



2030 M Street, NW
Fifth Floor
Washington, DC 20036
(202) 728-5500
Fax (202) 728-5520
www.ndi.org

MEXICO
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - JULY 2006
ELECTION WATCH BULLETIN #1
March 31, 2006

Presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for July 2, 2006. Elections will also be held in 12 other federal states of the Mexican Republic in 2006, including the Federal District of Mexico City (Distrito Federal, DF). This bulletin is the first in a series that will feature the 2006 electoral process in Mexico and the main political and electoral events. This first bulletin offers background on the political conditions and the pre-electoral environment, and covers the period between January 19 and March 31, 2006. Future editions will emphasize topics such as the work of the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE), campaign finance, media access, and the work of civic organizations, among others.

POLITICAL AND ELECTORAL CONTEXT

For more than 70 years, Mexico was governed by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido de la Revolución Institucional*, PRI), the Mexican political party with the longest track record and most solid structural strength. Since the mid 1980's, the PRI's dominance as the primary political force began to decline. First, it lost seats in several states' governorships and in local legislatures. Subsequently, it lost an absolute majority in the federal legislative elections of 1997, and ultimately, it lost the presidential election of 2000, which was won by Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (*Partido de Acción Nacional*, PAN), an event which also marked the first democratic transfer of power between parties since the nineteenth century.

As the electoral strength of various political parties grew, so did concerns about developing equitable and transparent electoral processes in Mexico. During the 1988 elections, although no major incidents were reported on election day, a sudden power failure during vote counting raised doubts

about the transparency of the process. The results of these elections, and how they were made public, produced multiple accusations of electoral fraud from opposition parties and some civic organizations.

The 1988 crisis served as a catalyst to generate debate regarding the need for electoral reforms. Not only were the opposition political parties and civic organizations interested in reform, but also the executive branch. Some of the most important reforms introduced in 1994 included: the legal rights of political parties, media and authorized civic groups to conduct parallel vote counts (quick counts); permission to invite local and international election observers; and measures to guarantee the security of the election day processes.

The reforms of 1994 also facilitated the reform and consolidation of the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, IFE). Some of the changes included an increase in the number of citizens who could become electoral advisors in IFE and the creation of a computerized voter registry.

All of these changes allayed concerns about possible electoral manipulation on election day. However, recent concerns have surfaced regarding possible irregularities during the pre-electoral phase, including important aspects regarding the quality of campaigns and competitive conditions. As part of an effort to enhance the quality of electoral campaigns, IFE has been promoting and coordinating various initiatives with the political parties including an electoral truce period and debates among all the presidential candidates.

CAMPAIGN PERIOD

The three main contenders of the 2006 election are Felipe Calderón of the PAN, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Party of the Democratic Revolution-Alliance for the Good of All¹, and Roberto Madrazo of the PRI-Alliance for Mexico².

The official campaign season began on January 19. It was preceded by an IFE-sponsored campaign truce from December 10, 2005 to January 18, 2006. The first few months have been characterized by a considerable increase in radio and television advertisements and by country-wide campaign visits. According to the newspaper *El Universal*, which has been tracking campaign ad expenditures, by March 27, 2006, after 100 days of campaigning, each candidate's accumulated publicity expenditure was as follows: Calderón holds first place, with \$231,284,649 pesos (approx. US \$21 million) spent; he is followed by Madrazo, with \$136,800,430 pesos (approx. US \$12 million); and in third place, López Obrador, with \$73,886,098 pesos (approx. US \$7 million).

Although the three main candidates have consistently addressed topics such as the economy, education and the fight against crime, there is an evident lack of clear and concrete platforms. To encourage public discussion of concrete programs and policy proposals by the candidates, IFE and the National Chamber for the Radio and Television Industry (*Cámara Nacional de la Industria de Radio y Televisión*, CIRT) have been

¹ The Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) formed an alliance with the Labor Party (*Partido del Trabajo*, PT) and Convergence (*Convergencia*). The name of the alliance is "Alliance for the Good of All" (*Alianza por el Bien de Todos*)

² The PRI formed an alliance with the Mexican Green Party (*Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano*, PVEM). The name of the alliance is "Alliance for Mexico" (*Alianza por México*)

promoting and coordinating debates among representatives of the different political parties. However, this initiative encountered some obstacles due to the lack of consensus regarding the number, length and format of the debates. Lopez Obrador's refusal to participate in the first four debates provoked verbal sparring among party representatives. Two debates were finally agreed upon, to be held in April and June. López Obrador has only agreed to participate in the second debate.

