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100 million Mexicans... only

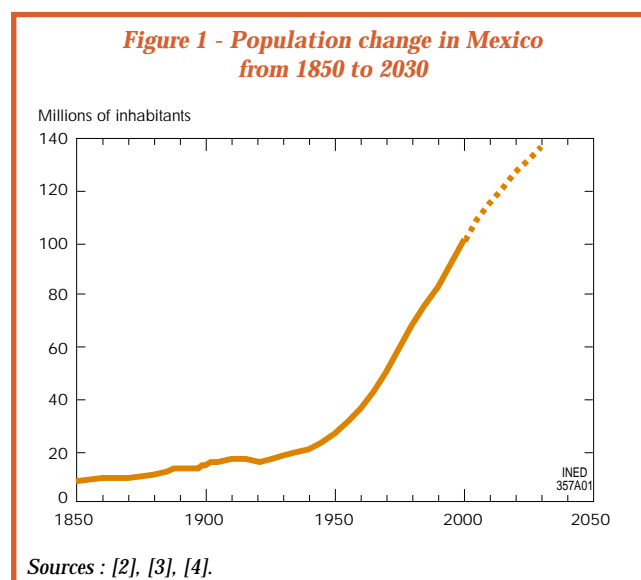
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For Mexico, as for most countries in the world, the 20th century will have been the century of demographic transition, characterised by population growth rates hitherto unknown. The decline in mortality, which began in the 1930s, preceded the decline in fertility by approximately thirty years, thus explaining why the population increased at such a pace [1]. In spite of the million deaths during the Mexican Revolution (the armed phase of which lasted from 1910 to 1918), in 2001 the country had eight times more inhabitants than in 1913: a hundred million compared with thirteen million (Figure 1).

◆ 150 million announced forty years ago

The figure of one hundred million inhabitants was reached between April and October 2001, according to the authors (1). But the accuracy of the date is of little consequence given the fact that this figure was reached ten years later than forecasted by projections made in the 1960s. Had fertility continued at the level estimated at the time, the population would have doubled in twenty years and there would be at least 150 million Mexicans today. According to the low variant, the projections still announced 132 million inhabitants for 2000. It is true it was difficult to imagine a decline in growth: at the time the population was growing by 3.5% every year, while official policy statements and legislation were openly pronatalist. Government policy changed drastically in 1973 with the passing of a general law on population that opened the way to family planning programmes, the firm intention being to reduce fertility. Following this law the National Population Programme for 1976-1982 was aimed at

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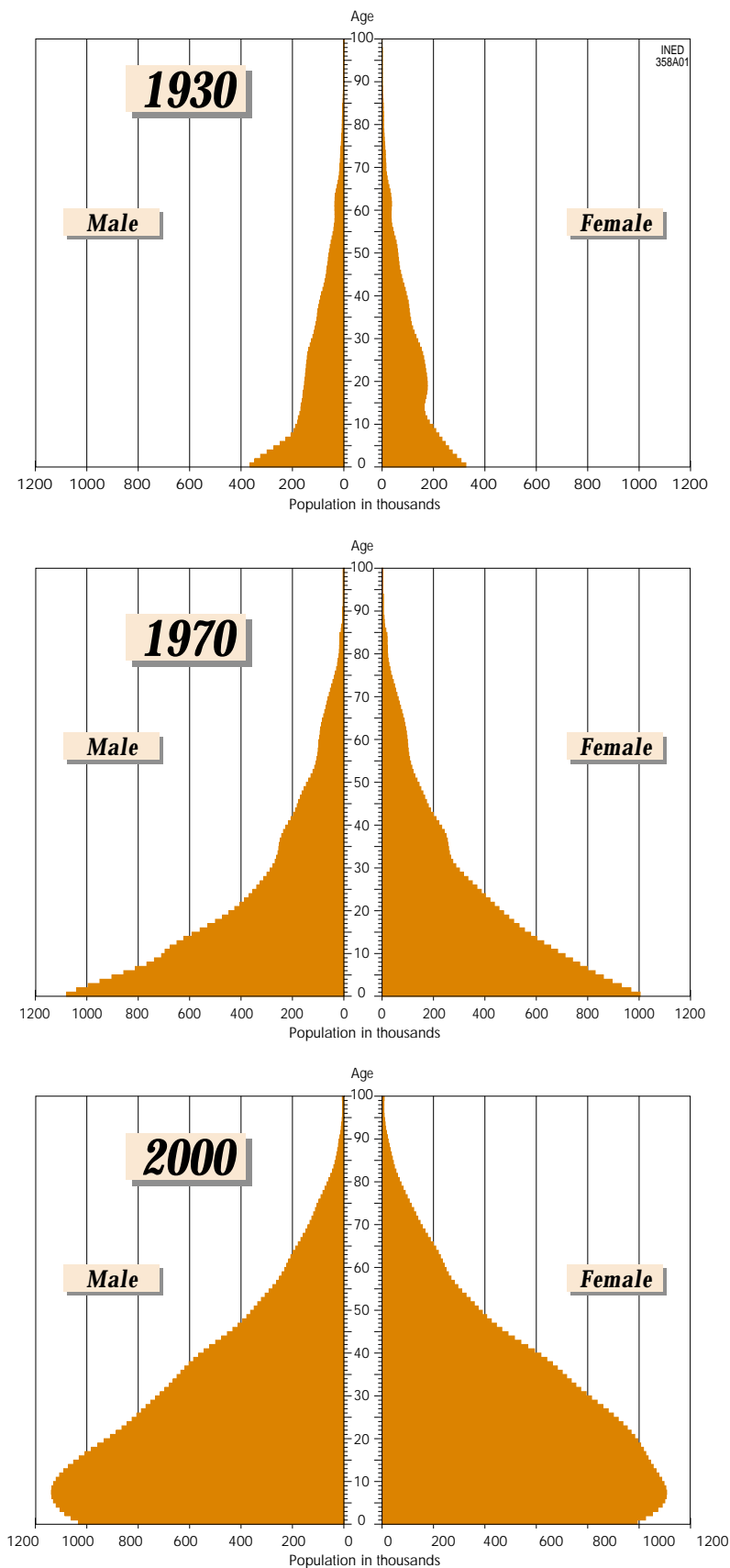


