

**THE
CARTER CENTER**



Election Report

THE JULY 2, 2000 ELECTIONS IN MEXICO: A PRE-ELECTORAL ASSESSMENT

THE CARTER CENTER/COUNCIL OF PRESIDENTS AND PRIME MINISTERS

1. INTRODUCTION

At the invitation of the major political parties and the government of Mexico and with the welcome of the Federal Election Institute, the Latin American and the Caribbean Program (LACP) of the Carter Center, representing the Council of Presidents and Prime Ministers, dispatched an exploratory mission to Mexico on June 12-14, 2000 to assess the electoral process and propose a strategy to monitor the elections of July 2nd. Led by Dr. Robert Pastor, former Director of the LACP, and Dr. Shelley McConnell, Associate Director of the LACP, the four-member team met with senior party officials, members of the government, IFE, the Electoral Tribunal, and diplomats. They were persuaded that an election monitoring team led by distinguished Council leaders could make a significant contribution to deterring electoral fraud or denouncing it in the event that it occurs and thus provide added confidence to the Mexican people that their votes would count. Dr. Vikram Chand and Dr. Todd Eisenstadt, two other members of the team, remained in Mexico for follow-up meetings and to prepare for the delegation.

The delegation will be led by former President Jimmy Carter and Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada, former President of Bolivia. Because of the large size of Mexico and the small numbers of the Carter Center/Council (CC) team, the exploratory mission proposed a new model for election monitoring. Political party representatives are the first line of defense in observing an election. The CC team encouraged the parties to send observers to all 113,703 polling-sites (casillas). The PRI said it would do so, but there was some doubt that the opposition parties could and so they were encouraged to coordinate their monitoring, which they subsequently did. All the parties, as well as IFE, the UN, and the NGOs, invited the CC to station a member of its team in each headquarters. This will permit the CC Team to learn about any concerns or irregularities during election day directly from those who are most engaged and to assess and pursue them as appropriate with the authorities.

The question addressed in this report is whether the pre-election campaign was sufficiently free and fair to provide the voters the information and environment to make an informed and free decision on election day. Before we develop the issues of concerns to the political parties, we shall first define the historical and political context of the July 2nd elections and the experience of the Carter Center during the past thirteen years in observing and analyzing elections in Mexico. After discussing the issues, we will offer our evaluation of the pre-electoral process.

2. MEXICO'S ELECTORAL JOURNEY IN THE PAST DECADE

Prior to 1988, Mexican elections, with few exceptions, were not competitive. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) dominated the political landscape. This began to change in the 1980's partly as a result of Mexico's severest economic crisis in decades, the defection of some PRI leaders, and the growing sophistication of Mexican civil society. In the 1988 Presidential election, Carlos Salinas de Gortari defeated Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, formerly a PRI governor, after the count had been stopped. Many believed the results were manipulated. In response to post-election pressures, Salinas began to undertake electoral reforms that became more serious over time.

Electoral reforms in 1989, 1990, 1993, 1994, and 1996 gradually opened up the electoral process; improved the quality of the voter registration process with a state-of-the-art voter identification card; established the Federal Election Institute (IFE) and over the course of several reforms; allowed it genuine autonomy; permitted opposition parties access to significant public resources for campaigning; improved access to the media; established new rules to combat election-day fraud; and developed a new electoral court, now known as the Electoral Tribunal (TRIFE) to resolve electoral disputes and certify the results of the presidential elections.

The 1996 electoral reforms, which established the full autonomy of IFE, set the stage for the most competitive national elections in Mexican history to date, in 1997 with the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) winning the governorship of Mexico City and the PRI losing its majority in the Congress for the first time. In addition, the National Action Party (PAN) won the governorships of Queretaro and the important industrial state of Nuevo Leon. By the year 2000, nearly one-third of all the states were governed by opposition parties. The Mexican electoral system thus became credible. Yet, with one party remaining in power at the national level for 71 years, important questions remain as to how to draw the line between the ruling party and the state in order to ensure a truly fair electoral process.