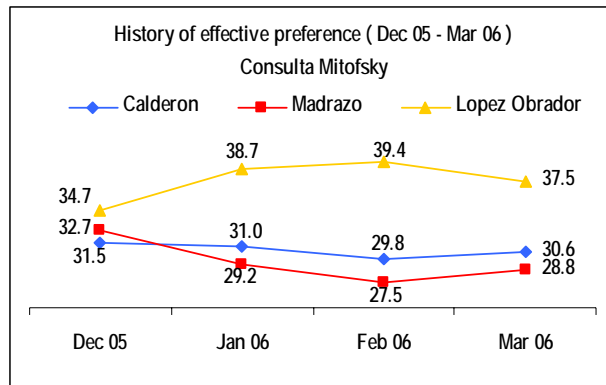
During the first weeks of the campaign, opposition parties also complained about remarks made by President Vicente Fox in various media, which according to the PRI and PRD, favored the PAN presidential campaign. These allegations led IFE to ask President Fox to revise his speeches, and several television spots in which President Fox appeared to indirectly sponsor the PAN candidate were subsequently dropped.

CURRENT TRENDS

At the end of March 2006, a poll conducted by the Consulta Mitofsky company³ gave López Obrador, the lead with 37 percent of voters polled. López Obrador is followed by Calderón, with 30 percent, and Madrazo with 28 percent. Compared to the poll taken the previous month, López Obrador had dropped two points, and Calderón increased by almost one point while Madrazo went up just over one point. In regional terms, the results show that Madrazo has greater support in the North (46 percent) and Lopez Obrador in Mexico

³ The polls used in this bulletin were conducted by independent polling firm, Consulta Mitofsky, as contracted by the Mexican television company Televisa. The results published here are not meant to be considered definitive, but are consistent with those of other respected, independent Mexican polling firms (Ipsos/BIMSA, Parametría, among others).

City (59.5 percent). Calderon's is Lopez Obrador's principal competitor in the central region, while Madrazo is his closest competitor in the southern region.



The polls also registered changes in electoral preferences by party/coalition. In March 37 percent of those polled stated that they would vote for the PRI Alliance for Mexico candidates for federal representatives, showing a four-point increase over the previous month; 32 percent stated that they would vote for the PAN candidates and 29 percent for the candidates of the PRD Alliance for the Good of All, a four-point drop.

THE POLITICAL PARTIES

PAN

The presidential candidate of the National Action Party, Felipe Calderón, was selected in an internal process generally perceived to be transparent and competitive. Although he was the least known of the principal candidates, the primary process made it possible for him to rise quickly in voter preferences within approximately one month. Aware of the fact that he was the least known of the candidates, Calderón began his campaign by increasing his presence in the mass media and by seeking support from

diverse sectors and organizations, including the religious sector.

However, while campaigning, Calderón has had to address internal party disputes due to the suspension of six state primaries for local candidates by party leadership. These candidates were instead decided upon by the PAN's National Executive Committee (*Comité Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN*).

More recently the PAN candidate has faced additional challenges. First, he confronted criticism of his party after the former president of Spain, José María Aznar, made declarations in support of Calderón during a public event. This was considered by many a violation of Article 33 of the Mexican Constitution, which stipulates that no foreigner can in any way interfere in Mexican political matters. The event even led the federal congress to recommend that sanctions required by the law be applied, whereby the executive branch can request the expulsion of the foreigner from Mexican territory.

After an initial upward trend in voter preference, Calderón's campaign leveled off, leading him to "relaunch" his campaign, by changing members of the campaign team, by emphasizing his identification with the general population, and even changing his campaign slogan from "Passion and Value for Mexico" to "The Employment President, So We Can Live Better".

PRD

The presidential candidate for the Alliance for the Good of All, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has remained the favorite among decided voters in several recent polls. A challenge to his candidacy is that the PRD has the smallest voter base of the three principal political parties and does not have a national presence.

López Obrador's campaign has concentrated on obtaining the support of the undecided voters. To accomplish this, he has developed a mechanism for extending his base of support, called Citizen Networks (*Redes Ciudadanos*), which targets voters from different sectors. During the month of March, López Obrador's campaign focused on the current Fox administration in speeches, reminding people that the promises made in 2000 have not been kept. This strategy kept Calderón, his closest rival, out of the discussion, yet links him to the current unpopular PAN administration.

Over the last few years, five factions or groupings have emerged within the PRD. These internal divisions were evident during the first months of the campaign when conflicts arose over the selection of candidates. These incidents, which were reported by the media and made more evident in the Mexico City candidate selection process, arose not only from the power struggles among the different internal party factions, but also from promises made as a part of the electoral alliances with the PT and Convergence.

