



The Other Mexico

Guidebook



**To order this and other programs call:
(888) 570-5400**

www.choicesvideo.net

Choices, Inc.
3740 Overland Ave. Ste. F
Los Angeles CA 90034

© 2008 Choices, Inc. All rights reserved

Mexican Government Background

Government type:

Federal republic

Administrative divisions:

31 states (estados, singular - estado) and 1 federal district* (distrito federal); Aguascalientes, Baja California, Baja California Sur, Campeche, Chiapas, Chihuahua, Coahuila de Zaragoza, Colima, Distrito Federal*, Durango, Guanajuato, Guerrero, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Mexico, Michoacan de Ocampo, Morelos, Nayarit, Nuevo Leon, Oaxaca, Puebla, Queretaro de Arteaga, Quintana Roo, San Luis Potosi, Sinaloa, Sonora, Tabasco, Tamaulipas, Tlaxcala, Veracruz-Llave, Yucatan, Zacatecas

Executive branch:

Chief of state: President Felipe de Jesus CALDERON Hinojosa (since 1 December 2006); note - the president is both the chief of state and head of government

head of government: President Felipe de Jesus CALDERON Hinojosa (since 1 December 2006)

cabinet: Cabinet appointed by the president; note - appointment of attorney general requires consent of the Senate

elections: president elected by popular vote for a single six-year term; election last held on 2 July 2006 (next to be held 1 July 2012)

election results: Felipe CALDERON elected president; percent of vote - Felipe CALDERON 35.89%, Andres Manuel LOPEZ OBRADOR 35.31%, Roberto MADRAZO 22.26%, other 6.54%

Legislative branch:

Bicameral National Congress or Congreso de la Union consists of the Senate or Camara de Senadores (128 seats; 96 members are elected by popular vote to serve six-year terms, and 32 seats are allocated on the basis of each party's popular vote) and the Federal Chamber of Deputies or Camara Federal de Diputados (500 seats; 300 members are elected by popular vote; remaining 200 members are allocated on the basis of each party's popular vote; to serve three-year terms)

elections: Senate - last held 2 July 2006 for all of the seats (next to be held 1 July 2012); Chamber of Deputies - last held 2 July 2006 (next to be held 5 July 2009)

election results: Senate - percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - PAN 52, PRI 33, PRD 26, PVEM 6, CD 5, PT 5, independent 1; Chamber of Deputies - percent of vote by party - NA; seats by party - PAN 207, PRD 127, PRI 106, PVEM 17, CD 17, PT 11, other 15

Political parties and leaders:

Convergence for Democracy or CD [Luis MALDONADO Venegas]; Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI [Beatriz PAREDES]; Labor Party or PT [Alberto ANAYA Gutierrez]; Mexican Green Ecological Party or PVEM [Jorge Emilio GONZALEZ Martinez]; National Action Party (Partido Accion Nacional) or PAN [German MARTINEZ Cazares]; New Alliance Party (Partido Nueva Alianza) or PNA [Jorge Antonio KAHWAGI Macari]; Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolucion Democratica) or PRD [Leonel COTA Montano]; Social Democratic and Peasant Alternative Party (Partido Alternativa Socialdemocrata y Campesina) or Alternativa [Alberto BEGNE Guerra]

Political pressure groups and leaders:

Broad Progressive Front or FAP; Businessmen's Coordinating Council or CCE; Confederation of Employers of the Mexican Republic or COPARMEX; Confederation of Industrial Chambers or CONCAMIN; Confederation of Mexican Workers or CTM; Confederation of National Chambers of Commerce or CONCANACO; Coordinator for Foreign Trade Business Organizations or COECE; Federation of Unions Providing Goods and Services or FESEBES; National Chamber of Transformation Industries or CANACINTRA; National Peasant Confederation or CNC; National Small Business Chamber or CANACOPE; National Syndicate of Education Workers or SNTE; National Union of Workers or UNT; Popular Assembly of the People of Oaxaca or APPO; Roman Catholic Church

