



SPECIAL REPORT

What votes are (and aren't) for Mid-term elections. Mexico, 2015

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1. CONTEXT: THREATS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS
 2. WHAT ARE VOTES FOR?
 3. WHAT VOTES AREN'T FOR?
 4. CONCLUSION: THE REMAINDER OF THE SEXENNIAL PERIOD
- AUTHOR

I. CONTEXT: THREATS AND DISAPPOINTMENTS

In Mexico, presidents experience a six-year term of office without the possibility of re-election. In a, until recently, highly centralized country, this means that mid-term elections attract few voters to the polls. If to this we add, in this 2015, a generalized climate of weariness of politics, the disappointment with the results of transparency –which has not diminished the impunity–, the threats from different groups to boycott elections in some states and a controversial campaign for abstention and invalid ballots, everything led to think that the voter turnout would be unusually low.

That was not the case: the turnout was around 48% of the electoral roll, **the highest since 1997**, when true pluralism was inaugurated in Congress with the loss of PRI's historic hegemony, which has not been recovered so far, that once the final tally is done, it could have been recovered adding to its seats those of the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM) and the Partido Nueva Alianza (Panal), its allies.

Citizens not only went out and voted, but sent several messages, although certain of them clearer than others. However, the first message is unquestionable: despite the unfavorable environment, **Mexicans continue to opt for the vote as an essential mean of citizen expression.**

“Votes went for Claudia Pavlovich, PRI’s candidate, strongly supported by Manlio Fabio Beltrones, former governor and leader of PRI in the Chamber of Deputies”

2. WHAT ARE VOTES FOR?

FOR PUNISHING BAD LOCAL MANAGERMENTS.

Among the 9 states with election of governor, only 3 held on power the same party: Campeche, an oil state with scarce plurality; San Luis Potosí, a relatively prosperous and calm state; and Baja California Sur, another sparsely populated, peaceful state, where local politics is rather a matter of families than parties. Campeche hadn’t had a governor from another party apart from PRI yet, SLP had had governors from PRI and PAN, and BCS had had governors from PRI, PAN and PRD. One more state: Colima, a small, calm and prosperous state, it is overly secretive to firmly affirm anything, but PRI appears to be the winner, which would make the fourth of this group, a state with high rates of economic growth and a relatively low criminality.

The rest of the cases have their own particularities:

- **Sonora:** the governor Guillermo Padrés, from the PAN, has been involved in all kind of scandals of corruption, from building a dam for his ranch –in a state with serious water problems–, to benefit from contracts or abuses. The candidate of his party proved to be a suspicious

owner of a million-dollar real estate in US, thus votes went for Claudia Pavlovich, PRI’s candidate, strongly supported by Manlio Fabio Beltrones, former governor and leader of PRI in the Chamber of Deputies. Political sophistry helped by a bad management of the opposition.

- **Nuevo León:** is the most extreme case in a pioneering institution in many respects. The management of Rodrigo Medina (PRI) was marked by a brief but intense period of unprecedented violence in the estate, in particular by a notorious corruption, openly orchestrated by governor’s father, and the negligence of a president photographed in working days shopping with his children in San Antonio. The granting of a controversial aqueduct to the Grupo HIGA, the building contractor in the houses of Peña Nieto and Videgaray, did not help. Besides, PRI made a mistake in putting aside the secretary of Economy and an influential senator to support another candidate, a local television hostess –senator as well–, whereas PAN seems to have missed the mark with a weak candidate. The result has been striking:

“Is the most shocking case. The governor (José Calzada, PRI) best evaluated of the country. The candidate of this party loses significantly against the PAN’s candidate”

the overwhelming victory of Jaime Rodríguez, “el Bronco”, an independent candidate –although militant of PRI until recently–, the first in Mexican history to reach a position of such importance, which opens up interesting possibilities and many questions on how can a man govern without a party nor a seat at the Congress, and a non-conciliatory, populist discourse. It is said that an important group of businessmen supported him; the truth is that more than enough voters did it.

- **Michoacán:** A state torn by violence and corruption, prey to two PRD mismanagements –L. Cárdenas y L. Godoy–, and a more recent one of PRI –F. Vallejo–, marked by an intermittent President, due to the cancer, and the internment of a subject who was video-taped with the drug cartel leader in the institution, as well as the son of Vallejo. In a campaign marked by the lack of transparency, Silvano Aureoles recovers the seat for PRD, defeating Felipe Calderón’s sister –candidate for second time– and a PRI’s candidate whose nomination suggests that PRI did not really want to govern the state.
- **Guerrero:** the closest thing to a “failed state”. Misery, discrimination, exclusion, all kinds of violence, rampant corruption, delinquent governors, empty of industry and declining tourism. PRD’s management has sunk the state; PRI recovers it as if it wasn’t meant to, in a clear protest vote to PRD’s state government, from which disappeared 43 students last September: that was the beginning of the current downturn of Peña Nieto’s government. The electorate seems to have thought better before blaming the president for the current situation and, due to those peculiar political changes, provoke that PRI comes back to the Government’s Palace.
- **Querétaro:** is the most shocking case. The governor (José Calzada, PRI) best evaluated of the country, in a state that grows above 7% and maintains enviable rates of low criminality. The candidate of this party loses significantly against the PAN’s candidate. Hypothesis: PRI’s candidate did not convince; candidate’s selection is important even where situation is good.
- Another case is the one of **Guadalajara**, the most populated municipality

“The Mexican lax electoral law allows voters to distribute power so that it is not concentrated on a single party, whenever they want”

of the country, and center of the second metropolitan area, where a candidate rejected by PRD, Enrique Alfaro, won with a secondary party, Movimiento Ciudadano (MC), beating PRI and PAN.

