Indigenous Chihuahua: Four Centuries of Conflict

by John P. Schmal

October 2019

Chihuahua Among the Northwestern Mexican States

Source: WikiVoyage, “Northern Mexico.”

Northern Mexico's Mountainous Regions

The **Sierra Madre Occidental Mountains** run from south of the Arizona-Sonora border southeast through eastern Sonora, western Chihuahua, Sinaloa, Durango, Zacatecas, Jalisco and farther south. The **Sierra Madre Oriental Mountains** run parallel to the Sierra Madre Occidental range on the eastern side of the country.

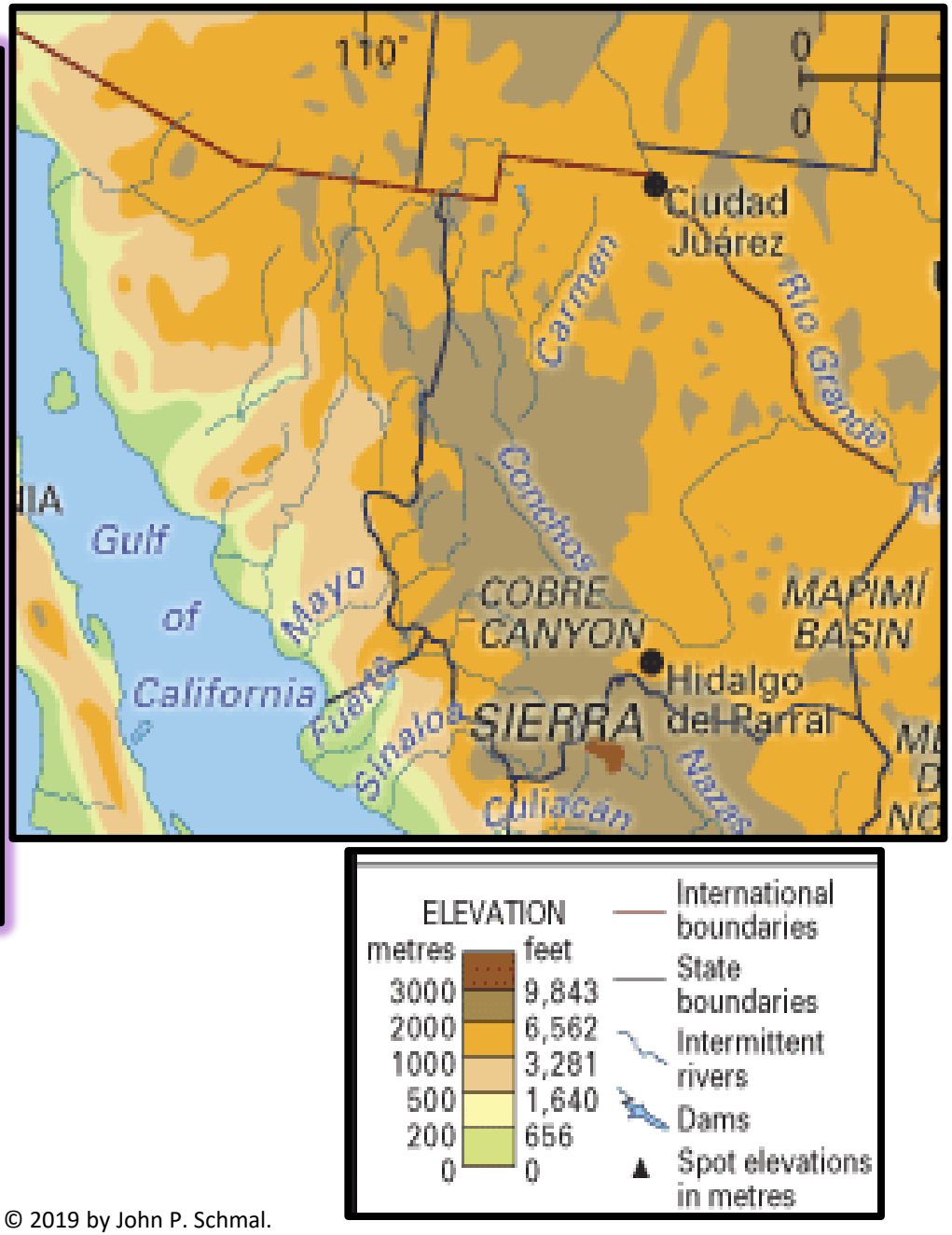
The areas colored in deep green are the highest mountains within the country. **Mountains account for over one-third of Chihuahua's surface area and over 71% of Durango's surface** and are rich in minerals important to Mexico's mining industry.

Online Map Source:
https://www.worldatlas.com/webimage/countrys/namerica/mx.htm.

The Sierra Tarahumara Range

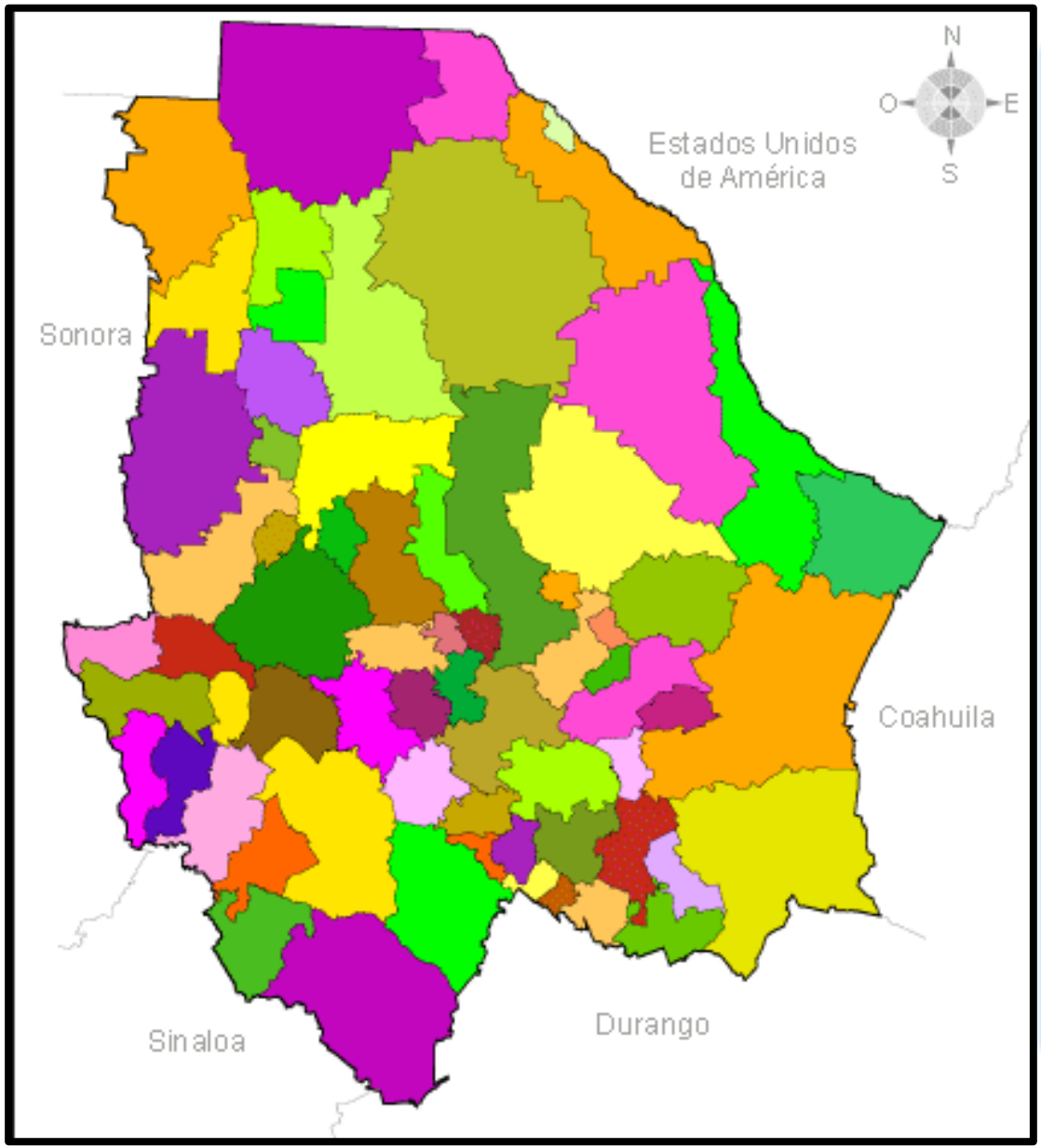
The **Sierra Tarahumara Range** is the name for the region of the Sierra Madre beginning at the Durango border and extending north. This is a dramatic landscape of steep mountains formed by a high plateau that has been cut through with canyons, including Copper Canyon.

It is within this range that the Rarámuri (Tarahumara) people sought refuge as Spanish settlements and mining camps began to flourish and after several failed revolts. Other indigenous groups that inhabit this range are the Dami (Northern Tepehuán), O'óba (Mountain Pima), and Guarijío.



Source: Wikipedia, “Sierra Madre Occidental.”

Chihuahua in 2010



Chihuahua is the largest state in Mexico.

Area: 247,455 square km.

Percent of Mexico's Territory: 12.6%

No. of Municipios: 67

2010 Population: 3.6 million inhabitants

Percent of Mexican Population: 3.2%

Capital: The City of Chihuahua

The Capital City of Chihuahua had 809,232 inhabitants in 2010, representing one-quarter (22.8%) of the state's total population.

