

## Zapatista Timeline

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**Beginning of history**—Mayans settle area now known as Chiapas, Mexico.

**1524–27** Spaniards conquer Mayan people, beginning five centuries of exploitation and repression.

**Late 1500s** Mayan population reduced by 50 percent through disease and repression. Population doesn't begin to recover until mid-seventeenth century.

**1712** Indigenous Tzeltal rebellion brought on by Spanish tribute demands and crop failures. The Tzeltals are brutally held down.

**1824** Chiapas separates from Guatemala to join a weak Mexican state, allowing relative autonomy for local elites, and beginning decades of Liberal/Conservative struggles for control over land and indigenous labor. Both liberals and conservatives accrue huge landholdings, displacing indigenous owners, and many indigenous people are forced into virtual slavery.

**1867–70** Indigenous communities rebel over taxation, control of markets, and religious freedom in Chamula. Violent repression again defeats the rebellion.

**1876–1910** Dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz oversees accumulation of immense landholdings by local mestizos. Chiapas economy is opened to international trade, with coffee, cacao, and mahogany as the major exports.

**1910–1920** Mexican Revolution. In Chiapas the fight is over control of land and indigenous labor. When General Alvaro Obregón becomes president in 1920, regional *caciques* declare loyalty in exchange for autonomy to govern Chiapas. Mexico's ensuing agrarian reform has limited impact in the state.

**1928** Calles created the National Revolutionary Party (PNR), the precursor of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)—in power for seventy-one years, until its defeat in the July 2, 2000 elections.

**1934–1940** The populist presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas proclaims a common struggle with indigenous communities. Many indigenous Chiapanecos assume positions in PRI-controlled labor unions and peasant organizations. Although Cárdenas's populism largely ends with his presidency, many indigenous political structures remain under PRI control for decades.

**1940–70** Land reform under the *ejido* system (communally owned land) continues to lag in Chiapas, while large landowners consolidate their holdings. Cattle ranching becomes an important business as roads penetrate the state. Pressure for land from a booming indigenous population results in over 100,000 Indians migrating to the Lacandon Jungle.

**1960** Samuel Ruíz García is named Bishop of San Cristobal de las Casas. After the Medellin Council of Latin American Bishops in 1968, Ruíz begins to promote liberation theology and an indigenous-centered Catholicism.

**1968** Student movement in Mexico City is brutally repressed, with hundreds murdered by government agents in the Tlatelolco massacre. The repression convinces many activists to carry their struggles underground. Over the next decade, more than two dozen urban guerrilla groups develop throughout Mexico. The most active period of guerrilla activity is between 1971 and 1975. Most movements disintegrate under brutal repression and a dirty war, which leave hundreds of activists “disappeared” and over one thousand dead.

**1970s** Pressure for land precipitates organized local revolts against indigenous *caciques* aligned with the PRI. Over the next two decades, 50,000 Indians are expelled from their communities for resisting local power structures, with many settling around large cities or in the Lacandon Jungle.

**1974** The Indigenous Congress is organized by the Diocese of San Cristobal at the invitation of the state governor. Over 1,200 delegates representing 300 communities demand land reform, education in native languages, health care, and labor rights. The congress proves to be a historical juncture for indigenous grassroots organizing.

**1979** Founding meeting of the National Coordinating Committee's “Plan de Ayala.” Two dozen peasant organizations declare themselves independent of the government.

**1982** General Absalón Castellanos Domínguez becomes governor of Chiapas and oversees a dramatic increase in militarization to control land struggles. During his administration, 102 campesinos are assassinated, 327 are disappeared, 590 are imprisoned, 427 are kidnapped and tortured, 407 families are expelled from their homes, and 54 communities are overrun by security forces.

**1983** Marcos and other activists from the National Liberation Forces (FLN) arrive in Chiapas. The Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) is born on November 17 with three indigenous and three mestizos.

**1985** Earthquake destroys large sections of Mexico City. Inadequate and corrupt response by government officials forces civil society to organize itself, marking an important break in PRI's control.

