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MEXICO
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS - JULY 2006
ELECTION WATCH BULLETIN #3

June 20, 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 third in a series that features the 2006 electoral process in Mexico and the main political and electoral events. This third bulletin offers information on developments in the electoral contest from May 1 to June 15, including information on campaign finance, electoral trends, the second presidential debate and NDI's second pre-election assessment mission, 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 in 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.

2006 CAMPAIGN

Despite calls from various sectors for the development of electoral campaigns based on the presentation and discussion of government proposals and for avoiding provocative rhetoric, defamatory tactics persist among candidates. The environment surrounding the electoral campaign is increasingly tense. Most recently, concerns have arisen concerning the possibility of post-electoral conflicts.

Opposition parties have complained about favoritism by the federal government towards the PAN candidate, citing the sizeable expenditure of the federal government on television spots highlighting the work of the current government. However, up to this point, no evidence exists that the federal government has incurred any violation of the current legislation in order to favor the governing party's candidate.

One element that has also generated significant discussion in recent weeks is the "political neutrality" agreement promoted by the Federal Electoral Institute. The agreement stipulates that during the forty days prior to the date of the elections, the president of the republic, governors and municipal presidents not engage in any publicity campaigns to promote the works of their governments, which has been respected up to this point. Additionally, the agreement also

dictates that these officials abstain from making public comments of a partisan nature.

Toward the end of May and beginning of June, several complaints emerged concerning President Vicente Fox's non-compliance to this agreement. Leaders from opposition parties and a portion of academics, civil society leaders and journalists believe that he has intervened in a direct or indirect way in the electoral contest, referencing opposition candidates or those of his own party and promoting his government's works. These acts have provoked concerns about the use of the presidential figure to influence voters in favor of the presidential candidate of his political party.

In electoral processes with a narrow margin of victory, a situation anticipated to occur in Mexico, the role of an impartial president can be a key element to maintaining political stability in the period before electoral authorities announce official results. The perceived partiality of President Fox might limit his ability to play this important role.

CONDITIONS OF CONFLICT

On May 3 and 4, public opinion focused on the events occurring in the municipality of San Salvador Atenco, in Mexico State, where a group of citizens from the organization Popular Front in Defense of the Land (*Frente Popular en Defensa de la Tierra*) led a series of confrontations with municipal, state and federal police agents.

This situation resulted in two deaths, the injury of more than 100 people and the detainment of close to 80 people. There was significant speculation over who supported these confrontations and the effects of this conflict on the campaigns and electoral process.

The conflict became a topic for criticism in the campaign. On one side, the opposition parties classified the event as a demonstration of excessive use of governmental force. On the other hand, the PAN speculated on the involvement of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as one of the promoters of the acts of civil disobedience.

Meanwhile, some voices in the press asserted that these demonstrations were part of a greater plan to provoke the government and demonstrate its inability to control this type of situation; the fact that the leader of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (*Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional*, EZLN), *Sub-comandante* Marcos, was in the area 48 hours before the demonstrations fed the theory of a conspiracy against the federal government.

These social protests have raised concern about prospects for conducting peaceful elections.

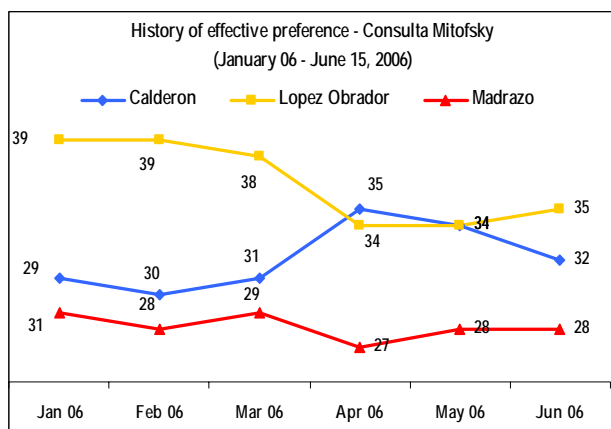
TRENDS

The most recent polls have confirmed the previous months' trends regarding the change in electoral preferences. These changes are reflected in the narrowing of the percentages between the two leading candidates (Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Felipe Calderón), the apparent technical tie and the real possibility of electoral results with very tight margins.

