Polls Show Center-Left Candidate Lopez Obrador with Lead Over Two Rivals

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex

Recommended Citation
LADB Staff."Polls Show Center-Left Candidate Lopez Obrador with Lead Over Two Rivals." (2005).
https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/4933
Polls Show Center-Left Candidate Lopez Obrador with Lead Over Two Rivals

by LADB Staff
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 2005-11-30

Public opinion polls have become the centerpiece of Mexico's presidential campaign, with polling companies differing on the margin by which former Mexico City mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is leading his two closest rivals. Lopez Obrador will represent the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) in the July 2, 2006, election, facing Felipe Calderon Hinojosa of the conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and Roberto Madrazo Pintado of the former governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

Six of seven polls published during November show support for Lopez Obrador in a range between 29% and 35%, with a seventh poll showing the former Mexico City mayor with as much as 37% of voter preferences. Three of the polls were conducted or commissioned by Mexico City-based daily newspapers, including La Crisis, Reforma, and El Universal.

In contrast, support for Calderon and Madrazo varies widely, with the two candidates vying for second place in voter preferences. Madrazo was second in voter preferences in five of the seven polls, although the lead was only by a few percentage points, creating a statistical dead heat.

In some polls, such as those conducted by Consulta Mitofsky and Reforma, Madrazo and Calderon were within a few points of Lopez Obrador, also creating a statistical dead heat. In some polls, the candidate of the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM), Bernardo de la Garza Herrera, obtained 6% to 8% of voter preferences, taking support away primarily from the PRI and PAN candidates. De la Garza has gained strong name recognition because his party has spent large sums on radio and television spots.

Following are the poll results released during November, listed in alphabetical order of polling company or entity: Beltran y Asociados (BGC): Lopez Obrador, 33%; Madrazo, 30%, Calderon, 28%; De la Garza, 8% Consulta Mitofsky: Lopez Obrador, 34.8%; Madrazo, 30.4%, Calderon, 28.8%; De la Garza, 6% Grupo Bimsa: Lopez Obrador, 35%; Madrazo, 30%, Calderon, 27%; De la Garza, 6% Instituto de Mercadotecnia y Opinion (IMO): Lopez Obrador, 37.2%; Calderon, 18.8%; Madrazo, 18%. El Universal: Lopez Obrador, 34%; Calderon, 22%, Madrazo, 18% La Crisis: Lopez Obrador, 33.7%; Madrazo, 28.5%, Calderon, 23.9% Reforma: Lopez Obrador, 29%; Calderon, 28%; Madrazo, 21%

Analysts cautioned against reading too much into the poll numbers because of the differences in the population sampled, the way questions were posed, and the content of the polls. In an editorial, La Crisis emphasized that public-opinion surveys should not be used to predict the results of an election. "The polls are only an indication to the candidates about their standing among the public," said La Crisis.

Candidates put own spin on polls
Still, the various political parties rushed to place their spin on the poll results, with the PAN citing the Reforma figures as a sign that the race is tightening and the PRD pointing to the IMO poll as the
more accurate measure of voter sentiment. Both the PAN and the PRI also highlighted the gradual erosion of Lopez Obrador's support during the last several months. The former Mexico City mayor, often known by his initials AMLO, at one time enjoyed support of close to 45%, partly a result of the effort to oust him from office earlier this year on a trumped-up charge of violating the Mexican Constitution. Most Mexicans saw that effort as an unfair maneuver by President Vicente Fox's administration and congressional members of the PRI and the PAN to keep Lopez Obrador off the ballot, adding to Lopez Obrador's popularity in the polls at that time (see SourceMex, 2005-04-13).

Calderon used the recent polls to boldly dismiss Madrazo's chances in the election. "The July 2 election is turning into a race between two contenders," said Calderon, in reference to Lopez Obrador and himself. Calderon is somewhat of a surprise candidate for the PAN, as many public-opinion polls earlier this year had projected that former interior secretary Santiago Creel Miranda would be the party's representative in the 2006 election. Calderon won the party's nomination with strong showings in three regional primaries (see SourceMex, 2005-10-26).

Creel was considered Fox's favorite, and many analysts saw Calderon's victory as a sign that party members were disenchanted with Fox. That sentiment was furthered in late November, when ex-agriculture secretary Javier Usabiaga, who was endorsed by Fox, lost the PAN gubernatorial primary in Guanajuato to federal Sen. Juan Manuel Oliva. Oliva defeated Usabiaga by 13 percentage points.

