



**TEKS** 1A, 1B, 2A, 2B, 3A, 3B, 3C, 3D, 4B, 4C, 4F, 12B, 15A, 15B, 18B, 21B, 21C, 22D

## What You Will Learn...

### Main Ideas

1. Government has traditionally played a large role in Mexico's economy.
2. Mexico has four distinct culture regions.

### The Big Idea

Mexico has four culture regions that all play a part in the country's government and economy.

### Key Terms and Places

inflation, *p. 202*  
 slash-and-burn agriculture, *p. 203*  
 cash crop, *p. 203*  
 Mexico City, *p. 204*  
 smog, *p. 204*  
 maquiladoras, *p. 205*



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### TAKING NOTES

Use the graphic organizer online to take notes on Mexico's government and economy.

# Mexico Today

## If YOU lived there...

For many years, your family has lived in a small village in southern Mexico. Jobs are scarce there. Your older brother and sisters talk about moving to a larger city. Big cities may provide some more opportunities, but they can be crowded and noisy. Many people from your village have already gone to the city.

## How do you feel about moving to the city?

**BUILDING BACKGROUND** After Mexico gained independence, many government leaders did not rule democratically. For years the Mexican people had little say in their government. But changes in the 1990s and 2000s led toward more democracy and prosperity.

## Government and Economy

Today people in Mexico can vote in certain elections for the first time. People can find jobs in cities and buy their families a home. More children are able to attend school. In recent years, changes in Mexico's government and economy have made improvements like these possible.

### Government

Mexico has a democratic government. However, Mexico is not like the United States where different political parties have always competed for power. In Mexico the same political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), controlled the government for 71 years. But this control ended in 2000 when Mexicans elected Vicente Fox their president. Fox represented a different political party. However, in 2012 the PRI assumed the office of president again when Mexicans elected Enrique Peña Nieto. As president, Peña Nieto hopes to improve Mexico's economy and reduce drug-related violence.

### Economy

Mexico is a developing country. It has struggled with debts to foreign banks, unemployment, and inflation. **Inflation** is a rise in prices that occurs when currency loses its buying power.

Although living standards in Mexico are lower than in many other countries, Mexico's economy is growing. The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which took effect in 1994, has made trade among Mexico, the United States, and Canada easier. Mexico's agricultural and industrial exports have increased since NAFTA went into effect.

**Agriculture** Agriculture has long been a key part of the Mexican economy. This is true even though just 13 percent of the land is good for farming. Many farmers in southern Mexico practice **slash-and-burn agriculture**, which is the practice of burning forest in order to clear land for planting.

The high market demand for food in the United States has encouraged many farmers in Mexico to grow cash crops. A **cash crop** is a crop that farmers grow mainly to sell for a profit. Trucks bring cash crops like fruits and vegetables from Mexico to the United States.

**Industry** Oil is also an important export for Mexico. Many Mexicans work in the oil, mining, and manufacturing industries. These industries are growing.

The fastest-growing industrial centers in Mexico lie along the U.S. border. Because wages are relatively low in Mexico, many U.S. and foreign companies have built factories in Mexico. Mexican workers in these factories assemble goods for export to the United States and other countries. Some Mexican workers also come to the United States to look for jobs that pay more than they can make at home.

**Tourism** Tourism is another important part of Mexico's economy. Many tourists visit old colonial cities and Maya and Aztec monuments. Coastal cities and resorts such as Cancún and Acapulco are also popular with tourists.

**READING CHECK** **Summarizing** How has NAFTA affected Mexico's economy?



**VIDEO**

Mexico in the Modern Era

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### Satellite View



Many people in Mexico are subsistence farmers. They do not own much land and grow only enough food to feed their families. To gain more land, farmers in southern Mexico burn patches of forest. The fires clear the trees and kill weeds, and ash from the fires fertilizes the soil. However, growing the same crops year after year drains valuable nutrients from the soil. The farmers then have to burn new forest land.

In the satellite image here, agricultural fires appear as red dots. As you can see, the fires create a lot of smoke. Wind then blows the smoke great distances. Every few years, when the conditions are right, smoke from agricultural fires in Mexico reaches as far as the southern United States. The smoke can cause health problems for some people.

**Analyzing** What direction was the wind blowing in this image?



## Mexico's Culture Regions



**Northern Mexico** Northern Mexico's land is generally too dry to be much good for farming, but ranching is an important part of the region's economy.

### ANALYSIS SKILL

#### ANALYZING INFORMATION

How do you think life in greater Mexico City differs from life in northern Mexico?



**Central Mexico** The architecture and cobblestone streets of many towns in central Mexico reflect the region's Spanish colonial heritage.

