

Summary: Guatemala Today

Guatemala's Government

In 1821, Guatemala and three other Central American states gained independence from Spain. In 1837 Rafael Carrera became a leader in Guatemala. Guatemala left the union of Central American states to become its own nation.

Many dictators ruled Guatemala. Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán became president of Guatemala in 1951. He introduced social and political reforms. Guzmán worked to develop a market economy and raise Guatemala's standard of living. He divided up the land to let more people earn their livings as farmers.

Because the United States owned land in Guatemala, the U.S. government opposed Guzmán's division of land. The U.S. accused Guzmán of supporting Communism and helped overthrow him. After 1954, military officers ruled Guatemala. Civil war raged throughout the country. Many people who opposed the government were killed.

In 1985, Guatemala established a representative democracy. The national government shares power with state and local governments. Guatemala's president appoints governors to head the 22 *departamentos*.

Economy and Culture

Guatemala has the largest gross domestic product (GDP) in Central America. Its most important industry is agriculture. Its economy relies on the export of agricultural products including coffee, sugar, cardamom, and bananas. The sale of manufactured products contributes to the strong economy. Tourism is also an important industry.

More than half of Guatemala's people are Maya. The rest are *ladinos*. While homes in rural villages are tiny and poor, many urban Guatemalans live in modern homes. Urban Guatemalans have access to schools and universities, as well as theaters, museums, and restaurants.



Before You Read

Find and underline the vocabulary word.

departamento *noun*, a Guatemalan state



After You Read

REVIEW Given the opposition to the new government after Guzmán's overthrow, do you think it continued social reforms?

Highlight the sentences that describe the trouble that followed the overthrow of Guzmán's government.

REVIEW Does Guatemala have a single-product economy? Why or why not? Circle the name of each product or industry that contributes to Guatemala's economy.