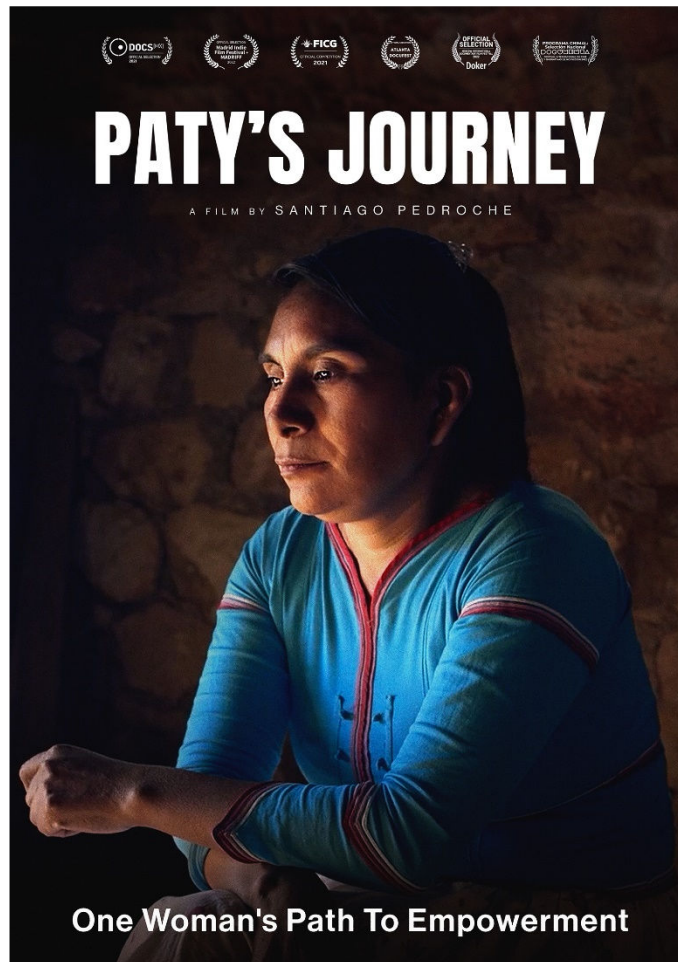




## PATY'S JOURNEY (EL VIAJE DE PATY)



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## **Paty's Journey**

Paty, an indigenous woman belonging to the Wixarika people, serves as her community's representative on the National Indigenous Congress (Congreso Nacional Indígena, CNI). In the 2018 federal elections, the CNI united to advocate for Mexico's native peoples, with Marichuy as their spokeswoman on the presidential ticket. Paty embarks on a journey that frequently takes her away from home for extended periods, while her husband, Rubén, takes care of their children. Throughout her travels, Paty contemplates her chosen path and confronts her past by visiting the places of her childhood. Scarred by her father's domestic violence, she channels her pain into a new way of life aimed at empowering the women in her community.

## **Mexico**

Located in North America, Mexico has a population of more than 129 million people, making it the tenth-largest country in the world by population. The country has 31 states and a federal district. There are three levels of government. Smaller, local municipalities have their own elected mayors, each state has its own congress and governor, and there is a central government, with a president, a congress, and courts. The president serves a six year term. The country is classified as a democratic federal republic.

## **Indigenous People**

Mexico has a substantial indigenous population. According to the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA), there are 68 different indigenous groups in the country—each with its own unique language—and 364 different variants in total. It reports that Nahuatl is the most common indigenous language, spoken by 22.5 percent of indigenous language speakers, followed by Mayan. Overall, the organization estimates that about 6 percent of the Mexican population—about 7.36 million people—speaks an indigenous language, and 25 million people identify as being part of an indigenous people, which is more than 20 percent of Mexico's population.

For a long time, the indigenous population has faced significant challenges. They have been marginalized, discriminated against, misled or coerced into selling their land, and not given access to a wide range of public services. Research shows that Mexico's indigenous people have a higher level of poverty than the rest of the country, and less access to education, healthcare, and employment opportunities. For instance, the World Bank reports that about three-quarters of Mexico's indigenous population lives below the poverty line. UNESCO reports that indigenous people in Mexico often have limited access to information too. It says, "Indigenous peoples face difficulties of access to the Internet, as well as scarce or insufficient telecommunications services (telephony, radio, television), making it difficult for them to access information." For instance, it says that data shows that while only 1 percent of the urban population does not have mobile data coverage, 44 percent of people in rural locations—many of them indigenous women—do not. Likewise, it says that at least 40 percent of indigenous people live outside of fixed mobile and broadband coverage areas.