Chihuahua's Relief

The University of Arizona anthropologist, Professor Anna Maria Alonso states that **Chihuahua is 45% desert, 30% dry grassland and oak savanna, and 25% pine forest and subtropical deciduous forest.** As a result, only 5 percent of its land area is suitable for crops.

Much of western, central and southern Chihuahua are dominated by the **Sierra Madre Occidental Mountain Range, which occupies 43% of the surface area** of the state. Northern and eastern parts of the state are part of the Chihuahua Desert, which represents part of the **Central Plateau** which runs southeastward into Coahuila, Durango, Zacatecas and San Luis Potosi. The sierras, deserts and plains that dominate the north and east **take up about 57% of the surface area of the state.**

Sources: Cuéntame, Página de inicio / Información por entidad / Chihuahua; INEGI. Anuario Estadístico y Geográfico de Guanajuato 2017.

Chihuahua's Indigenous People at Contact

The historical geographer Peter Gerhard (1920-2006) estimated a **Nueva Vizcaya indigenous population of 344,500 in 1550.** By 1700, the population would drop to under 100,000, due to war and epidemics from "Old World diseases." According to the American anthropologist, Edward H. Spicer (1906-1983), the Spaniards recognized the following as the primary language groups in Chihuahua:

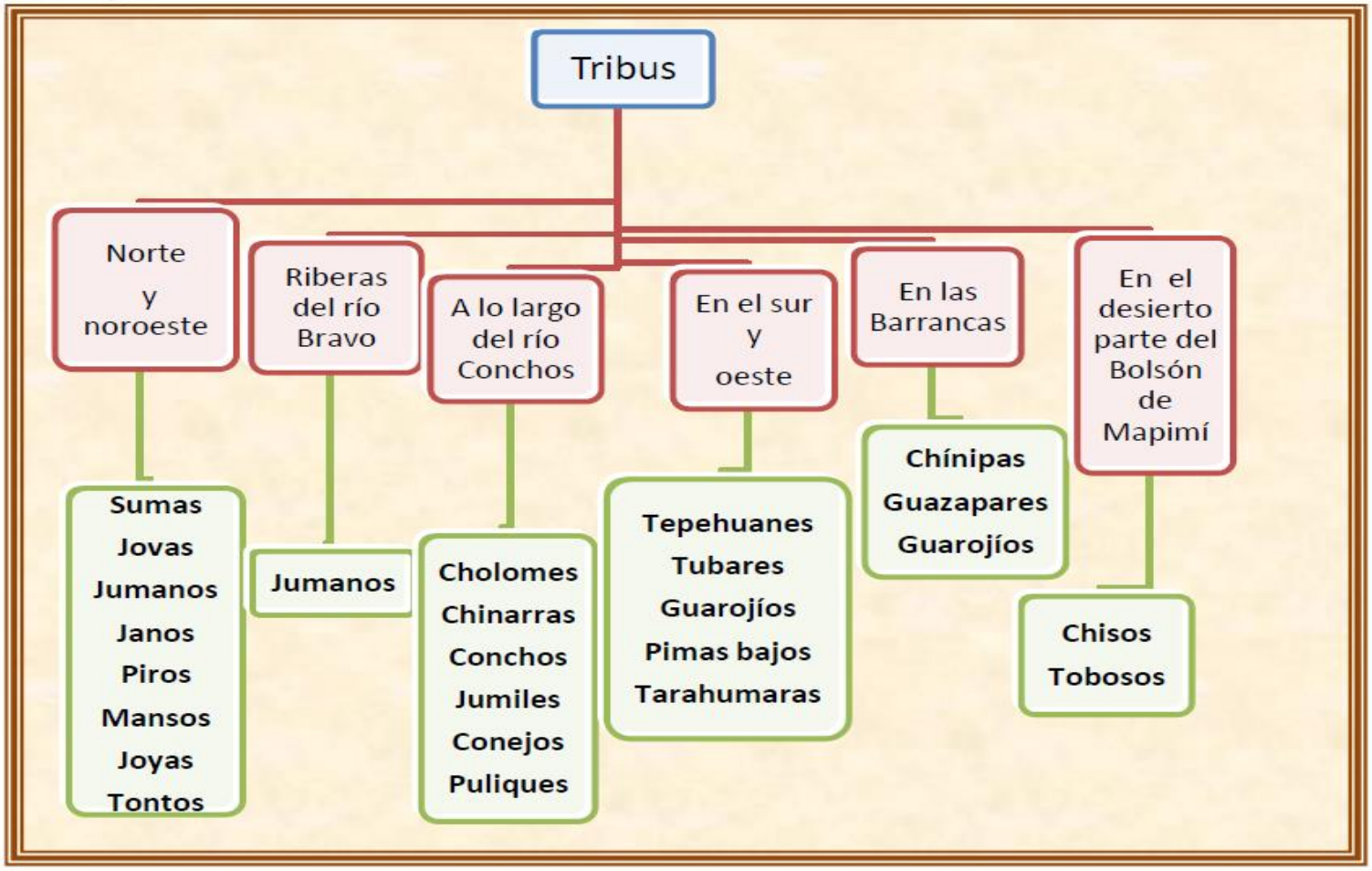
Tarahumaras	**Warihios (Guarijios)**	**Conchos**
Janos	**Sumas**	**Tobosos**
Apaches (who arrived in the area by the 1650s and increased their presence in the 1700s)		

William B. Griffen's **"Indian Assimilation in the Franciscan Area of Nueva Vizcaya"** provided **127 tribal names for indigenous bands and tribal groups** in the area the Spaniards referred to as the **"Greater Conchería."** However, because this list included "possible alternate designations" of some groups, Griffen only **offers detailed descriptions of 89 bands and tribal groups** in all. However, Griffen also cautions that a large number of these groups "are not placeable, linguistically or geographically, except within rather broad limits."

Source: William B. Griffen, Indian Assimilation in the Franciscan Area of Nueva Vizcaya. Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona Number 33.

Indigenous Tribes of Chihuahua at Contact

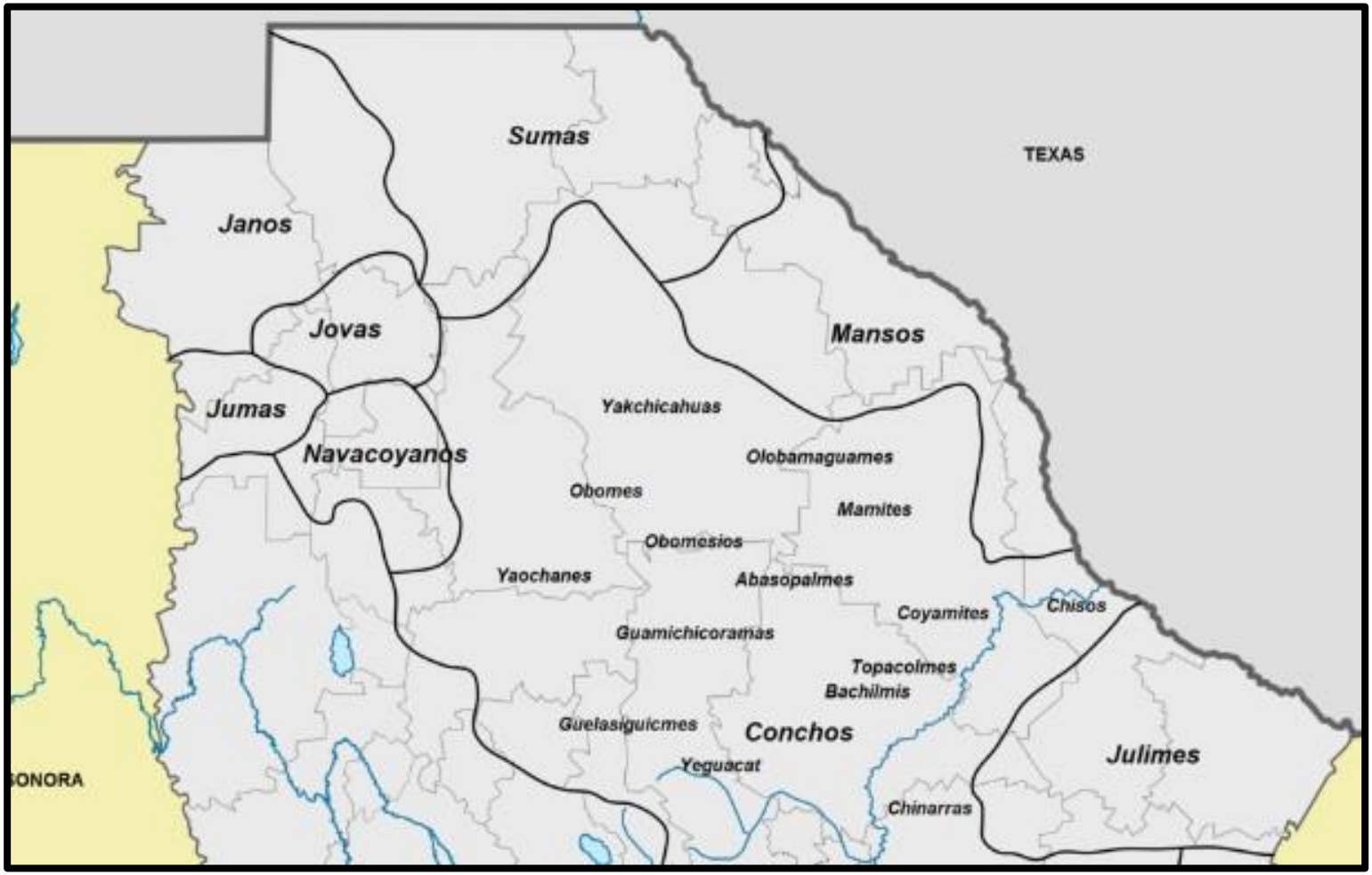
Of the original Chihuahua tribes at contact, only the Tepehuanes, Tarahumaras, Pimas and Guarajío in the south and west still survive as cultural entities in the present day.