reducing the annual growth rate of the population to 1% in 2000. Although the objective was far from being reached (the current rate being close to 2%), in 2000 Mexico had 53 million inhabitants fewer than it would have had if fertility had remained at its 1970 level.

The population pyramids of 1930, 1970 and 2000 clearly illustrate this dynamics (Figure 2). In 1930 the population was beginning to recover from the after-effects of the Revolution and did not exceed 16.5 million inhabitants. It was multiplied by three in 1970 with 48.3 million inhabitants, half of whom were under the age of 15, whereas in 2000 when the population was approaching the 100 million mark (98.9) the fertility decline manifestly contributed to diminishing the proportion of young people. From 1970 to 2000, the dependency ratio (the ratio between the number of people of working

(1) Some sources even estimate this mark was reached in 2000 [1].

Figure 2 - Population pyramid of Mexico, 1930, 1970 and 2000



Source: INEGI, general population censuses of 1930, 1970 and 2000.

age—from 15 to 64 in Mexico—and of people who are not) fell by one third, from 1.00 to 0.66. The high numbers of people of working age will continue for a time as a result of large birth cohorts, and the dependency ratio will therefore continue to decline for another twenty-five years before increasing under the effect of population aging.

◆ Fewer than three children per woman today

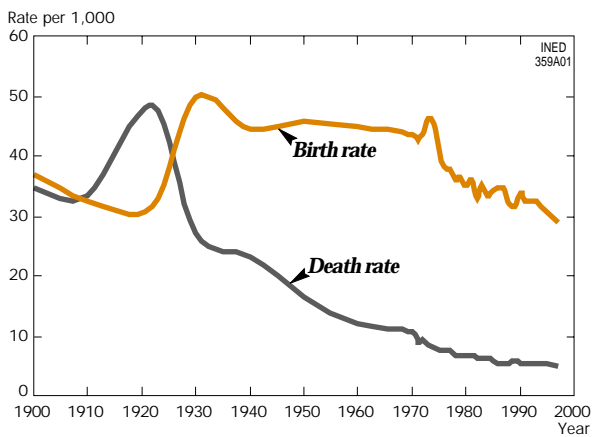
Changes in crude death and birth rates (2) are marked by the upheavals of the Revolution (Figure 3). In 1900, the crude birth rate reached 36‰ and the death rate reached 34‰; the two rates remained very close until 1910, resulting in low population growth. Because the conflict disorganised the statistical system, there is very little data from the 1910s and what is available is not very reliable: it seems that mortality then increased substantially, even provoking a population decline for a few years. However, after having fallen slightly the birth rate steadily increased between 1920 and 1930, mainly as a result of the recovery of delayed marriages and births. Following that, the birth rate remained stable at 45‰ (from 49‰ in 1930 it fell to 43‰ in 1970) before falling sharply in the last quarter of the century to less than 30‰ in 2000. At the same time the death rate continued to fall: 27‰ in 1930, 10‰ in 1970, and less than 5‰ today.