**1986** EZLN enters first indigenous community at invitation of local leaders.

**1988** Fraudulent presidential elections on July 6 bring PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari to power. Opposition candidate Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas is ahead in polling when vote-counting computers suddenly crash. Three days later, Salinas is declared the winner.

**1989** EZLN grows to over 1,300 armed members.

**1992** President Salinas reforms Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, ending seventy-five years of land reform and allowing for privatization of *ejidos*.

**1993** Zapatista communities approve a military offensive by the EZLN and form the Clandestine Indigenous Revolutionary Committee—General Command (CCRI-CG) to lead the struggle.

**1994**  
JANUARY: NAFTA is implemented on January 1. On the same day, 3,000 members of the EZLN occupy six large towns and hundreds of ranches in an armed uprising. Within twenty-four hours the army responds, bombing indigenous communities and killing at least 145 indigenous people. Mexican

civil society responds with massive demonstrations calling for an end to military repression. A cease-fire is declared on January 12.

**FEBRUARY:** Peace talks begin, but the government peace proposal is rejected by Zapatista communities.

**AUGUST:** The Zapatistas organize the National Democratic Convention. Over 6,000 people representing a broad range of civil society gather at Aguascalientes, a meeting place carved out of the jungle.

Ernesto Zedillo is elected president, and Eduardo Robledo Rincón is elected governor amid widespread charges of fraud. Amado Avendano Figueroa, the PRD candidate, declares a "government in rebellion."

**DECEMBER:** On December 19, the Zapatistas declare the civil authority of thirty-eight autonomous indigenous municipalities, representing a serious challenge to local PRI power structures.

The Mexican peso tumbles, losing more than half of its value during the next two months. A U.S./International Monetary Fund bailout of \$50 billion does not mitigate dramatic increases in unemployment and loss of living standards during the following year. The majority of Mexicans suffer, while the elite enjoys the fruits of privatization and NAFTA.

## 1995

**JANUARY:** The Chase Manhattan Bank issues a report calling for the Mexican government to "eliminate the Zapatistas." At this point, dozens of communities have publicly defined themselves as Zapatistas, representing well over 50,000 civilians.

**FEBRUARY:** On February 9, the army mounts a massive invasion in Zapatista areas of influence, implementing a strategy of low-intensity warfare (also known as civilian-targeted warfare). Among other things, the army displaces almost 20,000 campesinos, destroys Aguascalientes, and turns it into an army base. The Zapatistas respond by constructing five new Aguascalientes (centers of indigenous resistance). During the next five years, over 60,000 army troops occupy nearly every corner of the state, establishing army encampments just yards from most of the well-established Zapatista communities, disrupting the lives, economy and culture of Indigenous communities.

**APRIL:** Peace talks resume.

**AUGUST:** The Zapatistas hold the first international *consulta*. Over a million

people vote, calling on the EZLN to transform itself into a new independent political force.

**OCTOBER:** Talks begin in San Andres Larrainzar on indigenous rights and culture.

## 1996

**FEBRUARY:** The EZLN and the government sign the San Andres Accords, outlining a program of land reform, indigenous autonomy, and cultural rights.

**MARCH:** Talks begin on democracy and justice, concluding with no agreement on August 12, as government representatives refuse to discuss Zapatista proposals and present nothing substantial of their own.

**JULY/AUGUST:** the Zapatistas organize the first Intercontinental *Encuentro* for Humanity and against Neoliberalism. Several thousand people attend from Mexico and around the world to discuss the role of civil society in confronting neoliberalism.

**AUGUST:** On August 30, the EZLN suspends peace talks, demanding that government representatives actually be empowered to negotiate.

**DECEMBER:** President Zedillo formally rejects the San Andres Accords.

## 1997

**JULY:** The July 6 midterm elections mark significant gains for opposition parties; inside the "conflict zone" in Chiapas, however, abstention reaches 80 percent. Chiapas' elections are notoriously fraudulent, and the high rate of abstention reflects a general mistrust of government in indigenous communities.

