

## Chiapas, Mexico

Label: Chiapas, Mexico

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Description Located in the far southeast of Mexico, Chiapas is one of the richest Mexican states in terms of natural resources; yet it is also one of the poorest in terms of standard of living for the vast majority of its inhabitants. Chiapas has oil, natural gas, timber, and hydroelectric power and produces coffee, beef, corn, bananas, honey, melons, avocados, and cocoa, primarily for export. The Lacandon Jungle is also located in Chiapas and is one of the most resource-rich and biodiverse regions in the world. Significantly, Chiapas also has the second highest proportion of Indigenous population in Mexico with approximately 25 percent of the state's three million inhabitants belonging to one of seven major Indigenous groups.



Figure 1

Despite the state's resources, 70 percent of the population of Chiapas live in poverty and suffer from the lowest literacy rate in Mexico. In addition, the state suffers from an abysmal lack of infrastructure, health, and other social services. Since the Spanish Conquest of Mexico in the sixteenth century,

Chiapas has witnessed constant cycles of brutal repression and exploitation followed by rebellion. From the 1930s onward, however, Indigenous and mestizo peasants have engaged in increasingly militant political organizing over a variety of issues including land redistribution, political and cultural rights, access to credit, and freedom from violence and repression. It is in this context that the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) formed in the early 1980s and rose up in open rebellion in 1994.

Suggested  
Reading:

**Benjamin, Thomas.** 1996. *A rich land, a poor people: Politics and society in modern Chiapas*. Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press.

**Collier, George A. and Elizabeth Lowery Quaratiello.** 1999. *Basta! Land and the Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas*. Oakland, CA: Food First Books.

**Rus, Jan, Rosalva Aida Hernandez Castillo, and Shannan L. Mattiace. eds.** 2003. *Mayan lives, Mayan utopias: The Indigenous peoples of Chiapas and the Zapatista Rebellion*. Toronto: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.

**Weinberg, Bill.** 2000. *Homage to Chiapas*. New York: Verso.