

Massive Fraud in Mexico's Presidential Elections

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On August 31, Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) dismissed all but one of the formal objections filed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leftist candidate of the Progressive Movement coalition, against the certification of Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) as Mexico's next president. The only complaint IFE did not reject out of hand was that the PRI had greatly exceeded campaign-spending limits. IFE will get to that and we should find out sometime next year whether Peña Nieto really did spend ten times the limit.

However, he takes office in December.

Given that Peña Nieto's victory was pre-packaged, pre-paid, pre-sold and pre-certified, IFE may have effectively made popular elections obsolete. Ricardo Monreal, coordinator of López Obrador's coalition, [said](#) that with IFE's decision, Mexico could reach a point where "presidents are no longer elected by popular vote, but through periodic auctions."

Reciting their unanimous verdict one by one in a five-hour televised chant, the eight IFE counselors swept away all possible doubts that the July 1 presidential election was anything but the cleanest and fairest of all possible elections in all of Mexican if not world history. Thus, the party that ruled Mexico for 71 years returns to power on December 1 after a 12-year hiatus. Scattered calls among López Obrador supporters in the Chamber of Deputies for impeaching the entire IFE panel will not prosper.

Ironically, since IFE was created in 1990, it has become a model for the modern administrative and judicial management of elections. Nothing like it exists in the United States, where the mechanics of federal elections are largely left to state political hacks and local registrars.

In comparison with the US electoral system where everything that should be criminal – the commodification of candidates with corporate money for example – is made legal, Mexico has gradually outlawed the worst practices. What happens in the real world is another matter, however. If US elections are a game of legalized corruption, then Mexican elections are exercises in corrupted legality.

Previous legitimized stolen elections (1988, 2006) did not seem entirely to defile the system, which in turn allowed the fiction of a slowly growing democracy to live on awhile. Perhaps that was because IFE found and reported violations in those earlier campaigns though nothing was done to invalidate the results.

What seems remarkable about 2012 was that with its vast mechanisms of control, IFE was unable to find in all the pyroclastic river of hot mystery money flowing into Peña Nieto's campaign any cause to investigate anything. This was something new in IFE history and may have marked the point where feigned democracy could no longer be sustained.

Unlike previous disputed elections, the left in 2012 provided truckloads of physical evidence including bank gift cards, notarized eyewitness statements, telephone recordings, bank documents and even a sampling of farm animals used to buy votes in rural areas, all pointing to unprecedented vote buying with unexplained piles of laundered cash. The money laundering alone should have set IFE into investigative mode given the evidence that narco money may have penetrated the electoral system.

Despite the implausible IFE verdict, one finds in much of the post-election commentary a willingness to take the official vote count as fact. Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, three-time losing candidate for the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) — the anchor of López Obrador's coalition — and the victim of the 1988 election fraud, recently said that his party should have known López Obrador would lose because the polls said so. He hinted — while denying the hint — that Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard (PRD) might have won the election had he been the candidate instead of López Obrador.

“Whether or not you believe in the polls, it's clear that all of them indicated how the order of the votes would turn out weeks before the final results,” Cárdenas [said](#).

Actually, the polls indicated no such thing. With few exceptions, notably polls conducted by the Mexico City newspaper Reforma, the polls were proved wildly and consistently inaccurate. One of the contentions raised against the official verdict was precisely that the polls were manipulated to persuade the electorate of Peña Nieto's inevitability.

More to the point, the accuracy of polling data is a shaky foundation for judging López Obrador's performance without taking into consideration the multi-million peso vote buying and other schemes.

Despite the difficulty in knowing what election obscurities lie beneath IFE's whitewashing, many commentators are charging ahead employing analytical tools that can hardly be expected to yield reliable results given the paucity of reliable data.

Respected political analyst Jose Antonio Crespo, for example, [analyzed](#) the election outcome with references to “bases,” “independents” and “hardline votes.” He concludes that while López Obrador won more independent votes than Peña Nieto did, he lost the election (did he?) because he had a loyal base (*voto duro*) of only 16% of the electorate.

The left made redundant

IFE rulings have helped atomize the center-left. López Obrador's 2012 coalition was a mix of the PRD, the Labor Party (PT), the Civic Movement and the National Regeneration Movement (Morena), many of whose members were leftist in name only. Some coalition candidates who won congressional or gubernatorial seats are looking for accommodations with Peña Nieto. One of [them](#) recently cast a vote in the Chamber of Deputies that helped move forward a labor reform bill the left officially opposes.

With López Obrador out of the way for now, Mayor Ebrard has emerged as the PRD's centrist leader and has already announced his pre-candidacy for the 2018 election. He has begun to distance himself from López Obrador, who has left the coalition and plans to lead Morena into the dark ages of Peña Nieto's presidency.

Over the last 24 years, governments led by the PRI and the National Action Party (PAN) have followed nearly identical policies, among them a determination to permanently shut out the

left.