**SEPTEMBER:** On September 12, Zapatistas arrive in Mexico City for the founding of the unarmed Zapatista National Liberation Front (FZLN), the civil political arm of the indigenous movement.

**DECEMBER:** On December 22, a paramilitary group affiliated with the PRI attacks a church in the community of Acteal, killing 45 Indigenous campesinos, mostly women and children. Paramilitary activity has been growing throughout the state for several years as part of the strategy of civilian-targeted warfare. Local PRI officials and army officers are implicated, but the intellectual authors are never brought to justice. Shortly thereafter, the Zedillo administration denies the existence of paramilitaries in Chiapas, and

the army begins a campaign to disarm the EZLN, but not the paramilitary groups.

## 1998

**FEBRUARY:** In a twisted response to the Acteal massacre, February marks the beginning of a campaign to expel foreign human rights observers from Chiapas, as the Zedillo administration tries to hide the truth from the world. Over 150 are expelled during the coming two years.

Peace talks are still suspended, and the government continues to increase military presence throughout the state.

**APRIL:** The army begins to dismantle autonomous Zapatista communities. Over 1,000 troops and police invade four communities, destroying records and arresting community leaders.

**JUNE:** The army's campaign to dismantle rebel communities culminates in the predawn invasion of San Juan de Libertad in June. At least eight civilians and one policeman are killed. The resulting outcry from civil society puts a temporary halt to the army's offensive.

Bishop Samuel Ruíz ends his efforts to mediate a peace, accusing the government of preferring the path of war and repression.

## 1999

**MARCH:** The Zapatistas organize a *Consulta* on Indigenous Rights and Culture. Over 5,000 civilian Zapatistas conduct a week-long program of popular education throughout the country. On March 21, over 3 million Mexicans vote at thousands of polling places, agreeing that the San Andrés Accords should be implemented.

**APRIL:** State police occupy the autonomous community of San Andrés Sakamch'em, site of the historic San Andrés Accords, and install a PRI mayor. The following day, 3,000 unarmed Zapatistas nonviolently force the police to leave the town and re-install their elected representatives.

**MAY:** The second National *Encuentro* of Civil Society draws 2,000 participants to discuss the March *consulta*.

**AUGUST:** The military deploys paratroopers and forces to occupy the remote village of Amador Hernández, the final link in plans to build a road that will encircle the Zapatistas in the Lacandon Jungle. The community resists with nonviolent protests, but the military encampment remains.

## 2000

Zapatista communities register to vote in historic numbers, and the national election commission announces at least 100 new polling places in these communities.

**JULY 2:** Vicente Fox (of the conservative PAN party) is elected president, rupturing seventy-one years of PRI control.

**NOVEMBER 30:** Vicente Fox assumes the presidency of Mexico and the Zapatistas break a five-month-long silence, calling on the new administration to meet three demands before peace talks can resume: withdraw troops from seven of 250 military encampments in Chiapas, release all Zapatista political prisoners, and implement the San Andrés Accords.

**DECEMBER:** Fox responds by dismantling military checkpoints throughout the state. Over the next five months he gradually dismantles the seven army encampments, turning two into social service centers, and releases most of the political prisoners. On the 5th, Fox introduces constitutional reforms to implement the San Andrés Accords, with secret commentary to Congress encouraging the gutting of the reforms to prevent any substantial change in the status quo.

## 2001

**FEBRUARY 24:** The Zapatista Comandancia, including Subcomandante Marcos, commence a march into Mexico City to demand that the government comply with the San Andrés Accords.

**MARCH 11:** The Zapatistas arrive in Mexico City and enter the Zócalo, where 250,000 people have gathered to greet them. National and international press project this event world-wide.

**APRIL 25:** The senate unanimously approves a mutilated version of the Cocopa law. Three days later the Chamber of Deputies approves the law by 386–60. The approved law closely resembles the so-called Zedillo law, introduced by former president Ernesto Zedillo in 1998 and rejected by the EZLN. Indigenous groups throughout Mexico reject the new law and begin national mobilizations in support of the original Cocopa law.