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Mexico Under Spanish Rule: Historical Impact Until 1821

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Abstract

General Background Colonial administrative frameworks play a decisive role in shaping the long-term socio-political structures and eventual sovereignty movements of occupied territories. **Specific Background** For nearly three hundred years, Mexico functioned as a central base of the Spanish Empire, governed under a rigid centralized vicerealty that strictly regulated institutional, economic, and social systems. **Knowledge Gap** While conventional histories outline the sequential timeline of anti-colonial uprisings, there remains a lack of integrated structural focus on how specific class stratification policies and shifting transatlantic geopolitical shocks combined to transform localized unrest into a successful consensus for independence. **Aims** This study analyzes the historical trajectory of Spanish colonial administration in Mexico and evaluates the internal systemic factors and revolutionary phases that culminated in independence in 1821. **Results** The investigation demonstrates that institutionalized social discrimination against the Creole, Mestizo, and native populations, paired with systemic economic monopolies and the geopolitical chaos of the Napoleonic wars, directly accelerated the collapse of colonial authority. **Novelty** This paper provides a consolidated narrative framework tracking how fragmented social rebellions successfully transitioned into a coordinated political consensus under the Plan of Iguala. **Implications** The findings offer critical insights for historians studying colonial governance, emphasizing that the long-term sustainability of imperial rule is fundamentally undermined when institutional privileges remain completely detached from domestic social realities.

Keywords: Mexico, Colonial Administration, Hernan Cortes, Revolutionary Uprisings, Mexican Independence

Key Findings Highlights

The Spanish colonial apparatus maintained strict political and economic control over Mexico for nearly three centuries through a rigid centralized vicerealty.

Long-term socio-economic discrimination against indigenous populations and Creoles acted as the primary driver for widespread revolutionary sentiment.

Transatlantic political disruptions caused by Napoleon's invasions provided the ultimate geopolitical catalyst for the successful implementation of the Plan of Iguala.

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Introduction

This research examines the historical background of Mexico following Christopher Columbus's discovery of the western hemisphere in 1492 and the arrival of Spanish explorers in Mexico in 1517, followed by the 1518 expedition led by Hernán Cortés. From that time, Mexico was under Spanish colonization for nearly 300 years, becoming part of the Spanish Empire and administered by the Spanish Viceroy. Mexico held special significance as the seat of the Spanish Governor General in Latin America, and most Spanish administrative institutions were headquartered there. After several uprisings and revolutions, Mexico succeeded in gaining independence from Spanish colonization in 1821, entering a new historical phase marked by the establishment of an empire led by Agustín de Iturbide.

The research is divided into three main sections. The first section presents a historical and geographical overview of Mexico and its Spanish colonization. The second section focuses on Spanish administration in Mexico, while the final section discusses Mexican revolts and uprisings.

The first theme: a historical and geographical introduction to Mexico , as well as the Spanish colonization of it

Mexico is located in the south of North America, bordered by the United States of America to the north, the Pacific Ocean to the west and south, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean Sea to the east, Guatemala and Belize to the southeast and Mexico has an area of 1,972,550 square kilometers with 93% of its population converting to Christianity and the remaining 7% being distributed among other religions, and the currency of Mexico is the peso. Mexico is also the cradle of a large number of Native American civilizations, such as the Olmec, Mayan and Aztec civilizations.

On the economic side, Mexico is one of the countries with a lot of mineral resources such as silver, gold, sulfur, coal, manganese, copper and other minerals, while in terms of agricultural wealth, there are cotton, grains, tobacco, coffee, sugar, as well as livestock, and there are many industries such as iron, steel, textiles, oil, chemicals and other light and various industries.

