



# Mexico

**Assessment:** Fair

**Trend:** ↑

Capital: Mexico City

Type of Government: Federal Republic

Head of Government: President Vicente Fox Quesada (since 1 December 2000)

Secretary of Foreign Relations: Jorge Castañeda

Population: 101,879,171

Human Development Index Ranking 2002: 54

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Over the past ten years, Mexico's record of support for democracy abroad has been **fair** but shows significant signs of improving. Although Mexico's foreign policy has increasingly incorporated the democratic norms that became institutionalized throughout Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, the country's steadfast belief in the basic principles of non-interventionism traditionally has prevented it from taking a leading role in the defense of democracy in the region. Furthermore, it has abstained from participating in, and did not itself receive, international electoral observation missions until 1994. In general, Mexico has tended to be wary of any practices suggested in international fora that have seemed to impose foreign values and practices on other countries.

Vicente Fox's election as President in July 2000, which ended 71 years of one-party rule by the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), and other recent domestic developments indicate that, as the country has begun to democratize internally, it has also begun to promote democracy and human rights internationally. However, while the current political transition in Mexico has led to important reforms, many challenges remain. Fox has lost some political capital because of his perceived inability to demonstrate leadership in a divided political system or to clearly introduce new policy initiatives. Nonetheless, Mexico under Fox is expected to continue the trend toward greater multilateral cooperation in the defense of democracy in the region and possibly further afield.

## FOREIGN RELATIONS BACKGROUND

As a result of repeated foreign interventions in the nineteenth century and its struggle to establish revolutionary governments, Mexico's foreign policy came to be based largely on the *Carranza* and *Estrada* doctrines.<sup>1</sup> These doctrines advocated the principles of non-intervention, non-aggression and the self-determination of nations, regardless of the means by which governments came to power. Over time these doctrines were manipulated by authoritarian regimes and used as a shield against international scrutiny of internal undemocratic practices. Although Mexico is still a proponent of non-interventionism, beginning with the Salinas Administration (1988-1994), it has begun to move away from strict adherence to these principles. Mexico has relied on a variety of tools to promote democracy abroad, including participation in electoral observation missions, provision of technical electoral assistance, and adoption of most regional instruments to defend democracy.

Geographic proximity to the United States has always been a dominant factor influencing Mexico's foreign policy decisions. Through most of the twentieth century, the U.S. was more concerned with ensuring stability throughout the region and the world than with promoting democracy.<sup>2</sup> This was particularly true in the case of its relationship with Mexico, whose geo-strategic importance facilitated its position as an intermediary between the United States and the rest of Latin America. According to some analysts, this relative power allowed Mexico to adopt foreign policy positions that were sometimes blatantly defiant of the United States.<sup>3</sup> But at critical junctures Mexico has tended to support, or at least not openly oppose, U.S. policies.<sup>4</sup>

The financial crisis in the 1980s curbed Mexico's nationalistic and even subtly anti-American foreign



policy. Economic recovery dominated internal as well as external policies. Integration with the United States became the new focus of Mexican foreign policy,<sup>5</sup> although Mexico-U.S. relations were strained by incidents such as the assassination of DEA agent Enrique Camarena in 1985 and the retaliatory U.S.-authorized kidnapping of the alleged accomplices on Mexican soil. Mexico's regional activism during this period manifested itself mostly in efforts directed at promoting the peace process in Central America.<sup>6</sup>

During the Salinas administration (1988-1994) integration into the global economy, rather than democratic political reform, continued to dominate domestic and foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> International agreements, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), focused on economic development and did not include political conditionalities such as democracy strengthening. However, Mexico's continued quest for integration into the world economy also exposed it to greater international scrutiny of its domestic politics. During this period Mexico repeatedly resorted to the principles of non-intervention and self-determination to defend itself against potential queries from international organizations.<sup>8</sup> Yet such scrutiny could not be held off for long, and the political instability of 1994, beginning with the Zapatista rebellion in the southern state of Chiapas and followed by the assassination of the PRI's political candidate, Luis Donaldo Colosio, turned the world's attention to Mexico.

Under President Zedillo (1994-2000), Mexican foreign policy continued its gradual shift toward integrating Mexico into global political affairs. On issues of greatest importance, e.g., its relations with the United States, Zedillo himself controlled the agenda, while the bureaucrats at the Foreign Ministry maintained the traditional non-interventionist line on democracy-related matters and other issues. President Fox (2000-2006) has signaled a strategic reorientation of Mexico's foreign policy objectives to include the promotion of democracy and the protection of human rights using international instruments designed for such purposes, and the development of national legislation that fulfills international obligations.

