

# Zapatista

Organization: Zapatista

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**Description** The term "Zapatista" originally referred to the followers of Emiliano Zapata, agrarian revolutionary and General of the Liberating Army of the South, who became one of Mexico's greatest heroes and martyrs during the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920). Today the term "Zapatista" refers to people involved in the new Zapatista movement which began publicly as an armed uprising initiated by the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN). The uprising took place on 1 January 1994 in the southeastern Mexican state of Chiapas, and was timed to coincide with the implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). Apart from the economic devastation wrought upon Mexico's farming population who found themselves unable to compete with US-based agribusiness interests, this agreement also had profound cultural consequences for Mexico's Indigenous peoples, many of whom were the very same people affected by the economic repercussions of NAFTA. For Indigenous peoples whose cultural identities exist in deep and complex relation to the land, NAFTA's implementation posed powerful challenges, requiring the end of both constitutionally guaranteed land reform and redistribution as well as protection from the sale of communally owned and worked land.

The Zapatista uprising was also explicitly a struggle for "democracy, liberty, and justice" for all the people of Mexico. While the EZLN is the military wing of the Zapatista movement, the movement also includes civil and non-violent supporters from throughout Mexico. Many of the latter have formed the Zapatista Front of National Liberation (FZLN) to engage in peaceful and political struggle for democracy, liberty, and justice in Mexico and to support the EZLN and the Zapatista communities in Chiapas. Although the majority of the members of the EZLN and its communities in Chiapas are Indigenous Mayan peoples, the Zapatista movement has attracted many non-Indigenous supporters as well, both within Mexico and internationally.

**Suggested Reading:** **Hayden, Tom.** 2002. *The Zapatista reader*. New York: Thunder's Mouth Press.

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