Source: Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Cultura y Deporte del Estado de Chihuahua, "Descubriendo Chihuahua a Través de su Historia" (2014).

Indigenous Chihuahua: Tribal Distribution

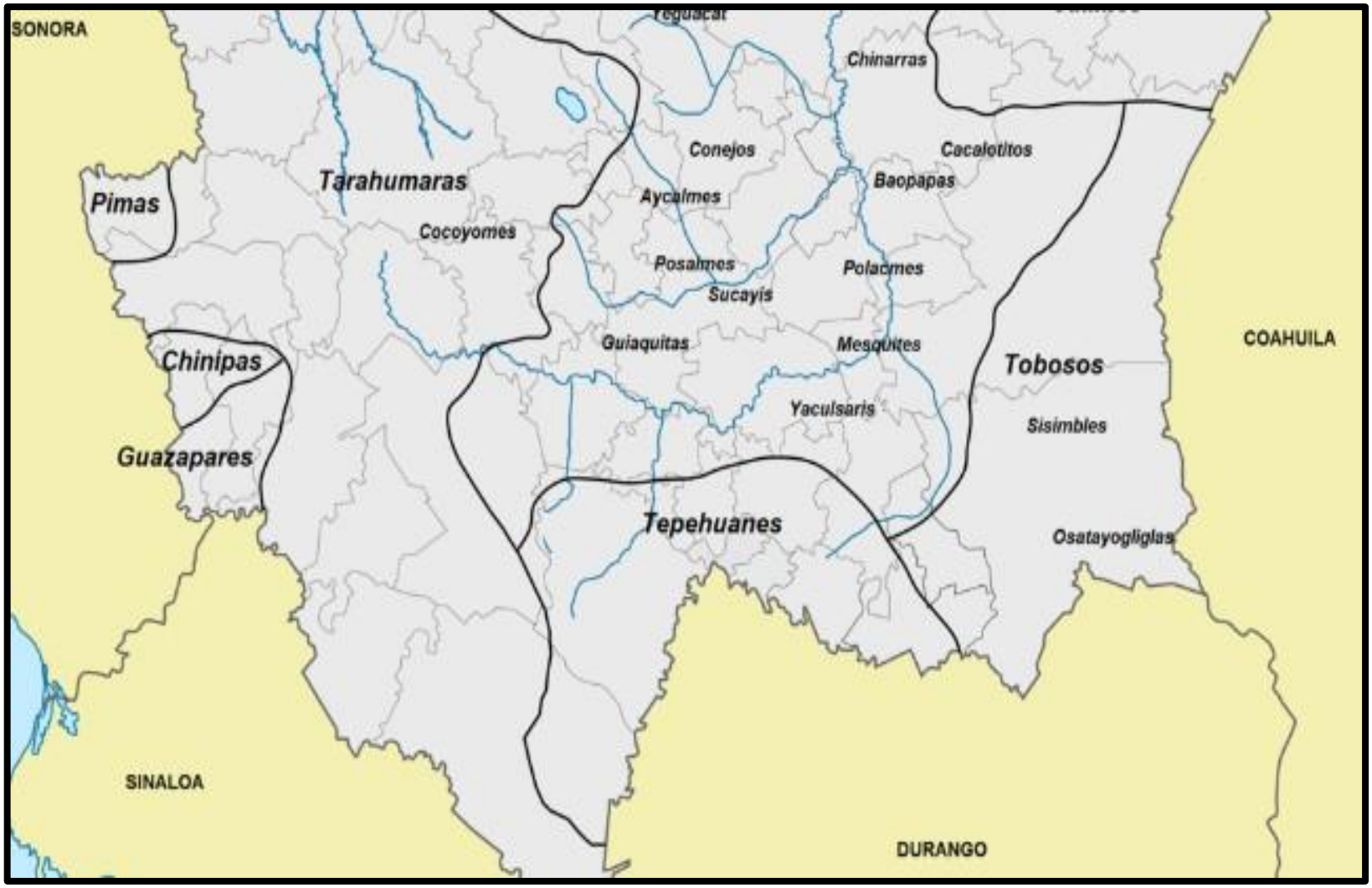
This Wikipedia map shows the tribal groups in northern and central Chihuahua in the early colonial period. The **coming of the Apaches** in later centuries caused even more profound changes that helped lead to the cultural extinction of most of these tribes and their languages.



Source: Source: Wikipedia, “Conchos.” Online: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conchos [Accessed 6-15-2017].

Indigenous Chihuahua: Tribal Distribution

The following Wikipedia map shows the tribal distribution in southern and central Chihuahua in the early colonial period. However, over time, the **Spanish mission system** and **the silver industry** altered the dynamics of this tribal environment significantly.



Source: Source: Wikipedia, “Conchos.” Online: https://es.wikipedia.org/wiki/Conchos [Accessed 6-15-2017].

Chihuahua's Primary Indigenous Groups

Conchos: Named for the Spanish word for "shells," the Conchos lived near the junction of the Rio Concho and Rio Grande Rivers in northern Chihuahua (near the present-day towns of Presidio (Texas) and Ojinaga (Chihuahua). The Spaniards first made contact with the Conchos Indians in 1575, and Franciscan missionaries began working among them in the 1590s. Many of the Conchos opted to cooperate within the Spanish colonial system and were gradually assimilated through the mission system. They are now extinct as a cultural entity.

Tobosos: The Tobosos inhabited the middle reaches of the Conchos River, as well as the Bolsón de Mapimí in what is now eastern Chihuahua and western Coahuila. They were associated with the Jumano and frequently raided Spanish settlements. Eventually they were rounded up and deported and were replaced by the Apaches as raiders. They went extinct as a cultural entity by the early Eighteenth Century.

Jova: This tribe was affiliated with the Opata and inhabited the upper part of the Valley of the Rio Yaqui in present-day Chihuahua. They are now culturally extinct.

Jumanos: The name "Jumanos" was a universal name that was used to identify at least three distinct peoples of the Southwest and South Plains who lived in Texas, New Mexico and Chihuahua. One band of Jumanos inhabited the Rio Grande between the mouth of the Concho River and present day El Paso, extending as far west as Casas Grandes in Chihuahua. They are believed to be related to the Suma Indians, the two names possibly being alternates of each other. They are now extinct.

Source: William B. Griffen, "Indian Assimilation in the Franciscan Area of Nueva Vizcaya." Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona Number 33 (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1979).

Chihuahua's Primary Indigenous Groups

Guarijíos (Varohío, Huarijío): The Guarijíos inhabited the Western Sierra Madre Mountains along the headwaters of the Rio Mayo from Rio Chinipas on the east to the border of west central Chihuahua and Sonora. Living in the isolated mountain and canyon country of the western Sierra Madre in Chihuahua, the Guarijíos seemed to prefer settlements of no more than a few families. Their many settlements were isolated from each other by steep mountains and precipitous canyons. In the 2010 census, 2,201 Mexicans spoke the Guarijío language, of which 877 lived in Chihuahua (40%) and another 1,306 lived in Sonora (59%).

Mansos: The Mansos inhabited the Rio Grande River Valley from present-day El Paso north to Las Cruces, New Mexico, primarily occupying the present-day municipios of Juarez, Praxedis G. Guerrero, Guadalupe and the northwest section of Ojinaga. The Mansos were also known as the Gorreta (Gorrite) and are now extinct.

Sumas (Zumas): The Sumas inhabited a range of territory that extended from the vicinity of present-day El Paso westward across northwestern Chihuahua, including the present municipios of Juárez, Praxedis G. Guerrero, Janos and Nuevo Casas Grandes. The Sumas were hunter-gatherer nomads who practiced little or no farming. Devastated by smallpox in the 1780s, the Sumas entered the Spanish missions near El Paso and Casas Grandes and merged with the mestizo population, while some Sumas gradually merged with the Apaches from the north. They are now extinct as a distinct people.

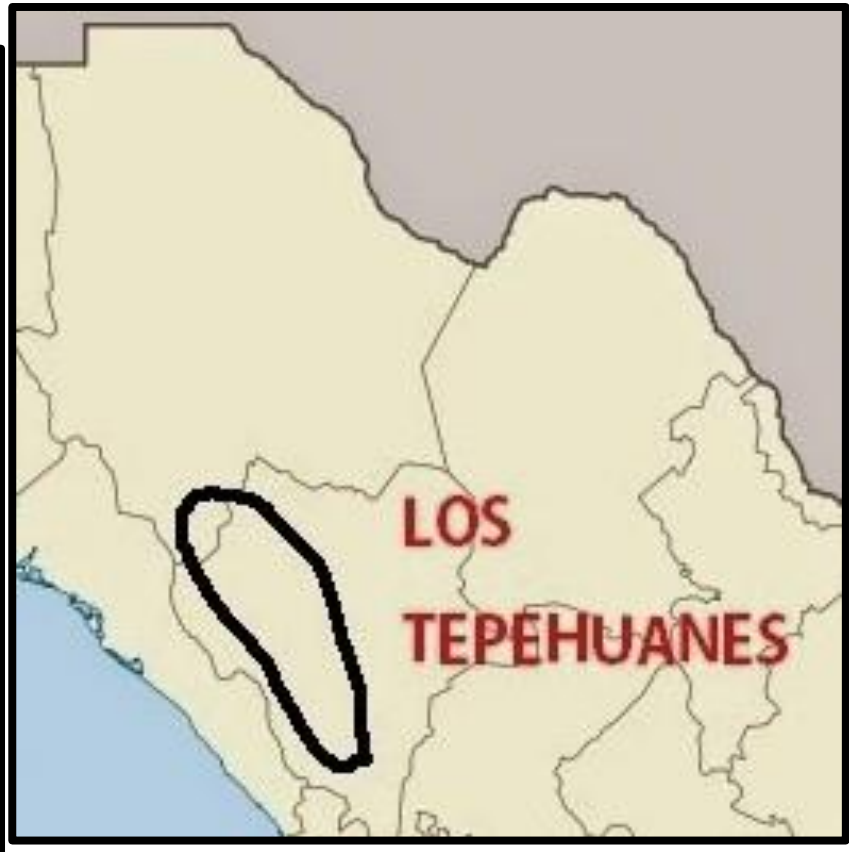
Source: William B. Griffen, "Indian Assimilation in the Franciscan Area of Nueva Vizcaya." Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona Number 33 (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1979).