## **RESPONSE TO OVERTHROW OF DEMOCRATICALLY-ELECTED GOVERNMENTS**

For most of the past decade, the Mexican government stuck to its position of non-intervention in response to attempted overthrows of democratically-elected governments. The Mexican government consistently indicated its disapproval of the interruption of constitutional rule, and clearly stated its refusal to support any coup attempts. Yet for many years it repeatedly refused to isolate or interfere with governments that were otherwise criticized as being undemocratic or that came to power through undemocratic means. In fact, Mexico was an outspoken critic of attempts to do so by other governments.

When Peruvian President Fujimori orchestrated an "auto-golpe" or self-coup, Mexico was quick to charge that any strong action taken by the organization under the pretext of the defense of democracy would be yet another example of how the United States uses the OAS to intervene in the internal affairs of countries in the region. Contrary to the measures called for by many Latin American governments, the Mexican Foreign Ministry declared that "it is up to the Peruvian leaders, institutions and people to find ways to overcome the difficulties their country [was] facing."<sup>9</sup> Though the Mexican government did express concern over the incident, and scrutinized events as they unfolded, it was firm in its position that Fujimori's actions were a matter only for Peruvians. Mexico's strong position was instrumental in blocking any type of regional consensus on tough sanctions against Peru. When Fujimori announced that he would hold elections for a Constituent Assembly later in the year, Mexico was supportive, and agreed to send electoral observers, even though Peruvian opposition leaders believed that doing so would legitimize an otherwise undemocratic process.

In May of 1993, when President Jorge Serrano of Guatemala initiated a coup similar in style to Fujimori's, Mexico again abstained from condemning it. Mexico had played a prominent role in advancing the Guatemalan peace process as a convening member of the 'Amigos de la Paz,' along with Germany, Canada, Norway, and the United States. Furthermore, Mexico gave refuge to the guerrilla leaders of the UNRG<sup>10</sup> and accepted over 50,000 Guatemalan refugees, mostly indigenous people escaping the armed conflict. However, Mexico did not join its fellow "Amigos," Germany and the U.S., in condemning the coup and threatening trade sanctions. The Mexican government did urge Serrano to return to constitutional rule, though it did not take a strong



position on the incident.

In July 1994, in response to a collapse of negotiations with the de facto military government in Haiti, as well as mounting unrest and distress throughout the country, the United Nations Security Council approved Resolution 940 authorizing the use of force to restore democracy. The Mexican Foreign Ministry strongly criticized the resolution, arguing that the economic and travel sanctions that had been imposed on the country had not been given enough time to have an effect. Mexico's Ambassador to the United Nations, Victor Flores Olea, proclaimed that the situation in Haiti did not justify the use of force to violate the sovereignty of another country, and that all diplomatic efforts must first be exhausted. The Ministry added that Mexico "rejects the use of force except in cases of a threat to peace, its violation, or acts of aggression," noting that the crisis in Haiti did not fall into any of those categories.<sup>11</sup> The Mexican government denounced the oppressive military regime in Haiti and publicly professed its commitment to the promotion of democracy in the region, maintaining diplomatic relations with Aristide's government in exile. Nonetheless, it viewed the UN resolution as having been pushed through largely by the United States. Mexico also joined Venezuela, Chile and Uruguay in seeking to meet with the military leaders of the de facto government in an effort to convince them to step down to avoid the bloodshed that an invasion would inevitably bring. Ultimately, Mexico approved a modified version of actions that the U.S. agreed to take after its negotiations with the Haitian military leaders and even pledged humanitarian relief and an economic development package in conjunction with nine other nations.

While regional leaders may have disagreed about what actions were appropriate for Haiti in 1994, the cases of Paraguay in 1996 and Ecuador in 2000 demonstrated an increasing resolve to oppose the overthrow of democratically elected governments. When Paraguay's Army General Lino Oviedo refused to give up his command after being asked to resign by President Wasmosy in what would have been South America's first successful military take-over in two decades, Mexico joined the OAS in expressing support for the democratically-elected government. In January 2000, when a military-backed rebellion forced the ouster of Ecuador's President Jamil Mahuad, the OAS unanimously condemned the military's actions and warned there would be "grave consequences in any attempt to destabilize the democratic system."<sup>12</sup>

Mexico went even further and stated that stronger actions than mere condemnation of the rebellion may be necessary.