In accordance with the results of the poll conducted by the Consulta Mitofsky¹ firm,

¹ The poll used in this bulletin was conducted by the independent firm Consulta Mitofsky, contracted by the television company Televisa. The results published here should not be considered definitive but were consistent with the results published by other respected

published at the beginning of June, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (“Coalition for the Good of All”²) has again taken the lead over Felipe Calderón (PAN). In the case of Calderón, polls show a fall of around two percentage points compared to the previous month, while preferences for López Obrador have increased by one percentage point since May. For his part, Roberto Madrazo has held steady at 28 percent of preferences.



CAMPAIGN SPENDING

One of the trends of the electoral process that has been highly questioned by all political and social actors is the high level of spending incurred by political parties to promote their presidential candidates, expenses that have been most concentrated (between 65 and 75 percent) on mass media. At the same time, certain concerns remain about possible arbitrary or preferential treatment in the allocation of rates for different parties and candidates.

For several months, the national newspaper

and independent Mexican polling firms (Parametría) and media (*El Universal* and *La Crónica*).

² The “Coalition for the Good of All” (“*Coalición por el Bien de Todos*”) is an electoral alliance between the Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD), the Labor Party (*Partido del Trabajo*, PT) and Convergence (*Convergencia*, C)

El Universal has been publishing reports on the estimated advertising expenditures of the five presidential candidates. The procedure consists of calculating the cost of advertisements of the presidential candidates on television and radio in the Federal District, Guadalajara and Monterrey. The calculation of spending is made from multiplying these figures and the public rates for spots.

The paper admits that the expenditure estimates are not necessarily exact because they do not take into account discounts by the advertising agency and other negotiations. Nonetheless, the spending is substantially high. Since the campaigns began on January 19, 2006, it is estimated that the candidates have spent the following:

Candidate	Expenditure (in Mexican pesos)
Andrés M. López Obrador	\$210,647,52.57
Felipe Calderón	\$483,140,745.20
Roberto Madrazo	\$310,881,990.51
Patricia Mercado	\$31,777,268.62
Roberto Campa	\$26,277,769.40

SECOND PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE

The second debate between presidential candidates took place Tuesday, June 6, and unlike the previous debate, all of the presidential candidates participated. The encounter lasted approximately two hours. Five issues were covered: public security and combating corruption; governability; foreign policy and migration; federalism and municipal and regional development; and reform of the state. The format for this encounter was similar to that of the first debate. For each issue, every candidate was allowed two and a half minutes to present proposals and one and a half minutes for rebuttals.

In general terms, this second debate presented some changes with respect to the previous debate. In the first place, in contrast to the first debate, Coalition for the Good of All candidate López Obrador (who refused to participate in the first debate) participated. Second, the confrontational personal attack rhetoric that had dominated the first debate was significantly reduced.

According to many political analysts, there was a notable change in some candidates' roles at this debate: Roberto Madrazo appeared more assured, less confrontational and more deliberate; Patricia Mercado appeared nervous; and Roberto Campa was less aggressive in his discourse, though more rigid. Felipe Calderón centered his criticism toward Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his legacy as Mayor of the Federal District, and López Obrador maintained the calm many thought he would lose in the face of attacks.

During the encounter, the incidents of mutual attacks or confrontation mostly involved Calderón and López Obrador, which for some was proof that they are the two candidates with the best chances of victory in the current contest.

The opinions of political analysts, respected journalists and academics regarding the event and its results are divided. While some thought the debate was light, not spontaneous, and a mere presentation of "public announcements", others thought that concrete proposals were presented. On the other hand, while some valued the proposals presented, others thought that, more than the ideas, it was necessary to substantiate on how they would be implemented.

In the end, a majority of the experts agreed that it was difficult to decide if there was a "winner" of the event. Many confirmed that,

in accordance with the most recent polls, it produced a technical tie between Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Felipe Calderón.

ELECTORAL ADMINISTRATION

With regard to the organization of the election day process, the political parties as well as the citizenry are confident about the arrangements and logistical advances that IFE has put into place.

The IFE has already chosen all of the citizens that will participate in the process as polling site officials and will conduct their training this month. Additionally, ballots have already been sent for voters living abroad. In the area of electoral training and civic education, IFE is working with national and local civic groups to jointly develop activities to promote the vote.

One activity that the IFE plans to implement for this electoral process is a quick count. Although the IFE has conducted this type of initiative in previous processes, some sectors have expressed their concern over the appropriateness of IFE publishing its quick count results.

