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Mexico

Will this election in Mexico be fraud-proof?

- IV Online magazine - 2018 - IV521 - June 2018 -

Publication date: Tuesday 12 June 2018

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One month away from Mexico's presidential election, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) finally appears to be the undisputed candidate for the presidency.

This isn't because it was ever a tight race between AMLO and someone else. AMLO has been leading opinion polls since before the campaign started. However, the specter of election fraud has loomed so large over Mexico's presidential voting that it seemed almost unthinkable for AMLO and his center-left party, the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), to ever have a fair shot at the presidency.

This year's general election on July 1 will be the biggest in Mexican history. In addition to the presidency, more than 4,300 public posts are being voted on, including 30 out of 32 state governors, all 500 deputies of the lower house of Congress and all 128 senators. In eight states, every elected position is up for grabs.

Voters will have three main contenders to choose between. AMLO and his MORENA party, in an alliance with the small Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the evangelical Partido Encuentro Social (PES), is the frontrunner by a long ways.

Opinion polls place AMLO 20 percentage points ahead of his closest opponent, Ricardo Anaya of the right-wing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), which is running in coalition with the decaying Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) — AMLO's old party — and the emerging Movimiento Ciudadano (MC).

José Antonio Meade, representing the establishment Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) — the party of the current president, Enrique Peña Nieto — and its coalition with the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM, the Green Party of Mexico) and the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL), is in third place.

Based on electoral models and opinion polls, the conservative Spanish newspaper *El País* predicts that AMLO has a 92 percent chance of winning. Such high numbers throughout the campaign have given AMLO and his supporters a great deal of confidence about overcoming the probability of electoral fraud orchestrated by the regime which stole the presidency from AMLO in 2006.

This time around, it seems like AMLO's candidacy will be "fraud-proof."

Before heading MORENA, AMLO was a leader of the reformist Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) — he became the mayor of Mexico City with this party.

Under the PRD's banner, AMLO launched a very popular campaign for president in 2006, but after he was denied the presidency as a result of a scandalous election fraud, AMLO launched his own political initiative, which eventually became MORENA.

Surrounding himself with intellectuals, like-minded reformists and politicians opposing the neoliberal agenda of the PAN and the PRI, he registered MORENA as an official political party.

As the current presidency of Peña Nieto of the PRI was caught up in one scandal and crisis after another, MORENA grew stronger. With the party appearing to be a more viable political alternative, many politicians of the PRD, PAN and even the PRI started joining MORENA's ranks.

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Under its political program, MORENA has promised to combat corruption, return to the rule of law, and invest in education and culture. To revamp the economy, AMLO has endorsed a free economic zone on the border with the U.S., high-speed rail in the Riviera Maya and job training programs. More importantly, he proposes to reinvest in the energy sector, to build new refineries, hydroelectric power plants and biodiesel refineries.

AMLO's political project doesn't break with neoliberal policies. On the contrary, he has promised to invite Canadian mining companies to do more business in Mexico if Donald Trump raises tariffs on Mexican mineral exports.

In response to Trump's scapegoating of Mexicans, AMLO has positioned himself as a "responsible" politician open to dialogue about immigration, but also as a defender of the rights of Mexican migrants abroad — a message that has been received well by Mexicans.

The positive numbers at the polls and optimism about what seems to be an inevitable victory has given AMLO the confidence that other candidates lack. During the presidential debates, Anaya and Meade tried to take jabs at AMLO, but this late in the campaign, AMLO seems untouchable.

The real elephant in the room throughout this general election campaign rallies is the incessant wave of violence across the country.

According to a new report by the consulting company Etelekt, since the campaigns begun, 110 people have lost their lives due to their political activism for one party or another. On June 2 alone, five people died in murders associated with political activity, such as canvassing or attending a political meeting.

One of the cases that brought political violence into the spotlight is that of Pamela Itzamaray Terán Pineda, who rose to national prominence after her political activism to bring aid to her municipality of Juchitán following the earthquakes of September 2017. She was registered as a candidate under the PRI alliance. On June 2, she was murdered, along with her driver and a journalist.

What makes these murders so unusual is they don't just target MORENA's candidates. All parties have lost candidates to the violence. Furthermore, most of the murders have happened at the local level — high-profile candidates running for the senate or state governors aren't the targets.

Part of what explains the killings is that all political parties have ties with organized crime at the municipal level, and the rivalries between political parties have also brought out conflicts among criminal organizations.

This is the result of the festering decomposition of the PRI, which once ruled Mexico as a one-party state and which returned to power under Peña Nieto; PAN, which also has ruled and PRD. As these parties collapse, along with their clientelist networks, they open the door for other forces to take their place.

