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**SOME CONSIDERATIONS ON THE RELEVANCE AND FEASIBILITY OF  
CREATING A POPULATION REGISTER IN MEXICO**

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## Abstract

The Civil Registration system in Mexico was established, as in most of the countries in Latin America, during the nineteenth century. It is an Institution ruled by special legislation. The State brought it into being in order to record vital facts such as births, marriages and deaths. Before the implementation of the Civil Registration, in Western civilization, the Church recorded the inscription of vital events. The secularization of this task meant a very important step towards getting information for demographically oriented dynamics studies.

Since the nineteenth century on, almost every country has a system that allows them to gather information pertaining to this nature. Owing to the implementation of the Civil Registration, and since the beginning of the twentieth century, the industrialized countries have managed to have almost total coverage of data, and at present this source is of great relevance. The new approach concerning devices for the recording of demographical information and for the planning of economical and social data is the design and the coming into existence of the "Population Registry". The facts and figures that can be obtained by the use of this new system allow scholars to study population, focusing on more dynamical perspectives such as Event History Analysis. Just as it happened when the Civil Registrations were put into practice, the first countries to establish such Population Registries in Northern Europe were The Netherlands, Denmark and Belgium. Taking into consideration the systems that have been developed by the Population Registry in the aforesaid countries, together with the approach followed by the United Nations, the purpose of this paper is to analyze the feasibility and relevance of the establishment of a similar system in Mexico. It will include the description and discussion of some deficiencies encountered by our Civil Registry and some other information sources that could be part of such a proposed system, as well as the economical and social reality in our country that is so different from that of the European ones.

## INTRODUCTION

Mexico is a country characterized by its attempts to incorporate measures to facilitate the government's task into its legislation, and to implement the latter, either because of its own needs or as an adaptation of measures effected in other countries. These measures do not always correspond to the situation in Mexico, although some of them are undoubtedly regarded as a sign of progress for society, with every endeavor being made to incorporate them as quickly as possible. Thus, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, on July 28, 1859, Benito Juárez's liberal government enacted the *Law on the Marital Status of Persons (Ley Sobre el Estado Civil de las Personas)* that served as the basis for the Civil Register in Mexico.<sup>1</sup> By way of a point of reference, Table 1 shows the date when various Latin American countries passed laws providing for the compulsory civil registration of births, deaths and stillbirths.

As one can see, only one country made the registration of vital events compulsory before Mexico, namely Peru, in 1852. Venezuela did so eleven years after Peru and four years after Mexico. The majority of Latin American countries (ten) made registration of these events compulsory during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Ecuador and Argentina did so in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the last to do so was Bolivia in 1940. In North America, although some provinces in Canada had

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<sup>1</sup> The first statute concerning the Civil Registry in the national sphere was the Organic Law of Civil Registry passed on 27 January 1857. However, since it infringed Article 5 of the Constitution, it was never enacted. This is why many researchers set 1857 as the date of the start of the Mexican Civil Registry (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1982, p. 23).

instituted civil registration since 1678, this practice was not extended to all its provinces until the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The situation in the United States was similar to that of Canada, except that it was not until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in 1900, that it acknowledged the existence of legislation throughout the nation. In other words, it instituted a type of legislation that would permit a common form of registration for all states.

In Mexico, one state outstripped all the others in establishing laws for the civil registration of vital events years. In 1828, the State of Oaxaca enacted and published the first Latin American Civil Code, based on the concept of the French Civil Code of 1806. In fact, legislation in Oaxaca on this matter was the origin of the civil registration of vital events in Mexico. This state was highly influenced not only by the liberal ideas that were gaining currency in Latin America, but also by those that had developed in Europe following the triumph of the French Revolution in 1789. Since one of the main postulates of this movement was the separation of Church and State, it is hardly surprising that it should have been a central aspect promoted by Mexican liberals as early as 1828, just twenty-two years after the enactment of the first civil code in the world. This bore fruit at a national level thirty years later with the aforementioned law, enacted in 1859 (Naciones Unidas, 1995, p.7).

In keeping with this tradition of incorporating measures from abroad, on August 20, 1980, the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* reported the institution, by presidential decree, of the State Office for the National Registration of Population

and Personal Identification (Dirección General del Registro Nacional de Población e Identificación Personal, Renapo), as part of the Ministry of the Interior. To register and identify all persons resident in the country, as well as Mexican citizens living abroad (Naciones Unidas, 1995, p. 9). This was the first step towards establishing a Population Register in the country. It led to an improvement of the Mexican Civil Registry because of the coordination that it encouraged between the Civil Registers in various states and the updating and harmonization of normative and organizational aspects, as well as the basic administration of Civil Registries. One of the achievements of this legislation was the creation of a single population reference number known as CURP (Clave Unica de Registro de Población) assigned by the Civil Registry from 1982 onwards to every child or adult who needed to register his or her birth and obtain a certificate for the first time. In 1992, further changes were made to the legislation to design a normative, operating framework to establish a National Population Registration System.<sup>2</sup> In August 2000, the functions of the State Office for the National Registration of Population and Personal Identification were expanded and specified with the explicit aim of consolidating a population register in Mexico (--<http://www.gobernación-gob.mx>—June 2001).

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<sup>2</sup> “On July 22, 1922, the *Diario Oficial de la Federación* published a series of major reforms to adjust the normative and operational framework of the National Population Register System. Some of the main provisions included the powers granted to the Ministry of the Interior, through the State Office for the National Population Register (Renapo), for the registration and accreditation of all residents in the country and Mexican citizens residing abroad. It also established the norms, methods and technical procedures of the National Population Register, and coordinated the methods for the identification and registration of offices in public federal administration.” (Naciones Unidas, 1995, p. 10).

Just as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when European Civil Registers were held as a model, nowadays, in the late 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Population Registers established in certain European countries are regarded as ideal information systems. Mexico is a clear example of this trend. The question is, therefore, whether it is possible to create a Population Register System in Mexico similar to those currently in use in European countries. In order to answer this question, I will first analyze what a Population Register is, including the purpose of creating such a system and its basic features. I shall then analyze these aspects for the case of Mexico. Finally, I shall make some recommendations for facilitating the implementation of a similar system in Mexico.