Lopez Obrador and PRD president Leonel Cota Montano questioned the Reforma and Mitofsky polls, saying the firms were launching a "dirty war" against the PRD candidate on behalf of the political right. Cota had especially harsh words for Reforma, a newspaper that has consistently criticized Lopez Obrador. "The forces of the right are out to discredit our candidate," said Cota. In an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper La Cronica de Hoy, officials from Mitofsky, BIMSA, and BGC cautioned the PRD to take the poll numbers seriously. "Lopez remains ahead, but in a highly competitive scenario compared to the situation a few months ago," said Mitofsky director Roy Campos. "What could be happening to the PRD candidate is that someone is advising him to ignore these results, which is a serious mistake," said BGC director Ulises Beltran.

Other analysts said the decline in Lopez Obrador's numbers were a natural consequence of the campaign, especially with the definition of the candidates for the PRI and the PAN. "The narrowing gap between Lopez Obrador and his opponents was predictable and predicted," said Kelly Arthur Garrett, a columnist for the Mexico City English-language newspaper The Herald. "AMLO is passing through media limbo, between the heady days of running the capital and the open warfare of the coming campaign. Nobody seriously believed he’d go wire to wire with the nearly 50% poll numbers he reached at the height of the counterproductive impeachment attempt last spring." "[Lopez Obrador] has enjoyed a bed of roses in terms of poll results since shortly after he became mayor," George Grayson, a Mexico scholar at the College of William & Mary, told Copley news service. "All of a sudden, some thorns are appearing and he finds that politically uncomfortable." Grayson is writing a book on Lopez Obrador.

**Calderon's rise coincides with Madrazo's decline**

Regarding Calderon, Campos said the Mitofsky poll does not necessarily reflect a strong rise in the standing of the PAN candidate, but appears to be more a growing rejection of his PRI rival. Madrazo is widely perceived to have used his position as PRI president to manipulate the party's internal process to gain the nomination, including a move to force his chief rival Arturo Montiel to withdraw...
from the contest (see SourceMex, 2005-10-26). Montiel was the representative for a PRI faction known as Unidad Democratica, informally known as Todos Unidos Contra Madrazo (TUCOM), which felt that Madrazo harmed the PRI's chances to win the presidency in 2006 (see SourceMex, 2005-08-17).

Montiel's withdrawal left only little-known Everardo Moreno, a former deputy attorney general, to face Madrazo in the party's primary in mid-November. Moreno managed to obtain almost 8% of the vote in an election where only 40% of registered PRI voters bothered to cast a ballot. Even with the lukewarm support from TUCOM partisans, Madrazo's bigger problem will be to bring the teachers union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educacion, SNTE) back into the fold. The SNTE has threatened to support the PAN and PRD because of Madrazo's move to oust SNTE leader Elba Esther Gordillo from the party.

Madrazo and the PRI leadership are angry with Gordillo for her strong support of some of Fox's policies and for her endorsement of an opposition candidate in the Oaxaca gubernatorial race (see SourceMex, 2004-08-04). As party president, Madrazo helped remove Gordillo from a leadership post in the Chamber of Deputies (see SourceMex, 2003-12-03). He then blocked a move to have Gordillo assume the party presidency once he retired to start his presidential campaign (see SourceMex, 2005-08-17).

More recently, the PRI executive committee (comite ejecutivo nacional, CEN) voted in mid-November to strip Gordillo of her political rights in the party, considered a first step toward expulsion. The PRI leadership has gone so far as to blame Gordillo for causing the party to lose support to the PAN and the PRD in public-opinion polls. "There are some members, and even some leaders, who have conspired against the unity of our party," said an internal PRI document obtained by Reforma. "The sanction against these individuals should be expulsion." Gordillo is happy to accept the blame for Madrazo's problems, as evidenced during a radio debate broadcast on Nov. 15, in which she told Madrazo she would do "everything possible" to make sure he does not become president in 2006.

Some analysts said other signs of disenchantment with Madrazo were evident in the mayoral elections in Hidalgo state in mid-November, when the PRI lost ground to the PRD. The PRI won only 37 municipal races, compared with 45 in the 2002 election. In contrast, the PRD won 23 races, compared with only 10 three years ago. The recent fortunes of the PRI are a sharp contrast to the Hidalgo gubernatorial and state legislative elections in March, which the party won handily (see SourceMex, 2005-03-02).

**PRI, PRD form alliances with minor parties**

The possibility of close presidential and congressional elections in July 2006 has led the three major parties to consider alliances with some of the smaller parties for the elections. These alliances must be registered with the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) by Dec. 10. The PRD appears to have made the most progress in the coalition-building process, convincing the Partido del Trabajo (PT) to enter the elections as its partner. The PT, which had run with the PRD in several state elections during the past several years, had balked at a coalition with the PRD in the 2006 presidential election because of concerns that Lopez Obrador was not sufficiently committed to leftist principles. Earlier this year, the PT proposed creating an alternative leftist coalition, possibly led by PRD founder Cuauhtemoc Cardenas (see SourceMex, 2005-08-24).
Cardenas' decision not to participate in the 2006 election may have been one of the factors that led the PT to negotiate with the PRD, said the Mexico City daily newspaper La Jornada. The PRD also forged a coalition with the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), which had partnered with the PRD in some recent state elections and with the PAN in others.