The Tepehuanes

The **Tepehuanes** – the people of the mountains – **occupied an extensive area of the Sierra Madre Mountains from northern Jalisco, through present-day Durango, and northward to southern Chihuahua**. The first Jesuits, bearing gifts of seeds, tools, clothing and livestock, went to work among the Tepehuanes in 1596. Between 1596 and 1616, eight Jesuit priests had converted the majority of the Tepehuanes.

However, epidemics struck the Tepehuanes population in 1594, 1601-02, 1606-07, and 1612-1615, The epidemics were among the catalysts that led to the Revolt of 1616-1619. The revolt was crushed by the Spaniards, but other revolts followed.

In 2010, nearly all of 8,399 Tepehuanes of the North lived in Chihuahua, while most of the 26,453 Tepehuanes of the South lived in Durango. Another 3,040 Tepehuanes were spread around the country, with most of them (1,972 or 65%) living in Nayarit.

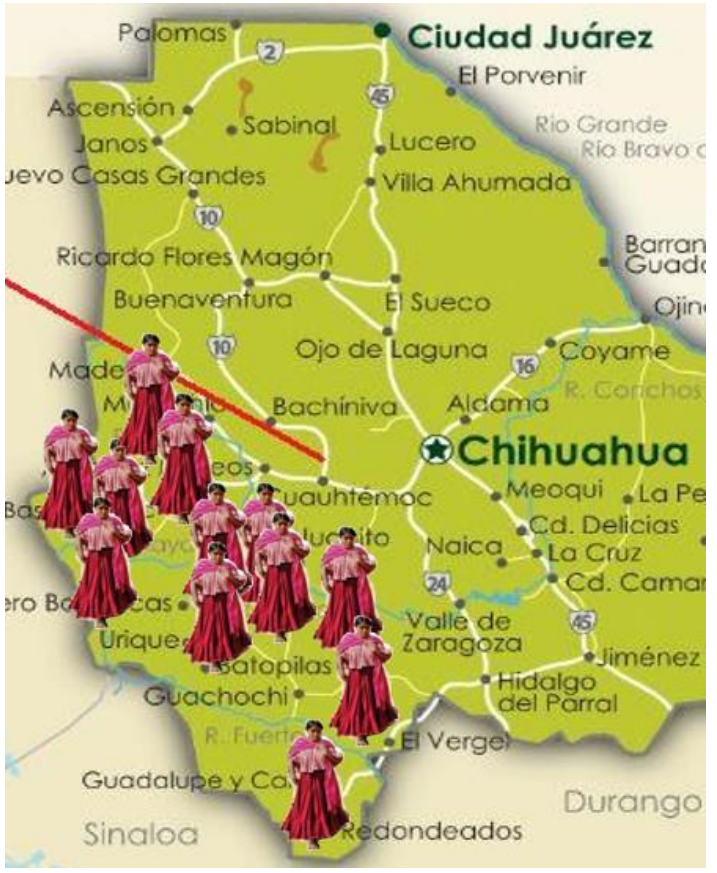


Sources: Susan M. Deeds, "Indigenous Rebellions on the Northern Mexican Mission
Frontier: From First-Generation to Later Colonial Responses" (1998); Historia
Cultural, "Pueblos Los Tepehuanes." Online: http://www.historiacultural.com/2015/02/pueblo-los-tepehuanes.html

The Tarahumara

The Tarahumara Indians of Chihuahua originally occupied more than 28,000 square miles of mountainous terrain, an area that is larger than West Virginia. Occupying an extensive stretch of the Sierra Madre Mountains, the Tarahumara Indians were ranchería people who planted corn along the ridges of hills and in valleys.

The Tarahumara received their first visit from a Jesuit missionary in 1607. But the ranchería settlement pattern of both the Tepehuanes and Tarahumara represented a serious obstacle to the efforts of the missionaries who sought to concentrate them into compact communities close to the missions. The Tarahumara participated in several rebellions and eventually retreated to less accessible canyons and valleys in the Sierra Tarahumara.



Today, the Tarahumara are a people whose rich spiritual ideology and strong cultural identity have persevered despite the intrusion of foreign customs. In the 2010 census, **85,316 of Mexico's 89,503 Tarahumara speakers (95.3%) lived in Chihuahua.**

The Establishment of Nueva Vizcaya

For most of the colonial period, Chihuahua was part of the **Spanish Province of Nueva Vizcaya.** From 1563 to 1565, Francisco de Ibarra traveled through **Nueva Vizcaya**, constructing settlements of a permanent nature. **But the silver industry would soon become the main driver of Spanish settlement.**

Originally, **Nueva Vizcaya** included Sinaloa, Sonora, Durango and Chihuahua. However, Sinaloa and Sonora became a separate province in 1733. After that, **Nueva Vizcaya consisted primarily of Chihuahua and Durango.**

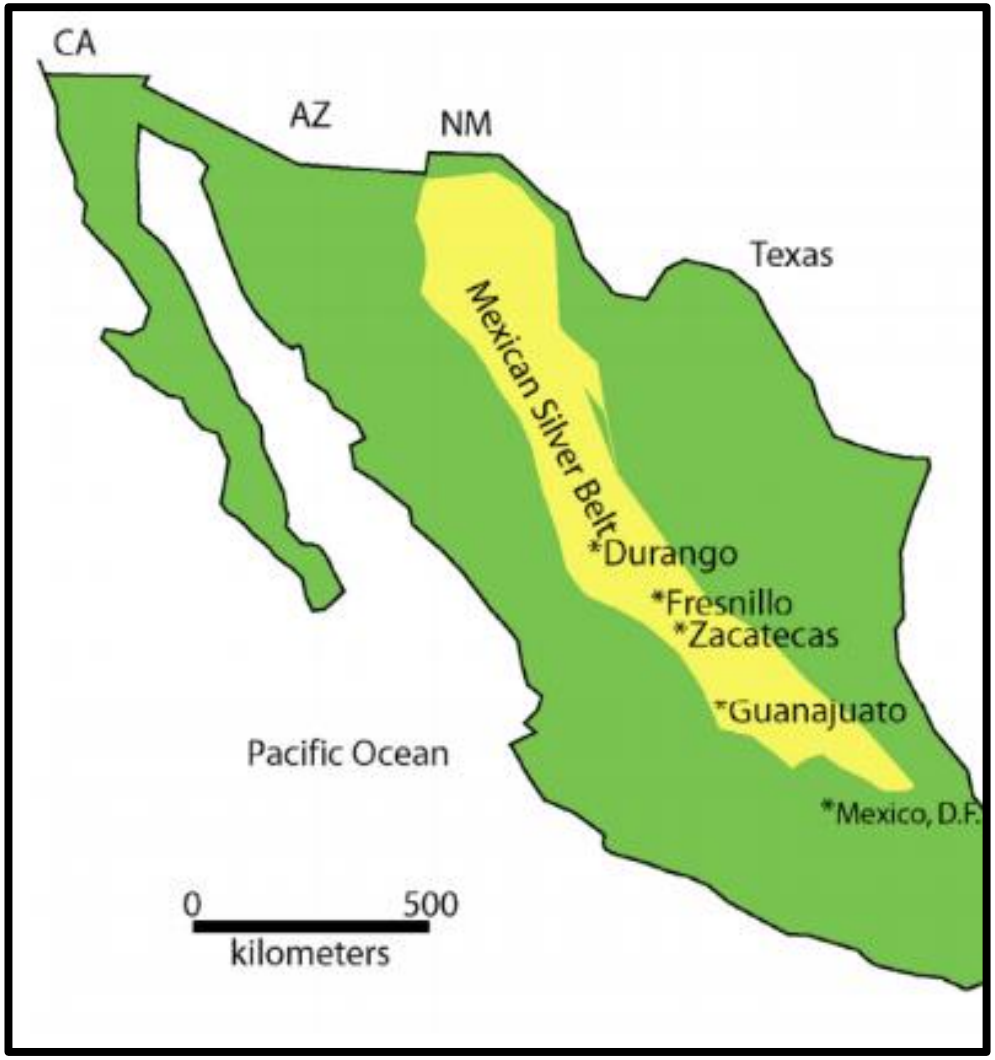
Map Source: Peter Gerhard, "The North Frontier of New Spain" (1982).

Mexico's Silver Belt Runs Through Guanajuato

Today, Mexico is the world's leading producer of silver with 21% of global production, followed by Peru (15%), China (12%) and Australia and Russia (each 6%).