Source – CIA Fact Book (June 2008)



Man in the mask returns to change world with new coalition and his own sexy novel

In a rare interview, Zapatista rebel chief Marcos warns US efforts to secure its southern border are pushing his poor compatriots over the edge

- [Jo Tuckman](#) in Mexico City
- [The Guardian](#),
- Saturday May 12, 2007
- [Article history](#)



Zapatista rebel leader Sub Comandante Marcos demonstrating outside the US embassy in Mexico City in 2006. Photo: Moises Castillo/AP

A bead of sweat is visible through the eyehole of his famous black balaclava. Latin America's most celebrated living rebel must be feeling the heat, but a glass of water would mean taking off the mask and that is out of the question. He makes do with a puff on his pipe, and a subject that is close to his heart.

"My new book's coming out in June," Subcomandante Marcos announces with relish during the first interview he has given to a British paper in years. "There's no politics in the text this time. Just sex. Pure pornography."

There has been a literary component to Marcos's revolutionary persona ever since he led the ragtag Zapatista indigenous army out of the jungle in the southern Mexican state of Chiapas on New Year's Day 1994. It began with lyrical communiqués on Mayan Indian rights, passed through a stage of barbed sarcasm and scatological put-downs, and recently included a crime novel featuring a rebel detective.

Fundraising

Now even his erotic imagination has been harnessed to the Zapatista cause as a fundraiser. "I'm sure it will sell if we put a lot of Xs on the cover."

Still, Marcos says that his next writing project will be a work of political theory analysing the forces he believes are pushing Mexico towards social upheaval. From dispossessed indigenous communities powerless to stop dams and agribusiness destroying their lands, to street vendors evicted from the capital's kerbs to make way for the retail magnates, he says the country's poor and exploited are close to their limit.

The former orthodox Marxist-Leninist turned anti-globalisation guru, who is not himself indigenous, predicts that the subconscious power of the year 2010 - the 200th anniversary of the war of independence and the 100th of Mexico's revolution - will ignite a fuse laid by American efforts to secure the bilateral border, leaving millions unable to escape to jobs in the north. "Mexico will turn into a pressure cooker," he says. "And, believe me, it will explode."

Marcos says that Mexico's politicians, the media, and even earnest leftwing academics are oblivious to the radicalisation he sees bubbling just under the surface. He points out that they also had no idea that the reputedly docile indigenous population in Chiapas was on the point of armed revolt 13 years ago. Not that the Zapatista rebellion fitted the traditional mould of macho Latin American armed struggle, or Marcos ever looked or sounded like rebel leaders elsewhere. Even the "sub" in his title - designed to imply an improbable subordination to a council of indigenous commanders - subverted the concept of military discipline employed in most other guerrilla armies.

"We left the jungle to die," Marcos recalls, remembering how poorly armed his fighters were. "It sounds dramatic I know, but that's the way it was."

The Zapatistas were beaten back by the Mexican army within days, but not before triggering a wave of sympathy across the country and the world that forced the government to call a ceasefire, as well as agree to peace negotiations that would eventually crumble.

In less than two weeks the Chiapas Indians became an international cause celebre and their mysterious mask-wearing, pipe-smoking, and poetry-spouting leader emerged as the closest approximation yet to the romance of the martyred Che Guevara. They have hardly done any fighting since then.

Powerful persona

Sitting in a sweltering back room of a Mexico City internet cafe, Marcos admits that the message in those early years would sometimes get lost in the fascination his persona inspired. He even confesses to occasionally letting celebrity go to his head. "But there was always the acerbic humour there to say 'tone it down, remember you are a myth, you do not really exist'."

It is certainly a durable myth, which has survived despite the world's attention shifting to more dramatic conflicts and the government's revelation that the man behind the mask is a former philosophy lecturer called Rafael Sebastián Guillén.