The PCD, a social democrat-leaning party, has won seats in some state legislatures and has a national presence in the federal Chamber of Deputies, but its biggest coup was to win the mayoral election in Oaxaca in 2001. "Our party could make a difference in the election," said PCD director Dante Delgado Rannauro. The biggest prize for the major parties could be the PVEM, which according to party officials could deliver as many as 3 million votes to a coalition partner.

The PVEM appears to be negotiating most seriously with the PRI, but has not discarded a partnership with the PRD. The PAN has already ruled out an alliance with the PVEM, citing the party's "excessive demands." The PVEM would like its policy proposals, which focus heavily on environmental protection and education, incorporated into its partner's platform. Also under negotiation are the number of at-large seats in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate that the partner would be willing to cede to the PVEM.

The PAN will apparently not forge a coalition with any major partner, although the party is sure to attract many disaffected PRI members, particularly those affiliated with the SNTE.

No independent candidates will run in 2006

Two independent candidates who pushed hard to get on the ballot will not be able to participate in the election. One of these candidates, the controversial former foreign relations secretary Jorge Castaneda Gutman, took his fight for the right to run in the 2006 election to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) after various Mexican agencies had denied his request. In October, the IACHR ruled that Castaneda's rights were being violated and urged the Mexican government to take provisional measures to place Castaneda's name on the ballot.

The IFE rejected the request, saying that such a move would require Congress to modify Mexico's Constitution. The Washington-based IACHR, part of the Organization of American States (OAS), then referred the case to the Inter-American Court on Human Rights in San Jose, Costa Rica. After a couple of weeks of deliberation, the court decided not to take the case, saying this was not an urgent matter where a party was threatened with "irreparable damage." The court's decision ended Castaneda's efforts to be included on the ballot. "There will not be any independent candidacy in 2006, but we will continue the fight to make this a reality in future elections," said Castaneda.

Castaneda's failure to get on the ballot led the other independent would-be candidate, Victor Gonzalez Torres, to abandon his efforts. Gonzalez, also known as Dr. Simi, owns a chain of discount pharmacies throughout Mexico. He gained nationwide recognition by organizing a tour of 43 cities, where he championed universal health care, improved education, and a tougher tax code. Gonzalez said he would continue to speak out on these issues. "I'm not a candidate, but I'm going to be a part of the election," he said. "I'm going to be a big presence."

Other independent voices are also emerging to focus on social-justice issues without actually running a candidate. In late November, the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) announced the creation of a new political organization to speak out on the issues, including its opposition to capitalism and the promotion of leftist ideals. The EZLN has been at odds with Lopez

©2011 The University of New Mexico, Latin American & Iberian Institute
All rights reserved.
Obrador, saying he has embraced some of the neoliberal policies supported by ex-President Carlos Salinas de Gortari (see SourceMex, 2005-06-29).

EZLN leader Subcomandante Marcos gave few details on the new group, saying only that it would replace its political arm, the Frente Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (FZLN). The EZLN created the FZLN in 1996 after a national "consultation," in which 1.3 million participants voted in favor of transforming the EZLN into a "political force." (see SourceMex, 1996-01-31). The EZLN said its new political organization was intended primarily to lend a broad voice to the issues of concern to Mexico's indigenous populations. "Now we are going to form a new Zapatista political organization civilian, peaceful, anti-capitalist, and left wing which will not fight for power but will trace the lines of a new way of carrying out politics," said Marcos. (Sources: Los Angeles Times, 11/18/05; Agence France-Press, 11/23/05; The Herald-Mexico City, 11/14/05, 11/17/05, 11/22/05, 11/28/05; Reforma, 11/14/05, 11/15/05, 11/20/05, 11/21/05, 11/27/05, 11/28/05; El Economista, 11/14/05, 11/15-18/05, 11/21/05, 11/22/05, 11/29/05; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 11/14/05, 11/16/05, 11/21/05, 11/23/05, 11/24/05, 11/29/05; La Cronica de Hoy, 11/14/05, 11/17/05, 11/21/05, 11/22/05, 11/24/05, 11/28/05, 11/29/05; La Crisis, 11/14/05, 11/17/05, 11/15/05, 11/21/05, 11/22/05, 11/24/05, 11/25/05, 11/27-29/05; Associated Press, 11/29/05; El Financiero, 11/14/05, 11/17/05, 11/21/05, 11/30/05; El Universal, 11/14-17/05, 11/19/05, 11/22/05, 11/24/05, 11/25/05 11/28-30/05; La Jornada, 11/14-19/05, 11/22/05, 11/24/05, 11/25/05, 11/27/05, 11/28-30/05; Copley News Service, 11/20/05, 11/30/05)

-- End --