

Election Observation Final Report from the IFES*

Mexico August 21, 1994

Presentación y síntesis de Isabelle Rousseau**

La presencia de observadores nacionales y de visitantes extranjeros durante el último proceso electoral representó una innovación de peso en los mecanismos tradicionales que habían regido hasta ahora el proceso electoral y que quedaban implícitamente fundados en un principio de base: la no intromisión de cuerpos extraños.

Entre los múltiples organismos que lograron formar y enviar una delegación para asistir a esos comicios, cuenta IFES, una organización no gubernamental estadounidense. Su papel consiste en proporcionar asistencia técnica y electoral en países que se caracterizan por vivir una situación de transición a la democracia, sin olvidar desde luego los Estados en donde este régimen es ya parte del patrimonio nacional.

Desde principios de abril de 1994, IFES se había involucrado en el proceso electoral mexicano: logró convocar a una conferencia trilateral sobre los sistemas electorales. Esta primera conferencia de América del Norte se desarrolló en México D.F. los días 6, 7 y 8 de abril de 1994. Con la representación de delegaciones de Canadá, México y Estados Unidos, se buscó sobre todo ofrecer una visión general sobre los mecanismos que rigen cada uno de los tres sistemas. Esta conferencia representó una primera etapa con miras a establecer en un futuro próximo actividades de cooperación técnica e instalar un canal permanente de comunicación.

Posterior a este primer acercamiento, IFES formó una pequeña delegación compuesta por ocho miembros con el fin de realizar únicamente un trabajo de observación electoral.¹

Con la autorización de IFES presentamos aquí una breve síntesis de su reporte final.

Obviamente, IFES no representa más que una organización de visitantes extranjeros entre decenas; por lo tanto, este informe no puede ni pretende ser una muestra representativa de la opinión vertida por tales organismos. Sin embargo, por la amplia experiencia que tiene IFES en cuestiones electorales (ha intervenido en más de 70 países), nos pareció interesante reproducir aquí sus conclusiones. *

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1 Esto, en contra de lo que suele hacer IFES en la mayoría de los países al involucrarse mucho más en la tarea de preparación electoral (trabajando meses antes con los diferentes actores y organismos que participan directamente en el sufragio: tribunales supremos electorales, comisiones de derechos humanos, iglesia...). Por ser la primera experiencia de esta índole en México, solamente la ONU (ONU-elecciones) fue habilitada a intervenir en un sentido similar bajo dos formas distintas: la revisión, por parte de una comisión de tres miembros, del padrón electoral (en mayo de 1994) y, luego, con la llegada de un equipo reforzado con el fin de capacitar a los miembros de las diversas ONG nacionales que iban a participar como observadores en el proceso así como de supervisar la formación de los funcionarios de casillas. Esta segunda misión fue dirigida por Miguel Boneo y Nguyen Hu Dong.

The IFES delegation arrived in Mexico City on August 17, 1994 for several days of extensive briefings with Mexican electoral officials on the electoral process and recently implemented reforms. The delegation based its findings upon a reference framework that included transparency and fairness.

The eight observers of the IFES delegation observed polling sites in both urban and rural areas, specifically Chiapas. The urban areas included Texcoco, Chalco, Chimalhuacan, and Amecameca, all areas surrounding Mexico City. Chiapas was chosen as an observation site as it has been at the center of controversy during the entire pre-election period due to the Zapatista uprising in January. This widespread coverage gave the IFES delegation the opportunity to visit polling sites located in a wide diversity of socio-economic communities.

On election day, the IFES delegation spread out over polling stations in the Federal District and the State of Mexico outside of Mexico City. Two members of the IFES team went to the State of Chiapas. In all polling sites visited, the polling activities progressed without problems. Both international visitors and local observers were present.

One IFES team visited areas in Mexico City located around Lomas de Chapultepec, Polanco, Hidalgo, and downtown sections. A total of 12 polling sites were visited and no major complications were apparent. Problems were found with the 300 voter limit of the *casillas especiales* (special polling sites), which operated as voting sites for people who were in transit, defined as those persons who were out of their cities or districts where they were assigned to vote.

Another IFES team witnessed the opening of a Mexico City poll and visited four small towns in the surroundings of Mexico's capital city. Each of the towns of Texcoco, Chimalhuacan, Chalco, and Amecameca displayed different socio-economic characteristics. Only minor formal problems were detected by the team. First, there was a considerable delay in the opening and closing of the polling station in Mexico City. Second, there was a shortage of "special ballots" in some areas.