PRI

The Alliance for Mexico presidential candidate Roberto Madrazo emerged as the winner of a primary election which failed to overcome the deep divisions within the party. During the PRI's internal process, two strong internal movements were established: one in favor of Madrazo and another entitled "All United Against Madrazo" ("*Todos Unidos Contra Madrazo*", TUCOM). Madrazo had strong support from the party hierarchy, partly due to his recent tenure as president of the PRI.

TUCOM, on the other hand, included five PRI influential leaders interested in seeking

the presidential nomination. To determine the candidate that could best counter Madrazo, they conducted a series of candidate preference polls among PRI members and the public at large. They eventually chose Arturo Montiel, former governor of Mexico State, who ultimately withdrew his candidacy from the primary process after corruption allegations against him became public. In the final heat, only two candidates remained, one of whom was virtually unknown. Finally, Madrazo was chosen as the presidential candidate with more than 90 percent support of participating voters.

The Madrazo candidacy, which has remained fixed in third place, has encountered several obstacles. In mid March, close to 27 PRI legislators formally resigned from the PRI, citing excessive control of internal party processes by Madrazo. The fact that Madrazo has remained in third place in all of the polls gave rise to the rumor that he would be replaced by a candidate with better prospects. However, this rumor was denied by the candidate and other party leaders. News stories charging the illicit enrichment of former PRI Governor of Mexico State Arturo Montiel, as well as influence peddling and manipulation of the judicial system by PRI Governor of Puebla Mario Marín, have not helped to erase the perception of corruption that many have of the party.

In recent weeks, and partially due to disagreements over the terms for debates between candidates, the PRI campaign has begun direct attacks against López Obrador. This tactic has been denounced by representatives of the PRD, PT and Convergence as evidence of a dirty campaign.

ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

On July 2, 2006, more than 70 million

Mexicans are expected to vote. The Mexican voters have expressed confidence in how the process will be managed by the Federal Electoral Institute. According to an opinion poll conducted by the Mexican newspaper *Reforma*, 64 percent of those interviewed have much or some confidence in IFE and in the process.

Since 2004, IFE has been taking steps to guarantee the integrity and transparency of the electoral process. These steps have included new internal processes. One of the most significant was the division of the Mexican territory into 300 electoral districts. In contrast to previous years, IFE organized a consultative panel of experts and representatives of the political parties to define new electoral districts taking into account socio-demographic variables not previously considered. In the opinion of IFE, these adjustments allowed for the establishment of more homogeneous electoral districts in order to achieve, among other things, community integration; to facilitate the work of electoral training, voter education and political campaigns; and to update the electoral rolls.

IFE has also begun to select and train poll workers. By the beginning of March, the first selection lottery had been held, based on date of birth and the first letter of the first surname. At that time, selection was made based on two criteria: 1) persons born in the month of January and 2) persons whose first surname began with the letter W. One million Mexicans will need to be recruited to work the elections. Should the established quota not be reached, IFE has stated that they will continue to recruit voters whose surnames begin with the letters X, Y or Z, and even A and B, if necessary. The training material for poll workers has already been prepared. However, doubts remain about whether it is possible to effectively train all of the poll workers because

of all of the processes established by election authorities for the recruitment, selection and training of workers (including up to three lotteries) and the lack of citizen interest in partaking in this civic duty.

KEY DATES IN THE 2006 ELECTORAL PROCESS	
March 14	Senate candidate registration (plurality)
March 25	Submission of voter registry list to political parties for review
March 31	End of period to withdraw voter credentials
April 30	Federal Deputy candidate registration (plurality)
May 9 – July 1	Electoral training for pollworkers
May 15	Validation of voter registry
May 7	Electoral assistant training
May 14	Second lottery for pollworkers
May 20	Electoral materials for the vote abroad are sent out
May 31	End of registration period for electoral observers
June 21	End of registration period for foreign observers
June 30	End of electoral campaigning
July 1	Reception of vote of Mexicans living abroad
July 2	Election Day
July 2	Counting and compiling of votes from abroad
August 2	Validation of electoral results

Another innovation within the 2006 electoral process is the vote of Mexicans residing abroad. Although most Mexicans abroad have chosen not to register to vote, it is important to note that this initiative constitutes a step forward and a challenge within the electoral framework, since this is the first time in the electoral history of Mexico that this measure is to be implemented.

Close to 40,000 applications of the more than

56,000 received by IFE have been validated, and the electoral authority will install approximately 190 polls in Mexican territory to tabulate the absentee votes.