#### POPULATION REGISTER DEFINITION AND PURPOSES

According to Verhoef and Van de Kaa (1987, p. 633), the United Nations defines a Population Register "...as an individualized data system, that is, a mechanism of continuous recording and/or coordinated linkage of selected information pertaining to each member of the resident population of a country (United Nations, 1969). Hence, population registers are defined as registers that contain figures about every individual in a certain country or area." Therefore, a population register is a system that permits the identification and location of each and every inhabitant in a country. In other words, it is an inventory of its inhabitants that is continuously modified by births, deaths, marriages, divorces and

other vital events, as well as other characteristics such as occupation, change of residence or migratory movements, which provides an up-to-date record of the population's size, composition and dynamics.

A population register is different from a civil register in that a file is compiled for every individual resident in the country, which enables his or her life history to be reconstructed. These file records, or transfers from other registration systems (one of the sources could be the data collected by the Civil Registry) include all the data from the time of a person's birth to his death. They also enclose all the intervening events, such as school entry, military service, occupation, marriage, change of address or migration, etc. Conversely, the information compiled by Civil Registries certifies certain demographic events, and files are not created for each individual, but rather for each vital event, such as the registration of births, marriages, divorces or deaths.

Given the contents of this sort of system, the latter obviously requires a very clear legal basis for its functioning and administration, to guarantee the confidentiality of the files created. The United Nations therefore recommends that the authorities responsible for the system be located at the very highest levels of the government (Verhoef and Van de Kaa, 1987, p. 634).

The main purpose of a population register is administrative and to help the government to undertake its various tasks. Obviously, a system of this nature also permits the generation of statistical data on the size, composition and

characteristics of the population that are crucial to economic and social planning. Moreover, as a continuous register, all its data are kept continuously up to date.

Countries that have instituted Population Registers have the following detailed information in their registers of each individual: name, sex, date of birth, current address or usual place of residence and place of birth. Other data, that not all countries have compiled, include marital status, citizenship, occupation, parents' names, former places of residence, spouse's name, religion and relationship to the household head. The list can be extended indefinitely according to the needs of society and government to plan their activities (Verhoef and Van de Kaa, 1987, p. 637).

Because of the information they contain, registers have been used for a number of administrative purposes such as the identification of persons, drawing up electoral rolls, selecting those eligible for military service, compiling lists of persons with social security, and preparing tax lists. Registers have also been used for food rationing during times of shortage or to implement regulations concerning compulsory education. According to Verhoef and Van de Kaa (1987, p. 635), the most important uses of a population register have included the following: "a) the generation of information on the population, includes current population statistics, population estimates and characteristics, statistics of population change, vital statistics and internal and international migration statistics. b) The planning of population censuses and the evaluation of



census results using data from the population register. c) The preparation of subpopulation lists by address, age group, sex, etc, for various statistical purposes such as surveys or research.” (Verhoef and Van de Kaa, 1987, p. 635).

Having described the main features and uses of population registers, what remains to be done is to go over the elements or sources of information that served as the basis for these registers in European countries. By the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup> century, all these countries had complete, reliable registers of vital events, which mean that population registers have been a key element in the compilation and running of such registers. They also possessed reliable data from other information systems such as those on driving licenses, passports and connections to water and gas networks that can be combined and matched to those in civil registers. They also had at least one census that could be used as a starting point. In 1968, in order to match the information from the various information systems that existed in the municipalities, Denmark issued each individual with a number allocated by the Central Population Register. Since 1970, this number has served as the basis for producing annual population statistics.

#### THE CASE OF MEXICO

As I have already mentioned, in Mexico, the first steps towards creating a Population Register, for very similar purposes to those included in the previous paragraph, were taken in 1980. Therefore, the register will not be described in detail here (for further information, see [http:// www.gobernación.gob.mx](http://www.gobernación.gob.mx)). From the outset, the system was organized at the highest

government level, the Ministry of the Interior, as recommended by the United Nations. At present, it is a State Office (Dirección General) within the aforesaid ministry. It is “responsible for registering each inhabitant, by means of using data that certify and provide proof of his or her identity. It also gives the public service the information so as to issue identification papers for Mexican citizens and minors, including population statistics for the public administration offices and departments” (<http://www.gobernación.gob.mx>), June 2001). From a legal and administrative point of view, at least all the necessary steps have been taken for the successful implementation of the Population Register. Nevertheless, nearly twenty years after its institution, the Register has been unable to record or assign a Unique Personal Reference Number (CURP) to all residents in Mexico or to Mexicans residing abroad. The question is, then, what are the obstacles and problems that have prevented this system from being completed and becoming the main source of population statistics?

Such a situation is not the result of technical problems, although the latter might have delayed the process at one stage; current advances in computing have gradually eliminated most of these difficulties. The main problem has undoubtedly been the current status of the Mexican Civil Registry. Despite having operated for over a century as a source of information and even though the series of measures implemented to modernize it since 1982, the register of vital events that should constitute the basis of this new system is incomplete and of poor quality. Some examples of the problems affecting the registration of births and deaths in Mexico are given below.

Although the first registers of vital events at the Clerkship's Offices of the Civil Register (Oficialías del Registro Civil) date from 1859, it was not until 1893 that the Mexican State managed to compile and publish data for the whole country on births, deaths and marriages (Secretaría de Salud s.f., p.5). These data continued to be published annually until 1907, when the series was interrupted as a result of the 1910 Revolution. In 1922, when order was restored and the Department of National Statistics reorganized, production of vital statistics was renewed, with these data being published in 1938. From that year onwards, data series on the principal vital events have been published uninterruptedly. One would expect the system to function properly, since both the data and the records from which these data were extracted for statistical processing and publication are available. This information should provide a record of all births and deaths as the basis for the system and one would simply have to capture or electronically record all the birth and death information registered since 1922. Moreover, assign a Unique Personal Reference Number (CURP) to all those who are still living so as to obtain a solid basis for a Population Register. The last step would be to record the entries for Mexican residing abroad. But even if this task were undertaken, the results would not be entirely satisfactory, since births and deaths are still under-reported, despite efforts made since 1982 and intensified in 1997 to improve and modernize the Civil Register. The problem of underregistration is due to behaviors that are deeply rooted in the population and unrelated to data capturing and processing methods in which enormous progress has been made. Table 2 contains data on the untimeliness with which

births are registered, as well as delayed registration, another aspect of underregistration.<sup>3</sup> The latter is defined for a given year (t) and comprises two elements: a) potential delayed registration and b) definitive underregistration or underregistration *per se*, that is, people who were born during a particular year (t) but who died or migrated before they were registered. The first year for which information on delayed registration is available is 1933, when the number of cases was low, (42,532), equivalent to 5.8%. This figure remained virtually unchanged throughout this decade, albeit with minor fluctuations. Over the next three decades (1940-1960) despite a slight upward trend, these fluctuations continued (totaling 3% during the entire period). A sharp upward trend began to be observed in 1961 and by the early 1970s, the percentage had raised to 15.6%, nearly three times the 1930 level and twice the 1960 one. Although these levels were high, the ones reached in the 1970s were extraordinarily high. During this period, delayed registration constituted the main problem in the underregistration of births.