An IFES team also observed polling stations in the State of Chiapas. Sites included the towns of San Cristobal, Oxchuc, San Pedro Ca-

ricel, and Ocosingo. Because of the security consideration involved, the team was required to obtain special documentation from the IFE office in Tuxtla Gutierrez for passage through several military checkpoints. The only problems encountered were with "special" voting stations. In the town square of San Cristobal de las Casas, the location of a special voting station, a spirited rally was held in protest of the ballot shortage during the day. The majority of the protestors remained into the evening in order to witness the ballot counting. As each ballot was held high in the air, the candidate's supporters cheered, and the vote was duly recorded.

The special polling stations were intended as a type of absentee ballot. If a voter was outside of his district, the voter could opt to go to a special table. In 1988, special voting tables had thousands of ballots in stock at each location. Under a pact signed by all of the political parties and the IFE General Council, it was agreed that the special voting tables would be limited to 300 ballots each for the August elections. The demand for ballots at these locations outnumbered the inventory of ballots by a large margin. Some voters went to these special stations rather than locating their assigned polling place. Some station officials also misdirected voters to special stations. In some areas including Chiapas, there was a significantly displaced population which placed further pressures on the special voting process.

The IFES delegation was impressed with the high levels voter participation on election day. The IFE organized a successful motivational civic education campaign resulting in a record turnout of 77 percent of the electorate. Local civic groups mobilized over 80 000 citizens, who were trained by the UN and accredited by IFE. Along with the training of election officials and national observers, IFE conducted a nationwide educational and motivational program. The combination of all these factors aroused great citizen interest in the electoral process and resulted in an unprecedented voter turnout.

The IFE authorized at least seven different organizations to conduct separate exit or parallel polls and rapid counts, and additionally requested that the methodology for such counts be submitted to them for analysis to ensure

broad and legitimate statistics. The results of the different counts coincided with the IFE's preliminary results. It is also important to mention that for the first time in Mexico's history, foreign visitors were officially allowed to observe their electoral process. The presence of these observers in polling stations around Mexico may have contributed to reduce irregularities and avoid fraud.

Analysis

What was paradoxical in the last Mexican electoral process (held on August 21, 1994) was the surprise that the results generated in a great part of the population. As a matter of fact, due to a series of circumstances that we will point out, this process has been characterized by strong innovations and, according to the prediction, should have introduced changes in the correlation of forces of the competing parties. However, in spite of the expectations, none of this has occurred.

1) A notable effort was given to establish credibility to the electoral process through the implementation of various mechanisms:

- A filtration of an irrefutable electoral registry (which permitted the UN and the PAN to validate it with 96.4% accuracy).
- A sensible liberalization of the body responsible for the implementation of elections, granting it a certain independence with regards to the official party—for the first time, its president, the Secretary of the Interior, is not a member of the PRI— and allowing the introduction of citizen councilors, formally independent from party politics.
- The presence of national as well as international observers, including a technical team from the UN which had completed various tasks including an evaluation of the electoral registry and the assessment of groups on national observers since May.

2) A massive participation of the population at the polls was achieved, never before seen in the history of Mexico, passing the 75% mark in comparison to a 52.5% participation rate of the last election.

Contrary to the opposition's belief, these innovations have not favored an electoral weakening of the PRI. On the contrary, not only has the official party maintained the lead in the voting, but has come out strengthened by the same credibility that these new factors have brought to the suffrages.

The opposition parties seem to have been strengthened; PAN is to the right of the PRI and the PRD is to its left. In spite of their ideological and platform differences, they coincide in their demands for a democratic proliferation of the regime. In particular, they have coincided to perform the battle in the electoral arena. Undoubtedly, the major innovations that the Mexican electoral system has known recently, are a product of the battles that have liberated both parties in this area. In spite of the work completed, a series of deficiencies have subsisted that have led to an unequal electoral competition in at least two aspects:

CAMPAIGN FINANCING

In spite of a reform to this effect, the maximum limit for campaign spending remained too high at 134 460 new pesos for the opposition parties that do not have these resources at their disposal.

ACCESS TO THE MEDIA

This point reiterates the question of party financing. In fact, the opposition's problem in Mexico is not a problem of access to the purchase of air time in the media under COFIPE protection, but a problem of economic means available to them. Without relying on the fact that some entities such as Televisa generated an open campaign in favor of Ernesto Zedillo, the great inequality between the parties regarding access was denounced. The press announced for example in June, that the PRI was enjoying a 1 to 4 lead in this area, for which the Secretary of the Interior was forced to intervene to establish equality. However, this intervention was effected near the end of the campaign.

In spite of the reforms made in this area, it is evident that the PRI has enjoyed an advantage that has permitted it to construct two

electoral campaigns. It has been able to project two candidates in the same amount of time that the other parties were struggling to consolidate their image and the projection of their single candidates.