At the population level, there are many ethnic groups, including the Native American Indians, who make up one-tenth of the total population, and the mixing of local and European populations has created a large population called Mestizos, who constitute about three-fifths of the total population, while the Mexicans of European origin (whites) constitute an important element within the other ethnic groups that make up the rest of the population. Linguistically, religious, economic, and social, before the arrival of Europeans in the early sixteenth century, it was believed that the peoples inhabiting Mexico had migrated to the land of the Americas from Asia tens of thousands of years ago, and these inhabitants had established elaborately organized civilizations and occupied different parts of Mexico for at least 2000 years before the arrival of Europeans, especially since the Aztec cities included a part of the architectural wonder. The population of European origin controls the main structures of Mexican society because of the racial discrimination that centuries of policies of preference for them at the economic, political and social levels have earned them wealth and well-being, in contrast to the hybrid population who worked in a wide range of social and economic positions while the native Indians represented the (poor working class) and worked in the field of artisanal activity in the cities and peasants in the countryside. The population provides for their own needs, including clothing, grows food crops, raises livestock, and their women make clothing from cotton and wool while the presence of these populations is concentrated in the Central Plateau region with a small proportion of them in the temperate zone, and the population of Mexico at the census of 1895 was about 12,570,195, although it is difficult to conduct a proper census in Mexico. In addition to the fact that many of the inhabitants lived in remote areas, so that they were not able to communicate with other places or were almost isolated, and this is an additional reason that made it difficult to obtain a correct census. Thus, Mexico is the most important country in South America and North America in terms of agricultural and mineral resources, as well as in terms of population and geographical location, so it was natural for foreign capital to flow to Mexico to exploit its large resources.

The Indians of Mexico speak at least 150 different languages, and when the Spanish clergy arrived in Mexico who arrived with the occupiers, they then wrote grammar books and dictionaries for these languages, but the Indians entered into confusing situations that made them lose their civilization and literature, and in light of this, their languages became obsolete or very primitive.

Spanish Colonization of Mexico

Following the discovery of the Western Hemisphere by Christopher Columbus in 1492, Spanish and Portuguese explorers continued to search for riches in the New World, so the Spanish pioneers arrived in Mexico in 1517 when they landed on the Yucatán coast (Yucatan) but they soon re-listed, and in 1518 a second expedition was able to discover part of the Gulf of Mexico, during which the Indians and Spanish exchanged gifts. The third expedition came under the command of Hernan Cortes when it landed on the coast of the Gulf of Mexico on April 22, 1519, which is now called the port of Veracruz, and had a fleet of 11 ships and 100 sailors, and brought with it about 508 soldiers, 16 horses and 14 cannons .)

Several factors helped Cortés to carry out the conquest of Mexico, including the strength of his army, although it was small in number of 500-600 fighters, but they were initially motivated and equipped with some horses and a number of cannons the likes of which the Indians had never seen before. There is also a legend that the Aztec Emperor Montezuma II (1466-1521) welcomed Cortés because he believed he was an Indian god , and the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan, present-day Mexico City, fell to the Spaniards, followed by the rest of the country Cortés managed to capture Montezuma, began to rule the empire himself, and then forced the Spanish and Indians to provide them with a great wealth of gold, as well as some

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other valuable possessions, thus extending his control over the Aztec Empire, making Mexico the most important Spanish base in the world and then gradually penetrating the country until he was able to control the whole of Mexico after he was able to completely eliminate the resistance of its native inhabitants in August 1521. Fierce battles, and Cortés destroyed the Aztec Empire, which was the most powerful political gathering of Native Americans.

The second theme: the Spanish administration in Mexico

The Spanish ruled Mexico for 300 years as a colony, known as New Spain, and the colony's wealth lay in silver mines and agriculture, and the Spanish Indians taught them how to grow corn, tomatoes, and cocoa, crops that were not known in Europe at the time, and the Spanish in turn brought sugar cane, wheat, rice, cattle, and sheep.