Without a clear, dominant force like the PRI or the PRD to guarantee established alliances between politicians and organized crime, we are seeing fights over the spoils of local governments and narco-trafficking territories.

This free-for-all at the local level also reveals the broader shifts taking place in the corridors of power in state capitals and corporate boardrooms: the new political order that is being built out of elements of the old one.

The collapse of the PRI's regime and its extensive network of alliances is leading to a deep restructuring. The PRI is

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now associated with theft and corruption, and links to the party are turning into more of a political liability. Therefore, various PRI politicians are running under the banner of their long-time ally, the PVEM — Mexico's "Greens," which don't represent a left alternative in any way in Mexico.

The shifting loyalties also reflect a ruling class split. The most recalcitrant sectors of the ruling class, organized around conglomerates like Grupo Mexico and FEMSA — which distributes Coca-Cola — have consistency attacked AMLO and his party. They've gone so far as to issue orders to their workers not to vote for MORENA.

A more pragmatic sector of the ruling class, no doubt concerned with the ungovernable state of the country under the last 18 years of either the PAN or the PRI, has thrown its support behind AMLO.

For example, AMLO's advisor on tourism, Miguel Torruco, comes from one of Mexico's wealthiest families. He is an in-law of Carlos Slim, one of the richest men in the world. Other AMLO supporters link him to the nation's largest media conglomerates and banking institutions.

In short, this formerly anti-establishment politician is very much established.

The reconfiguration of political and capitalist alliances is also affecting parties like the PAN and PRD. These parties are being abandoned for others that aren't as corroded and tainted, such as the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) or even the evangelical, anti-abortion and anti-gay Partido Encuentro Social (PES), which formed an alliance with AMLO in 2017.

As these shifts take place, the possibility still exists that one sector might try to force through electoral fraud against AMLO, with the help of the military and the blessing of Donald Trump. Unfortunately, something similar to the right-wing governments in Brazil and Argentina is not off the table in Mexico.

The fact that such a harrowing scenario might still play out after AMLO has led polls by such a decisive margin shows the contested nature of the political transition underway in Mexico.

Nevertheless, this scenario would face real obstacles — not the least of which is that if high-ranking officers supported such a move, they couldn't necessary trust the base of the military, which seems to be leaning towards AMLO, to support them.

All this has also forced the radical left to reflect on its own political initiatives.

The most interesting to emerge from the radical left is the candidacy of MarÃ-a de JesÃ's Patricio, an Indigenous woman known as Marichuy. Her campaign was spearheaded by the Congress of Indigenous Governance (CIG) — the nation's largest representative body of Indigenous groups — with the backing of its most important member, the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberaci3n Nacional (EZLN).

Although the aim of this initiative was to use Marichuy's campaign as a vehicle to fuse anti-capitalist social movements and pull national political debates to the left, it lacked a clear message and got off to a slow start. To complicate matters further, the earthquakes that rocked the south and center of the country last September derailed the campaign and delayed signature-gathering efforts.

In many respects, the Zapatistas reaped what they sowed — it was unrealistic to think that they could launch a

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national campaign after years of isolation in Chiapas and sectarian posturing against unions.

The campaign was also poorly organized and run through student collectives and loose alliances. After it was finally launched, it received little support from unions and NGOs, many of which had already committed to AMLO.

Once the Marichuy campaign failed to get the signatures required to get on the ballot, the initiative collapsed, and the Zapatistas retreated. MORENA doubled down on its efforts to pressure the left to close ranks behind AMLO — despite his refusal to address the grievances and demands of the social movements around forced disappearances, femicide, and dispossession at the hands of extractive industries.

If, as expected, AMLO comes to power, he and his government will face a steep uphill battle to stabilize the country. The social and economic tensions of Mexican society will continue to define politics for the coming period.

For the socialist left, this election will also likely close a cycle that began in 1988 with the creation of the then “center-left” PRD to challenge the newly neoliberal PRI. As MORENA becomes the official left, it will force socialist groups and social movements to reorient themselves in opposition to it and its “social-liberal” program.

Through the Congress of Indigenous Governance, the Zapatistas will continue to play an important role in cohering sectors of the left — in April, they brought together 8,000 women for a three-day gathering in Chiapas. There is potential for a new axis for anti-capitalist organizing to form around the Zapatistas, together with Indigenous movements, urban popular movements, feminist collectives and independent labor unions.

For now, Mexico waits impatiently. The general election campaign has dragged on for more than a year, and the suspense over whether AMLO would endure another stolen election seems to have finally subsided. With or without fraud, however, this year’s elections seem likely to close a 30-year cycle — and open a new one in Mexican politics.

June 11, 2018

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