## **Wixárika People**

The Wixárika —also known as the Huichol—are an indigenous people who live in the central west part of Mexico, in the Sierra Madre Occidental mountain range. They are known for the fact that they have been able to preserve their identity and traditions despite strong outside influences. According to the Wixárika Research Center, “The Huichol . . . are recognized as one of the Mexican native cultures most resilient to outside influences.”

## **Women in Indigenous Communities**

The role of women in Mexico’s indigenous communities varies widely, however, they often play many important roles in the community. Traditionally, women play the central role in the domestic sphere, looking after the household, making food, and caring for children. Many also engage in a variety of economic activities such as farming, making handcrafts, and entrepreneurship on a small scale. Women often play a significant role in cultural preservation too, preserving and passing down things like language, culinary practices, and cultural traditions.

However, many indigenous women face significant challenges, including sexism, violence, and discrimination. IWGIA explains, “The current situation of Indigenous women in Mexico is blighted by the most serious forms of discrimination, racialisation and structural violence. They suffer from educational, health and economic difficulties that result in real barriers to their development and well-being. . . . Statistics show that they have the poorest rates of education in relation to men in terms of illiteracy (64.6%) and lesser school attendance between the ages of 12 and 14. This has an impact on their employment opportunities as well as their employment rate, which is even lower than that of non-Indigenous women (17.7% vs. 22.9%). They also frequently suffer domestic violence: 59% have experienced emotional, physical, sexual, economic or asset-related violence.” Despite all of these challenges, IWGIA finds that many women in Mexico’s indigenous communities continue to work for change. It says that they are doing this in a number of different ways including by seeking greater political participation. For instance, it reports, “13 Indigenous candidates were nominated for a place in the Congress of the Union in 2018, only three of these being women. By 2021 this had increased to 13.” However, IWGIA and others agree that while statistics such as this are positive, much more progress is needed.

## **The National Indigenous Congress**

In recent years, many of Mexico’s indigenous communities have begun to push back against their marginalization. The National Indigenous Congress was formed in 1996 and is a coalition of indigenous groups. It fights for the rights, autonomy, and self-determination of indigenous people. Its website explains, “The National Indigenous Congress (CNI) was constituted on October 12, 1996, as the home of all indigenous peoples, a space where originary peoples can find shared thought and solidarity to strengthen their struggles of resistance and rebellion, with their own forms of organization, representation and decision-making. It is the house of the indigenous peoples, tribes and nations we are.”

## **María de Jesús Patricio Martínez**

María de Jesús Patricio Martínez, also known as “Marichuy,” is a human rights activist and a traditional healer. She is also a founding member of the National Indigenous Congress. For years, she has fought against the violations of rights experienced by indigenous communities in Mexico. She also works to get women more involved in politics. In a 2017 interview, she explained, “It is time that women participate in their communities, they are the ones that give life by having children and taking care of them. The active participation of women is necessary because they are wise and strong. I think that without the participation of women there would be a large gap. It is very important that we walk together, because that’s the way the Indigenous communities are; they are not just men, it’s all of us.”

Marichuy was the first indigenous woman to attempt to run for president. She was chosen as a candidate for the 2018 presidential election. While she did not ultimately collect enough signatures to get on the ballot for the presidency, she did do a lot to help make the problems faced by indigenous communities more visible, and for that reason, she considers her campaign a success. She says that one of her goals in running for the presidency was to help people in the indigenous communities understand that they can organize and fight back; something she calls a “struggle from below.” One of the things that she wants to achieve is, “That the people below, the workers of the countryside and the city, don’t feel less and that we see that we have the same values and rights.”

## Additional Resources

### Books

- Daniel M. Cobb, *Say We Are Nations: Documents of Politics and Protest in Indigenous America Since 1887*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- T. R. Fehrenbach, *Fire & Blood: A History of Mexico*. New York: Open Road Media, 2021.
- Gilbert M. Joseph and Timothy J. Henderson, eds., *The Mexico Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2022.
- Luis Hernández Navarro, *Self-Defense in Mexico: Indigenous Community Policing and the New Dirty Wars*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2020.

### Online Sources

- Congreso Nacional Indígena, “What Is the CNI?” no date.  
<http://www.congresonacionalindigena.org/what-is-the-cni/>
- Cultural Survival, “Observations on the State of Indigenous Women’s Rights in Mexico,” June 2018.  
[https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/CEDAW\\_Report\\_Mexico\\_2018.pdf](https://www.culturalsurvival.org/sites/default/files/CEDAW_Report_Mexico_2018.pdf)
- International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, “The Indigenous World 2022: Mexico,” April 1, 2022.  
<https://www.iwgia.org/en/mexico/4670-iw-2022-mexico.html>
- Duncan Tracker, “‘Mexico Needs Healing’: the First Indigenous Woman to Run for President,” *The Guardian*, June 12, 2017.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jun/12/mexico-maria-de-jesus-patricio-martinez-indigenous-woman-president>

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