The Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) had a great effect on the security of Texas and other states bordering Mexico. Officially the Mexican Revolution began in 1910, when President Porfirio Díaz could no longer suppress opposition to his thirty-four year rule. Dissent had been building among various social, political, and power groups for years.

At first, these opposition forces were united in their desire to see President Díaz removed from power. However, the Mexican Revolution was complex and lasted a long time. One regime after another was overturned, and so for almost a decade confusion reigned.
The ten year Revolution devastated Mexico.

These images portray some effects of the violence of the Mexican Revolution. Note especially the bottom left image, The Juarez Cemetery, the unburied bodies are Mexican Revolutionaries who were executed. The city in the background is El Paso, Texas. Thus Texans were very concerned by the Mexico's instability, and revolutionary violence that created a dangerous and lawless border. These problems often filtered across the border into Texas.

B729 Bodies of Mexican Revolutionists waiting to be buried at A cemetery in Juarez, Mexico El Paso Public Library, 1910-1920

B730 Mexican Revolution-Red Cross El Paso Public Library, 1910-1920

B732 Dead man and cow in the New Mexico desert .Negative B&W 6x6cm El Paso Public Library, circa 1910-1920
Throughout the ten years of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1920) large numbers of Mexicans fled to the safety United States. They left due to the widespread lawlessness, revolutionary violence, lack of security, and societal disruptions.

Refugees arriving at Fort Bliss. B650 negative B&W 6x7.5cm El Paso Public Library, circa 1910-1920.

Mexicans flee the violence of the revolution.

Refuges of all social and economic classes fled the carnage and societal disruption of the Mexican revolution. Whether one was wealthy or a poor revolutionary, violence did not play favorites.
So what did all the bloodshed and conflict of the Mexican Revolution mean for Texas?

It meant that much of the violence and societal disruption occurring in Mexico filtered across the border into Texas. In response to the constant cross border crime and raids, the Texas state government stationed its Texas Rangers along the border. However, there were simply not enough Texas Rangers to effectively police the 1,969 miles long border.
The United States and Mexico border is 1,969 miles long.
Texas served as a haven and target for many Mexican Revolutionaries. The constant unrest in Mexico spilled over into Texas with refugees, political exiles, criminals, revolutionaries, recruiters, and financiers.

Emilio Vasquez Gomez, a former Mexican Minister of the Interior and member of the revolutionary party, who had worked closely with Madero and his Vazquistas forces until they had a falling out, he then fled to Texas.
In July of 1901 the state Legislature passed new laws which reorganized the Texas Rangers after the passing of the Ranger Frontier Battalion in 1900. The reorganized Texas Rangers' purpose was “for the purpose of protecting the frontier against marauding or thieving parties, and for the suppression of lawlessness and crime throughout the state.”
Disruption of the civil society caused by the Mexican Revolution.

This locomotive and its accompanying cars were the victims of an ambush orchestrated by Villias’ men. Often such ambushes meant dynamiting a section of the railroad tracks so the train would be derailed, after which the banditos/revolutionaries would loot the train and eliminate any opposition.

Villistas in this photograph can be seen riding their horses near a group of parked railroad cars. Trains and Railroads were important strategic resources and targets for the various factions and bandits of the Mexican revolution.

The Mexican revolution affected all aspects of life, disrupting the security and sanctity of normal life. As is evidenced by turning this church into a fort.
Banditos attack from ambush.

Mexican revolutionaries or insurrectos firing from cover on a knoll. Hit and run attacks and ambushes were common throughout the Mexican Revolution. They were effective and hard to defend against as the attacker choose the time and place of the engagement.

Mexican revolutionaries or insurrectos. B809 Negative B&W 5.5x7cm El Paso Public Library. circa 1910-1920
US efforts to secure peace with Francisco ‘Pancho’ Villa

In 1913 President Woodrow Wilson sent U.S. Army General Hugh L. Scott to meet with General Francisco Villa in El Paso, Texas in an attempt to broker a peace between General Francisco “Pancho” Villa and General Venustiano Carranza.