3. CARTER CENTER EXPERIENCE

The Carter Center and its staff have been monitoring Mexico's electoral process very closely for more than a decade - from an informal observation of fraudulent state elections in Chihuahua in 1986 through the significant mid-term elections of 1997. This has coincided with a major change in the character of the elections and the attitude of the Mexican government.

LACP invited leaders from Mexico's human rights community to participate in Carter Center election observation missions in other countries. In 1990, Sergio Aguayo, the president of Mexico's non-governmental Academy of Human Rights, was invited to join the Carter Center/Council delegation observing elections in Haiti, and to partner there with Gregorio Atienza, the former Secretary-General of NAMFREL, the election-monitoring group in the Philippines that detected and denounced the attempt by Ferdinand Marcos to commit electoral fraud in 1986. Aguayo returned to Mexico and organized eight grass-roots groups to become election observers, and they, in turn, invited the Center/Council in July 13, 1992 to witness state elections in Michoacan and Chihuahua. Dr. Robert Pastor, then Director of the Latin American and Caribbean Program and Executive Secretary of the Council, negotiated an arrangement with the Office of the President of Mexico, which permitted the group to be recognized by the government, provided it monitored the observers rather than the election. Soon after this experience, domestic observers were permitted by the government.

Two years later, two other Mexican leaders, Julio Faesler of the Council for Democracy, and Miguel Basanez of the National Accord for Democracy (ACUDE), were invited to join the Carter/Council observation of elections in Guyana, and they, in turn, built their organizations into election observers when they returned. As a final and important gesture of reciprocity, the Carter Center invited all the major political parties and the civic organizations to observe the U.S. Presidential elections in November 1992. This really helped to break the ice, and Mexican President Salinas finally permitted "international visitors" to the 1994 Mexican presidential elections.

In advance of the 1994 Mexican elections, The Carter Center fielded two pre-electoral delegations in September 1993 and June 1994 and published four reports that analyzed the electoral reforms and offered recommendations on ways to build confidence in the process. For the August 21, 1994, election, The Carter Center pooled its resources with the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) and the International Republican Institute (IRI) and collaborated on fielding an 80-member delegation to observe the 1994 presidential election. This joint delegation found that election day proceedings generally were peaceful, voter turn-out was high at 77 percent, and 82,000 Mexicans participated as domestic observers. Despite the improvements, the delegation noted there still were issues of serious concern, such as media access, observer registration, campaign finance, and the autonomy of election authorities.

In November 1996, the Mexican legislature passed several electoral reforms that addressed some of these concerns. In response to a public invitation from President Ernesto Zedillo, the Carter Center sent a study mission to the July 6, 1997 elections to assess the implementation of the reforms. The election represented a significant advance toward democracy. All the major political parties accepted both the process and the results of the elections with a few exceptions in the state elections of Campeche, Colima, and certain federal districts in Chiapas. Victories by the opposition parties, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in the governor's race for Mexico City and the National Action Party (PAN) in the governor's race for Querétaro and Nuevo León, promptly were recognized by the government. Mexico's electoral institutions, particularly IFE, showed considerable maturity and objectivity in their conduct of the elections. Also, Mexicans themselves turned out in record numbers, demonstrating a high degree of civic enthusiasm.

In 1998, the Carter Center/Council commissioned a study of the reforms of the Electoral Courts. That study, "Electoral Justice in Mexico: From Oxymoron to Legal Norm in Less Than a Decade," was written by Dr. Todd Eisenstadt. The report analyzes the cases reviewed by Mexico's federal electoral courts from 1988-97. It found that the autonomy of Mexico's electoral dispute-adjudicating institutions increased dramatically during this period. Eisenstadt found that the political parties' complaints became more sophisticated and the judicial decisions more serious. The Courts will be tested most seriously in the 2000 elections, as this process inaugurates the electoral court's complete autonomy in certifying the presidential election. Even in 1994, the presidential election was certified by the incoming chamber of deputies, convoked as an electoral college.