Mexico's "La Faja de Plata" (The Silver Belt) runs 1,000 km from NW of Mexico City to Chihuahua and is the **most prolific mining district in the world,** with a historical production of more than 10,000 million ounces of silver (311,000 tons).

Many of the major mines now operating in the Silver Belt include Guanajuato, Zacatecas, Fresnillo, **Santa Eulalia, Parral, Santa Barbara and San Francisco del Oro,** the latter four in Chihuahua.



Source: University of Texas at Dallas, "Colonial Silver- Potosi (Bolivia) and Guanajuato (Mexico)."

Establishment of Chihuahua's Silver Industry

In 1567, the discovery of silver in Conchos territory made **Santa Barbara** into a wealthy frontier town of slavers, ranchers, miners, adventurers, and priests. By the 1570s, cattle were introduced, and wheat was planted in the chain of settlements extending from Durango to **San Bartolomé** (founded in 1569, now known as Valle de Allende). The earliest mining settlements of Chihuahua are shown in the following table.

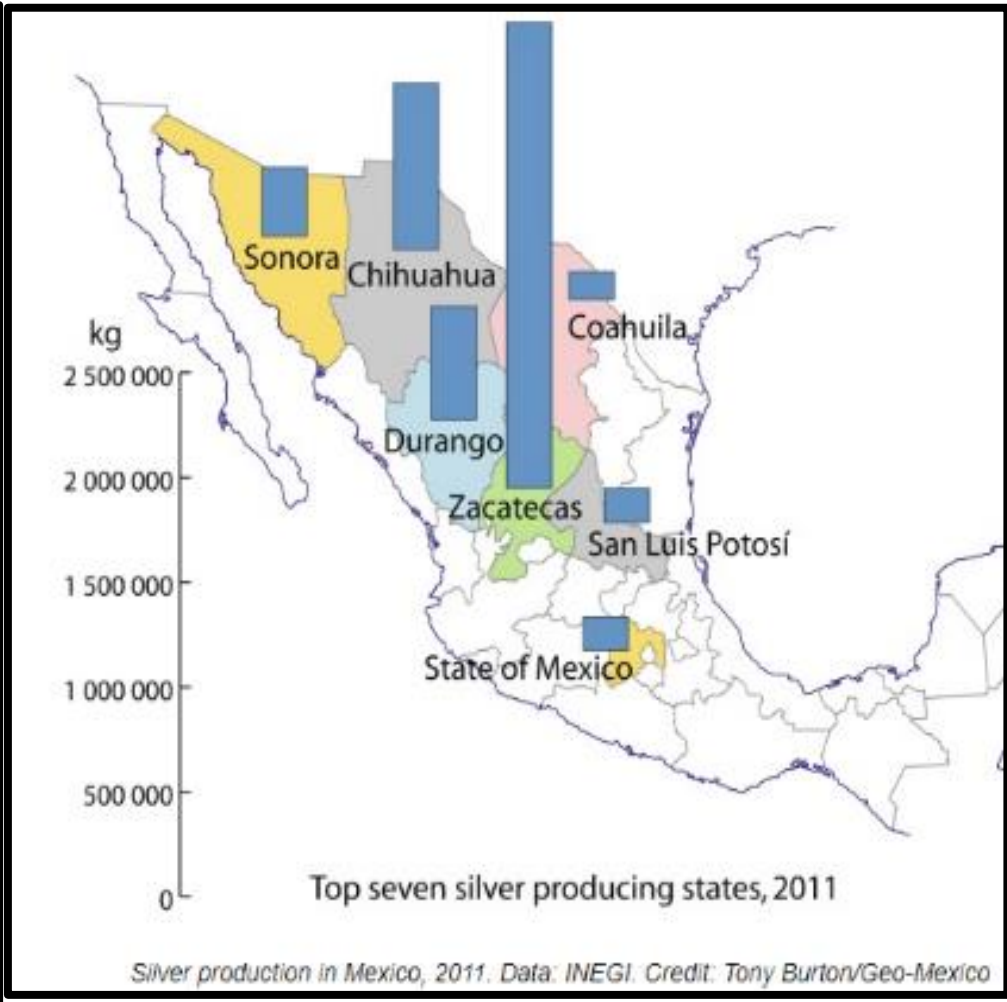
Centro Minero	Nombre Actual	Año de fundación
1.- Santa Bárbara	Santa Bárbara	1567
2.-San Bartolomé	Allende	1574
3.- San José del Parral	Hidalgo del Parral	1631
4.-San Francisco del Oro	San Francisco del Oro	1650
5.-Santa Rosa de Lima de Cusihuiriachi	Cusihuiriachi	1687
6.-Santa Eulalia de Mérida	Aquiles Serdán	1707-1708
7.-San Francisco de Cuéllar	Chihuahua	1709
8.- Satevó	Satevó	1704

Source: Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Cultura y Deporte del Estado de Chihuahua, "Descubriendo Chihuahua a Través de su Historia" (2014).

Parral and the Silver Industry

In 1631, silver was discovered in Hidalgo de Parral (southern Chihuahua). Peter Gerhard noted "the Parral bonanza of 1631 brought a horde of rowdy elements to a frontier until then little exploited, initiating a period of hostilities with the desert tribes of the north that was to continue, with few interruptions and frequent crescendos of violence, for two centuries and more." By 1635, the population of Parral reached 1,000 españoles and 4,000 Indians and Afro-Mexican slaves.

Today, Zacatecas is Mexico's leading silver producing state (46.5% of total), well ahead of **Chihuahua (16.6%),** Durango (11.3%) and Sonora (6.9%). At the present time, the main silver mining municipality in Chihuahua is **Santa Bárbara** (3% of the national total).



Silver production in Mexico, 2011. Data: INEGI. Credit: Tony Burton/Geo-Mexico

Source: Peter Gerhard, "The North Frontier of New Spain" (Princeton University Press: 1982); Map Source: "The Geography of Silver Mining in Mexico." Online: http://geo-mexico.com/?tag=mining.

The Mission System of Chihuahua

The Spanish colonial missions — together with garrisons and mining towns — were established by the Jesuit and Franciscan orders as **vehicles for spreading Spanish culture and religion (Catholicism).** Many indigenous peoples were recruited or forced to work the mission lands.

Sited on rivers in rural, agriculturally rich areas of Chihuahua, the adobe-and-wood religious and farming settlements reached their peak in the eighteenth century.

Unfortunately, **the concentration of so many Indians facilitated the spread of disease among a population that had no immunity to the European diseases.** Epidemics were frequent occurrences and reduced many local populations.

The expulsion of the Jesuits in 1767 precipitated the abandonment of many of the missions, while natural changes in the course of some rivers forced communities to move with them.

Sources: Clara Bargellini, "Misiones y Presidios de Chihuahua" (Gobierno del Estado de Chihuahua, Mexico, 1997); "Chihuahua Missions." Online: https://www.wmf.org/project/chihuahua-missions.

The Earliest Missions of Chihuahua

The first Spanish mission in Chihuahua was established in 1565 at Santa Bárbara. By 1673, twenty missions had been established.

Centros de población: Las Misiones			
Misión	Municipio Actual	Orden religiosa	Fundación
1. Santa Bárbara	Santa Bárbara	franciscana	1565
2. San Bartolomé	Valle de Allende	Franciscana	1570
3. San Francisco de Conchos	San Francisco de Conchos	Franciscana	1604
4. San Pablo Tepehuanes	Balleza	Jesuita	1611
5. Atotonilco	López	Franciscana	1619
6. Chínipas	Chínipas	Jesuita	1626
7. Guazápares	Guazapares	Jesuita	1626
8. San José del Parral	Hidalgo del Parral	Franciscana	1632
9. San Francisco de Borja	San Francisco de Borja	Jesuita	1639
10. Zaragoza	Valle de Zaragoza	Jesuita	1639
11. Satevó	Satevó	Jesuita	1640
12. S.P. Conchos	Rosales	Franciscana	1649
13. Santa Isabel	Santa Isabel	Franciscana	1650
14. Huejotitán	Huejotitán	Jesuita	1651
15. Chuvíscar	Chihuahua	Franciscana	1653
16. Bachíniva	Bachíniva	Jesuita	1660
17. Paso del Norte	Juárez	Franciscana	1662
18. Casas Grandes	Casas Grandes	Franciscana	1662
19. Namiquipa	Namiquipa	Jesuita	1663
20. San Bernabé	Cusihuiriachi	Jesuita	1673

Source: Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Cultura y Deporte del Estado de Chihuahua, “Descubriendo Chihuahua a Través de su Historia” (2014).

The Mission System of Chihuahua

By 1752, 53 Spanish missions had been established in Chihuahua: 19 by the Franciscans, the rest by the Jesuits. But in 1767, the Jesuits were expelled from Mexico.