Since 1973, delayed registration has never fallen below 20%. The years with the highest delayed registration in the country's history were 1974 (32.6%) and 1973 (26.3%) during which a special registration campaign called "The Mexican Family" was undertaken. Although the campaign was launched in 1973, its greatest effects were observed in 1974 and

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<sup>3</sup> In several of the articles that I have written on this issue, I have defined delayed registration for a given year (t) as the registration of persons over the age of one  $N_{1+(t)}$ . The percentage accounted for by this register of the total number of births registered for the year  $NR(t)$  is an indicator of the latter. This definition is different from the one established in the Legislations of the various states. Most

largely explain the levels achieved. From 1975 onwards and throughout the 1980s, delayed registration remained at 20%, with slight variations. Levels were particularly high in 1983 (26.1%) and 1987 (25.05%), when similar percentages to those of 1973 were reached, although registration campaigns like the one mentioned earlier were not carried out. High levels of delayed registration probably continued throughout the 1970's and 1980's, since some births that had not been registered before 1960 were registered during this period. It was thought that once these previously unregistered births were recorded, the number of delayed registrations would fall. During the latter half of the 1980s, it was thought that the number of delayed registrations would fall every year, but this was not the case. Indeed, far from declining, these high levels continued, and, contrary to expectations they actually rose rather than fell in the 1990's. Since 1993, with the exception of 1998, they accounted for just over a quarter of all births registered (between 700,000 and 800,000 delayed registrations). This phenomenon does not occur with the same frequency throughout the country, as one can see in Table 3, which shows the percentage of births registered after the age of one for each of the states and for the period from 1950 to 1996. In 1950, the state with the lowest percentage of delayed registration was Zacatecas with 0.36%, while the state with highest percentage was Veracruz with 23.3% (three times the national rate). Since 1980, the state with the lower number of delayed registrations has been Aguascalientes, with rates of under 3%. States with the highest percentage of delayed

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states establish a time limit of 180 days from the time of birth for parents to register their children, after which registration is regarded as delayed (Secretaría de Gobernación, 1983).

registrations include Veracruz, Tabasco, Chiapas, Guerrero, Puebla and Hidalgo, those with the highest rates being Veracruz, Guerrero and Chiapas, where, in some years, over 50% of all births were registered late.

The reasons behind the population's failure to register births within the established deadlines are not known, since very few studies are available on the subject; the only thing that has been established is a pattern by age. This pattern shows that people only register their children or themselves when they need a birth certificate for a particular procedure in which they are required to prove their identity or filiation. The age pattern observed in delayed registration has been described as follows: "from 1976 to 1990, the highest number of registrations occurs before the age of three; this curve is followed by two peaks that correspond to school entry and completion of primary school, when birth certificates are required. A small peak is also observed at 18, which may be due to the need to submit this document for military service, work or marriage in the case of women. After 1996, the pattern changes slightly and shows that births are now registered in a more timely fashion than in the 1980s. The peaks at the age of 12 and 18 have disappeared and there is only a small peak corresponding to pre-primary school entry, meaning that the modal age is now 5 rather than 6 or 7" (B. Figueroa, 1998, p. 37). This publication also reports that parents are registering their children at an earlier age and that there has been an increase in the number of people ages 50 or over who register to obtain their birth certificates. Although these two trends at least partly explain why the percentage of delayed registrations has not fallen, they fail to account for regional differences, nor do they enable this information to be used as the basis for the Population Register. Moreover, there is no

easy way of knowing how many individuals currently residing in the country or who have emigrated have failed to register their birth at the Civil Registry authorities. The information analyzed only shows that there is a deeply-rooted custom among the population of only obtaining a birth certificate when they need one for a particular procedure and that the authorities have failed to persuade the population to register their children within the established time limits. As for permanent underregistration, the other component of underregistration, that is, those who die before their birth is registered, I know of no studies or estimates that would be useful for this paper.

A number of problems also exist regarding the registration of deaths, such as underregistration, delayed registration and double registration. It is worth noting (as shown in Table A) that there is no consensus on the total number of deaths in Mexico. The table also contains data for the past five years. This information has been published by three different Mexican government institutions. The National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Information Technology (INEGI) reports a higher number of deaths every year than either the National Population Council (CONAPO) or the Secretariat of State for Health (SSA), which reports the lowest figures for the year 2000.

Table A  
Number of deaths by source

<i>Year</i>	<i>INEGI</i>	<i>Conapo</i>	<i>SSA</i>
1995	430 278	423 118	n.a.
1996	436 321	422 235	n.a.
1997	440 437	421 637	n.a.
1998	444 665	421 512	420 859
1999	443 959	422 258	424 209
2000	442 000	423 912	418 362

Source: Fernández Cantón, 2001.

As far as the estimates of underregistration for the country as a whole are concerned, the following figures are available. As a result of the 1990 Census, a 30% rate of underregistration was estimated. With information from the 1992 and 1997 ENADID Surveys, underregistration for 1992 was estimated at 8.3% and at 7.0% for 1997. On the basis of this same source, underregistration of infants under the age of one was estimated at 25.3% for 1992 and at 16.3% for children ages 1-4 (Fernández Cantón, 2001). Delayed registration of deaths also occurred, although to a lesser extent than for births. According to Fernández Cantón, approximately 2% of the births registered, totaling between eight and nine thousand cases annually, had taken place in earlier years. Delayed registration also varies by state, with Guerrero, Mexico state,



Chihuahua, Durango, Michoacán and Veracruz being primarily responsible for this phenomenon. There are no available estimates for double registration (Fernández Cantón, 2001).