After the situation stabilized for the Spanish colonists in Mexico, they established a centralized system directly subordinate to the Spanish throne, through which they were able to control the political, economic and social capabilities of the country, especially since it developed a simple system that is simple on the face of it and complex in reality, based on the concentration of power in the colonies in the hands of people chosen by the Spanish throne, and who follow their loyalty directly to the Spanish king, and in 1535 Spain gave to Mexico or what New Spain called a ruler called the Viceroy, who is appointed by the King of Spain to He was the head of the colony, responsible for peace and war, as well as the appointment of senior officials, supervised the economy and finances, and supervised the church, and was the first viceroy in Mexico (1535-1550), and he received orders from the king and thus his powers were limited, which led many rulers to exploit the country, plunder its wealth, and treat the population harshly. In the centre, the executive power was in the hands of the viceroy or commander-in-chief, the president, and four who prepared decisions, first meeting as a court and then as a council, and appointing a general officer to lead the armies, provide defence and ensure the implementation of administrative and judicial laws and decisions. In addition, the Spanish were able to find (12) centers for religious and missionary missions, which extended to the Rio Grande River, then developed into the exploitation of environmental minerals such as gold and silver, then began to exploit the tropical region for the cultivation of crops and established settlement areas for them in the state of Florida, Texas, New Mexico, Nevada, and Arizona.

The Spanish administration in Mexico was also based on a policy of apartheid of the population, as Mexican society was divided into four classes, and the group to which a person belonged was determined by the ethnic background and place of birth, the most powerful group was the Spaniards, i.e. people who were born in Spain and were sent across the Atlantic to rule the colony, and they are the only ones allowed to occupy high positions and high-level positions in the colonial government, while the second group is called the Criollos) are citizens of Spanish descent who were born in Mexico and many of them were landowners but nevertheless had little say in the administration of the colony, followed by the Mestizos who served as counselors or served as soldiers or chaplains in the parish, while the native Indians came in last place, being forced to work in mines and large plantations under slavery-like conditions. Besides these four major groups, there were minorities of Africans who were brought in from Africa for work, and who shared the low and degrading situation with the Indians, who made up about 4 to 5 percent of the population.

On this basis, Mexico became part of the Spanish Empire administered by the Viceroy and was of special importance because it was the seat of the Spanish governor-general in Latin America, and most of the Spanish administrative institutions were based in Mexico, and soon the Spanish government began to enact a series of laws and regulations and issue a number of legislation that ensure its continued influence and dominance over the inhabitants of Latin America, its exploitation of the country's wealth, and the destruction of the main civilizations, including the Maya and the Aztecs, the Spanish monopolized positions, whether political or religious, economic or judicial, as well as their acquisition of land, as the viceroy gave tracts of land to the Spanish settlers, who began to use the native Indians, men and women, to cultivate the land under unfair and harsh conditions and to serve their households as well.

In the same vein, the Spanish destroyed most of the old capital (Tino Getitlan) and rebuilt its Mexico-based ruins. They also brought with them their language and Catholic religion to modern Mexico.

The Third Theme: Mexican Revolutions and Uprisings

The first signs of the battle for independence occurred as a result of Spanish policy, as the Spanish issued a law through which Spaniards born in Spain were allowed to enjoy different rights from those born in New Spain, on this basis the law became a source of indignation and dissatisfaction among many people who desperately needed their good intentions towards him, especially in light of the existence of cases of commercial monopoly that were not in line with the public interests, at the same time the deputies worked to reap the benefits in order to send them to the Madrid to support the Spanish financial requirements to face the troubles of the Napoleon Bonaparte years⁰.

On the other hand, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, Spain witnessed an important event represented by the coronation of Spain's first King of the Bourbons, the French King Philip V ("Phiлип") after Spain suffered during the Austrian Habsburg (1787-1874) from the scourge of wars and internal and external conflicts, especially that the Bourbon administration, when it came to power in 1707, adopted structural changes in the Spanish government by concentrating power in the hands of the The King, which cast a shadow over the colonies, received more attention in terms of their defence and the reorganization of their economies.

In the same vein, during the reign of their third king in Spain, Charles III (1759-1788), the Bourbons carried out important reforms both locally and in the colonies.