FOR MANAGING PLURALISM

The Mexican lax electoral law –in which concerns to creation and survival of new parties– allows voters to distribute power so that it is not concentrated on a single party, whenever they want. It has not been the case of Distrito Federal, absolutely ruled by PRD since 1997; however, in 2015, DF voters have decided to seize the opportunity and divide seriously the presence of parties in 16 “delegation leaderships” –nearly municipalities–.

PRD lowers from 14 to 6 delegations; the other 8 go to Morena (5), PRI (2) and PAN (1). The two remaining continue as they were: Cuajimalpa with PRI, and Benito Juárez with PAN. Therefore, they result in:

- PRD: 6 (Álvaro Obregón, Coyoacán, Gustavo A. Madero, Iztacalco, Venustiano Carranza and Iztapalapa)
- Morena: 5 (Azcapotzalco, Cuauhtémoc, Tlalpan, Tláhuac and Xochimilco)
- PRI: 3 (Cuajimalpa, Magdalena Contreras and Milpa Alta)

- PAN: 2 (Benito Juárez and Miguel Hidalgo)

The explanation is naturally on the division of the “left” –which is more a set of corporate and client groups than an ideological movement– between PRD and Morena, the new political vehicle of Andrés Manuel López Obrador –twice presidential candidate– and its aligned groups: the victories in DF explain, mostly, a surprising debut with around 9% of polling.

At first sight, it could seem that the mentioned “plurality” is not such, since Morena get the votes of PRD, from which has removed. As in many fratricidal wars, it can be seen that in fact the rivalry between PRD and Morena is more real than the usual between other parties of the capital.

The Head of Government of DF, Miguel Ángel Mancera, is in an odd position since he was nominated by PRD without being affiliated to the party. Now he will have to navigate between several waters if he expects to make its presidential candidature in 2018 a reality.

Chamber of Deputies: It cannot be said the same of the Chamber of Deputies: there will be wider variety, but probably PRI might recover the absolute majority thanks to its allies, PVEM and Panal. Is it hard vote? Is it inertia? Or is it the negative image of the opposition, maybe as a result of

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the “Pact for Mexico”? It is early to venture hypothesis, but the fact is that PRI could have had its net polling reduced. Again, the government would go wrong considering the result as an endorsement of its situation. President’s popularity continues to be at historical low levels.

With 93% of polling counted, the results for deputies of relative majority (300) remain as follows:

- PRI/PVEM: 187 (60%)
- PAN: 56 (18%)
- PRD/PT: 34 (11%)
- Morena: 14 (4%)
- MC: 11 (3%)
- Panal: 1 (0.5%)
- Independent: 1 (0.5%)

It has to be completed yet the counting of 200 deputies of proportional representation.

FOR REJECTING VIOLENCE AND AFFIRMING ELECTORAL MEANS.

As mentioned before: despite the threats of violent groups, 98% of polling places were installed, participation was high and voters’ decisions were, in many cases, innovative and bold. Mexican democracy is poor in many respects, but it is still alive.

3. WHAT VOTES AREN'T FOR?

FOR AN OBSERVANCE OF LAW BY THE PARTIES

It is still needed to review campaign costs, but it can be assured right now that every party have violated limits and raised money from not-permitted sources. If INE had followed strictly the law, it would have had to cancel all the campaigns. It is urgent either to enforce the law properly or change a law that is clearly not enforceable. The current situation is unacceptable and the funding of parties and campaigns must be modified: they are really expensive and opaque.

PVEM deserves a special mention, because it has violated the law in several chapters, becoming a creditor when the register that INE did not dare to apply was removed.

FOR DIMINISHING CORRUPTION

Mexico already has a long history of changes in political power at any level, but corruption and impunity are not reduced. The vote is clearly a necessary condition of democracy, but it is not sufficient: accountability is the other side of the coin of a truly democratic government system, and Mexico has still work to do in such area.

**“Elections are not
substitute for day-to-
day decision-making”**

4. CONCLUSION: THE REMAINDER OF THE SEXENNIAL PERIOD

It is not a trivial matter that PRI and its allies reach the majority at the Chamber of Deputies: it will allow them to pass budgets and laws in such chamber –they do not have the majority in the Senate–, however, legislative agenda of the government was already approved, at least in which it is concerned. The effectiveness of such majority, without additional projects of great scope, will be more a symbol than a tool for governing.

We insist that the government shouldn't perceive the results as an endorsement; thus, in any case, it would not solve the problems coming, in both economic, politic and security matters. Elections are not substitute for day-to-day decision-making.

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