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MEXICO
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - JULY 2006
ELECTION WATCH BULLETIN #1
April 30, 2006

Presidential and legislative elections are scheduled for July 2, 2006. Elections will also be held in 12 other states of the Mexican Republic in 2006, including the Federal District of Mexico City (Distrito Federal, DF). This bulletin is the second in a series that will feature the 2006 electoral process in Mexico and the main political and electoral events. This second bulletin analyzes activities pertaining to the electoral process from the month of April, including NDI's first pre-electoral assessment mission. Future editions will focus on 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, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido de la Revolución Institucional*, PRI) ruled Mexico, but since the beginning of the 1980s, the PRI's role as the dominant political force in Mexico has gradually diminished.

As the electoral competitiveness of various political forces grew, concerns emerged about the development of fair and transparent electoral processes.

In 1994, a series of electoral reforms were implemented that created improved conditions for competitiveness. These reforms included: the legal right of parties, media and authorized civic groups to conduct parallel vote counts (quick counts); permission to invite domestic electoral observers and international election observers; measures to safeguard election day processes; and reforms that helped to consolidate the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, IFE).

For the first time in its history, the PRI lost the Mexican presidential election of 2000, finishing second to the National Action Party (*Partido de Acción Nacional*, PAN) candidate, Vicente Fox. The election resulted in the first peaceful transfer of presidential power in Mexico since the nineteenth century.

PARTIES AND CAMPAIGNS

During the month of April, as many political analysts had predicted, the electoral campaigns were characterized by confrontations and attacks between candidates, mainly through the broadcasting of various media spots. At the same time, these broad publicity campaigns have neglected to present each candidate's platforms and concrete proposals for addressing the nation's main problems.

According to figures published at the end of the month by the polling company Parametría, in effect, 64 percent of those questioned believe that aggression between candidates is the principal characteristic of this electoral campaign, and 62 percent consider the current campaign to be more aggressive than the 2000 campaign.

One element that has marked the development of electoral competition in Mexico has been the prevalence of inter-party defections, which the release of candidate lists for federal congress has made more evident. In effect, all of the parties have included, to a greater or lesser degree, former members of other political movements on their lists.

PAN

During this period, the PAN launched three television spots that mention Andres Manuel López Obrador, the "Alliance for the Good

of All”¹ (“*Alianza por el Bien de Todos*”) candidate who occupies first place in the polls.

The first spot states that López Obrador would greatly increase the country’s debt during his mandate, based on allegations that while he was the PRD Mayor of the Federal District of Mexico City, he significantly increased its public debt. A second spot tries to establish similarities between López Obrador and Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, emphasizing both political leaders’ presumed intolerance. The third spot promotes the idea that López Obrador represents a threat for Mexico.

This type of publicity provoked immediate reactions from the Alliance for the Good of All campaign. Against emerging criticism, the PAN has expressed its unwillingness to remove the spots, citing freedom of expression guaranteed in the constitution.

These differences of opinion have brought the content of the PAN’s spots to the attention of the electoral authorities for them to decide whether these ads should be removed or not. By mid-April, the Federal Electoral Institute’s Board of Directors had approved the removal of the spots, although definitive approval from the IFE’s General Council is still pending.

However, a few days later, the IFE Counselor President, Luis Carlos Ugalde, declared that the IFE will simply monitor to check that the spots’ messages do not contain defamatory language that goes beyond the limits of free speech. He noted that IFE cannot sanction, regulate or dictate the contents of

campaigns, advertising spots or the speeches of presidential candidates. Also, he mentioned that it is up to voters to decide the value of campaign messages. Despite Ugalde’s comments, however, the IFE General Council decided to sanction one phrase included in one of the PAN’s spots², but did not find fault with the other two. In the end, the Calderón campaign resolved the controversy itself by removing all three spots, claiming that they had been effective but had already run their course.

PRD

The PRD and López Obrador’s campaign team reacted very negatively to these initiatives of the PAN and “Alliance for Mexico”³ (“*Alianza por México*”) candidates. They claimed that these actions not only implied a violation of the electoral code but also represented evidence of a dirty campaign aimed at weakening López Obrador’s position.

The López Obrador team decided to counter these spots with more television ads. By the middle of the month, a spot was launched in which a well-known Mexican writer⁴ called for an end to the “dirty war” and attacks against the Alliance for the Good of All candidate.

One element that has changed from the previous period is the tone of López Obrador’s discourse. Although he maintains a critical tone toward his political adversaries, there has been a notable decrease in his

¹ The Alliance for the Good of All is a coalition of three parties: the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD), the Labor Party (*Partido del Trabajo*, PT) and Convergence (*Convergencia*)

² The sanction demanded that the Calderón campaign remove from one of their television advertising spots a phrase (stating that López Obrador “permitted” corruption by his subordinates as Mexico City mayor) which was judged by the IFE General Council to be “defamatory”.