The electoral results of last August 21 in Mexico have received different evaluations. The nature of the one-party system that has existed in this country for several decades has been the major reason for the demand of democratic strengthening in the American hemisphere. Many Mexicans, especially members of opposition parties, argue that Mexican citizens feel obligated to vote for the PRI because they receive some sort of economic or political benefit from the government, which range from farmers' subsidies to government contracts. In addition, some observers criticized the PRI's seemingly unlimited amount of financial and logistical resources. According to estimations based on direct monitoring by the Mexican Public Opinion Institute, the total cost of the PRI's presidential campaign was approximately 4.25 billion new pesos compared the 12 million new pesos spent by the PRD.

Reports developed by Alianza Civica described cases of citizens with identification cards whose names did not appear on the voter registry and thus could not vote, cases which occurred in approximately 70% of the observed polling stations. In addition, the reports accused the political party representatives, polling station officials, and PRI members of coercing or pressuring voters at the polling station and questioned the overall results in those polling stations where this occurred. The PRD argued after the election that Mexicans cast votes of fear. Even if one takes into account this statement and the irregularities reported by Alianza Civica, however, one must accept that a large majority of voters did indeed vote for the PRI.

Beyond the many valid arguments, from Mexicans and foreigners alike, that emphasize the persistence of fraud and political stagnation in Mexico, the recent changes and innovations in the electoral system of this nation will have a significant impact on the wave of democratic consolidation that is presently taking place in the Americas. Several arguments serve to support the previous statement:

FIRST, AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, Mexico has demonstrated that with political will, it is possible to move from an inert political and electoral system into one that may easily exercise leadership in the implementation of transparent elections. Complete electoral purity is nearly an impossible achievement, let alone in a nation with a strong tradition of electoral fraud and manipulation by an hegemonic party. Nevertheless, the new features of the recent Mexican electoral reform proved that the substance of the positive change of this structural pattern rests on active "citizen participation in the entire electoral process", *ciudadanización electoral*. This was accomplished through massive pollworker training, voter motivation, poll watching (observation) by Mexican natives complemented by international observers, quick counting by several civic organizations, and exit-polling performed by a private media interest association —CIRT and the appointment of Citizen Councilors to represent the public interest on electoral matters. Although total reliance on the system was not regained, this led to an unprecedented participation rate of 77.73%.

SECOND, AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL, this transformation has had an effect by breaking the one party dominance in Mexico. Even though the Institutional Revolutionary Party, PRI, is still the dominant political force, for the second time, the electoral results of the National Action Party (PAN) and the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD) clearly reflect the entry of alternative forces that have transformed the nature of both political competition and of pluralism in the political composition of the legislative bodies of Mexico at all levels.

THIRD, AT THE REGIONAL LEVEL, the recent tragic events of 1994, including the Zapatista Revolutionary Army's revolt in Chiapas in January of 1994, the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio in Tijuana, and the kidnapping of important entrepreneurs have had a detrimental influence in Mexico's external image. The image has marginally been improved to some extent with the electoral performance of last August 21, the peaceful recognition of electoral defeat by PRD and PAN, and by the general acceptance of challenges in the struggle for

national democratic strengthening, which has deepened the expectations from the international community.

FOURTH, AT A TRULY REGIONAL SCOPE, the members of the economic and political integration with Mexico (NAFTA, G3 and G8) are pleased to count on a partner that has formally and openly expressed its commitments to electoral democracy and its willingness to accept plural electoral competition. The challenge now rests in the new government's ability to open channels in ensuring stable political guarantees to the opposition forces and the implementation of programs promoting democratic political reform.

FIFTH, THE EMPHASIS that multilateral organizations and the NGO community are presently supporting democracy (UN, OAS, OECD, etc.), not only implies a positive recognition to the recent Mexican democratic experience but also presents the possibility of using it as a new approach to their own work on this cause. The previously mentioned massive citizen (civil society) involvement in the electoral process is now being considered as a strong line of action in the preparation of new elections for the reconstruction of Haiti.

The IFES delegation was impressed with the commitment and dedication of the electoral bodies responsible for this first ever transparent election in Mexico's history. The electoral registry was usually posted in a visible and accessible place for voters. National observers, consisting mostly of party representatives, were present at all the polling station the IFES delegation observed. The advance preparations, which included the issuance of voter identification cards and an accompanying voter list at each polling site, allowed the vast majority of citizens to witness these preparations of their own electoral process. This election was an important step towards a new stage of democratic political development in this leading Latin American country. The major goal of creating trust in the process by opening the system to all the citizens was achieved. For the first time, Mexicans could believe that their vote was important and that they contributed to the outcome of an election of this magnitude.