Mexico's non-interventionist policies have gradually softened as its internal democratization process has advanced. This was demonstrated during Venezuela's April 2002 coup against President Hugo Chavez. President Fox promptly condemned the attempted rebellion and the interruption of constitutional order, despite his earlier expression of concern about Chavez's increasingly authoritarian policies. While Mexico continued to maintain limited diplomatic relations with Venezuela, Fox stated that Mexico would refuse to recognize Venezuela's new government until new elections were held. He later welcomed Chavez's return to power as a victory for democracy in the region. Unlike the response of previous Mexican governments, Fox has made it clear that any such interruptions of constitutional rule are unacceptable to Mexico and all of Latin America.

#### **RESPONSE TO MANIPULATION OF ELECTORAL PROCESSES**

Mexico's steadfast commitment to the principle of a country's right to self-determination has on various occasions prevented it from criticizing other governments that came to power through flawed elections, even when it sent its own electoral observers. In effect, Mexico has lent legitimacy to shoddy elections by sponsoring observers who remained silent in the face of electoral malpractices, as was the case in Peru.

In May 2000, eight years after his *autogolpe*, Fujimori again threatened democracy in Peru by manipulating the electoral process to win an unprecedented third term in office. Though a member of the OAS, and traditionally supportive of election monitoring endeavors, Mexico questioned the subsequent attempt by some member governments to take action by invoking OAS Resolution 1080.<sup>13</sup> Mexico further urged the Rio Group to abstain from issuing a statement about the election one way or another. Foreign Minister Rosario Green stated that "my government's stance is that the topic of elections falls solely and exclusively within the view of the citizens of Peru," thereby supporting Peru's requests to the OAS to refrain from responding in any way that it considered an unwarranted violation of its sovereignty.<sup>14</sup> The PRI government in Mexico likely was influenced by the fact that its own



presidential elections were scheduled just two months later, and did not want a precedent to be set whereby the OAS could actively intervene in the outcome of a country's elections. Mexico had had its own democratic credentials scrutinized in the past, owing to perceived political manipulation by the PRI for many years, and the events in Peru set off alarms about the potential consequences of any post-election crisis in Mexico. Thus, Mexico advocated for a regional non-response to the 2000 presidential elections in Peru, citing concerns of the OAS becoming an "election police" that had the authority to "decertify" results. In contrast to its strong position in Peru, Mexico largely abstained from the OAS response to flawed elections the same year in Haiti, which were widely criticized both within Haiti and by the international community.

Perhaps the strongest contribution that Mexico has made towards strengthening democratic electoral outcomes at home and abroad has come in the form of the establishment of the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE). Until 1994, fraud and manipulation characterized the Mexican electoral system. In fact, up until that year, Mexico prohibited international electoral observation missions from monitoring its elections, and did not contribute to monitoring missions abroad.<sup>15</sup> In 1993, however, the IFE was established with the official mandate of creating a "systematic effort to approach, establish links and collaborate with different institutions and organizations in the international community that are interested or that specialize in electoral issues."<sup>16</sup> This Institute is now considered to be a very successful model for the region, and has participated in 34 technical cooperation missions in 17 countries since 1993 and 33 electoral observation missions in 19 countries since 1996.<sup>17</sup> Through its creation Mexico, in a very practical manner, has helped to strengthen democratic processes throughout the region and the world.

## PROMOTION OF INTERNATIONAL DEMOCRACY

Until 2000, Mexico's record in promoting international democracy presented a dichotomy between support for general declarations in favor of human rights and democracy,<sup>18</sup> and consistent opposition to active intervention to restore democracy in a given country.

During the 1980s Mexico, together with Colombia, Panama and Venezuela, actively participated in the Contadora group, which sought

the restoration of peace and democracy in Central America. Contadora later merged with the Support Group, which included Argentina, Brazil, Peru and Uruguay, to form what is now known as the Rio Group. Since its creation the Rio Group has issued numerous statements expressing its commitment to democracy, including the *Acapulco Commitment for Peace, Development and Democracy*, the *Statement for the Defense of Democracy*, issued in 1997, and the *Cartagena Democratic Commitment* adopted in 2000.