Centros de población: Las Misiones			
Misión	Municipio Actual	Orden religiosa	Fundación
21. Santa Ana	Satevó	Jesuita	1674
22. Tutuaca	Belisario Domínguez	Jesuita	1675
23. Tomochi	Guerrero	Jesuita	1675
24. Carichí	Carichí	Jesuita	1675
25. San Lorenzo	Buenaventura	Jesuita	1676
26. Papigochi	Guerrero	Jesuita	1676
27. Nonoava	Nonoava	Jesuita	1676
28. Sisoguichi	Bocoyna	Jesuita	1676
29. Temósachi	Temósachi	Jesuita	1676
30. Yepómera	Temósachi	Jesuita	1676
31. Coyachi	Cusihuiriachi	Jesuita	1676
32. Yepachi	Temósachi	Jesuita	1677
33. Matachí	Matachí	Jesuita	1677
34. Témoris	Guazapares	Jesuita	1677
35. Loreto	Batopilas	Jesuita	1677
36. Santo Tomás	Guerrero	Jesuita	1677
37. Cocomorachi	Temósachi	Jesuita	1678
38. Presidio del Norte	Ojinaga	Franciscana	1683
39. Carretas	Gran Morelos	Franciscana	1685
40. Moris	Moris	Jesuita	1690
41. San Francisco	Chihuahua	Franciscana	1697
42. San Cristóbal de Nombre de Dios	Chihuahua	Franciscana	1697
43. Bocoyna	Bocoyna	Jesuita	1702
44. Tubares	Urique	Jesuita	1707
45. Guadalupe	Guadalupe y Calvo	Jesuita	1708
46. Santa Ana de Chinarras	Aldama	Jesuita	1717
47. Julimes	Julimes	Franciscana	1718
48. Janos	Janos	Franciscana	1718
49. Julimes	Julimes	Franciscana	1718
50. Janos	Janos	Franciscana	1718
51. Batopilillas	Uruachi	Jesuita	1719
52. Arisiachi	Guerrero	Jesuita	1740
53. Coyame	Coyame	Franciscana	1752

Source: Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Cultura y Deporte del Estado de Chihuahua, “Descubriendo Chihuahua a Través de su Historia” (2014).

The Great Northern Revolt (1680s)

Between 1666 and 1680, the Salineros, Conchos, Tobosos and Tarahumaras of Chihuahua all rose in rebellion following several droughts, famines and epidemics. The indigenous people of New Mexico also witnessed drought and crop failure with increasing frequency. The result of these events would be **The Great Northern Revolt**.

In 1680, the Pueblos rebelled against the Spaniards in New Mexico. The Spaniards were pushed out of New Mexico down the Rio Grande to present-day El Paso. However, in 1684, as they nursed their wounds in El Paso, more rebellions popped up across much of Chihuahua.

From Casas Grandes to El Paso, between 1688 and 1696, revolts against the Spaniards took place among the Conchos, Janos, Jocomes, Sumas, Chinarras, Mansos, Tarahumaras, Pueblos and some Apaches. Eventually effective resistance in both Chihuahua, Sonora and New Mexico was ended after many deaths.

The revolts of the late Seventeenth Century led the Spaniards to design a more mobile force that could wage war against swift, fast-moving Indian raiders.

Source: William B. Griffen, “Indian Assimilation in the Franciscan Area of Nueva Vizcaya: Anthropological Papers of the University of Arizona Number 33” (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1979).

The Apache Nations

Historian Cynthia Radding referred to the Apaches as **"diverse bands of hunter-gatherers** related linguistically to the Athapaskan speakers of Alaska and western Canada." The Apaches were composed of six regional groups:

1. *The **Western Apaches (Coyotero)** of eastern Arizona*
2. *the **Chiricahua** of southwestern New Mexico, southeastern Arizona, Chihuahua and Sonora;*
3. *the **Mescalero** of southern New Mexico*
4. *the **Jicarilla** of Colorado, northern New Mexico and northwestern Texas*
5. *the **Lipan** Apache of New Mexico and Texas*
6. *the **Kiowa** Apache of Colorado, Oklahoma, and Texas*

Sources: Cynthia Radding, "The Colonial Pact and Changing Ethnic Frontiers in Highland Sonora, 1740-1840," in Donna J. Guy and Thomas E. Sheridan (eds.), *Contested Ground: Comparative Frontiers on the Northern and Southern Edges of the Spanish Empire,* pp. 52-66. (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1998)

Colonial Presidios of Chihuahua

By the 1750s, the Chiricahua Apache began raiding along the mountainous frontier regions of both Sonora and Chihuahua. The pressure of constant warfare waged against the Apaches led the Spanish military to **adopt a policy of maintaining armed garrisons of paid soldiers (presidios) in the problem areas**.

The Apaches did not have a central political structure and each bank functioned as a separate unit. The Spaniards had to deal with each group separately.

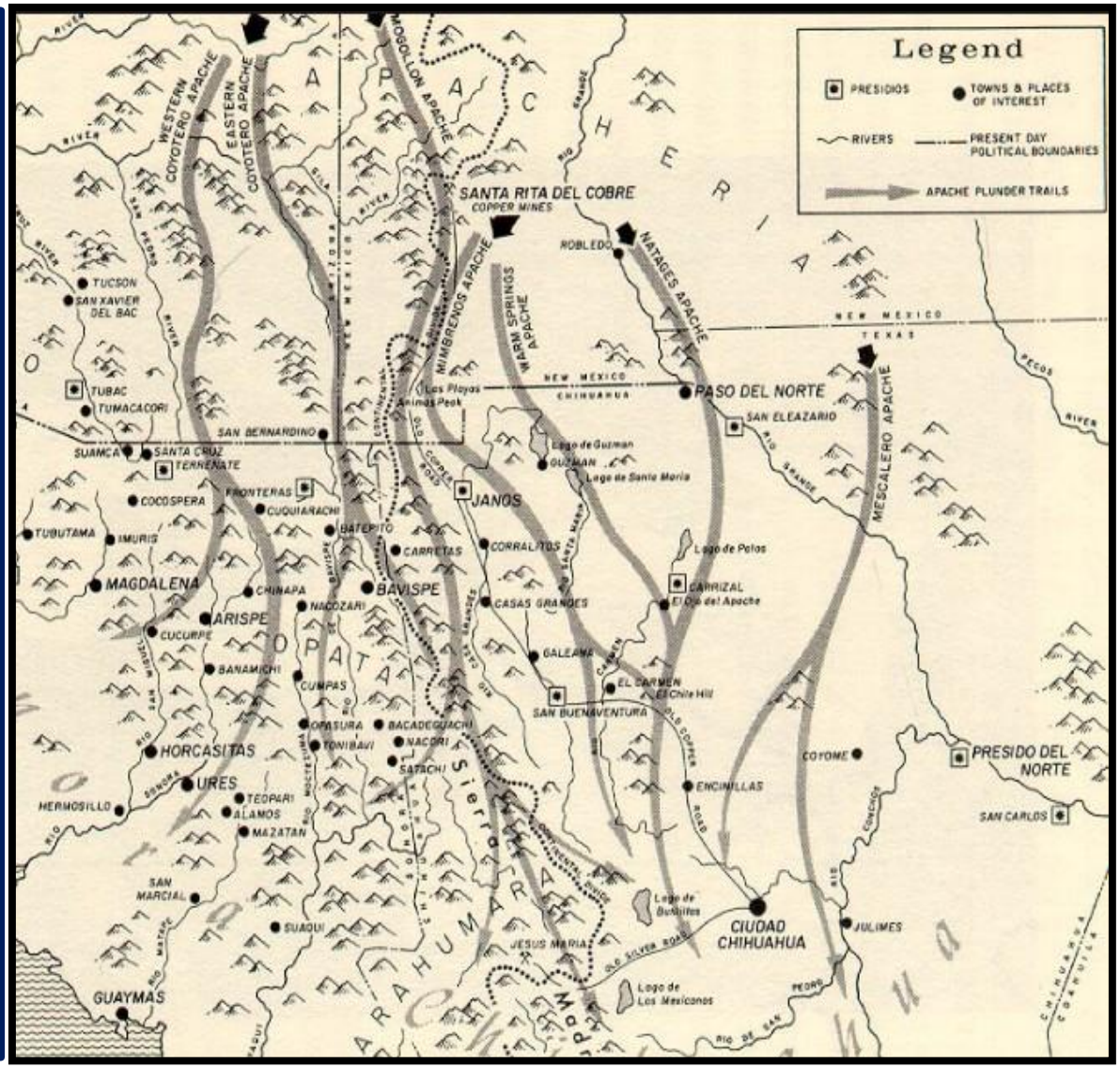
Presidios durante la colonización			
	Presidio	Nombre Actual	Año de fundación
1.	Paso del Río del Norte	Juárez	1683
2.	San Francisco de Conchos	San Francisco de Conchos	1685
3.	Casas Grandes	Casas Grandes	1686
4.	Janos	Janos	1691
5.	Santa Catalina	Namiquipa	1730
6.	Mapimí	Mapimí	1730
7.	Guajoquilla	Jiménez	1751
8.	Junta de los Ríos	Ojinaga	1751
9.	El Carrizal	Ahumada	1758
10.	San Elizario	El Paso, Texas	1772
11.	San Carlos	Manuel Benavides	1772
12.	San Pablo	Meoqui	1772
13.	San Buenaventura	Buenaventura	1776
14.	Chihuahua	Chihuahua	1776
15.	Ancón de Carros	Saucillo	1776
16.	Julimes	Julimes	1776
17.	Chorreras	Aldama	1776

Source: Secretaría de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, Cultura y Deporte del Estado de Chihuahua, “Descubriendo Chihuahua a Través de su Historia” (2014).

A State of Constant Warfare

The Apaches became highly skilled horsemen whose mobility helped them elude presidio troops. But, they had to prey on Spanish settlements in Sonora, Chihuahua and Coahuila to acquire more horses.

In 1786, the Spaniards launched their own peace initiative with the Apaches and, by 1790, most of the Apache bands had made peace with the Spanish. Relative peace between the Apaches and the Spaniards and the Mexicans would endure until 1831. After that date, the Apaches would periodically go to war against both the U.S. and Mexico.



Sources: Robert Mario Salmon, "Indian Revolts in Northern New Spain: A Synthesis of Resistance (1680-1786)." Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1991; World Press, "La Apachería en el Siglo XVII" (World Press). Online: https://apacheria.es/la-apacheria-en-el-siglo-xvii/; From the Texas State Historical Association (TSHA),from The University of Virginia; Images included in accordance with Title 17 U.S.C. Section 107.

