide rate, much of it drug-related. It also led to an increased level of human rights abuses by the armed forces.

President Enrique Peña Nieto, who took office in 2012, campaigned on a pledge to employ innovative strategies. He proposed a new federal force, a gendarme unit, trained in police and military skills. Originally, it was to be large enough to replace a significant percentage of the armed forces devoted to the antidrug campaign, but ultimately it totaled only five

thousand members. It became active in the summer of 2014, but had no measurable effect on the drug war.

An increasing number of Mexicans, in response to the rising level of violence, now believe their personal security is compromised and that the government's strategy is largely responsible for that violence. The government's own data from the 2015 National Survey of Victimization and Perception of Public Security revealed that twenty-three million Mexicans were victims of crime in the previous year. The frequency of crime generated widespread fear of being a victim among six out of ten citizens in 2015. Drug-related homicides account for approximately a third to half of all intentional homicides, depending on how the data are calculated. The National System of Public Security released new data in 2016 indicating that homicides increased significantly in seventeen states from December 2012 through June 2016.

Has Mexico always had a drug problem?

Since Felipe Calderón became president in 2006, most of the news about Mexico published in the United States has focused on drug traffickers and the drug-related violence that has resulted from the government's intense efforts to destroy the cartels. That pattern continues to be the case under Peña Nieto. Whereas the level of drug-related violence and the large number of homicides are recent phenomena, drug trafficking has been present in Mexico for decades. Mexico's long-term drug-trafficking history is tied to the consumption of illegal products in the United States. When the United States prohibited the production and sale of alcohol in the 1920s and 1930s, Mexico and Canada both became sources of illegal shipments. The repeal of Prohibition ended the illegal transportation of alcohol across the border, but the consumption of other illegal substances grew, reflecting the huge population increase in the second half of the twentieth century. Mexico has been the source of drugs, such as marijuana, for