The underregistration of deaths varies by state, as it does for births. By way of an example, the following chart contains figures from a study carried out in Guerrero to estimate child and infant mortality and its principal causes; underregistration was estimated as a by-product of this study (See Table B).



The high frequency of underregistration of infant and children's deaths in this state is undoubtedly higher than that of any other state in the country and it is hard to believe in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, an analysis of the main

reasons for failure to register deaths given by the mothers: "I didn't realize I was supposed to register (my child's) death" (43.3%); I thought it was not necessary to register my child death (25.8%), "I didn't have the money" (10.7%) and "People

don't usually register deaths," shed some light on the high levels of underregistration. For most of the population in Guerrero, certifying a child's death with the authorities is pointless.

These examples of some of the problems faced in the civil registration of births and deaths show that this source of information has failed to provide each individual with a CURP, since the population registered by this institution does not cover the country's entire population. To date, it has not even been able to identify each and every one of the inhabitants born within its frontiers, a major component of the entries in a Population Register in a country that does not have high immigration rates, such as Mexico.<sup>4</sup> Data from the Civil Register have also failed to adequately cover an important source of people's exit from the system, namely deaths, which are not fully reported either. Moreover, in the case of Mexico, the principal destiny of international migration is the United States. And it also constitutes a significant source of people's exit from the system: "...it is estimated that the population born in Mexico that lives in the United States currently accounts for approximately 8.5 million people, approximately three million of which are undocumented." (Conapo, 2001, p. 78). Furthermore, in the case of Mexico, this figure increases annually by 300,000. Emigration is another source of uncertainty in identifying residents, since if three million persons are estimated to have left without documents, then it will be almost impossible to find out how many of them have their CURP. This is not true for those who emigrated legally, since there is

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<sup>4</sup> In 1990, 341,000 persons born abroad were registered, and in the year 2000, the 12<sup>th</sup> General Population and Housing Census recorded 406,000 persons of foreign origin aged 5 or over. (Conapo, 2001, p. 71).

documentation on them. In short, so far it has proved impossible to identify the country's residents, an essential feature of a Population Register.

The above only refers to one feature: identity, although another crucial feature of a Population Register: the location of residents, has yet to be analyzed. If establishing residents' identity has proved difficult, establishing their location will be virtually impossible. In Mexico, there are no complete lists of services such as water, electricity or gas that could be used to match with information from the CURP to obtain users' residences. In Mexico, there are only two sub-systems that could be used to help with this task, even though they only cover part of the population: the Mexican Internal Revenue Service (Registro Federal de Contribuyentes) and the Federal Electoral Register (Registro Federal de Electores).

As its name suggests, the Mexican Internal Revenue Service has a list of all those who pay taxes. In other words, they have been enrolled in this register because they earn an income that is subject to tax. When a person joins the workforce or sets up a business that generates an income, he is supposed to request inclusion in this register. At present, enrolling in the Mexican Internal Revenue Service' List entails the following steps:

- a) Requesting a Tax Identification Number with a Unique Population Reference Number (CURP).
- b) If the applicant already has a CURP, he must submit proof of the latter, issued by the National Population Register.

- c) If the applicant does not have a CURP, he must submit a photocopy of his birth certificate. In the event that he is a naturalized Mexican citizen, he must provide a certified copy of his “naturalization letter”. If he is a resident alien in Mexico, he must submit a certified photocopy of his migratory document.

Those who have already enrolled in the Mexican Internal Revenue Service’ List and currently possess a Tax ID number issued by the Ministry of Finance (Secretaría de Hacienda y Crédito Público, SHCP) must show their original Tax ID number.

Both first-time applicants and those who are already enrolled are given a Tax Identification Number with their CURP. The CURP contains their Tax Identification Number, essential for any procedure they carry out with offices in the public sector ([www.sat.gob.mx](http://www.sat.gob.mx), June 2001).

The decision to match the Tax ID numbers with the CURP has undoubtedly been an extremely important measure for the Population Register, even though the CURP has only recently been instituted. In fact, in the year 2001, the majority of taxpayers continued to submit their declarations with the number from their previous tax identification number-assigned on presentation of the applicant’s birth certificate-which was different from the CURP. Now the authorities at least have the possibility of locating a large number of the country’s residents, in addition to ascertaining their identity. However, this Register excludes several major sectors of society, including those who have never worked for a salary or been engaged

in paid employment, and do not expect to do so in the future. Below are some figures, with very rough indicators, to give us some idea of the size of the population that might fall into these categories (See Table C). One group that might never require a Tax ID number with CURP would be women classified under the Economically Inactive Section who totaled approximately 23 million in 1999. At the same time, the section entitled “type of activity” contains approximately 17 million persons engaged in housework, the vast majority of whom are presumably women. These two figures can be regarded as the upper and lower limits of the number of women who might never require a Tax ID number with CURP. The section entitled “Position at work” also contains a group that may never be included in tax lists, namely unpaid workers, who, in 1999, totaled just over 4 million. Some of the workers classified as “self-employed”, including street vendors and other workers in the “informal sector”, may never enroll in the taxpayers’ register. Finally, children are not included in this register either. There are approximately 12.8 million persons under the age of 15 (Conapo, 2001, p. 17), yet since all the births registered since 1982 now have a CURP, when they start to work, their Tax ID number will use this code as its identification number. In short, the Federal Taxpayers’ Register is unable to locate approximately 25% of the country’s population, equivalent to approximately 25 million, given that in the year 2000, the population totaled approximately 100 million inhabitants.