With the decline in general mortality and the even greater decline in infant mortality (3), life expectancy has continued to increase even though progress has been less rapid since the 1960s: at less than 30 years in 1900, it almost doubled from 1930 to 2000, and the difference between men and women has gradually increased to approximately five years in the last twenty years (Figure 4).

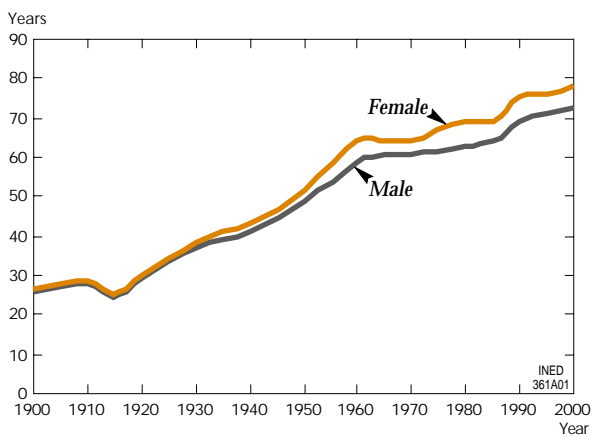
As for fertility, measured by the total fertility rate, after reaching very high levels (6.9 children per woman on average in 1965) it declined sharply: it was down to

(2) The quality of the birth registration data, and consequently birth rates, is much debated.

(3) The infant mortality level in 1930, although still contested, has been put at more than 250‰. It dropped to 65‰ in 1970 and 25‰ in 2000.

Figure 3 - Crude birth and death rates

Source : [3].

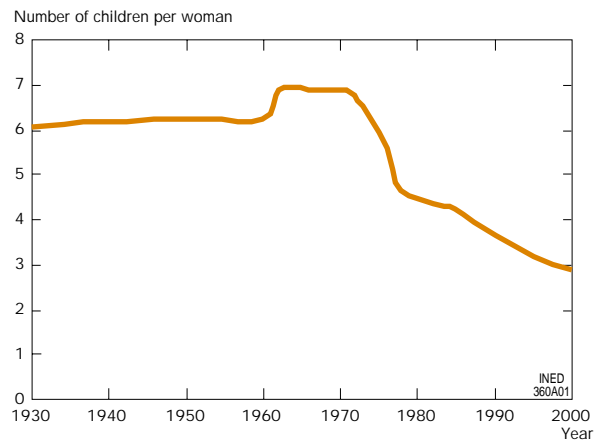
Figure 4 - Life expectancy at birth

Source : [3].

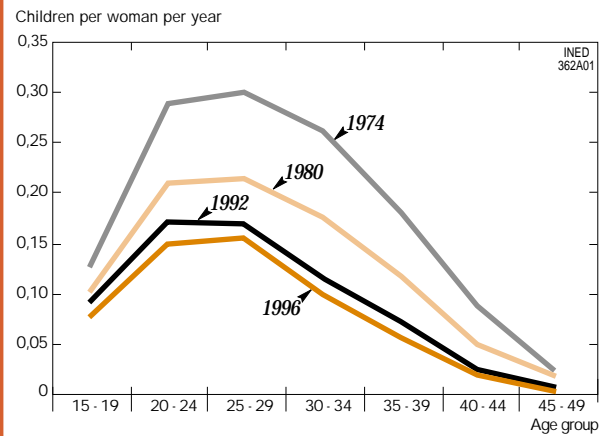
2.8 in 2000 (Figure 5). This fertility decline has been observed at all ages (Figure 6).

◆ Seven women out of ten are contraceptive users

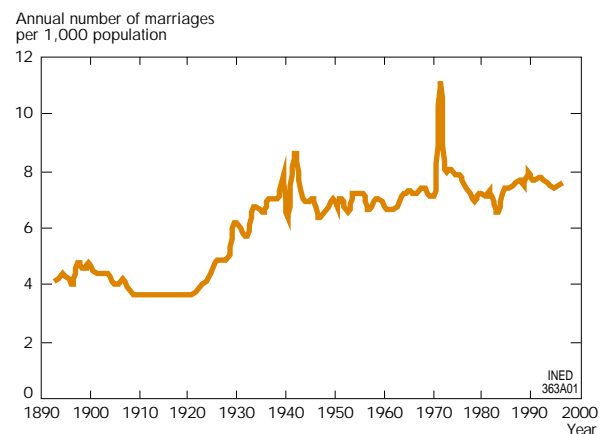
What role has nuptiality played in the fertility decline? Since the 1920s it has progressed with a few increases due to the recovery of marriages after the Revolution and the obligation imposed by the State on the Church of performing religious marriages only after civil marriages had been celebrated (Figure 7). The crude marriage rate, the annual number of marriages for a thousand inhabitants, has fluctuated around 7‰ since 1940, with sharp increases linked to official campaigns in favour of the legalisation of consensual unions. However, this indicator presents the disadvantage of not taking the latter into account and therefore of minimising the importance of nuptiality in the wider sense of the term; it is estimated that during the 20th century marriages represented 80% of all unions. On average women currently enter their first union around the age