4. THE ISSUES IN 2000

The elections of 2000 are for the presidency, the entire Congress, the mayorship of Mexico City, and two

governorships, and yet the focus is the contest for the Executive, and the polls suggest that the two principal candidates, Francisco Labastida of the PRI and Vicente Fox of the Alliance for Change and the PAN, are in a race that is too close to call. Both candidates are trying to compete for the supporters of the third candidate, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the Alliance for Mexico while Cardenas has been alternatively critical of each. The principal concern of the PRI is that its candidate will win the election and Fox will not accept the results. We raised that issue with Fox, and he was very clear in acknowledging that he would accept the results if the election is fair. Fox doubts whether the PRI will permit a free election because he believes that would result in his own election. If there is fraud, he said the elections should be annulled.

Campaign. The Presidential candidates have two debates that were broadcast live, and the media has been filled with advertisements, arguments, and counter-arguments. No issue has been side-stepped in the fiercest and most public national discussion that the country has ever witnessed.

The PAN and the Alliance for Mexico share concerns that the PRI apparatus is so fearful of losing that they deployed both old and new techniques to prevent that from happening. The opposition parties were concerned that after the first debate, Labastida publicly embraced many older PRI politicians, who are believed to have manipulated past elections. The PRI acknowledged that these individuals were accepted and that they were playing a role in several state elections, but they denied that the officials were doing anything illegal or that they had an important role in the national campaign.

The principal concerns of the opposition relate to the use of government funds to buy votes or coerce voters (compra y coaccion). The exploratory mission explored these issues in some depth in its many meetings and conversations (see Appendix). Most of the allegations derive from the use of two social programs in particular, Progresas and Procampo. Progresas is a form of social assistance designed to aid poor women in rural communities who receive a check intended to pay for their children's educational and other expenses in return for sending their children to school and taking them to medical centers for vaccinations and health care. The program began in 1996 and covers about 2.6 million families; opposition parties calculate that 6 million potential voters are affected by the program. Procampo, begun in mid-1994, assists 2.9 million farmers with subsidies. The two opposition parties in Congress established a commission to investigate the diversion of funds by government agencies to aid the PRI. PRI deputies reluctantly accepted the Commission, led by PAN Deputy Elodia Gutierrez.

Most opposition criticism, as well as that of the Congressional Commission and civic groups such as the Movimiento Ciudadano Democratico (MCD), has focused on Progresas, not Procampo as the main source of voter manipulation in the current election, as they perceive there is more government discretion in the allocation of Progresas. To summarize the main charges by the opposition:

1. PRI leaders and some Progresas coordinators at the local level are charged with warning voters that the programs would end if the PRI loses or if they vote against the PRI. A survey by Mund suggests that this argument may have had an effect: 36% of poorer voters feared that the program would end if the PRI loses the July 2 elections.
2. Progresas coordinators and some PRI notables are alleged to have asked voters to photo-copy their credentials. While such information cannot be used to influence the way voters cast their ballots on election day, some peasants may think that their votes could be known because of this tactic.
3. Opposition parties and civic groups believe that the list of beneficiaries of Progresas has been given to the PRI campaign in order to enable the PRI to identify such beneficiaries and pressure them into voting for the official party. The official in charge of managing the padron (list) of Progresas at the Ministry of Social Development (SEDESOL), Hector Hernandez Llamas, resigned from his position and is now active in the PRI campaign. The Congressional Commission has a photograph of him (after resigning from Sedesol) in the presence of a group of women beneficiaries of Progresas who were asked to come to a meeting of the program, which to their surprise turned into an occasion to ask them to vote for the PRI.
4. The MCD alleged that the Minister of SEDESOL appeared with the governor of Guerrero in Chilapa to promote Sedesol with the propaganda of the Labastida campaign prominently displayed in the auditorium.
5. Commission President Gutierrez complained that federal government ministries have refused to sign agreements ("convenios") with the commission to cooperate in monitoring government programs to ensure that they are not used for partisan purposes. She argued that the failure to sign such convenios suggests that the government is hiding something. She criticized the government for failing to cooperate with the Commission or provide it access to radio and television to broadcast messages against the use of programs for political ends. Despite repeated requests from the Commission, President Zedillo declined to meet with them.
6. Opposition parties expressed concern that the publicity surrounding government social programs could benefit the PRI partly because such programs were sometimes publicized along with the Mexican flag which contains the same colors as the PRI seal, suggesting an association between the two. In response to these concerns, Dr. Jose Woldenberg, the President of IFE, requested that President Zedillo and all Governors suspend all publicity relating to the government programs 30 days before the elections as a