Table C  
National Employment Survey 1999

<i>Principal Indicators</i>	<i>1991</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1999</i>
<b>Economically Inactive Populat</b>	27 088 201	28 423 612	31 223 506
Men	6 195 271	6 713 071	7 471 657
Women	20 892 930	21 710 541	23 751 849
<u>State of availability</u>	27 088 201	28 423 612	31 223 508
Available inactive persons	892 638	613 043	307 387
Non-available inactive pers	26 195 563	27 810 569	30 916 119
<u>State of inactivity</u>	27 088 201	28 423 612	31 223 506
Students	8 721 484	9 119 001	10 475 973
Housewives	15 352 431	15 802 293	16 823 177
Retirees	651 934	825 418	1 108 466
Other types of inactivity	2 362 352	2 676 900	2 815 890
<b>Position at work</b>	<b>30 534 083</b>	33 881 068	39 069 095
Paid, salaried, commissione	16 877 569	19 397 488	23 763 584
Owner	2 395 597	1 462 614	1 580 566
Self-employed	7 216 783	8 582 791	9 515 273
Unpaid worker	3 968 645	4 409 164	4 197 287
Other workers	75 489	29 011	12 385

Source: *Encuesta Nacional de Empleo* 1999, INEGI, Secretaría de Trabajo y Previsión Social, Mexico 1999, Table 2.2

The Federal Elector Register, currently known as the State Office of the Federal Elector Register (Dirección Ejecutiva del Registro Federal de Electores), had enrolled and located 59,591,638 citizens for the 2000 federal elections (Ortega Ortiz, 2001, p. 563) This register is the only system that updates its data base annually. Additions are made to the system at the applicants' request. Applicants' are issued a voter registration card with their picture. This entitles them to exercise their right to vote. Enrolment requires filling an application form and having one's photograph taken at a module in the system. A voter identification card is then issued, although failure to collect it within the specified deadline will result in the applicant's exclusion from the system. Since the voter's identification card incorporates several safety features to prevent its falsification, it has become widely accepted as an ID card in Mexico. Persons are removed from the voters' list in the event of loss of civil rights, loss of citizenship and death. Information is stored in optical disks that currently contain over 150 million images including citizens' photographs, fingerprints and signatures. Each person's register also contains the following information: name, date of birth, place of birth, usual place of residence, date of registration, and occupation. In the event that the person is a naturalized citizen: date of naturalization and number of naturalization, number of voter identification card and date when the Voter ID card was handed to him (<http://ife.org.mx>—June 2001). No expense has been spared in setting up this system, and state-of-the-art technology has been used to ensure that it functions as efficiently as possible. This seems to be a perfect system for identifying and locating people (at least those over the age of

18 who reside in Mexico and are entitled to vote). Why, then, do the authorities insist on having a Population Register, whose objectives are also to certify and accredit the identity of persons resident in the country, as well as providing the latter with a Citizens' ID Card? The answer lies in the differences between the registers, which apparently should only be to issue an ID card for Mexicans under 18, although that is not the case. There are other differences that, from my point of view, are extremely important, some of the most significant are given below.

1. The first of these is the legal basis. The Population Register is based on the Political Constitution of the United States of Mexico, Article 38, Paragraph 1, and on the General Population Law, Chapter VII. Conversely, the National Federal Electoral Register is based on the Federal Code of Electoral Institutions and Procedures.
2. The second concerns functions and powers. In addition to issuing an official identification document (The Citizen's ID Card, as well as the Personal Identification Document for Mexicans under the age of 18) the Population Register assigns a unique reference number, the CURP, to all residents in Mexico, as well as to all Mexicans residing abroad. This number has permitted the creation of multi-purpose Population Register, which is one of the advantages of this type of system. Conversely, the Federal Elector Register was created exclusively for electoral purposes. Even though the Voter's ID card (which provides evidence that a person belongs in this system) has a



different number from the CURP, its sole aim is to enable citizens to exercise their political right to vote. Notwithstanding that it is now recognized as an ID card by many institutions.

3. Thirdly, where the information data came from, or proof of the latter. Enrolment in the Population Register requires presenting a certified copy of one's Birth Certificate. The Federal Electoral Register does not require applicants to submit proof of identity. Information was validated by the applicant's submission of proof of residence or two letters of recommendation signed by two citizens.

This last fact is extremely important, since the ID card issued by the National Voters' Register is not based on any genuine proof of identity. The only institutions that can genuinely prove a person's identity and filiation are the Civil Registry, by means of a Birth Certificate, and the Ministry of the Interior in the case of naturalizations. Consequently, Voter's ID cards cannot provide proof of identity. Thus, the Federal Electoral Register is able to locate 59 million Mexicans, for which it has no proof of identity.

I believe that investing such a large amount of money and effort in registering voters has been misguided. The authorities wasted an opportunity of consolidating the Population Register. If the resources used for the Federal Electoral Register had been spent on the Population Register instead, an electoral register could have been drawn up from the latter, as has been the case in other countries.

At present, it is impossible to easily combine or match data from these registers, because the access codes used different features. The only feature they share is that they have 18 alphanumeric characters (see Diagrams 1 and 2 in the appendix.) The question is what measures must be taken to consolidate the National Population Register.

#### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As has been noted throughout this document, the two main features of a population register are the identification and location of a country's population. This is why the main problems faced by the National Population Register are linked to these issues. As a result, some of the measures that would contribute to the simplification and subsequent drawing up of this national register are mentioned below.

The first determinant factor in a population register is undoubtedly the identification of the latter. As long as the Mexican Civil Registry fails to achieve integral coverage of vital events, it will be impossible to identify those born in this country, meaning that it will also prove impossible to obtain a reliable Population Register. Since this is the first problem that must be solved, some of the measures for solving it are given below.

To begin with, the process of identifying the country's residents must be speeded up. In the year 2000, a CURP reference number had been assigned to 75,271.239 million persons (<http://www-gobernación.gob.mx>---June 2001) meaning that

numbers would still have to be assigned for approximately 30 million persons. Work would therefore have to be carried out at two levels: in the automation and improvement of Civil Registry Services and in raising the population's awareness of the functions of the latter.

Automation entails modernizing the computerized records of the Civil Register Systems. Financial resources must be geared to purchasing the necessary electronic equipment. This is required for the gathering and processing of information to be fast, reliable and timely. The equipment must have similar features to those that have been used by the Federal Elector Register, now known as the State Office for the Federal Elector Register.

Efforts must also be made to establish a network of communications that will enable information to be transferred quickly and safely between the Civil Registration Offices and the State Office for the National Registration of Population and Personal Identification.

Likewise, continued efforts must be made to capture data from the Civil Registry's Historical Archives for the period from 1930-1998. Moreover, this period should be set back to the year 1925, while data from the last two years should also be recorded (1999 and 2000). It should be pointed out that the only states in Mexico to have completed this task are Aguascalientes, Campeche, Morelos, Nayarit, Quintana Roo, Sinaloa and Zacatecas.