Figure 5 - Total fertility rate

Source : [5].

Figure 6 - Age-specific fertility rates

Source : [6].

Figure 7 - Crude marriage rate

Source : [7].

of 22 and men at 24. Age at first union, whether legitimate or not, has fallen slightly in recent decades for women, but this change only started ten years after the fertility decline; it has not therefore contributed to

reducing the decline [7].

In fact, the key factor explaining this fertility decline is the massive adoption of contraception. Fewer than one woman in three of reproductive age practised birth control in 1976, compared with seven out of ten today. As for abortions, which are still forbidden by law, it is believed that close to one in five women ever married or in consensual union have had at least one abortion in their lives. This proportion, however, has fallen slightly: from 22% in 1987 to 19% in 1997.

◆ Mexico City, the second largest megalopolis in the world

Like the other countries in the region, Mexico experienced rapid urbanisation between 1940 and 1970 with an urban population growth rate in excess of 5%. Because of this, three quarters of Mexicans live today in towns with more than 15,000 inhabitants, compared with one fifth in 1930 (Table 1). Living conditions which have relatively improved in towns have brought about such rapid rural-urban migration that urban growth has become practically uncontrollable: the lack of housing forced newcomers to occupy land and build very precarious accommodation, especially in municipalities next to Mexico City where the largest waves of immigrants have settled. This has been at the origin of the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City (*Zona Metropolitana de la Ciudad de México*) which is currently the second largest megalopolis in the world after Tokyo with 18.2 million inhabitants.

When will the growth of this city stop? Although its population is increasing at a slower rate than the rest of the country (1.5% annual growth) it is estimated that it could reach 20 million inhabitants by 2010. This is less than the 25 million announced thirty years ago in the projections. Not only has the natural growth of the urban area of Mexico City slowed down but different factors have led to the departure of a number of its inhabitants: among these are the economic recession, the earthquake of 1985, insecurity, pollution and the general degradation in living conditions.

This brief presentation of the population of Mexico would be incomplete if no mention were made of migration towards foreign countries. The border with the United States and historical reasons have always favoured such migration. It is an issue of major concern for both countries since it is largely illegal and constantly on the increase. An estimated 8.5 million people born in Mexico are currently residing in the United States, with an annual migration balance evaluated at approximately 300,000 emigrants. As a result Mexico's net population growth is of 1.7% instead of 2%. Formerly largely temporary, Mexican migration to the United States is now becoming durable and occurs from a greater variety of places of departure. Whatever the future pattern of emigration, it is already of essential importance for the Mexican economy since it gen-

Table 1 - Urban population (cities of more than 15,000 inhabitants) and the population of the Metropolitan Area of Mexico City

	Year					
	1900	1930	1940	1950	1970	2000
Urban population (in %)	10.5	17.5	20.0	28.0	45.0	74.7
Population of the MAMC (in thousands)	345	1,049	1,560	2,872	8,400	18,234

Source : INEGI.

erates monetary transfers each year amounting to six billion dollars, as much as tourism.

* * *

Three key dates mark Mexico's transition towards a new demographic regime: 1930, with an annual growth of 2% and a death rate which started to decline; 1970, when growth reached its peak (3.5% per year) but fertility began to decline; and the current period, in which the threshold of one hundred million inhabitants has been reached. The current population is very different from that of 1930, in terms of size, age structure and pace of growth. This transformation is essentially due to the education and health systems. However, in spite of progress, these systems are lagging behind in terms of the needs of the population, which is continuing to grow while aspiring to improved living conditions. In addition to this there is a new challenge that has to be faced: population aging.

As far as the future is concerned, annual projections are banking on the fact that population growth in Mexico could fall to the replacement level in approximately 2020 and become stationary in approximately 2050. Although the country has succeeded relatively well in controlling its population growth, it has had less success in the area of socio-economic development. A large proportion of the population remains poor, notably the Indians, who make up the most underprivileged fraction of the country's inhabitants. ■

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