good-will gesture. (Because Mexico City has such a law, the PRD Mayor, who had dramatically increased its publicity in the previous two months, was compelled to stop it 30 days before the election, but the President chose not to do so.)

Carter Center representatives pursued these issues, first, in conversations with the opposition. The critical question is whether the law was broken. Although it would have been desirable for the President to suspend publicity on government programs thirty days before the election, as Dr. Woldenberg requested, and as his predecessor had done six years before, he was not required by law to do so. There were only five formal complaints filed against Sedesol, and 86 complaints were filed with the Congressional Commission on individual violations of Progresa. None concerned Procampo. When asked why so few complaints had been filed, opposition representatives said that the charges were very difficult to prove in part because poor peasants are reluctant or fearful of criticizing the PRI. Opposition parties also claim that the authorities charged with punishing electoral violations do not take them seriously, particularly the Fiscalía Especial para Delitos Electorales (FEPADE), which is an "independent" office in the Executive Branch, working under the Attorney General.

Javier Patino, head of the FEPADE, complained that his small budget of \$4 million, permitted him to hire only 65 prosecutors, and these were inadequate for the case load. He said that in the year 2000, he received 285 complaints, of which 60 resulted in arrest warrants. Of these 60, the courts have found that twenty had grounds for criminal prosecution. Eight of these twenty concern the misuse of government funds by public employees, usually at the municipal level. Patino did not recall that any of them related to Progresa or Procampo. The record in previous years reflect a comparatively small number of cases that are prosecuted. Between 1997 and 1999, the FEPADE received 1,341 complaints; it resolved 76% (or 1,007), but most of these were not pursued for lack of information or because it was believed to be outside of their jurisdiction. Only 140 - or 14% - were ruled violations of the law, and FEPADE obtained 135 indictments. Of these 135, 73 were for falsifying elector credentials; 19 were for misusing public funds; and 43 were for stealing electoral documents. Critics have argued that FEPADE spends a lot of funding on relatively few prosecutions. The following responses to the criticisms of Progresa were offered by Ministers of Social Development Carlos Jarque and Agriculture Romarico Arroyo, as well as by the Sub-secretary of Interior (Gobernacion), Armando Labra:

1. Instances of vote buying cited by the opposition, the Commission, and civic groups are really anecdotes that have not been proven. The accused are "innocent until proven guilty," in the words of the Sub-Secretary of Gobernacion. Thus far, no one has been convicted in a court of law.
2. The Secretaries of SEDESOL and Agriculture claim that they did not sign convenios with the Commission because they were instructed by Gobernacion not to do so. Sub-secretary Labra said the government didn't want to cooperate because Elodia Gutierrez was acting for partisan purposes and that the Commission was unconstitutional. Despite these doubts, Secretaries Jarque and Arroyo stated that they continued to work with the Commission and met with Gutierrez on several occasions.
3. Secretaries Jarque and Arroyo acknowledged that their programs might have a positive effect on the PRI vote but only because they are "good programs that add to up to good politics," in the words of Arroyo, and not because they are being used to bring out the PRI vote. They claim that it is very difficult to use their programs for partisan ends because both programs bypass the traditional PRI structure and go directly to beneficiaries. They also state that the primary logic of their programs is economic (to boost productivity levels, improve access to schooling and nutrition, and aid women), not political. Secretary Jarque also pointed out that all Progresa materials distributed to beneficiaries contain warnings stressing the non-partisan nature of the program.
4. Both Secretaries repeatedly cited the fact that the programs have to operate in 11 states that are currently in the hands of the opposition and hence relatively easy to monitor for the opposition.
5. Both Secretaries said that the surveys that indicated that voters receiving Progresa were more likely to vote PRI might be true, but not because of coercion, but because the people like the programs and believe that the PRI looks after their interests.
6. Both Secretaries Jarque and Arroyo provided data showing that neither Progresa nor Procampo had experienced significant increases in funding in the current election year. They said that the increases were in line with previous such increases and there were no surges in government spending in 2000 that might indicate the widespread political use of such programs.