Missions as a Place of Refuge

Over time, the Apache raids in Chihuahua, Coahuila, Texas and Nuevo León **displaced many of the nomadic hunter-gatherer groups.** In addition, epidemic diseases depleted the indigenous populations, making them even more vulnerable to their highly-mobile Apache enemy.

Eventually, the numerous Spanish missions in the region would provide **a refuge for the displaced and declining Indian populations**. Each mission village usually became home to dozens of indigenous groups who came from the surrounding areas. The appeal of the mission system to these hunter-gatherers included:

1. The irrigation system promised a more stable supply of food than they normally enjoyed.
2. The presidio – frequently located close to a mission -- offered much greater protection to the refugees from the Apaches.
3. The missionaries and their lay helpers instructed the natives in the Catholic faith and in the elements of Spanish peasant society. The Indians learned various trades, including carpentry, masonry, blacksmithing, and weaving; they also did a great deal of agricultural work.

In the mission system, local Indians mixed with displaced groups from Coahuila, Chihuahua and Texas. **This displacement created an unusual ethnic mix that led to the assimilation of many of the Northern Mexican Indians.**

The Comanche-Mexico Wars (1821-1870)

The Comanche–Mexico Wars was a series of conflicts from 1821 until 1870 which consisted of large-scale raids from Texas into northern Mexico by Comanches and their Kiowa and Kiowa Apache allies which left thousands of people dead. T. R. Fehrenbach, the author of Comanches: The Destruction of a People, writes that "a long terror descended over the entire frontier, because Spanish organization and institutions were totally unable to cope with war parties of long-striking, swiftly moving Comanches." The Comanche raids were sparked by the declining military capability of Mexico in the turbulent years after it gained independence in 1821, plus a large and growing market in the United States for stolen Mexican horses and cattle.

In 1834, Mexico signed its third peace treaty with the Comanches of Texas. However, almost immediately Mexico violated the peace treaty and the Comanches resumed their raids in Chihuahua. In the following year, Sonora, Chihuahua and Durango reestablished bounties for Comanche scalps. Between 1848 and 1853, Mexico filed 366 separate claims for Comanche and Apache raids originating from north of the American border. In the 1840s, Comanche raids became larger, more deadly, and penetrated deeply into Mexico. From September 1840 until March 1841, six Comanche armies numbering between two hundred and eight hundred warriors invaded northern Mexico. Like the Apaches, the Comanches did not have a central leadership.

Chihuahua in the 1895 Census

In the first national Mexican census of 1895, Chihuahua had 265,546 citizens, of which 19,327 spoke indigenous languages and represented 7.3% of the total population. As noted in the table below, the Tarahumar language was spoken by 94% of Chihuahua's indigenous language speakers.

Indigenous Languages Spoken in the State of Chihuahua: 1895 Census		
Indigenous Language	**Population in 1895**	**% of all Indigenous Speakers**
Tarahumara	18,174	94.0%
Náhuatl	355	1.8%
Pima	324	1.7%
Tepehuanes	286	1.5%
Other Languages	188	1.0%
Total Indigenous Speakers	19,327	100.0%

Source: Dirección General de Estadística, Censo General de la Republica Mexicana. 1895: Resumen General. Mexico: Ministerio de Fomento, 1899, pp. 90-107.

Chihuahua's Racial Classifications in the 1921 Census

Mexico's 1921 census asked people to categorize themselves by three primary categories: Pure Indigenous, Indigenous Mixed with White, and White. Although the persons of **"indígena pura"** heritage represented 12.8% of Chihuahua's state population in 1921, the actual number of people speaking indigenous languages amounted to 25,772 persons five years of age or more, or 6.4% of the total population. The two most commonly spoken languages in 1921 were the Tarahumara (23,585) and Tepehuán (1,741).

The 1921 Mexican Census: Racial Classifications in Chihuahua

Racial Classification	No. of Persons	% of Total State Population
Indígena Pura	51,228	12.76%
Indígena Mezclada con Blanca	201,182	50.09%
Blanca	145,926	36.33%
Question Ignored or Other Classifications	3,286	0.82%
Total Population	401,622	100%
Speakers of Indigenous Languages	25,772	6.4%

Sources: Departamento de la Estadística Nacional, Annuario de 1930: Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Tacubaya, Distrito Federal, 1932), pp. 48-50; Departamento de la Estadistica Nacional, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, "Censos General de Habitantes: 30 de Noviembre de 1921, Estado de Chihuahua," (Mexico, Distrito Federal: Talleres Graficos de la Nación, 1926), pp. 20, 24.

Comparing Chihuahua to Other States: 1921 Census

The states of Chihuahua and its western neighbor Sonora had a larger than average percent of "Blanca" residents in 1921 than other northern Mexican states. They also had much smaller populations of "pure indigenous" people than their neighbors and much of the rest of Mexico.

State	Indígena Pura (% of Total State Population)	Indígena Mezclada con Blanca (% of State Population)	Blanca (% of State Population)	Extranjeros sin distinción de razas (% of State Population)
Sonora	13.78%	40.38%	41.85%	2.05%
Chihuahua	12.76%	50.09%	36.33%	0.82%
Baja California	7.72%	72.50%	0.35%	19.33%
Sinaloa	0.93%	98.30%	0.19%	0.58%
Durango	9.90%	89.10%	0.01%	0.15%
The Mexican Republic	29.16%	59.33%	9.80%	0.71%

Classifications: Indígena Pura (Pure Indigenous Origins); Indígena Mezclada con Blanca (Indigenous Mixed with White); Blanca (White); Extranjeros sin distinction de razas (Foreigners without racial distinction) One percent of the population of the Republic of Mexico chose a fifth option: "Cualquiera otra o que se ignora la raza" (persons who chose to ignore the question or "other."

Sources: Departamento de la Estadística Nacional, Annuario de 1930: Estados Unidos Mexicanos (Tacubaya, Distrito Federal, 1932), pp. 48-50; Departamento de la Estadistica Nacional, Estados Unidos Mexicanos, "Censos General de Habitantes: 30 de Noviembre de 1921, Estado de Chihuahua," (Mexico, Distrito Federal: Talleres Graficos de la Nación, 1926), pp. 20, 24.

Monolingualism in Chihuahua (1930-2010)

From 1930 to 2010, the monolingual rate of Chihuahua's indigenous speaking population dropped from nearly one-half (47.7%) to 12.4%. While Chihuahua's indigenous speaking population increased numerically (not in percentage), monolingual speakers numbered less than 15,000 in every census except 1980.

Chihuahua – The Population of Monolingual Indigenous Language Speakers (1930-2010)			
Year	Speakers of Indigenous Languages Who Are Monolingual (1)	Speakers of Indigenous Languages in Chihuahua (1)	Monolingual Speakers of Indigenous Languages as a Percentage of all Indigenous Speakers (%)
1930	13,876	29,111	47.7%
1940	12,304	26,630	46.2%
1950	9,707	22,448	43.2%
1960	10,973	41,280	26.6%
1970	8,662	26,309	32.9%
1980	15,258	68,504	22.3%
1990	10,628	61,504	17.3%
2000	14,047	84,086	16.7%
2010 (1)	13,566	109,378	12.4%

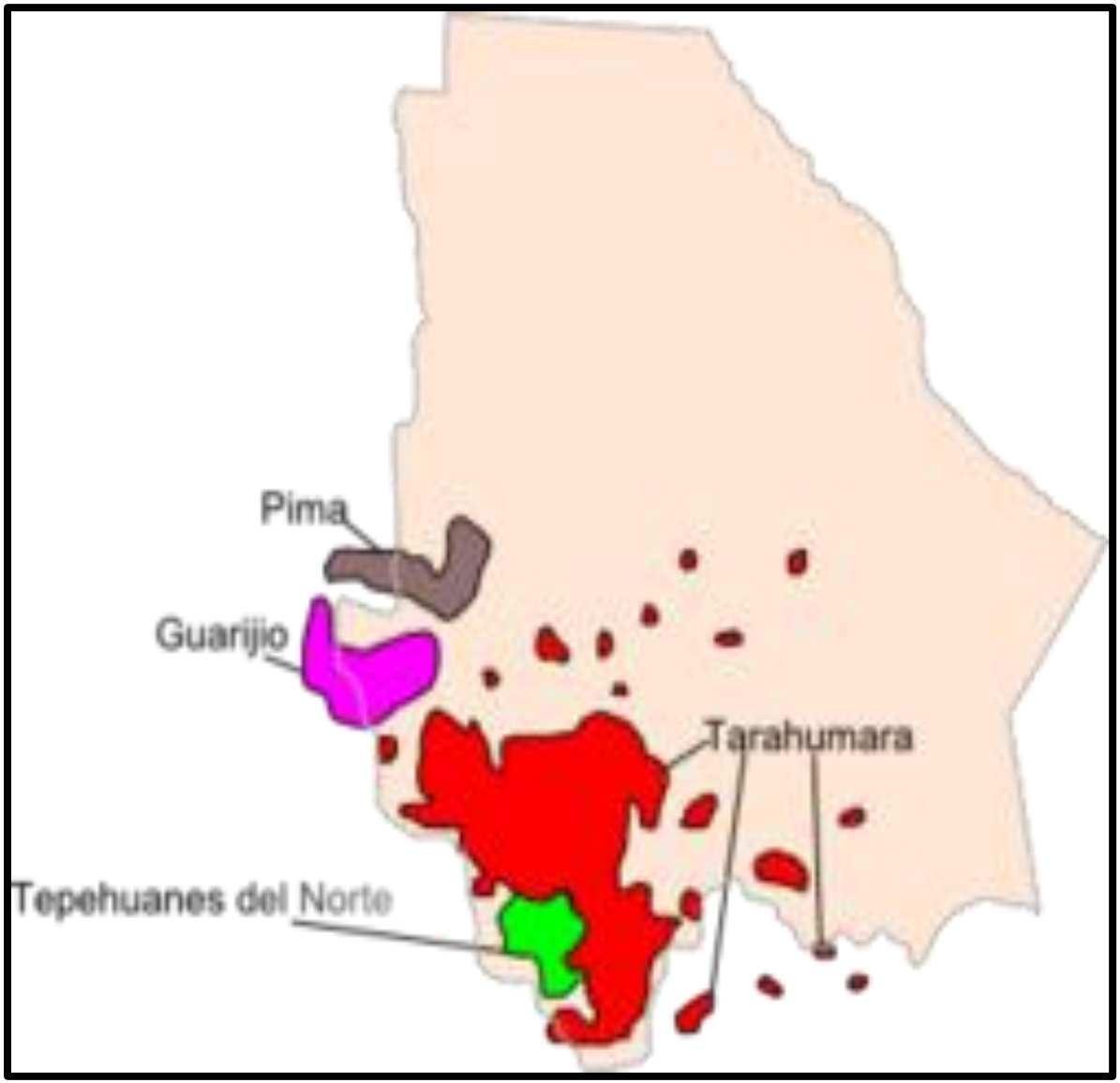
(1) From 1930 to 2000, indigenous speakers are persons five years of age and more. For 2010, indigenous speakers are persons three years of age and more.