Having suggested solutions for the problems associated with the identification of the population, we should now deal with the second aspect, linked to raising the population's awareness. First of all, campaigns must be launched on the advantages of the timely registration of births at the Civil Registration Offices, as well as the need to do so. As a result, this activity will be regarded as a right rather than an obligation. Emphasis must be placed on the advantages of having a Birth Certificate and what this document represents as proof of identity and filiation. It is important to note that these campaigns must adopt a regional approach, given the differences in the degree of delayed registration between the various states. Likewise, campaigns must also be undertaken to encourage the population to register deaths, since the population must be shown how useful this information is for the public health programs.

Although these measures would apparently facilitate the creation of a National Population Register, even if full coverage of births and deaths existed, the authorities would still have to record all the entries and exits from the system. This is due to the fact that Mexico has a complex migratory phenomenon: it is simultaneously a sending, receiving and transit country for international migratory flows (Conapo, 2001, p. 71). As far as legal migrants are concerned, since the process has been duly documented and the necessary steps have been taken to incorporate this information into the Population Register, no further recommendations are required. However, a strategy must be designed to find out about and locate undocumented immigrants on the southern border, as well as Mexicans who emigrate illegally to the United States. Needless to say, the problem of measuring undocumented international migration has yet to be solved anywhere in the world.

These recommendations could simplify the process of the entry and exit of information from the Mexican system, which serves to identify the population. However, the second crucial element in population registers, the location of the population would then have to be dealt with. First of all, efforts must be made to reinforce the campaign that has been undertaken on the CURP, to publicize the significance of this personal reference number and the advantages of using it.

Secondly, this code should be required for undertaking any government procedure, as well as for civil activities. This is because CURP makes it possible to match several registers, such as those of the Secretariats of Health and Education, Military Service, driving licenses, etc, which would therefore enable the authorities to locate all those residing in national territory.

A final observation, --perhaps the most obvious but yet the most difficult to implement-- is that the information compiled by the State Office for the Federal Electoral Register should be linked to that obtained by the Population Register. Given the amount of resources invested in the first system, its usefulness should be increased to justify the investment. We know that there were political reasons why the code for the voters' register was different from that of the population register, since it was feared that if voters' registration cards were associated with the administration at that time, the elections would lack credibility. However, the situation has changed and it is now time to put the ghosts of the past behind us and consider the advantages of a full Population Register. Moreover, we should realize that Mexico is a poor country that must

allocate its resources wisely to avoid duplicating efforts and expenditure. The time has come to combine rather than divide our efforts.

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TABLE 1

Date of Compulsory National Civil Registration Law Governing Registration  
of Live Births, Deaths and Stillbirths

<i>Continent and Country</i>	<i>Live births</i>	<i>Deaths</i>	<i>Stillbirths</i>
AMERICA			
Canada <sup>1</sup>	1869-1925	1869-1925	1869-1925
United States <sup>2</sup>	1811-1911 1900	1811-1911 1900	1811-1911 1900



Latin America			
Argentina <sup>3</sup>			
Bolivia	1884-1904	1884-1904	1884-1904
<b>Brazil</b>	1940	1940	1940
	1889	1889	1889
Chile	1885	1885	1885
Colombia	1938	1938	<sup>4</sup>
Costa Rica	1888	1888	1888
Cuba	1885	1885	1885
Ecuador	1901	1901	1901
Dominican Republic	1884	1884	1884
Guatemala	1877	1877	1877
Haiti	1922	1922	1922
Honduras	1882	1882	<sup>4</sup>
<b>Mexico</b>	1859	1859	1859
	1879	1879	1879
Nicaragua	1914	1914	1914
Panama	1914	1914	1914
Paraguay	1852	1852	<sup>4</sup>
Peru	1879	1879	<sup>4</sup>
El Salvador	1879	1879	1879
Uruguay	1863	1863	1863
Venezuela			

Source: United Nation (1955) Handbook of Vital Statistics Methods, Studies in Methods, Series F, no. 7. pp. 20-24.

<sup>1</sup> “The registration system is a provincial responsibility administered under Provincial Acts. Registration Acts were adopted in the provinces and territories at different dates from 1678 to 1916. For the province of Quebec, a civil registration act was adopted in 1925.”

<sup>2</sup> “Within the United States of America, the authority for vital statistics law was has generally been considered as a part of a police power, and as such solely within the provinces of the various state governments. Historically, while vital registration law in the United States dates back to 1632 (registration law enacted in Virginia Colony) because of the weakness of many laws, the incompleteness of registration, and the variation found in forms and definitions, the modern law can be said to date from 1900” (p. 22 United Nations, 1955. For further details see p. 22

<sup>3</sup> “The Civil Register is a provincial responsibility and laws governing it were adopted at different times: 1884 to 1904.” (p. 23. United Nations, 1955).

<sup>4</sup> “Civil registration if stillbirths is not compulsory but in Honduras, El Salvador, Colombia and Peru, statistics of such stillbirths as are reported are obtained from other sources such as burial permits or entries in the register of deaths or births. (p. 22 United Nations, 1925).

Table 2  
Mexico. Birth registered by age at registration 1933-1999

<i>YEAR(t)</i>	<i>Number of births registered</i>	<i>Births registered under the age of one</i>	<i>Births registered over the age of one</i>	<i>Percentage of births registered under the age of one</i>	<i>Percentage of births registered over the age of one</i>
(1)	<i>NR(t)</i>	<i>NRO(t)</i>	<i>NRI+(t)</i>	<i>%NRO(t)/NR(t)</i>	<i>%NRI(t)/NR(t)</i>
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1933	737 020	694 488	42 532	94,2	5,8
1934	787 314	744 474	42 840	94,6	5,4
1935	764 326	729 660	34 666	95,5	4,5
1936	791 725	753 990	37 735	95,2	4,8
1937	826 307	778 330	47 977	94,2	5,8
1938	829 651	794 550	35 101	95,8	4,2
1939	865 081	808 478	56 603	93,5	6,5
1940	875 471	822 448	53 023	93,9	6,1
1941	878 935	834 671	44 264	95,0	5,0
1942	940 067	864 193	75 874	91,9	8,1
1943	963 317	893 146	70 171	92,7	7,3
1944	958 119	889 827	68 292	92,9	7,1
1945	999 093	922 608	76 485	92,3	7,7
1946	994 838	924 670	70 168	92,9	7,1
1947	1 079 816	996 458	83 358	92,3	7,7
1948	1 090 867	1 014 381	76 486	93,0	7,0
1949	1 123 358	1 056 224	67 134	94,0	6,0
1950	1 174 947	1 087 217	87 730	92,5	7,5
1951	1 183 788	1 111 790	71 998	93,9	6,1
1952	1 195 209	1 119 029	76 180	93,6	6,4