This process, to be conducted by mail, includes a first step where interested Mexicans can send an application to IFE to be included in the voter registry of Mexicans residing abroad. Once the applications are received and considered, IFE will send the electoral materials (ballot, envelop and instructions) to registered Mexicans by the end of May. They must send in their vote with sufficient time for it to reach Mexico no later than July 1, 2006.

ELECTIONS IN MEXICO STATE

On March 12, 2006, elections were held to select members of the local congress as well as municipal authorities in Mexico State (*Estado de México*, Edomex). These elections were considered a “barometer” of what could occur at the national level, since this state is the most populous in Mexico and demographically reflects the national average for voters – i.e. both rural and urban populations and significant indigenous, industrial and agricultural sectors.

As expected, the PRD obtained 30 percent of municipal presidencies, displacing the PAN as the second political force in the state. During the weeks prior to the election, Lopez Obrador focused his campaign efforts with multiple visits to the state to support PRD candidates, which demonstrated the coattails he can bring to bear to obtain a favorable result for his party. The PRI, on the other hand, maintained its political strength partly because of the popularity of current PRI Governor Enrique Peña Nieto. However, the PRI lost the city of Ecatepec, the municipality

with the greatest number of registered voters in all of Mexico State, to the PRD.

One important element of this election, which is expected to be repeated at the federal level, was the high rate of voter abstention. Close to 60 percent of voters did not exercise their right to vote during these elections, a percentage which stands out even more in light of the fact that in 2000, voter abstention was less than 40 percent.

ELECTION OBSERVERS

Since the 1994 elections, many Mexican civil society organizations have monitored the electoral process. These organizations began by monitoring election day processes, not only through qualitative observation of the process but also through quantitative (quick count or parallel vote tabulation) observation.

Currently, 26 local and national organizations will conduct observation initiatives during the pre-election phase and on election day, as well as various civic education campaigns encouraging people to vote, providing information on any charges of electoral fraud and monitoring the use and potential abuse of social funding programs. These organizations will implement their projects with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

Of these groups, seven have decided to establish a coalition to combine efforts and cover different sites and aspects of the election process. This coalition is called Citizens United for Electoral Observation (*Ciudadanos Unidos para la Observación Electoral*, CUOE) and includes Civic Alliance (*Alianza Cívica*), Building Bridges (*Tendiendo Puentes*), Citizen Presence (*Presencia Ciudadana*), New Millennium Foundation (*Fundación Nuevo Milenio*), National Feminine Civic Association

(*Asociación Nacional Cívica Femenina, ANCIFEM*), Mexican Commission on Human Rights (*Comisión Mexicana de Derechos Humanos*) and National Confederation Of Private Business Associations (*Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana, COPARMEX*).

As part of its programs in support of the 2006 Mexican electoral process, the National Democratic Institute is providing technical assistance to the coalition in the areas of media relations and coalition building. In January 2006, the first training workshop was conducted on media relations. New workshops are planned for May.

NDI IN MEXICO

NDI has developed several technical assistance programs for Mexican civil society organizations and for international election observation initiatives with funds from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the National Endowment for Democracy (NED).

Since 1991, NDI has provided advice and financial support to nonpartisan groups such as the Council for Democracy (*Consejo para la Democracia*), Convergence (*Convergencia*) and Civic Alliance (*Alianza Cívica*) for election observation programs, parallel vote counts (quick count), the monitoring of government budgets and media objectivity with regard to election processes. NDI has also collaborated with these and other national and international institutions in the organization and implementation of conferences, seminars and forums on political and electoral reform topics, including work with the Federal Electoral Institute and the International Republican Institute (IRI).

For the elections in 1988, 1994 and 2000, NDI organized delegations of international election observers, both for the pre-election phase and election day. Since 1999, NDI has been working with political parties on a Leadership Program. As a part of this program, NDI works with emerging leaders of the three principal parties in Mexico to strengthen their leadership skills and promote internal projects for renewal and modernization of the parties.

NDI is currently implementing four programs in Mexico: the Leadership Program, a Program for Party Reform and Accountability, advocacy training with civic organizations and the Win With Women Program, which targets increasing the political participation of women.

ABOUT NDI

The National Democratic Institute (NDI) is a nonprofit organization established in 1983 working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and to promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

For more information about NDI's programs in Mexico, please contact Julian Quibell from NDI Mexico office (5255) 5575-2135 or Rebecca De Mar at NDI Washington DC office at (202) 728-5500.

For more information about our organization access to the following webpage: www.ndi.org.