These reassurances by the government have not succeeded in calming fears that the governing party is using government programs for partisan ends. When we raised concerns that the government budget was increased in the first quarter of 2000 by more than 15% above that of the previous year, PRI officials claimed that was due to the vast increase in funding for the Census and for IFE. In the table given the delegation, the increase in both of these programs was dramatic - representing 3.4 billion pesos more in the first three months of 2000 as compared to the previous year - but this only amounted to 7% of the 51 billion peso increase in the government's budget. The government has been able to keep the budget deficit low because of the soaring price of oil that accounts for so much of its revenues.

The lack of concrete evidence of "vote buying" makes it difficult to judge how much intimidation or illegal use of government funds is occurring. Some of the NGOs are telling people they should not be averse to accepting offers from any party but then feel free to vote their conscience without fear that the way they voted would be known. A recently published Mund Opinion poll (commissioned by the Dallas Morning News, May 12, 2000), suggested that Mexicans might be following this strategy: a vast majority (85%) of the 4,634 respondents indicated that they felt their vote would be "free and fair" regardless of what some parties might be saying. It is impossible to assess the ultimate effectiveness of this message as opposed to assistance that a peasant might receive. IFE has publicized many advertisements that "the vote is secret," but the political parties share with IFE the responsibility to ensure that all the polling sites are monitored closely so as to make that promise real.

Whether the lack of formal complaints reflects widespread fear based on history, effective intimidation, or a lack of faith in the judicial system is also hard to judge. It is worrisome, however, that the government and FEPADE have not been more aggressive in pursuing election-related crimes. We urged FEPADE to take seriously the complaint of a PEMEX official, who accused the government agency of compelling its workers to work and vote for PRI. We also asked the officials in the office of the presidency and in Gobernacion to take steps to prevent violence against PRD leaders or party representatives in rural Chiapas, Guerrero, the State of Mexico, and Oaxaca. The official said he would make sure that the state governors would take special precautions to allow party representatives to work without fear of reprisals or intimidation.

It would not be unusual for a strong incumbent party, like the PRI, to want to use its superior resources to retain power, but incumbency is a double-edged sword, as we was seen in the case of Nicaragua in 1990. The recipients of such largesse may be grateful, or they may be angry that the party acts as if it owns the government. The key is to make sure that the people understand that their vote is their own.

Media Access and Bias. As compared to previous elections where the media opportunities for opposition parties was limited or non-existent, in this year, the parties and candidates have significant amounts of free time allocated to them on television (200 hours divided among the parties according to a complicated formula) and 250 hours on radio. In addition, they purchase large amounts of time to advertise, and they have had two major televised debates. The parties, in brief, have had many opportunities to get their program and messages to the public.

A related issue is whether the reporting of the campaign by the media has been fair in terms of the amount of time devoted to each party and the nature of the coverage. IFE, several NGOs, and newspapers periodically monitored the media to assess whether there was a bias in the reporting. Until March or April, these assessments suggested that the reporting was quite balanced. Since then, IFE has reported an increasing bias nationally in the media in favor of the PRI. The fact that IFE reported this was a positive step, but the results are not. Regrettably, the news media did not achieve the level of professionalism and independence commensurate with the standards suggested by IFE.