1953	1 261 775	1 152 798	108 977	91,4	8,6
1954	1 339 837	1 237 285	102 552	92,3	7,7
1955	1 377 917	1 267 581	110 336	92,0	8,0
1956	1 427 722	1 293 786	133 936	90,6	9,4
1957	1 485 202	1 360 266	124 936	91,6	8,4
1958	1 447 578	1 327 462	120 116	91,7	8,3
1959	1 589 606	1 447 688	141 918	91,1	8,9
1960	1 608 174	1 472 936	135 238	91,6	8,4
1961	1 647 006	1 507 290	139 716	91,5	8,5
1962	1 705 481	1 534 349	171 132	90,0	10,0
1963	1 756 624	1 557 509	199 115	88,7	11,3
1964	1 849 408	1 633 251	216 157	88,3	11,7
1965	1 888 171	1 656 132	232 039	87,7	12,3
1966	1 954 340	1 691 396	262 944	86,5	13,5
1967	1 981 363	1 709 402	271 961	86,3	13,7
1968	2 039 145	1 752 688	286 457	86,0	14,0
1969	2 077 399	1 772 946	304 453	85,3	14,7
1970	2 132 630	1 799 536	333 094	84,4	15,6
1971	2 231 399	1 893 575	337 824	84,9	15,1
1972	2 346 002	1 932 211	413 791	82,4	17,6
1973	2 565 287	1 890 714	674 573	73,7	26,3
1974	2 607 452	1 758 179	849 273	67,4	32,6
1975	2 429 768	1 914 265	515 503	78,8	21,2
1976	2 370 025	1 880 231	489 794	79,3	20,7
1977	2 402 418	1 923 997	478 421	80,1	19,9
1978	2 346 862	1 861 116	485 746	79,3	20,7
1979	2 448 773	1 890 615	558 158	77,2	22,8

(Continued on following page)

Table 2  
Mexico. Birth registered by age at registration 1933-1999

<i>YEAR(t)</i>	<i>Number of births registered</i>	<i>Births registered under the age of one</i>	<i>Births registered over the age of one</i>	<i>Percentage of births registered under the age of one</i>	<i>Percentage of births registered over the age of one</i>
	<i>NR(t)</i>	<i>NR0(t)</i>	<i>NR1+(t)</i>	<i>%NR0(t)/NR(t)</i>	<i>%NR1(t)/NR(t)</i>
<i>(1)</i>	<i>(2)</i>	<i>(3)</i>	<i>(4)</i>	<i>(5)</i>	<i>(6)</i>
1980	2 428 499	1 882 368	546 131	77,5	22,5
1981	2 530 662	1 910 161	620 501	75,5	24,5
1982	2 392 849	1 898 977	493 872	79,4	20,6
1983	2 727 833	2 014 280	713 553	73,8	26,2
1984	2 547 798	1 971 336	576 462	77,4	22,6
1985	2 680 781	2 030 908	649 873	75,8	24,2
1986	2 596 382	2 053 921	542 461	79,1	20,9
1987	2 816 720	2 111 638	705 082	75,0	25,0
1988	2 752 563	2 214 630	537 933	80,5	19,5
1989	2 620 262	2 063 386	556 876	78,7	21,3
1990	2 735 312	2 113 555	621 757	77,3	22,7
1991	2 756 447	2 097 158	659 289	76,1	23,9
1992	2 797 397	2 118 781	678 616	75,7	24,3
1993	2 839 686	2 098 692	740 994	73,9	26,1
1994	2 904 389	2 102 581	801 808	72,4	27,6
1995	2 750 444	2 047 889	702 555	74,5	25,5
1996	2 707 718	2 015 097	692 621	74,4	25,6
1997	2 698 425	1 990 010	708 415	73,7	26,3
1998	2 668 428	2 016 688	651 740	75,6	24,4
1999	2 769 089	2 038 787	730 302	73,6	26,4

Source: 1933-1940 Anuario Estadístico de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos. Dirección General de Estadística (DGE).  
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ESTADOS UNIDOS MEXICANOS

MENORES DE UN AÑO

MAYORES DE UN AÑO	729 442	730 302
NO EPECIFICADO	860	
	2 769 089	

Table 3

Mexico. Percentage of births registered over one year of age of the total number of birth registered 1951-1996

States	<i>Country and States</i>						
	<i>Year</i>						
	<i>1950</i>	<i>1960</i>	<i>1970</i>	<i>1980</i>	<i>1990</i>	<i>1995</i>	<i>1996</i>
Mexico	7,45	8,41	15,62	22,36	22,70	25,44	25,55
Aguascalientes	1,26	2,00	5,91	2,97	1,39	2,86	2,50
Baja California Norte	7,31	8,65	11,50	15,45	7,82	13,02	11,59
Baja California Sur	7,26	8,33	15,50	12,40	7,08	8,04	8,72
Campeche	3,33	3,83	8,43	8,57	18,63	23,29	28,88
Coahuila	4,63	6,40	11,61	15,69	7,54	7,15	7,90
Colima	3,48	2,36	8,66	10,42	7,50	9,66	10,28
Chiapas	4,24	7,54	11,87	24,73	63,10	54,55	50,02
Chihuahua	5,47	4,67	8,53	14,83	11,96	18,17	20,40
Distrito Federal	19,02	14,52	21,40	25,97	13,09	10,79	9,99
Durango	6,18	6,15	8,91	20,77	22,14	29,19	30,89
Estado de México	3,43	4,96	16,96	18,68	12,97	14,73	15,17
Guerrero	5,43	8,85	19,53	32,10	46,18	58,43	55,67
Guanajuato	2,24	8,94	16,14	25,12	31,92	33,43	34,70
Hidalgo	5,39	4,28	7,29	10,65	6,36	6,76	6,84
Jalisco	2,48	7,68	17,78	21,46	21,00	16,14	16,79
Michoacán	0,75	4,50	12,14	22,14	24,90	29,84	30,34
Morelos	4,55	6,24	16,43	30,93	22,14	25,57	28,83
Nayarit	1,54	4,06	8,21	15,95	18,27	23,19	22,50
Nuevo León	12,91	8,70	11,71	11,56	5,62	7,45	7,90
Oaxaca	0,51	1,13	8,74	10,16	22,26	32,24	36,44
Puebla	3,11	7,54	16,11	26,28	27,46	32,38	36,85