In the context of the OAS, Mexico has formally supported most instruments that endeavor to promote and defend democratic rule, but it has consistently expressed reservations, and at times openly opposed any tendency towards what it considered to be interventionist measures.<sup>19</sup> For example, Mexico expressed reservations regarding Resolution 1080 adopted by the OAS in 1991, which allowed for collective action in the event of a threat to democratic rule in a member country.<sup>20</sup> Mexico was also the only country to oppose the *Washington Protocol*,<sup>21</sup> adopted in 1992, which allows OAS member states to suspend any government that comes to power through force. However, Mexico supported and ultimately did adhere to the Inter-American Democratic Charter signed on 11 September 2001.<sup>22</sup>

Mexico has also supported recent UN resolutions and documents regarding the promotion and protection of human rights, as well as the promotion and consolidation of democracy. Mexico was a cosponsor of the UN Resolution for the Fifth International Conference of New or Restored Democracies to be held in Mongolia in 2003. The resolution welcomes the adoption of regional and subregional organizations initiatives to implement measures for the collective defense of democracy.<sup>23</sup>

In June 2000, Mexico participated in the first meeting of the Community of Democracies and endorsed the Warsaw Declaration. Mexico is also one of ten countries that comprise the Convening Group, which acts as the steering committee for the Community of Democracies. In this position Mexico is integral to preparations for future ministerial meetings, including determining invitations and agendas. The current administration is committed to fulfilling this role, though it has failed to make its participation in this historic initiative widely known either within the government or among relevant civil society actors.

In 2000, Mexico signed a free trade agreement with the European Union that contains a



democracy clause, committing all parties to respect democratic principles and human rights and to promote civil society participation through mechanisms of political cooperation based on the principle of shared responsibility.<sup>24</sup> The inclusion of this clause in a trade agreement represented a significant reversal for Mexico, accepting for the first time conditionality related to democracy criteria.

With regards to changes in institutions as well as in the official political discourse, President Fox has increased Mexico's capacity to support democracy in the international arena by creating a new position of Special Ambassador for Human Rights and Democracy within the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and appointing MariClaire Acosta, a renowned defender of human rights, to the post.<sup>25</sup> The position was later upgraded to the rank of Under-Secretary of State and is charged with designing official policies to promote and protect human rights and democracy both in Mexico and abroad.<sup>26</sup> Since he entered office, Jorge Castañeda, Mexico's current Foreign Affairs Minister, has stated the need for Mexico's foreign policy to shift towards a more active role in the international system, thus placing the country at the "...forefront of the world movement toward the protection of human rights – a place it should have always kept."<sup>27</sup> In a significant departure from previous official positions, he has also declared that respect for national sovereignty does not justify overlooking human rights violations, and that abuses in any nation should be a source of concern for the entire international community.

#### **POLICY TOWARDS ENTRENCHED DICTATORSHIPS**

For decades Mexico has supported Cuba's right to self-determination, consistently standing with Havana in its confrontations with the United States. Between 1959 and 1962, Mexico was the only member country to oppose the exclusion of Cuba from the OAS, and it has repeatedly reaffirmed this position ever since. The Mexican government has contended that suspensions and

embargoes have had little real effect in fostering democracy in the closed state, and has rejected U.S. attempts to get others in the region to tighten the economic embargo, claiming that U.S. national legislation should not be applied "extra-territorially."

However, relations with Cuba began to change during the presidency of Ernesto Zedillo. At the 1999 Ibero-American Summit, which was held in Havana, Zedillo made a speech promoting the values of democracy, including the right to dissent. A few weeks later he sent then Mexican Foreign Minister Green to join various international leaders in meeting with renowned Cuban dissident Elizardo Sanchez.

Mexico's recent support of a United Nations resolution calling for Cuba to examine its human rights record, a resolution Cuba views as "meddling in its internal affairs," has strained relations between the two countries. In the past, Mexico has abstained from the annual UN resolution censuring Cuba for its poor human rights record. As recently as February 2002, when President Fox made his first official state visit to the island in an effort to strengthen relations with Cuba and negotiate trade issues, Mexico's Foreign Ministry claimed it was likely they would again abstain from the U.N. vote. However, Mexico ultimately reversed this position, agreeing to sign this year's version of the resolution as it condemns the U.S. trade embargo and does not condemn Cuba outright, as it had in the past. During the same February visit, President Fox took the time to meet with Cuban dissidents and shared with Castro a list of political prisoners whose cases he hoped Castro would review. Fox reportedly told Castro that he hoped "Cuba would come closer to the standards of human rights and of democracy that day-by-day help make things more secure not only in Latin America, but in the rest of the world."<sup>28</sup> Fox's approach, however, has not been well-received back home, where the opposition parties aligned with Mexico's traditional policy of support for Cuba reacted adversely to Fox's support for the UN resolution.

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<sup>1</sup> The *Carranza Doctrine*, created in 1918 by then president Venustiano Carranza confirmed the basic elements of Mexican foreign policy: non-intervention and self determination of nations. In 1930, then Foreign Minister Genaro Estrada espoused the *Estrada Doctrine* which states that Mexico will not practice "recognition" of foreign governments arguing that it is a denigrating and interventionist practice since it ultimately means that foreign governments can make judgments about the legal capacity of other governments. Mexico would limit itself to keeping or withdrawing diplomatic representation but without issuing a value judgment.