Recommendations

Specific actions can be taken by the IFE, the Mexican government, political parties, and non-government institutions to deepen the integrity of the electoral process. The electoral reform which has occurred since the creation of the IFE has created opportunities for greater participation and has established a track record of electoral success through a violent and fluid campaign process. The IFE should continue to seek international partnerships and the development of working relationships with institutions that have similar functions and responsibilities in other countries. As a result, the IFE will gain more insight and knowledge of other electoral systems and be able to distinguish between the beneficial and the harmful characteristics of its own electoral practices.

In addition, the IFE should become an institution independent from the Interior Ministry. Reforms have already been made to modify the structure of the IFE itself with citizen councilors now forming part of the council. The presence of citizen councilors is progress, but this presence does not guarantee the complete independence of IFE and for that matter, the electoral process. By restructuring the IFE to make it an institution more representative of Mexican society, the democratic process in Mexico could continue to develop towards a more pluralist and representative democratic institutionalized force. However, independence from a government ministry is needed in order to ensure that the IFE does not become the governing party's tool for achieving electoral victories. In addition, the IFE must extend its resources and influences to the state electoral board level to promote continuity in reform at all electoral levels. Therefore, reforms must include specific agreements that will guarantee the separation of the ruling party from the government.

Campaign finance and disclosure laws should also continue to be examined for greater effectiveness. Some campaign finance reforms have already been implemented. However, the prosecutor's office responsible for investigating electoral law crimes should be given greater discretion and authority in order to adequately respond to complaints and accusations against political parties and/or their candidates. Electoral

crimes should be prosecuted in a strict fashion, even if the crimes are committed by members of the highest levels of government. The IFE must respond in a timely manner to reports made against election officials. This authority should also be exerted over reviewing campaign disclosure reports in order to ensure their accuracy and validity. In addition, the loopholes that still remain in the recent reforms for regulating political party financing must be closed and progress must continue to be made based on the current laws. Better auditing and disclosure tools are needed and ceilings on private contributions to political parties must be lowered. Independent control over campaign expenditures must also be formed.

More extensive news coverage of all political parties in a fair and equitable manner should also be promoted. A solution to the problem of establishing a more equitable playing field for all parties involved would be to establish less problematic property rights in radio and television licenses which would not hinder the media's freedom of expression, citizen's right to information, free electoral competition, and greater competition in the mass media market. Additional formal debates with media coverage

should be organized and encouraged. This would allow the average Mexican voter to become better informed of the political parties' platforms and the candidates' views. By enabling certain media entities, specifically television, to broadcast these debates at a convenient time around the country, voters will become more informed as to how their political actions function, while ensuring the transparency of the process at the same time. Equitable conditions in the electoral competition are necessary for democratic development and television must become a truly independent and objective player in the democratic process. This points to the need for change not only on the part of government, but in civil society as well.

One of the major problems with the August elections was the presence of special polling stations. In light of the difficulties and complaints these special polling stations generated, other alternatives should be considered. Tended ballots or absentee ballots are two such options. An education campaign also could be developed for the voter registration period to better inform the citizenry of the procedures for voting outside of their district. *

En la Meseta Tarasca, tierra, madre y virgen son una y la misma fuente. En esta región casi todo lo que se come, lo que se bebe y lo que se viste se obtiene del entorno. La cultura rural de este universo no hace diferencia entre la vida material y la vida simbólica y festiva. Las labores y las creencias caminan siempre de la mano. Religión, agricultura, comunidad son voces faro en estos parajes.

El conjunto de relatos que se presentan en este libro pretenden sugerir caminos para aprehender la vida de estos campesinos. No solamente por la evidencia material que describen sino porque pretenden alcanzar el sustrato emocional de sus visiones.

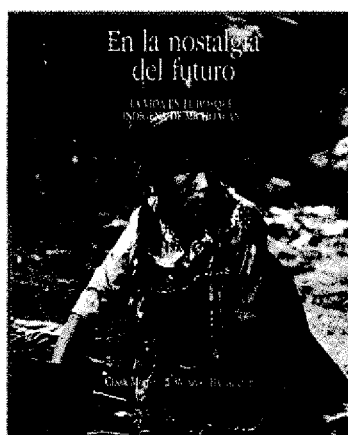
De esta intensidad, de la energía incandescente que irradian esos hombres y mujeres del mundo rural en el teatro de la naturaleza michoacana [...] se pretende presentar la trama de los tiempos ritmados por el pulso de nacimiento y muerte, de cosecha y siembra, de bendición y duelo, de fiesta

En la nostalgia del futuro, la vida en el bosque indígena de Michoacán

César MOHENO

Ricardo BARTHELEMY

CEMCA, 1994



y desafío, de comercio y de lluvia.

Ciclos de la vida en los que se planta la apuesta campesina de que hay que conservar para cambiar. Asegurando así una continua nostalgia del futuro.

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