## Mexico's Culture Regions

Although all Mexicans share some cultural characteristics, we can divide Mexico into four regions based on regional differences. These four culture regions differ from each other in their population, resources, climate, and other features.

### Greater Mexico City

Greater Mexico City includes the capital and about 50 smaller cities near it. With a population of about 20 million, **Mexico City** is one of the world's largest and most densely populated urban areas. Thousands of people move there every year looking for work.

While this region does provide job and educational opportunities not so easily found in the rest of the country, its huge population causes problems. For example, Mexico City is very polluted. Factories and cars release exhaust and other pollutants into the air. The surrounding mountains trap the resulting **smog**—a mixture of smoke, chemicals, and fog. Smog can cause health problems like eye irritation and breathing difficulties.

Another problem that comes from crowding is poverty. Wealth and poverty exist side by side in Mexico City. The city has large urban slums. The slums often exist right next to modern office buildings, apartments, museums, or universities.



**Greater Mexico City** Traffic clogs Mexico City's busy streets. Taxis, buses, and private cars zoom past modern office buildings and old colonial government buildings.



**Southern Mexico** While poverty is a problem in much of southern Mexico, some people make money selling traditional handicrafts to tourists.

## Central Mexico

North of greater Mexico City lies Mexico's central region. Many cities in this region were established as mining or ranching centers during the colonial period. Mexico's colonial heritage can still be seen today in these cities and towns. For example, small towns often have a colonial-style church near a main central square. The central square, or plaza, has served for hundreds of years as a community meeting spot and market area.

In addition to small colonial towns, central Mexico has many fertile valleys and small family farms. Farmers in this region grow vegetables, corn, and wheat for sale, mostly to cities in Mexico.

While central Mexico has always been a mining center, in recent years the region has also attracted new industries from overcrowded Mexico City. As a result, some cities in the region, such as Guadalajara, are growing rapidly.

## Northern Mexico

Northern Mexico has become one of the country's richest and most modern areas. Trade with the United States has helped the region's economy grow. Monterrey and Tijuana are now major cities there. Many **U.S.- and foreign-owned factories called maquiladoras** (mah-kee-lah-DORH-ahs) have been built along Mexico's long border with the United States.

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY**

**affect** to change or influence

Northern Mexico's closeness to the border has **affected** the region's culture as well as its economy. American television, music, and other forms of entertainment are popular there. Many Mexicans cross the border to shop, work, or live in the United States. While many people cross the border legally, the U.S. government tries to prevent Mexicans and others from crossing the border illegally.

**Southern Mexico**

Southern Mexico is the least populated and industrialized region of the country. Many people in this region speak Indian languages and practice traditional ways of life. Subsistence farming and slash-and-burn agriculture are common.

However, southern Mexico is vital to the country's economy. Sugarcane and coffee, two major export crops, grow well in the region's warm, humid climate. Also, oil production along the Gulf coast has increased in recent years. The oil business has brought more industry and population growth to this coastal area of southern Mexico.

Another place in southern Mexico that has grown in recent years is the Yucatán Peninsula. Maya ruins, beautiful sunny beaches, and clear blue water have made tourism a major industry in this area. Many cities that were just tiny fishing villages only 20 years ago are now booming with new construction for the tourist industry.

Mexico will continue to change in the future. Changes are likely to bring more development. However, maintaining the country's unique regional cultures may be a challenge as those changes take place.

**READING CHECK** Comparing and Contrasting

What similarities and differences exist between greater Mexico City and southern Mexico?

**SUMMARY AND PREVIEW** Mexico has a democratic government and a growing economy. It also has distinct regions with different cultures, economies, and environments. In the next chapter you will learn about the countries to the south of Mexico.

**FOCUS ON READING**

What do you think makes southern Mexico vital to the country's economy?

**Section 3 Assessment**

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**ONLINE QUIZ**

**Reviewing Ideas, Terms, and Places**

- 1. **a. Define** What is the term for the practice of burning forest in order to clear land for planting?
- b. Compare and Contrast** How is Mexico's government similar to and different from the government of the United States?
- 2. **a. Identify** What is an environmental problem found in **Mexico City**?
- b. Make Inferences** What conditions in Mexico lead some Mexicans to cross the border into the United States?
- c. Develop** If you were to start a business in Mexico, what type of business would you start and where would you start it? Explain your decisions.

**Critical Thinking**

- 3. **Finding Main Ideas** Review your notes on Mexico's economy. Then use a chart like this one to identify the geographic factors responsible for the location of economic activities in each region of Mexico.

Greater Mexico City	Central Mexico	Northern Mexico	Southern Mexico

**FOCUS ON WRITING**

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- 4. **Describing Mexico Today** Write some details about the four culture regions of Mexico. Which details will you include in your poem?