<sup>2</sup> Dresser, Denise. "Treading Lightly and without a Stick: International Actors and the Promotion of Democracy in Mexico", in Tom Farer ed., Beyond Sovereignty: Collectively Defending Democracy in the Americas. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996. p. 319. Diamond, Hartlyn & Linz, "Introduction", in Diamond, Hartlyn, et. al. Democracy in Developing Countries: Latin America, Colorado: Lynne Reiner, 1999, p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> For example, contrary to U.S. foreign policy, Mexico has maintained official relations with the Castro government in Cuba since the 1959 revolution. During the early seventies, Mexico adopted an active role in the non-aligned movement with other Third World Countries in an effort to avoid alliances with either the United States or the Soviet Union.

<sup>4</sup> Aguayo Quezada, Sergio. "The 'External Factor'." in Journal of Democracy 11.4 (2000): 34.

<sup>5</sup> Dresser, *op. cit.*, p. 319.

<sup>6</sup> Such efforts were influenced in part by the large numbers of migrants seeking refuge from armed conflict. Although Mexico has always had a tradition of liberally offering political asylum, nothing had prepared it for the massive influx of non-professional, non-intellectual refugees coming from Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Honduras in need of security, food and work. See Ferris, Elizabeth. "The Politics of Asylum: Mexico and the Central American Refugees." Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 26.3 (1984): 363-364.

<sup>7</sup> Dresser, *op. cit.*, p. 320; Chabat, Jorge. "Mexico's Foreign Policy in 1990: Electoral Sovereignty and Integration with the United States." Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 33.4 (1991):3.

<sup>8</sup> Dresser *op. cit.*, p. 322.

<sup>9</sup> Notimex News Agency 6 April 1992

<sup>10</sup> Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity.

<sup>11</sup> Nordahl, Peter. "México Criticizes Haiti Resolution." Christian Science Monitor 2 August 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Dow Jones International News: 21 Jan. 2000.

<sup>13</sup> OAS Resolution 1080 mandates member states to meet to collectively elaborate and adopt a decision regarding action in response to the interruption of power of a democratically elected state in the region.

<sup>14</sup> Notimex News Agency 31 May 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Millet, Richard L. "Beyond Sovereignty: International Efforts to Support Latin American Democracy." Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs 36.3 (1994):7.

<sup>16</sup> Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral –IFE) <http://www.ife.org.mx>.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Mexico has ratified several international instruments dealing with the protection and promotion of human rights and democracy, including the International Agreement on Civil and Political Rights, the Inter-American Democratic Charter, several agreements on political asylum, women's and children's rights, instruments against torture and forced disappearances as well as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights. Nevertheless, it has also consistently voted against or abstained from UN and OAS proposals to send missions into countries for the purpose of evaluating the status of human rights or restoring democratic order (Cooper & Legler: 4; Nordahl).

<sup>19</sup> Cooper, Andrew F & Thomas Legler. "The OAS Democratic Solidarity Paradigm: Questions of Collective and National Leadership." Latin American Politics & Society, Spring (2001): 8.

<sup>20</sup> Studer, Isabel. "Toward the Other Distant Neighbor." Voices of Mexico 37.Oct-Dec (1996): 5.

<sup>21</sup> The Washington Protocol establishes that any country whose legitimate and democratically elected government is forcefully ousted can be suspended from participating in OAS meetings and proceedings. See Perina, Ruben M. "El regimen democrático interamericano: el papel de la OEA", < <http://www.oas.org>.> 2001 p. 2, 43; Studer, *op.cit.* p. 5; Dresser, *op.cit.* p. 323.

<sup>22</sup> Article 17, Article 20. OAS, Democratic Charter, Lima, Peru, 11 Sep. 2001.

<sup>23</sup> United Nations, E/CN.4/2002/L65.

<sup>24</sup> Articles 36 and 39 of the Economic Association, Political Coordination and Cooperation between Mexico and the European Union signed in June 2000. Diario Oficial de la Federacion, 26 June 2000.

<sup>25</sup> She was co-founder of the Mexican Academy for Human Rights (Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos) as well as the Citizens Movement for Democracy (Movimiento Ciudadano por la Democracia), among other non-governmental organizations within Mexico.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Secretaria de Relaciones Exteriores –SRE <http://www.sre.gob.mx>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Snow, Anita. "Mexican president returns, juggles pressure in his first state visit to Cuba." Associated Press Newswires 4 Feb. 2002.