To shut the left down now may first require shutting it up. By closing off the main avenues of political expression, the lumbering electoral bureaucracy is forcing popular movements into the streets. At a post-election rally in the capital's main square, López Obrador called for a strategy of civil disobedience. There have already been nearly continuous demonstrations since May against the "imposition" of Peña Nieto by the student-led movement #YoSoy132. It joined others in a [cacerolazo](#) on October 13, the pot-banging protest demonstrations called in 27 countries against austerity, worker "flexibility" and corruption.

Reform storm

Following the IFE verdict, the PRI-PAN alliance announced a bold agenda that will test the limits of public tolerance. In the final weeks of his presidency, Felipe Calderon (PAN) sent the newly installed congress a bill to reform Mexico's labor code. The reforms would, among other things, make it easier for employers to fire workers, deny advancement through seniority, outsource jobs, put workers on hourly rates and suppress wages.

The Chamber of Deputies stripped out portions of the bill that would have mandated the democratic election of union leaders through the secret ballot and transparency in the use of union funds. Without a rebellion in the Senate, there is little likelihood this section will be restored given that representatives of some of the country's most corrupt union bosses occupy Senate seats.

Defenders of worker "flexibility" rely on two basic but contradictory arguments: that workers will actually be better off as the reforms create new jobs; and that, in the interest of global competition, Mexican workers must match the wages of the world's lowest paid workers.

[Data](#) from Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) show that Mexican labor costs are now approaching or have fallen below those in China as Chinese wages rise and Mexican wages stagnate, increasing competitiveness for Mexican exports in the US market.

This wage leveling took place without the benefit of the pending labor law reforms. Even so, Investor Business Daily [wrote](#) that US manufacturers might be discouraged from reshoring production from China to Mexico despite the already favorable labor costs unless Peña Nieto is given the new legislation to do away with what remains of current "labor inflexibility."

Proponents of further assaults on labor argue that without still lower labor costs, Mexican workers will face job losses and worse working condition than what the new legislation would produce. Mexico's neoliberal policymakers reject the alternative of enlarging the domestic market through wage increases relying instead on the laws of globalism that require an inexorable march toward world-wage equilibrium.

The PRI's post-election strategy is apparently to frontload Peña Nieto's six-year term with its wish list of unfulfilled neoliberal dreams. Besides labor flexibility, the party wants to further open the state oil monopoly Pemex to private capital. Peña Nieto's advisors have told [The Wall Street Journal](#) that the new president would ask Congress for legislation to do so in the coming year.

How odd that the same administrations that have nurtured Mexico's monopoly-dominated economy should have such distaste for Pemex, which for years has been the ATM machine

for a profligate government and a dysfunctional taxation system. During the Calderon administration, Pemex has paid [60%](#) of its revenues to the government in taxes.

At the start of his term, Calderon pressed for legislation to open Pemex, and secured some reforms allowing private companies into certain areas such as exploration. Further privatization was blocked in Congress and discouraged by popular demonstrations capped by a national referendum that rejected it out of hand.

Peña Nieto, however, faces a friendlier congress dominated by his own party and its allies in the PAN, the grossly misnamed Green Ecologist Party (PVEM) and the New Alliance Party (Panal), a designer concoction representing the personal interests of Elba Esther Gordillo, leader for life of the national teachers union.

It remains to be seen whether Peña Nieto will press on with more drastic privatization of Pemex and other reform favorites such as imposing the VAT tax, currently at a general rate of 16%, on food and medicine, and to continue Calderon's monthly gasoline price increases that started in January 2010.

But the labor law and Pemex legislation are quite enough to raise the ultimate question: has the PRI-PAN axis calculated carefully enough the Mexican public's ability to absorb reactionary reforms.

PRI savings time

There is a joke running around just now that Mexicans will have to set their clocks back 83 years; to the year the PRI was born. That is not quite fair because in the 1930s, Mexico was making serious reforms in land tenure, education and many other areas. López Obrador might actually have found a place for himself in the PRI of that era.

The more appropriate date is 1876. In their exaggerated reliance on the market and foreign capital and on the fiction of democracy, there are striking similarities between the next era of PRI dominance and the pre-revolutionary period in Mexican history.

What IFE and the rest of the electoral bureaucracy have accomplished is to make Mexico safe for the dictatorship of Gen. Porfirio Díaz. And for guidance on how to achieve perfect labor flexibility and encourage foreign investment, Peña Nieto need look no further than the 35- year *porfiriato*.

Except for the years 1880-1884, Díaz ruled Mexico until the Revolution forced him into exile in 1911. To be sure, there were elections during the *porfiriato*, but they were never seriously contested until Francisco I. Madero ran against Díaz in 1910 and was arrested for his trouble. In 2006, President Vicente Fox (PAN) tried to imprison López Obrador to the same end.

Díaz was his own IFE and could declare every election clean, fair and honest. Now, it takes a complex legal, administrative and judicial monstrosity with a budget of 1.2 billion dollars and thousands of employees to say the same thing and with no more credibility.

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