The United States attempts to broker a peace agreement between warring Mexican factions

24 August 1914 International meeting of Generals – Left to right: General Alvaro Obregon, General Francisco Villa And General John J. “Black Jack” Pershing. The Generals are shown during their meeting on the international bridge shortly after the overthrow of Mexican President Victoriano Huerta. Pershing called the meeting in an effort to stop border fighting and to suggest that the Mexican people stop their internal strife. Two years later after Villa’s raid on Columbus, New Mexico, General Pershing would be ordered to pursue and capture Francisco Villa.

The United States undertook several efforts to broker peace agreements between the warring factions in Mexico. None succeeded.
Confrontations with bandits along the border during Mexican Revolution were often violent and fatal.

For some, the Mexican Revolution meant adventure and/or financial gain.

A small number of Anglo mercenaries and thrill seekers joined the various factions of the Mexican Revolution. Some participated due to their political ideals, others for money and some simply in a quest for adventure.

In addition to the United States Army the Texas Rangers were sent to border to combat the lawlessness and cross border banditry made endemic by the Mexican Revolution. The highly mobile and experienced Rangers proved very effective. However, combating this problem was beyond the capabilities of the existing number of Rangers. Thus the State Legislature quickly authorized the creation of ‘Special’ Ranger Forces. These units lacked the training and command structure of normal Texas Rangers, with several companies acting in a vigilante nature. One entire ‘Special’ Ranger company was dismissed because of such actions.
This image depicts dead Villistas from the battle of Celaya, 13-15 April 1915. This battle saw Constitutionalist forces (or Carrancistas) under the command of General Alvaro Obregon Decisively defeat Pancho Villa’s 30,000 troops and his Division del Norte, a unit that had gained a fearsome reputation as undefeatable. Villa’s losses are estimated at 5,800 killed, 3,000 wounded, and 8,500 taken prisoner. This defeat marked the beginning of a permanent decline of Villa’s fortunes and the end of the Conventionist government as Villa’s generals and troops began to desert or changed sides. After this battle the U.S. Government officially recognized Carranza as de facto president of Mexico. The Carrancistas/Constitutionalist faction would now serve as the foundation of Mexico’s new Government. By 1916 Pancho Villa would be reduced to leading several hundred guerillas.
Senator turned General Venustiano Carranza, arriving in Ciudad Juarez. Carranza was the leader of the Carrancistas /Constitutionalist faction. He would ultimately become President of Mexico in 1917. His administration adopts the modern Constitution of Mexico.
The U.S. Army aids in patrolling the border.

Guard Duty at the boundary commission marker- A soldier stand duty at one of the International Boundary Markers along United States/Mexico border. B654 El Paso Public Library, circa 1916.
B715 American Troops on guard duty at the Santa Fe Street Bridge in El Paso, Texas. negative El Paso Public Library, 1916
Marching across the vast landscape the Army attempts to secure the border.

As can be seen from these images the crossing the Rio Grande River into the open expanses of West Texas or Northern Mexico was not difficult whether mounted or on foot. These images also convey a sense of the scale of the border and landscapes of Texas and Mexico.


U.S. Army troops and residents Protecting the city of EL Paso.

Troops from the 24th Infantry U.S. Army troops patrol the Santa Fe Street Bridge in El Paso, Texas in 1916.
The U.S. Army reacts to bandit attacks.

21 May 1916 Colonel Frederick W. Sibley, commanding officer of the 14th Cavalry and Major George T. Langhorne Commander of 1st Battalion of the 8th Cavalry are shown discussing tactics to be employed in the pursuit of the Mexican bandits responsible for the raid on Boquillas, Texas. Negative El Paso Public Library, 21 May 1916.

Left to Right General George Bell Jr., Lieutenant Charles B. Moore, and Lieutenant Conger Pratt, of the Infantry, ADC. The image suggests they are discussing tactics and strategy after Pancho Villa’s raids on Columbus, New Mexico. ELPA_B666_01 El Paso Public Library, circa 1916.