³ The Alliance for Mexico is a coalition comprised of the PRI and the Mexican Green Party (*Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano*, PVEM)

⁴ Elena Poniatowski

negative comments against President Vicente Fox.

PRI

For its part, the PRI's spots against López Obrador call for him to debate, but they have not provoked any change in the López Obrador campaign's position regarding the debates. Similar to the PAN spots, a complaint has been submitted to the IFE regarding these ads, yet there has been no order to remove the spots up to this point.

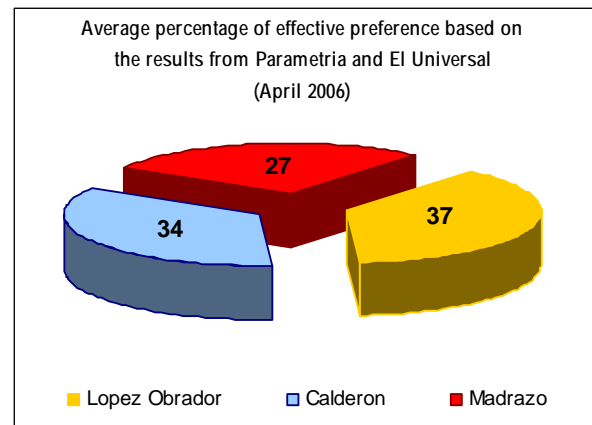
One element that has persisted throughout the month of April has been the disapproval of various groups within the PRI of the party's candidate lists for the federal congress. These differences forced the party's National Executive Committee (*Comité Ejecutivo Nacional*, CEN) to revise and approve proposals for the lists in subsequent meetings. Meanwhile, the dissatisfaction of many groups was evident in the multiple resignations of party leaders, including Emilio Chuayffet, who resigned as coordinator of the PRI parliamentary group in the Chamber of Deputies after being excluded from the senate candidate list. Afterward, Chuayffet rescinded his decision, and he remains the coordinator of the PRI parliamentary group in the lower house.

TRENDS

It was hoped that the following polls on electoral preferences would be published after the first presidential debate. On the morning of the debate, however, several polls began to circulate - in the opinion of some, as part of media strategies to change voter opinions, given the differences in results presented.

Calculating an average between the results of polls conducted by the company Parametría and the newspaper *El Universal*, both

published at the end of April, a reduction in the gap in voter preference can be observed for the candidates that occupy first and second place. The average of both polls shows López Obrador maintaining first place in voter preference with 37 percent while Calderón captures 34 percent. For his part, Madrazo obtains 27 percent.



These trends appear to confirm the results of the poll conducted by the newspaper *Reforma*, in which Calderón emerges in first place. However, these trends cannot be confirmed until other polls are released.

THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATES

The first of two debates among the presidential candidates took place on Tuesday, April 25, and all of the presidential candidates, with the exception of Andres Manuel López Obrador, participated. The event lasted approximately two hours, and five subjects were discussed: housing policy, energy policy, employment policy, how to address poverty and social and sustainable development.

For each subject, each candidate was given two and a half minutes to present his/her proposals and one and a half minutes for rebuttals. Even though the four candidates agreed on issues such as employment and modernization of the energy sector without

privatization, established strategies and deficiencies became evident during the event.

According to many political analysts, members of the press and academics, the debate was characterized by:

- Insults and accusations among the candidates.
- The lack of an effective debate, as no counterproposals or critiques of candidate proposals by other candidates were presented.
- The presentation of proposals without any specifics on how they would be implemented.
- The lack of any apparent spontaneity in the speeches and reactions of candidates.

The strategies each candidate employed in their discourses were also very clear. Alliance for Mexico (PRI/PVEM) candidate Roberto Madrazo chose a discourse of accusations and criticism directed as much against PAN candidate Felipe Calderón, who is in second place in the polls, as against the administration of President Vicente Fox. Calderón attacked Madrazo and emphasized his social proposals, even though it appeared to many that he was on the defensive. New Alliance party (*Partido Nueva Alianza*, PANAL) candidate Roberto Campa chose to constantly attack Madrazo and maintain an excessively dramatic tone. Alternativa (*Partido Alternativa Social-demócrata y Campesina*, PASC) candidate Patricia Mercado centered her message on targeting the women’s vote, though analysts indicate that her performance in the debate barely strengthened her candidate profile.