Quintana Roo	3,45	3,44	8,22	13,17	16,76	17,63	17,00
Querétaro	2,33	5,81	35,44	11,15	20,90	15,28	18,97
Sinaloa	13,34	7,03	8,47	13,91	14,37	20,32	20,55
San Luis Potosí	3,27	13,21	21,68	23,44	17,13	23,32	25,65
Sonora	6,62	7,18	10,48	9,09	7,56	11,05	11,56
Tabasco	6,50	11,71	23,61	34,97	34,35	40,02	43,18
Tamaulipas	22,25	19,71	25,72	31,38	20,02	31,96	19,02
Tlaxcala	1,71	3,76	9,00	8,83	6,06	7,91	8,73
Veracruz	23,31	19,96	34,11	47,30	40,20	50,46	51,55
Yucatán	1,63	2,13	3,56	4,10	1,85	3,10	3,56
Zacatecas	0,36	1,11	3,35	3,86	7,21	10,20	8,89

Fuentes:

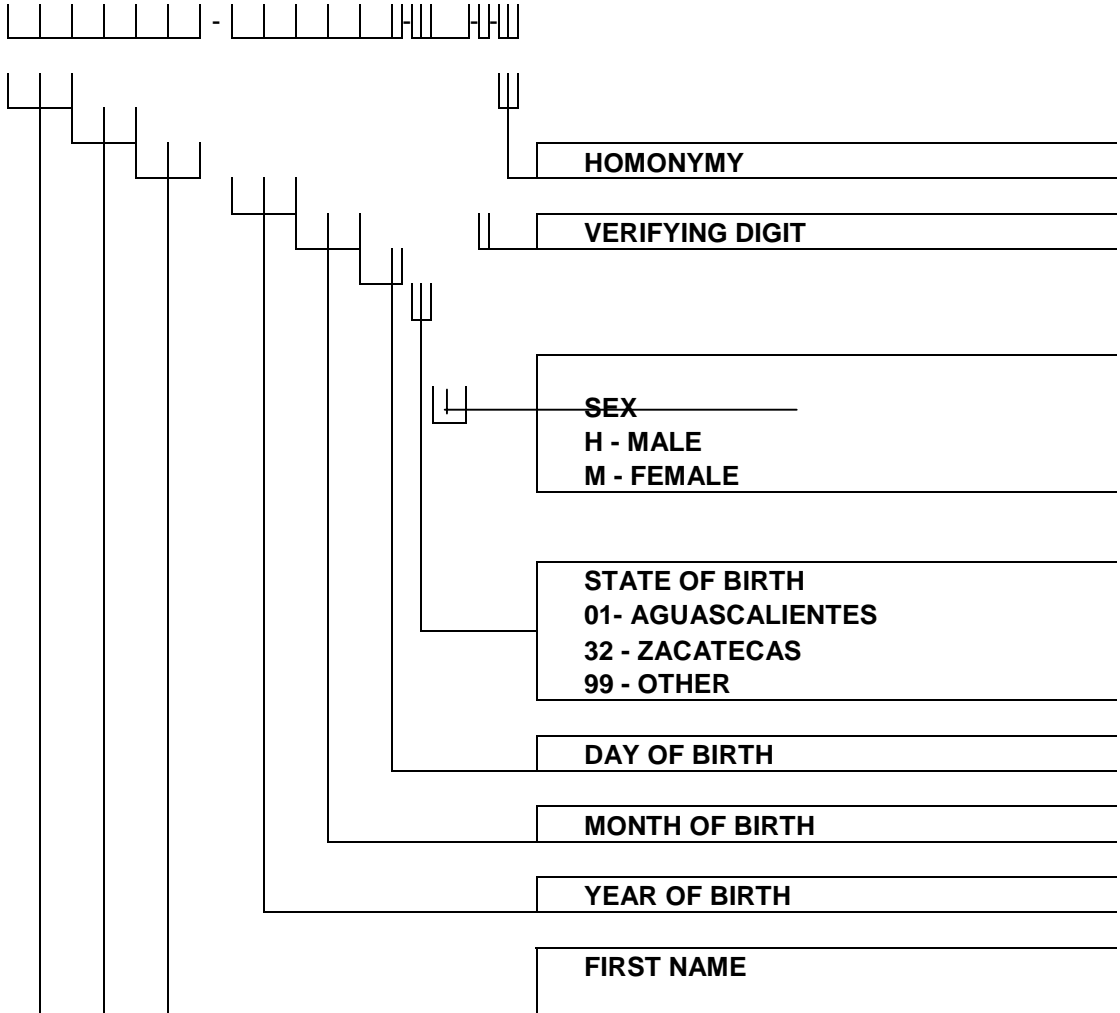
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Secretaría de la Economía Nacional, México, various years.

1980 Data obtained by Beatriz Figueroa from magnetic archive of births registration provided by the DGE

1990-1996 Unpublished tabulations compiled by El Colegio de México using data on registration of births provided by the INEGI.

**FORMATION OF VOTERS' CODE**





**FIRST LETTER OF FIRST NAME (PROVIDED IT IS NOT MARÍA OR JOSÉ,  
UNLESS THESE ARE THE ONLY NAMES**

**NEXT CONSONANT OR VOWEL IF THERE ARE NO CONSONANTS OR "X" IF  
THERE ARE NO OTHER LETTERS**

**SECOND SURNAME (WITHOUT PREPOSITIONS OR ARTICLE)**

**FIRST LETTER OF SECOND SURNAME**

**SECOND CONSONANT OR VOWEL IF THERE ARE NO CONSONANTS OR  
"X" IF THERE ARE NO OTHER LETTERS**

**"XX" IF THERE IS NO SECOND SURNAME**

**FIRST SURNAME (WITHOUT PREPOSITIONS OR ARTICLE)**

**FIRST LETTER OF FIRST SURNAME**

**NEXT CONSONANT OR VOWEL IF THERE ARE NO CONSONANTS (OR "X"  
IF THERE IS NO OTHER LETTER)**