The Conduct of Elections: Both the PAN and PRD expressed confidence in IFE's Councils (Consejeros Electorales), which decide on policy and direction of IFE, they had less confidence for the professional electoral service (SPE), whose older officials were appointed by the Ministry of Interior. The SPE are accountable to the local and district councils as well as the General Council, and they are responsible for carrying out the election at the district levels. The opposition parties fear that some members of the SPE may be biased in favor of the ruling party. The Carter Center raised this issue with both the President of IFE and Electoral Councilor Juan Molinar, a widely-respected intellectual, who had been first nominated by the PAN; both assured us that members of the SPE were obliged to follow strict procedures and lacked the discretion to influence the process in ways that might be considered arbitrary. Molinar also pointed that the SPE was subject to constant supervision by the District Councils and IFE-appointed commissions led by IFE's Electoral Councilors. But complaints have come from a variety of states about insufficient training of election officials or errant designations of the presidents of the casillas based on faulty screening.

But IFE has designed a sophisticated system to report and check any problems on election day. IFE will have 18,000 'roving' asistentes, who will observe the process of voting in every seven casillas and then report back on whether the casillas opened on time, casilla officials appeared for duty, and any irregularities that occurred. These officials, who are not members of SPE, will relay this information to IFE headquarters via the internet at each of the 300 districts, on a continuous basis and the information will be available for monitoring by political parties and election observers throughout the day. Roving officials will have the additional responsibility of filing complaints with the local councils for immediate action in the event of fraud in a particular casilla.

The number of domestic observers posted by Mexican NGO's has declined from about 82,000 in 1994 to about 50,000, representing roughly 128 organizations, in 2000. Alianza Civica, which posted approximately 12,000 observers in 1994, will field only 2000 this year. The decline in domestic observers reflects both the increased credibility of the electoral process and the greater capacity of the major parties to monitor elections. Nevertheless, observers of all types will need to be extremely careful about monitoring possible fraud in remote rural areas, particularly in the southern portion of Mexico, where it is feared that local elites and rural bosses might try to manipulate the vote in favor of their candidates. Fortunately, most of the domestic NGOs are going to focus on these areas, with 8 groups in Tabasco, 11 in Chiapas, and 12 in Veracruz. The number of international observers has also declined to about 860. The combination of an effective IFE, 'roving' officials, party

representatives, and domestic and international observers is likely to make election fraud much easier to detect and thus more costly to undertake than in previous elections.

Electoral Disputes: The Electoral Tribunal or, more precisely, Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion (TEPJF) is charged with judging electoral complaints and certifying the validity of the presidential election results. (The new Tribunal is often still referred by its old acronym, TRIFE, though the old one did not have the responsibility of certifying presidential elections. IFE has the responsibility for certifying results of federal elections for deputies and Senators.) Under the 1996 reforms, TEPJF was placed within the Judicial Branch, and its members were nominated by the Supreme Court with two-thirds confirmation by the Senate. While both the PAN and the PRD express full confidence in IFE, they have reservations about the TEPJF. Consejero Electoral Emilio Zebadua feels that TEPJF's judges tend to vote for the PRI in major decisions. Zebadua cites three cases. In one case this year, the Tribunal voted 6:1 to disallow the PAN from placing the photo of candidate Fox in the emblem of the party. Zebadua feels that this reveals a bias on the bench by the judges because the law does not prohibit a party from including a photo of a candidate in its emblem. Because TEPJF's judges are usually strict legal constructionists, they tend to follow the law literally and in this case, following that logic, they should have ruled in favor of the photo, according to Zebadua. In another case, the judges overturned a 1997 decision by IFE's General Council to set up a commission to oversee the issue of vote-buying in Mexican elections. Finally, TEPJF refused to pursue a case registered by the PRD against the PRI for excess spending in the 1994 elections.

