

6-7-2006

Polls Show Presidential Race Very Tight Less Than a Month Before Election

LADB Staff

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

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Polls Show Presidential Race Very Tight Less Than a Month Before Election." (2006).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/4996>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Polls Show Presidential Race Very Tight Less Than a Month Before Election

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2006-06-07

Mexico's presidential election remains too close to call less than a month before voters go to the polls on July 2. Public-opinion polls released just before and right after the second presidential debate on June 6 showed the two front-runners, Felipe Calderon Hinojosa of the governing conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), running neck and neck.

Three polls show PRD, PAN candidates dead even

At least three polls showed the PRD and the PAN candidates in an actual tie, not just a statistical tie. Consulta Mitofsky, which conducted its poll among registered voters on May 23-28, had the two candidates at 34%. Similar results came from BGC, Ulises Beltran y Asociados, which said its poll conducted on May 31-June 3 had Lopez Obrador and Calderon both at 35%. The daily newspaper El Universal had both candidates with 36% of voter support in a recent survey.

Two other polls had Lopez Obrador marginally ahead of Calderon. One survey, by respected pollster Maria de las Heras on behalf of the Mexico City daily newspaper Milenio Diario, had the PRD candidate ahead of his PAN rival by a nose. Lopez Obrador received 33.6% support in that poll, compared with 33.1% for Calderon. Lopez Obrador's lead was slightly higher in a poll conducted in May by Parametria, which had the PRD candidate receiving 35.5% of voter preference, versus 34.4% for Calderon.

Conversely, the business-oriented Grupo de Economistas y Asociados-Investigaciones Sociales Aplicadas (GEA-ISA) gave Calderon a wide lead of 42% in its poll, versus 31% for Lopez Obrador. A similar outcome was reported in a poll conducted by the firm Analisis y Resultados en Comunicacion y Opinion Publica (ARCOP), which was commissioned by the PAN. The ARCOP poll had Calderon with 39% support, compared with 32% for Lopez Obrador.

Support for Roberto Madrazo of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which governed Mexico for seven decades, ranged between 25% and 28% in most surveys, although he received as much as 30% in the Milenio poll. The results in the latest polls seemed most favorable to Lopez Obrador, who has caught up with Calderon after losing ground the previous two months. The PRD's decline was linked in part to hard-hitting negative advertisements placed by the PAN calling the PRD candidate "a danger to Mexico" and linking him to Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez. Lopez Obrador's decision to forego the first presidential debate in late April also contributed to his drop in the polls (see SourceMex, 2006-05-03).

Negative advertising affects voter preferences

Calderon's negative spots prompted the PRD to lodge a formal complaint with the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) calling the TV and radio ads untruthful. After reviewing the complaint, the IFE sided

with the PRD and ordered the Calderon camp to remove the ads. "Free speech has its limits," said Marco Antonio Gomez, a member of the IFE council. The IFE board also ordered the PAN not to air any similar ads, but some members were split on this decision. They warned that limiting speech would only lead the country "down the path to censorship."

The PRD responded to the PAN ads by airing its own negative ad against Calderon, accusing the PAN candidate of playing a major role in the approval of billions of pesos in taxpayer money to rescue the financially ailing banks through the Fondo Bancario de Proteccion al Ahorro (FOBAPROA). The administration of former President Ernesto Zedillo and the Mexican Congress created the bank-rescue fund to help keep the Mexican banking system afloat following the 1994 peso devaluation. The major concern was that many borrowers would default on overdue loans, causing the banking system to crash (see SourceMex, 1995-06-07).

The FOBAPROA program was beset with irregularities, however, which forced the Congress to eliminate it and replace it with the Instituto de Proteccion al Ahorro Bancario (IPAB) in 1998 (see SourceMex, 1998-12-16). As president of the PRD, Lopez Obrador led the criticisms of FOBAPROA, charging that the bankers should have assumed the losses rather than relying on taxpayer funds (see SourceMex, 1998-07-22 and 1998-08-26).