Although confidence is widespread in the technical capacity of the IFE's professional staff, in May many actors criticized the timeliness of some of the politically appointed General Counsel's decisions. In particular, the Counsel's ruling against the PAN's television spots criticizing Coalition for the Good of All candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador was considered by many to have been tentative and to have been made too late to have any effect on their impact.³

³ In March, the campaign of PAN presidential candidate Felipe Calderón ran a series of attack ads accusing López Obrador of being, among other things, a "danger to Mexico" ("*un peligro para México*"). The ads, which many observers regarded as both highly

KEY DATES IN THE 2006 ELECTORAL PROCESS	
May 9 – July 1	Electoral training for pollworkers
May 7	Electoral assistant training
May 31	End of registration period for electoral observers
June 21	End of registration period for foreign observers
June 30	End of electoral campaigns
July 1	Deadline for 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

SECOND NDI MISSION

From May 29 to June 3, 2006, NDI conducted a second pre-election observation mission with the goal of demonstrating the support of the international community for a transparent and genuine electoral process and to offer an accurate and impartial study of the political environment ahead of the upcoming elections.

The delegation was headed by Félix Ulloa, NDI Haiti Resident Director and ex-Magistrate of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal of El Salvador. It also included: Luis Alberto Cordero, Executive Director of the Arias Foundation for Peace (*Fundación Arias para la Paz*) and former Director of the Center for Electoral Assessment and Promotion (*Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Electoral, CAPEL*); Harriet Babbitt, Vice-President of the Hunt Alternatives Fund, former Ambassador of the

controversial and highly effective at reducing voter opinions of López Obrador, were allowed to run their course for several weeks before IFE ruled that the PAN had to either remove “defamatory” (“*defamatoria*”) rhetoric from the spots or retire the them altogether.



Members of the assessment mission announce their findings at a June 3 press conference in Mexico City.

United States to the Organization of American States and member of the NDI Board of Directors; and Mirtha Correa, Executive Director of the Association of Social Communicators CALANDRIA (*Asociación de Comunicadores Sociales CALANDRIA*) of Peru. Accompanying the delegation were NDI Mexico Resident Director Julian Quibell and NDI Mexico Resident Program Officer Keila González.

The delegation conducted a series of meetings and interviews with leaders of political parties, civil society organizations, electoral authorities, media representatives and the international community. All of its activities were conducted in compliance with Mexican law and the Declaration of Principles for International Election Observation, which guarantees the non-interference, impartiality and professionalism with which international election observers should conduct themselves in host countries.

The short-term recommendations of the delegation were:

- For the month that remains in the 2006 campaign, the political candidates should self-regulate the contents of their political messages to ensure that concrete platforms and

policy preferences supersede negative campaign tactics and inflammatory rhetoric.

- To increase confidence in the results of the 2006 electoral process, the IFE should not publish the results of its quick count, and should investigate mechanisms or processes that could make its Preliminary Electoral Results Program (PREP) more efficient. In most electoral processes in the world, publicized quick counts are the provenance of civil society organizations, campaigns, and the media, and electoral bodies concern themselves with the efficient reporting of official results. IFE, however, could play a role in encouraging citizen organizations to share the results of their quick count findings to encourage confidence in the process.
- To create incentives for greater compliance with existing finance regulations, and to promote a more transparent process, IFE should incorporate as a permanent practice its efforts to monitor campaign spending prior to election day and establish the mechanisms to disseminate as widely and promptly as possible the results of this analysis.
- For the duration of the campaign period, official state air time should be dedicated to television and radio programs that guarantee the dissemination of candidates' platforms and proposed public policies.

English and Spanish versions of the mission's full report are available on NDI's web page at www.ndi.org.

CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organizations continued with their efforts to implement electoral observation and get-out-the-vote projects.

The coalition Citizens United for Electoral Observation (*Ciudadanos Unidos por la Observación Electoral*, CUOE) has implemented information dissemination activities on the electoral process. With the support of educational organizations, the coalition launched a web page with information on their projects and the results obtained. The group also has a weekly radio spot in which each of the member organizations has the opportunity to discuss their activities, promote voter turnout, and encourage the prevention and reporting of electoral crimes.

The presence of international electoral observers in Mexico will likely be smaller than in recent federal elections (1994 and 2000). While more than 200 international election visitors have been accredited by the IFE, to date, the only large-scale observation mission to confirm its presence is the European Union. The EU will send 66 observers for the days immediately prior and subsequent to the July 2nd elections.

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 Peter Dugan at NDI Washington DC office at (202) 728-5500.

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