Sources: INEGI. Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010: Tabulados del Cuestionario Básico: Población de 3 Años y Más por Entidad Federativa, Sexo y Grupos Quinquenales de Edad Según Condición de Habla Indígena y Condición de Habla Española; INEGI, La Población Hablante de Lengua Indígena de Chihuahua. XII Censo General de Población y Vivienda 2000. Aguascalientes, Aguascalientes, 2004, p. 24., pp. 19, 24.

Indigenous Chihuahua Today

Today, the Indigenous Chihuahua population Is located primarily in the southern And southwestern portions of the state.

In 2010, 109,378 persons 3 years of age and older spoke indigenous languages. Of these, 78% spoke Tarahumara and 8% spoke the Tepehuanes language.



Map Source: Diego Castro, “Mapa de Distribución de Grupos Etnicos en Chihuahua 2005” (Jan. 28, 2007).

Indigenous Chihuahua in 2010

In 2010, Chihuahua had a 3,116,723 inhabitants three years of age and older, of which 109,378 — or 3.5% of the population — were speakers of indigenous languages. But 8.5% of the population considered themselves to be indigenous by cultural background.

The 2010 Census: Indigenous Languages Spoken in Chihuahua		
Indigenous Language	**Population 3 Years and Older Who Speak an Indigenous Language**	**Percent of all Indigenous Speakers**
Tarahumara	85,316	78.0%
Tepehuano de Chihuahua (Tepehuano del Norte)	8,396	7.7%
Unspecified Indigenous Language	5,986	5.5%
Mixteco	2,500	2.3%
Náhuatl	1,286	1.2%
Zapoteco	894	0.8%
Guarijío	887	0.8%
Chinanteco	839	0.8%
Mazahua	803	0.7%
Total	109,378	100.0%

Source: INEGI. Censo de Población y Vivienda 2010: Tabulados del Cuestionario Básico: Población de 3 Años y Más Que Habla Lengua Indígena por Entidad Federativa y Lengua.

Chihuahua's Most Indigenous Municipios in 2010

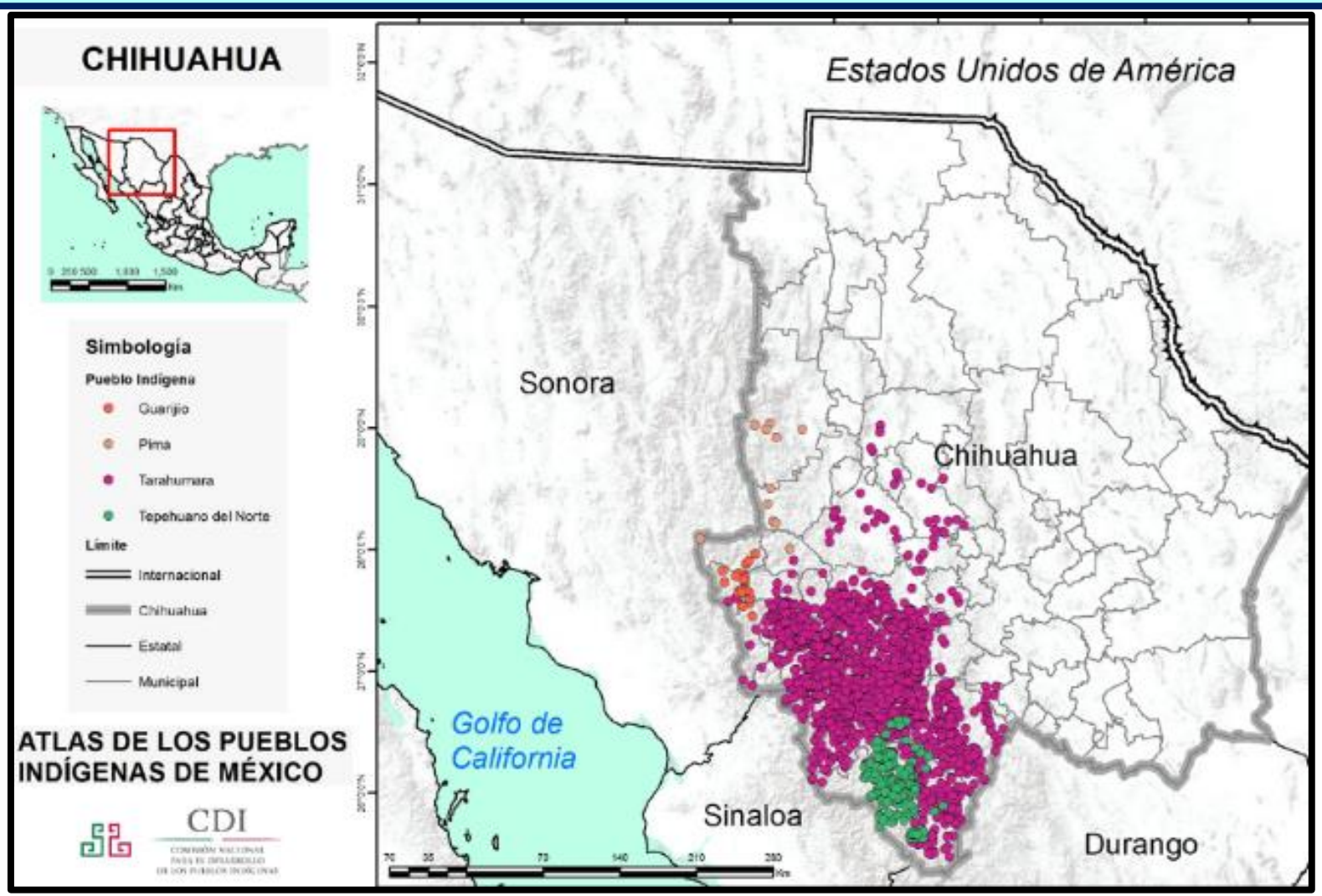
Two Chihuahua municipios — Guachochi and Guadalupe y Calvo — contained nearly 39% of Chihuahua's indigenous speaking population in 2010. Tarahumara and Tepehuanes are among the few surviving indigenous languages from Chihuahua's pre-Hispanic past.

Chihuahua's Most Indigenous Municipios (2010 Census)						
Municipio	**Population of Persons 3 Years of Age and More Who Speak an Indigenous Language**	**% of Total Indigenous Population in the State**	**Most Spoken Language in the Municipio**	**%**	**Second Most Spoken Language in the Municipio**	**%**
Guachochi	27,967	25.6%	Tarahumara	98.3%	Tepehuano	0.6%
Guadalupe y Calvo	14,341	13.1%	Tepehuano	55.3%	Tarahumara	42.5%
Urique	9,060	8.3%	Tarahumara	97.1%	Various	2.9%
Balleza	7,856	7.2%	Tarahumara	97.5%	Tepehuano	0.3%
Juárez	6,680	6.1%	Tarahumara	12.7%	Náhuatl	10.0%
Chihuahua	6,615	6.0%	Tarahumara	66.6%	Náhuatl	2.9%
Batopilas	6,462	5.9%	Tarahumara	99.2%	Various	0.8%
Bocoyna	5,773	5.3%	Tarahumara	98.6%	Various	1.4%
Carichí	4,240	3.9%	Tarahumara	99.7%	Various	0.3%
State of Chihuahua	**109,378**	**100.0%**	**Tarahumara**	**78.0%**	**Tepehuano**	**7.7%**

Source: INALI, 2010 Censo: Población de 3 Años y Más por Entidad y Municipio Según Habla Indígena y Lengua.

Chihuahua's Most Indigenous Pueblos in 2015

The following map from INALI shows the location of the Guarijio, Pima, Tarahumara and Tepehuanes pueblos in Chihuahua as of 2015.



Source: Atlas de Los Pueblos Indígenas de México; Instituto Nacional de los Pueblos Indígenas (INALI), "Chihuahua: Distribución por Entidad Federativa: Pueblos Indígenas con Mayor Presencia en la Entidad" (2018).