In television and radio ads, the PRD noted that Calderon was the leader of the PAN delegation in the lower house during the FOBAPROA approval and therefore bears responsibility for its creation. The strategy appears to have worked well, as Lopez Obrador has caught up with Calderon in the latest polls. "Lopez Obrador appears to have touched bottom," Mitofsky's marketing director Carlos Penna said in an interview. "Now his ads are hurting Calderon."

The IFE board disagreed with the tenor of the PRD ads and asked the party to withdraw the radio and TV spots. "We defend the right [of parties] to present information based on facts and actual occurrences," said IFE president Luis Carlos Ugalde. "But if we defend the right to distort, we would also be defending the right to present disinformation."

Candidates try to highlight differences during debate

The FOBAPROA controversy resurfaced during the second presidential debate, held in Mexico City June 6. Addressing Lopez Obrador, Calderon took issue with the ads. "You are lying, Mr. Lopez Obrador," he said. Lopez Obrador did not respond to the charges directly, saying that he would take up the matter in private with his PAN rival. Some political analysts suggest Lopez Obrador might have scored points with a strategy to avoid direct conflict and quietly emphasize his plan to end privileges for the wealthy and place a higher priority on Mexico's poor. "Of the leading candidates, he was the one who handled the situation best. He was much more confident, more affable," said Juan Pablo Cordoba Elias, a political science professor at the Universidad Nacional Autonoma de Mexico (UNAM).

Even with the FOBAPROA controversy and the marked differences among Calderon, Lopez Obrador, and Madrazo regarding economic philosophy, crime, and governability, the overall tone of the debate was calm. "The general consensus of panelists gathered on public television was that Felipe Calderon and Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador waged a cautious, defensive battle that ended

in a virtual tie," said Kelly Arthur Garrett, a columnist for the Mexico City English-language daily newspaper The Herald.

Lopez Obrador and Calderon did make an effort, however, to emphasize the difference in their philosophies. "The candidates didn't talk much in left versus right terms, but the debate leads me to believe that the campaign is taking that shape," said Sergio Aguayo Quezada, a political analyst at Colegio de Mexico (Colmex). Aguayo said this difference was evident in the discussion about crime, in which Lopez Obrador emphasized social solutions while Calderon talked about "firmness." Two other candidates, Roberto Campa Cifrian of the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL) and Patricia Mercado of the Partido Alternativa Socialdemocrata y Campesina (PASC), also made some very good points during the debate.

Some commentators remarked, however, that Campa and Mercado, and to a lesser extent Madrazo, appeared to be in a "different debate," since all the attention was on Lopez Obrador and Calderon. "The two front-runners faced each other in a debate where Madrazo, Mercado, and Campa were only spectators," said the Mexico City daily newspaper Excelsior.

Two separate polls conducted right after the debate showed a marked difference in voter preferences. A telephone survey conducted by the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma showed that respondents generally favored the PAN candidate over his PRD rival by a 44% to 30% margin. For the other candidates, 11% saw Madrazo as the winner, while 3% favored Mercado and 2% Campa.

Conversely, a call-in poll on a local television station gave Lopez Obrador the victory with 56%, compared with 40% for Calderon. PRI candidate Madrazo fails to gain much ground. Madrazo may have been the biggest loser in the debate, given his inability to close the gap between him and the two front-runners. "[The PRI candidate] didn't reach his goal of making this a three-way race," said political commentator Maria Amparo Casar of the Centro de Investigaciones y Docencia Economica (CIDE). "He used the wrong strategy of diagnosing the problems of the Fox administration too much."

There is some concern that Madrazo's lackluster performance in the campaign could damage the PRI in the long term. Besides a likely third-place finish in the presidential race, the party's plurality in the Mexican Congress could be in danger. "With Roberto Madrazo, the PRI has its worst-ever presidential candidate," said columnist Jose Gil Olmos, whose comments are distributed by Agencia de noticias Proceso (apro). "The party could lose its status as the top force in Congress, which would be total disaster."

