Ai Camp, Roderic. Mexico: What everyone needs to know (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

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In the acknowledgments section, Ai Camp describes how he was approached by Oxford University Press to work on a project with the potential to reach a broader audience and inform North Americans and other people about multiple issues affecting specific countries and their people. In this book, Ai Camp accomplishes that objective by presenting important historical and social issues in Mexico and their relation to events in the United States. He accomplishes this objective by presenting his discussion in easy to read and understandable responses to specific questions in all the chapters. Some examples of such questions include, "Why does Mexico have so much drug violence today?" (p. 3); "What were the causes of the Mexican Revolution of 1910?" (p. 89); and "Why was the 2000 presidential race essential to Mexico's democratization?" (p. 153). Ai Camp answers all these questions in twelve chapters, divided into three major sections.

In the first section, Ai Camp discusses current economic, social, and political conditions in Mexico and their effect on Mexico's citizens. The section also includes a chapter on current Mexico-U.S. relations. Right from the beginning, in chapter one, Ai Camp discusses security and violence in Mexico. He clearly states that drug problems and violence in Mexico are directly connected to the great demand for drugs in the United States. This is a key point, for as long as there is demand for drugs, suppliers will bring their product to the United States, fostering a climate of violence and instability in Mexico that recent Mexican presidents have not been able to curtail. The author begins with an examination of President Vicente Fox's (2000-2006) strategy to eliminate or capture the top leaders of drug cartels, which led to a power vacuum and violent confrontations to fill the top positions. This is followed by a discussion of Felipe Calderón's (2006-2012) strategy to increase the number of military troops to combat the cartels in an attempt to break them up into units that are more manageable. This strategy also did not work as planned, leading to more inter- and intra-cartel fighting, affecting not just the cartels but also people in the military, the police, the court system, and innocent bystanders. President Peña Nieto (2012-2018) decided to change the strategy against drug cartels by attempting to create a "Gendarme" force of 50,000 members, with the skills of the military and the police. However, this force reached only 5000 members and was not effective in reducing violence levels.

According to Ai Camp, directly connected to Mexico's drug trade is its high poverty rate and limited economic opportunity for a large segment of the population (chapter 2). The poverty rate in 2015 stood at 46.2 percent, an increase from the 43 percent figure recorded for 2006. The author then goes on to highlight that poverty levels across Mexico are uneven, with a large percentage of the poor residing in rural areas. He argues that some recent declines in poverty (1996-2008) were due to greater government expenditures on anti-poverty programs like "Progresa" and "Prospera." In this chapter, Ai Camp also discusses NAFTA's mixed impact in fostering economic growth. While employment opportunities increased in the manufacturing sector, rural areas experienced 1-2 million jobs lost.

In chapter 4, Ai Camp takes a closer look into U.S.-Mexico relations. He argues that Mexico's proximity to the U.S. and the countries' shared 1,954-mile border provides an opportunity for understanding the intricate economic and social interdependency between the two countries. He highlights the wage differential as an important factor in fueling documented and undocumented Mexican immigration to the U.S. The migratory phenomenon is not

understood by a large segment of the U.S. population, which often results in anti-immigrant sentiment in periods of economic recession. Ai Camp rightly points out that the U.S. population benefits from the labor of hundreds of thousands of Mexican migrant workers in the agricultural sector of the U.S. Moreover, with respect with trade with Mexico, he points out that exports to Mexico contributed to the creation of 1,344,000 jobs in the U.S. in 2014.

The second section of the book looks at the historical development of Mexico's political parties and the transition towards democracy in the year 2000. This section covers the Spanish colonial legacy, the independence movement, the war with the United States, the Mexican Revolution, and a number of more recent economic and social conditions, which have influenced Mexican society and its political system to the present. Ai Camp traces Mexico's strong individual rulers and the dominance of a single strong political party all the way back to the form of government imposed by Spain and the impact of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1921) on the creation of the National Party of the Revolution (PNR) in 1929 and its later form as the Institutional Party of the Revolution (PRI).

Ai Camp traces much of Mexico's current political system to the Mexican Revolution and its aftermath. Two factors leading to the Revolution were large segments of the population mired in poverty and increasing middle- and upper-class dissatisfaction with the long dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, who ruled Mexico from 1884 to 1911. Leaders of the Revolution, like Madero and Venustiano Carranza fought to end Díaz's authoritarian leadership and multiple reelections. Others, like Villa and Zapata fought to improve the rights of workers and peasants. The Mexican Revolution and its aftermath were fraught with violence, coups, and the assassination of Mexican presidents. In this environment, President Elias Calles established the foundation of the PNR in order to incorporate military and civilian authorities under a strong political organization.

The PNR, later renamed the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institutcional*, PRI) went on to control the political system of Mexico until the year 2000, when it lost the presidential election to an opposition party. Ai Camp argues that Mexico's transition to a more democratic government is due to three factors. First, the massacre of university students in Tlatelolco in 1968 led to the formation of a more politically active Mexican people, some of whom joined the electoral left and others of whom joined indigenous groups in the military uprising of the "Zapatista" front in Chiapas in 1994. The first group eventually joined Cuahutémoc Cárdenas in the formation of the Democratic Party of the Revolution (PRD) in 1989. Second, the 1982-1988 economic crisis (brought about by the import-substitution strategy, the foreign debt, and a decline in oil prices) led many people including the leadership to question the current economic-political system. Third, President Salinas de Gortari, (1988-1994), in order to foment economic growth, followed a more neo-liberal economic policy, which eventually led to a trade agreement with the U.S. and Canada. Ai Camp argues that officials in Wall Street and in the U.S. government began to pressure Salinas de Gortari towards greater democracy. This, in turn, resulted in the first of the victories for the opposition parties PAN (National Action Party) and PRD to win some local and state victories, eventually culminating in PAN's presidential victory by Vicente Fox in 2000.

The third section of the book discusses Mexico's democratic consolidation and its current challenges. From Ai Camp's perspective, the PAN victory in 2000 was a threshold providing the opportunity for the electorate to vote for whomever they consider best to lead the country. Thus, the electorate gave a second chance to the PAN party with the election of Felipe Calderon in 2006—although the PRD candidate, Lopez Obrador, contested the elections. Limited economic

growth and an increase in violence led to the PRI with Peña Nieto to return to power, an outcome that was, again, contested by Lopez Obrador, who eventually left the PRD to create the new MORENA party.

Ai Camp concludes the book by listing three challenges that Mexico faces. First, economic monopolies, corruption, and lack of transparency limit economic growth. Second, continuing criminal activity negatively affects businesses and may deter further economic investment in the country. Third, the above two factors may limit or slow down democratization due to human right abuses. And finally, Ai Camp concludes that the U.S. can help Mexico by reducing its drug consumption levels and providing financial assistance for anti-poverty programs in Mexico.

Ai Camp provides a good overview of Mexico's current economic, social, and political situation. He also highlights the interdependency of Mexico and the U.S. What happens in one country, be it positive or negative, affects both countries. I hope that more people read this book and become more knowledgeable about this situation. This will go a long way in fostering a more accurate picture of Mexico and the Mexican population in the collective imagination of the U.S.

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