In 1808, Napoleon Bonaparte conquered the Iberian Peninsula, following which French troops entered the Spanish capital, Madrid, and Napoleon appointed his brother Joseph Bonaparte as the new King of Spain, and the Spanish patriots in unoccupied Spanish territories announced the inauguration of Ferdinand VII as king of their country, and when this news reached New Spain there was great chaos over the question of who was the rightful ruler of their colony, whether he was Ferdinand VII or Joseph Bonaparte, in the hope that he would be installed king in the newly independent country, while the viceroy Jose de Iturrigaray supported the Creole population of New Spain when they proposed the establishment of a governing body for the colony, the inhabitants of the peninsula realized the danger of rapprochement between the Creoles and the procuratorate. In the face of these events and after the coup, Ettore Garibay was replaced by a Spanish governor as a puppet, Pedro Garibay, amid great despair among the Carriole population, especially since many matters caused dissatisfaction among the Creole population, especially towards the administrative practices of the inhabitants of the peninsula and their control over the authorities and interests, which led to the initiatives towards the uprising, which he led. The Creole cleric Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla (1) which was considered the first large-scale real rebellion for independence in Mexico.

In particular, many factors contributed to stimulating the spirit of revolt among the Mexican population against the Spanish authorities, including the fact that the continuous turmoil that occurred in Europe after the rise of Napoleon Bonaparte cast a shadow over Spanish policy in its colonies, as well as the war of independence in the United States of America against Britain and the formation of the United States, as the principles of the American Revolution began to spread among other American peoples as a model to be followed to achieve independence, especially among the people of Mexico as a neighboring people. In addition to the presence of large numbers of Americans in Mexico, it helped to fuel the spirit of the revolution and, finally, the tyranny of the Spanish ruling government in Mexico and the growing discontent of the Mexican people against that policy.

Mexican War of Independence

On the level of internal developments, Mexico witnessed the start of the first uprising against the Spanish authorities on December 8, 1810, and on this basis, the central government warned after the news of an uprising arrived, and the conspirators were warned that orders had been issued to arrest them in this regard, Hidalgo began on September 16, 1810, to work towards gaining independence without delay, and at the same time the church bells were rung to call on the individuals who Hidalgo had asked to join him against the Spanish government. The crowds responded enthusiastically and an angry crowd marched towards the regional capital of Juana Guanajuato, and from there Hidalgo launched his famous speech or what was called "Dolores' Call" as mentioned above. **My sons, we have brought a new measure today, will you accept it? Will you free yourselves? Will you return the lands that were stolen from your ancestors three hundred years ago by the hated Spaniards? Will you defend your religion and your rights as real citizens? Long live our lady Guadalupe! Death to the bad government! Death to the people of the peninsula."**

Hidalgo, through a smart decision, chose a symbol of the independence movement, embodied in the Virgin of Guadalupe, to become a unifying force of the people, and the miners of Guanajuato joined the workers of Dolores and slaughtered all the inhabitants of the peninsula who resisted them, including the local governor. Valladolid, Valladolid, but on 30 October 1810 the Independence Forces encountered resistance in the Monte Delas Cruces region and therefore failed to capture Mexico City, forcing the rebels led by Hidalgo to retreat to northern Mexico so that the government forces could easily pounce on the rebels. Hidalgo was tried as a clergyman by a competent religious body and found guilty of sorcery and treason and sentenced to death, carried out on July 31, 1811 and his head was displayed in Juanaguato as a warning to other revolutionaries.

On this basis, the revolutionary forces moved north towards Texas away from the Mexican capital, and the revolutionaries received support from American immigrants, who constituted the majority of immigrants in Mexico, and in 1812 the revolutionaries were able to impose their control over important cities within Texas, including the city of San Antonio (which represents the center of Texas), as a result of which the revolution spread to other Mexican cities.

During this period, after Hidalgo's death, Jose Maria Morelos Pavon took over the leadership of the revolutionary movement, oversaw the political and military aspects of the rebellion and planned a strategic move to encircle Mexico City and cut off communications with the coastal areas.) to discuss the future of Mexico as an independent country, the preparatory document for the conference included key points related to popular sovereignty (the power of the people), the general right of men to vote, the adoption of Roman Catholicism as the official religion, the abolition of slavery and forced labor, the abolition of the monopoly of government offices, and the end of corporal punishment, and despite the initial successes of Morelos' forces, the colonial authorities were able to lift the siege of Mexico City after six months, took control of the positions in the surrounding areas, and then invaded the city of Gila Ban Sengo. Eventually, Morelos was arrested on 15 November 1815 and met the same fate as Hidalgo, as he was sentenced to death and executed on 22 December 1815.