Several prominent PRI members have already jumped ship, with Sens. Manuel Bartlett Diaz and Oscar Canton Zetina recommending to party members that they cast their votes for Lopez Obrador. "With our candidate in third place, people shouldn't waste their vote, and they should vote against the conservative right," Bartlett said in a radio interview.

Other PRI members associated with the Zedillo administration including ex-Oaxaca Gov. Diodoro Carrasco and former Cabinet members Luis Tellez, Carlos Ruiz Sacristan, and Jesus Reyes Heroles

have tacitly thrown their support behind Calderon. Sen. Genaro Borrego and ex-PRI secretary Elba Esther Gordillo, who feuded with Madrazo, are also supporting the PAN candidate.

The PRI leadership responded by threatening to expel members who supported Calderon or Lopez Obrador. In early June, Borrego saved party leaders that effort by declaring himself an independent. Madrazo's uninspiring campaign and the presence of Manuel Camacho Solis and other ex-PRI members in the Lopez Obrador campaign led to rumors that the PRI candidate would form some sort of alliance or coalition with the PRD in the July 2 election. The PRD is already running in an alliance with the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD) and the Partido del Trabajo (PT) in the Por el Bien de Todos coalition.

The PRI, meanwhile, has partnered with the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM). While talk of a PRI-PRD alliance generated a significant buzz, officials for the two parties adamantly denied such a move was in the offing. "We have different styles," said PRI Deputy Manlio Fabio Beltrones. "We disagree with the PRD's violent way of expressing disagreements." "There's no such alliance," PRD secretary general Guadalupe Acosta Naranjo also told reporters. "It's unthinkable."

Officials for the two parties acknowledged having made some contacts, but they said the purpose was to work on a joint strategy to ensure that President Vicente Fox does not illegally use his office to support Calderon. "Our only coinciding point with the PRD is that we want an equitable election," Madrazo said in Mexico City. In recent months, Fox has actively touted the accomplishments of his administration, which rivals see as a strategy to support Calderon.

At the behest of the opposition parties, the IFE ordered the president to remain neutral during the last weeks of the election or face possible sanctions. The electoral institute also scolded PAN Gov. Patricio Patron Laviada of Yucatan, PRI Govs. Ulises Ruiz of Oaxaca and Silverio Cavazos of Colima, and Mexico City Mayor Alejandro Encinas of the PRD for violating neutrality regulations that prohibit them from supporting their respective candidates. (Sources: The New York Times, 05/23/06; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 03/08/06, 05/24/06, 05/29/06, 05/31/06, 06/06/06; Associated Press, 05/20/06, 05/22/06, 05/29/06, 06/06/06; Bloomberg news service, 05/23/06, 05/30/06, 06/06/06; La Cronica de Hoy, 05/22/06, 05/24/06, 06/05/06, 06/07/06; Reuters, 05/22/06, 05/26/06, 05/29-31/06, 06/02/06, 06/04/06, 06/06/06, 06/07/06; Excelsior, 05/22-26/06, 06/01/06, 06/02/06, 06/05/06, 06/07/06; La Jornada, 05/22-26/06, 05/31/06, 06/02/06, 06/05-07/06; Reforma, 05/22-26/06, 05/31/06, 06/01/06, 06/05-07/06; El Universal, 05/23/06, 05/24/06, 05/30/06, 06/02/06, 06/05/06, 06/07/06; Milenio Diario, 05/23-26/06, 05/30/06, 06/01/06, 06/02/06, 06/05/06, 06/07/06; El Financiero, 05/23-26/06, 06/01/06, 06/02/06, 06/05/06, 06/07/06; The Herald-Mexico City, 05/23-26/06, 05/29/06, 06/02/06, 06/05-07/06, El Economista, 05/23-26, 05/30/06, 06/01/06, 06/02/06, 06/05-07/06; Los Angeles Times, 06/01/06, 06/07/06; Copley News Service, 06/06/06, 06/07/06; The Dallas Morning News, The Washington Post, 06/07/07)

-- End --