The President of the Tribunal Jose Luis de la Peza claims that there is no bias against any party on the bench. With regard to the Fox case, the Court felt that putting the photo of a candidate on a party emblem was inappropriate since the party transcends the candidate, and there were many other elections occurring besides the presidential. With regard to the decision to prevent IFE from creating a commission to investigate vote-buying, de la Peza felt that that was the responsibility of the "junta general ejecutiva" or the professional electoral service at the national level, not a commission. The General Council was thus going beyond its competence by attempting to create such a commission.

With regard to the decision not to pursue the PRD's case against the PRI, the judges claimed that too much time had elapsed from 1994 when the violations occurred and 1999 when the case was filed before the bench, and the judges lacked the documentation to conduct an investigation.

The Tribunal has increased its staff by one-third to prepare for complaints, which it will need to resolve by September. Part of its problem concerns the rules of evidence. While the professional magistrates and personnel of the electoral courts have spent a decade developing an impressive and unique body of electoral law, the burden of proof for complaints remains quite restrictive. Since 1994, technical evidence (e.g. videos, tapes, photos) have been admissible to demonstrate violations of the secret vote, but only at the discretion of magistrates, who sometimes require other direct evidence (e.g., official acts of the polling stations). Notary publics play a key role in witnessing such depositions (under Article 241 of the Electoral Code), but in the past, Notaries, who receive their appointment from Governors, have responded slowly, if at all, to requests for help. We raised this issue with the Tribunal and the government and hope that the Notaries will be more responsive.

Given the potential importance of the TEPJF's work in this election, we are appreciative that it consented to permit a member of our delegation to monitor its resolution of disputes in the post-electoral period. In a close election, the impartiality and judgment of TEPJF could be severely tested.

5. THE CARTER CENTER ELECTION-MONITORING MODEL FOR 2000

The President of IFE, Jose Woldenberg, said, on June 16, that "a large-scale fraud is impossible in Mexico" in the elections of 2000. We agree with that assessment, but given the close race, it is conceivable that small-scale fraud of 1-2% could affect the outcome of the election. If such manipulation were to occur, it is most likely in the most remote rural areas - those that would be most difficult for international observers to monitor. Some estimates suggest that as many as 30,000 casillas could be at risk. It will clearly be impossible for the international observers to monitor so many remote casillas, and so we have devised a unique strategic approach that adapts to the large size of Mexico and the small size of our delegation.

Our approach is based on the premise that the first line of defense for any election is party and non-partisan domestic observers - in short, civil society of Mexico. All Mexicans have a responsibility to ensure that this election is clean, and we too will rely on all the groups that have invited us. At their invitation, we will place our team strategically in the offices of the major parties, IFE, the UN, and domestic NGO groups during the elections. We will use the eyes and ears of those with the most at stake - the political parties and candidates - and seek to keep open lines of communication among all the actors and thus to help resolve disputes and keep the tensions low.

6. CONCLUSION

The Mexican electoral system has made great strides towards assuring a fair and credible electoral process and outcome. Yet democracy in any country is a work-in-progress, and there is still room for improvement in Mexico as well. IFE has clearly made the most progress in establishing its credibility and competence. In some ways,

FEPADE and TRIFE - the prosecutor and the courts - are at the point that IFE was at in 1994, which is to say, that they are not viewed as fully autonomous or impartial. This election is a challenge for them. The pre-electoral process in Mexico has had flaws and inequities as one might expect for a system that has not seen alternation in power at the national level in 71 years and the emergence of a genuinely independent civil service. Serious charges of the abuse of government resources have been made; not all of them have been investigated or pursued as vigorously as we believe they should have. The government and the PRI have insisted that their officials have complied with the law. We agree that is the right standard, but for the law to be followed and respected, it must be applied and enforced with impartiality and determination.

Despite these flaws and shortcomings, in our judgment, the campaign, while heated and not equal, provided more than adequate political space and access to the media for the major parties to get their messages to the people. The voters of Mexico have a heavy responsibility to choose their leaders. We hope that they all choose to exercise this responsibility and that they understand that they are free to choose in private. We will be monitoring the process through the election and the count and, if need be, through the election-related complaints.



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