Despite Morelos' death, the Mexican revolutionary struggle did not end as in 1815-1821 two men, Guadalupe Victoria in Puebla and Vicente Guerrero in Oaxaca, who led the liberation movement against Spanish domination, prompting the viceroy Juan Ruiz de Apo da ca) sent military forces in December 1820 under the command of a Creole royal officer, Augustin de Iturbide, to defeat Guerrero's army in Oaxaca, but the appointment of Iturbide coincided with the successful military coup in Spain against the new King Ferdinand VII, and in light of this, the leaders of the coup gathered in the form of a campaign aimed at suppressing the American independence movements, and the deposed King Ferdinand was forced to sign the liberal Spanish constitution in 1821. When news of the Liberal Constitution reached Mexico, Aturpad saw it as a threat to the status quo and an opportunity for the Creoles to gain control of Mexico, and indeed independence was finally achieved, especially after the conservative forces in the colonies rose up against it and chose against it the liberal ruling regime in the mother country, and after the initial clash with Guerrero's forces, Iturbide changed his allegiance and invited

the leader of the revolutionaries to meet him and discuss the principles of the struggle for independence.

In light of this, Autobide proclaimed three principles when he was stationed in the city of Iguala, which served as guarantees for Mexico's independence from Spain:

1. Mexico is an independent monarchy ruled by a conservative king or prince from Europe.
2. The Creole population and the Peninsular population enjoy equal rights and privileges.
3. The Roman Catholic Church regains its exclusive religious privileges and rights.

After convincing his troops to accept these principles, which were proclaimed on February 24, 1821, in what was known as the Plan of Iguala, he later persuaded Guerrero to join his forces in support of the new conservative manifesto issued by the independence movement, and a new army was established under the command of Aturbide with the aim of implementing the Plan of Iguala. The rebel forces from all over Mexico joined the army of Iturbide, and the viceroy was forced to surrender after it was found that the victory of the revolutionaries was just around the corner, so on 24 August 1821, the representatives of the Spanish crown and Autorbide signed the Treaty of Córdoba or Córdoba, which recognized the independence of Mexico according to the principles of the Plan of Aguala, and Aturbide inserted a special phrase in the agreement that made it possible to appoint a Creole king over Mexico if he chose a Mexican council. If the appropriate element of the European monarchy did not agree to the accession to the throne of Mexico, the next day the Trusteeship Council was chosen, chaired by Aturbide, by which it formally declared Mexico's independence from Spain and the appointment of the country's first independent Government.

It is clear from the above that Mexico is one of the most important countries in North America, due to its important geographical location, which made it the focus of attention of European countries, because of its many economic wealth, especially that it is rich in silver, in addition to that, Mexico is considered the cradle of the most important ancient civilizations, and because of this, Mexico and its people were exposed to Spanish colonialism from the movements of geographical discovery until its independence in 1821, and Mexico was persecuted and killed during that era by the Spanish colonizers, so the desire to get rid of them was born in them. They carried out many uprisings against the Spanish presence, although some of them failed, but eventually Mexico became independent in 1821, thus getting rid of the dominance of Spanish colonialism and entering a new phase in its history, which is the establishment of the empire led by Augustín Aturbide.

Conclusion

Mexico and its people were subjected to Spanish colonialism, like the rest of the two parts of the Americas, since the movements of geographical discovery, and Mexico during that era was subjected to persecution and murder by the Spanish colonizers, which provided the opportunity for the anti-the-revolutionary movements that born in them the desire to get rid of the control of the Spaniards, so they carried out many uprisings against the Spanish presence, although some of them failed, but in the end, Mexico gained its independence in 1821 To begin a new chapter in the history of Mexico.



Figure 1.

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