Still, the subcomandante does always seem to be looking over his shoulder at himself, which is perhaps one explanation for his periods of near total silence. The longest came in 2001, shortly after the so-called Zapatour in which the Marcos bandwagon travelled the country accompanied by hundreds of international sympathisers and a police escort.

Elections had just ended 71 years of one-party rule in Mexico and the Zapatistas had decided to test the new democracy with the demand for an indigenous bill of rights. When parliament ignored the pressure, the rebels returned to the jungle and concentrated on putting indigenous self-government into practice, with or without constitutional sanction. Marcos disappeared from view, emerging four years later with a new concern to build alliances beyond the indigenous movement.

"This is the last battle of the Zapatistas," he says of the strategy, which relies on the government deciding not to reactivate old arrest warrants for fear of sparking more sympathy for Zapatista. "If we don't win it we will face complete defeat."

The subcomandante's specific aim in his current low-key tour of the country is to consolidate the broad and loose collection of marginal left groups known as The Other Campaign. Marcos hopes this rather chaotic mix of everybody from radical transvestites to Marxist trade unionists will eventually play a leading role in channelling the discontent he is sure will soon be raging into an unarmed civilian movement organised around the principle of respect for difference.

"We think that what is going to happen here will have no 'ism' to describe it." His voice becomes wistful. "It will be so new, beautiful and terrible that it will make the world turn to look at this country in a completely different way."

Ballot box

Such talk could be seen as contrary, perhaps, at a time when the left has taken power in much of Latin America through the ballot box, but Marcos is unimpressed by elections he views as primarily a mechanism for ping-ponging power within the elite. So while he gives Evo Morales in Bolivia a nod of approval for his links to a radical indigenous movement, he describes Hugo Chávez in Venezuela as "disconcerting", and brands Brazil's President Lula and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega as traitors.

Mexico's politicians on both left and right receive nothing but his scorn. Is it easier to claim the moral high ground when your face is hidden?

Marcos acknowledges that the mask helps, although he stresses it is also a burden. It can be itchy and uncomfortable, and it is so intertwined with his revolutionary persona that to take it off in public even for a few seconds would be the end of the subcomandante.

"The mask will come off when a subcomandante Marcos is no longer necessary," he says. "I hope it's soon so that I can finally become a fireman like I've always wanted. Firemen get the prettiest girls."

About this article

This article appeared in [the Guardian](#) on [Saturday May 12 2007](#) on p29 of the [International](#) section. It was last updated at 02:11 on May 12 2007.

guardian.co.uk © Guardian News and Media Limited 2008

Discussion Questions for “The Other Mexico”

1. How does the “myth” or “legend” of Subcomandante Marcos play into his political power? Does the mystery behind his identity strengthen or weaken his cause? Compare and contrast his personality to U.S. political candidates who use their personality and past to their advantage.
2. Many analysts complain that Marcos does not really engage the Mexican government in dialogue instead preferring to lead rallies among his supporters. Some argue that Marcos should use his support among the indigenous Mexicans as a means to form an alliance with an existing political party with representation in parliament. Do you agree or disagree? What would Marcos stand to lose or gain from such an alliance? Compare this process to other countries where alliances between parties is more the norm.
3. The contested political election in 2006 was mired in controversy that is still debated today. How does this election compare to the 2000 U.S. Presidential election? What similarities exist? Why was Mexico subject to more public protests about the outcome than the U.S.?
4. The balaclava as a symbol of a people “hidden” is a key element of the Zapatista movement. Aside from the obvious protection it provides, what else does the balaclava provide or represent to their movement? If Marcos were to reveal his identity would it help or hinder the cause?
5. Many of the supporters of the Zapatista movement are indigenous people forced to illegally immigrate to the U.S. to find work and a better future. As immigration is a major issue for the U.S., should the U.S. government engage at all with the EZLN at risk of offending the Mexican government?
6. Discuss the long-term effects that the Zapatista movement could have in Mexico? In Latin America? With regards to the U.S.?