It should be noted that some analysts predicted that the other candidates would emphasize the absence of López Obrador in the debate, with the intention of highlighting his refusal to participate, and that this would help to reinforce López Obrador’s “presence”

at the event. However, the Alliance for the Good of All candidate was only alluded to twice. The effect of López Obrador’s absence in the first debate on his campaign still cannot be verified. It is difficult for many analysts to defend the idea that López Obrador was right to avoid the debate

ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

The IFE continues with the work of recruiting and training citizens who will be pollwatchers on election day as well as assisting in other organizational processes.

In the second half of the month, the IFE published the results of their media monitoring project designed to record the number of times candidates’ campaign activities are mentioned on the radio and television. This first report covered the period between January 19 and March 31, and it shows that the Alliance for Mexico candidate is mentioned most frequently in news and other programs.

KEY DATES IN THE 2006 ELECTORAL PROCESS	
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
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	Deadline of receipt of ballots from Mexicans living abroad
July 2	Election Day
July 2	Counting and compiling of votes from abroad
August 2	Validation of electoral results

NDI PRE-ELECTION ASSESSMENT MISSION

From April 4 to April 9, 2006, NDI conducted a pre-election assessment mission, with the purpose of demonstrating the support of the international community for a transparent and substantive electoral process and to offer an accurate and impartial study of the political environment as the elections approach.

The delegation was led by Félix Ulloa, Resident Director of NDI's Haiti offices and ex-magistrate of the Superior Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador, and also included: Arturo Valenzuela, former Special Assistant to U.S. President Bill Clinton, former Senior Director for Inter-American Issues for the National Security Council, Director of Georgetown University's Center for Latin American Studies and member of NDI's Board of Directors; Patricia Bullrich, President of the Argentine political party Union for All (*Unión por Todos*) and former Minister of Labor for Argentina; and Stella Maris Cacace, Technical Secretary of the Human Rights Coordinator of Paraguay and Executive Secretary of the Paraguayan non-governmental organization (NGO) *Decidamos* ("Let's Choose"). Assisting the delegation were: Julian Quibell, Resident Director of NDI Mexico; Keila González, Resident Program Officer of NDI Mexico; and Linda Patterson, Program Officer of NDI's Electoral Processes team.

The delegation met with leaders of political parties, civil society organizations, electoral authorities and representatives of the international community. The objective was to collect information directly from the electoral actors in order to understand the context of the electoral process that will culminate with the presidential and legislative elections on July 2, 2006.

The short-term recommendations made by the delegation were:

- The IFE should build consensus among the members of the General Council.
- To combat voter apathy, vote-buying and coercion of voters, the IFE should redouble its civic education efforts by increasing coordination with civic groups that are conducting similar activities
- During the campaign, political parties and candidates should avoid as much as possible the use of inflammatory rhetoric and personal attacks. Parties and candidates should increase their efforts to disseminate their platforms.
- IFE should develop a coordinating mechanism to work with the parties and civil society groups, including Citizen Presence, to coordinate the public announcement of preliminary results of the elections generated by a sampling of polling places to engender confidence in the electoral process on election night.
- Domestic monitoring organizations should make it a priority to attend the June 10 meeting on encouraging effective coordination of observation efforts among local groups and with the IFE.

NDI will conduct a second pre-electoral assessment mission that will examine more closely topics pertaining to the regulation of campaign finance and equal access to the media.

CIVIL SOCIETY

The electoral observation network Citizens United for Electoral Observation (*Ciudadanos Unidos para la Observación Electoral*, CUOE) was formally launched on April 5.

This group - consisting of the organizations 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*), the Mexican Commission on Human Rights (*Comisión Mexicana de Derechos Humanos*) and the National Confederation of the Mexican Republic (*Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana*) – is attempting to coordinate the efforts to safeguard the development of the electoral process and to implement activities to promote voting and a culture of intolerance of electoral crimes. NDI is providing technical assistance on media relations and team building with the coalition over the course of the electoral season.

During the launch, the group reported that their electoral observation projects include assessing the pre-election environment: monitoring the resolutions of the IFE General Council as well as local and district councils, monitoring campaign and political party expenses, analyses of legislative candidate profiles and platforms, monitoring social programs to discourage vote-buying or voter coercion and the implementation of civic education campaigns.

This group has already signed a working agreement with the Special Prosecutor for Electoral Crimes (*Fiscalía Especial para la Atención a Delitos Electorales*, FEPADE).

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 Mexican political parties through its regional Leadership Program. As 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 targeting 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 on NDI programs in Mexico, please contact Julian Quibell in NDI's Mexico office at +(5255) 5575-2135 or Rebecca De Mar in NDI's Washington, DC office at (202) 728-5500.

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