

6-29-2011

Federal Electoral Watchdog, Political Parties Already Looking Beyond Key MÃ©xico State Election on July 3

Carlos Navarro

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

Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Federal Electoral Watchdog, Political Parties Already Looking Beyond Key MÃ©xico State Election on July 3." (2011). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5504>

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.

Federal Electoral Watchdog, Political Parties Already Looking Beyond Key México State Election on July 3

by *Carlos Navarro*

Category/Department: Politics, Elections

Published: Wednesday, June 29, 2011

The all-important gubernatorial election in México state is just days away, but attention has already turned to the presidential and congressional elections scheduled for July 2012. In what is considered an important step to ensure fairness in next year's races, the federal electoral watchdog (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) issued a controversial set of rules governing radio and television spots. The new measure, intended to promote a more fair debate among the various candidates, reduces the time by which media outlets are required to air an advertisement after it is turned in by a political campaign. The IFE is also looking to increase voting by expatriates in the 2012 election, particularly those residing in the US, by launching a big campaign to encourage participation. This includes streamlining the mail-balloting process and providing postage-free envelopes.

Political parties are also looking ahead to the 2012 elections, with the two top contenders to head a center-left coalition, Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Marcelo Ebrard, agreeing that the candidate who is in the better position in the polls obtain the nomination. The center-left coalition, led by the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), has been deeply divided, and the agreement is an effort to unite factions ahead of the elections.

The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) appears to be consolidating support behind outgoing México state Gov. Enrique Peña Nieto, whose fortunes could receive a boost from the upcoming México state election. If polls are any indication of the final result, PRI candidate Eruviel Ávila is expected to win the election easily over rivals Alejandro Encinas of the center-left Coalición Unidos Podemos Más and Luis Felipe Bravo Mena of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN).

Campaign launched to boost expatriate vote

The IFE's decision to facilitate the vote for Mexican expatriates in the US and elsewhere was met with strong approval from all parties. During the past several months, the institute has issued various guidelines to make it easier for Mexican citizens to vote in the 2012 federal election. One directive, announced in April, stipulates that voters could post their ballot as early as 75 days before the election, scheduled for July 1, 2012.

To participate in the election, voters must register via a special Web site created by the IFE, <http://www.votoextranjero.mx/>. The site also contains instructions and answers questions for expatriates seeking to participate in the election. Voters whose registration is confirmed will receive a ballot in the mail between April 16 and May 20. To encourage participation, the IFE will provide postage-free envelopes.

IFE officials said they are making every effort to ensure that as many eligible voters as possible participate in the elections. As part of this effort, the IFE dispatched Benito Nacif Hernández, president of a special commission to foster relations with expatriate voters (Comisión del Voto de los Mexicanos Residentes en el Extranjero), to present the voting plan to various immigrant associations

in the US. The IFE will be working closely with Arturo Sarukhán, Mexico's ambassador to the US, to help boost the vote.

In the 2006 election, the IFE sent out almost 41,000 ballots to expatriates. Slightly more than 33,000 were returned to the institute, a figure that officials described as disappointing ([SourceMex, Jan. 25, 2006](#)). The number of total votes cast is slightly higher than the number of Mexicans estimated to reside in New York City, said the IFE.

Nacif Hernández said the IFE is working with the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) to develop other options to facilitate the vote, including greater use of the Internet. "We have been in contact with the UNAM, and the university is taking a great interest in the project," said the IFE council member.

New guidelines on broadcast spots cause controversy

The promotion of voting overseas is not as controversial as other initiatives recently enacted by the IFE ahead of the 2012 election. In late June, the IFE's governing council approved changes to the media-access regulations (Reglamento de Acceso a Radio y Televisión). The changes, approved by a 4-2 vote, reduce the timeline by which media outlets must air a political advertisement after receiving it from a political campaign.

On the surface, the move to expedite the airing of commercials to four days, compared with 10 days previously, does not appear to be a big deal. The IFE argues, however, that the fast turnaround on political spots allows candidates who have been attacked unfairly to present a quick rebuttal. IFE president Leonardo Valdés Zurita said the changes seek to encourage greater equity among presidential candidates and promote campaigns that are much more dynamic and offer greater contrasts.

Anticipating strong criticism, the IFE was compelled to issue a statement pointing out that councilors studied and debated the changes for several months to ensure that they were compatible with the Constitution and electoral laws.

Many others see the matter in a different light. The Cámara Nacional de la Industria de Radio y Televisión (CIRT), the Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana (COPARMEX), and several columnists have criticized the measure as more of a hindrance than a benefit to the electoral process.

The CIRT—which projected before the changes that 33 million spots would be run by candidates and parties during the 2012 presidential election—argues that the new regulation will make campaign advertisements unmanageable. Francisco Borrego, a spokesperson for CIRT's management council, said Mexico's radio and television outlets lack the proper infrastructure to deal with the flood of political ads that will result from the changes.

"What the IFE wants to achieve is that, if any communications medium publishes or broadcasts a note that portrays a candidate or party in a negative light, then electoral law requires that the offended party be given a similar space...so that such party is given a right of rebuttal," wrote columnist Yuriria Sierra in the Mexico City daily newspaper .

But Sierra also noted sarcastically that the change would increase exponentially the overexposure that the public has to the candidates.

Borrego said the CIRT has filed a motion with the electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, TEPJF) in an effort to overturn the IFE ruling.

Others see a more fundamental problem in the manner in which the IFE attempted to comply with a constitutional provision that requires that citizens have fair access to the media. José Contreras, a columnist with the Mexico City daily newspaper, said the IFE is attempting to make changes by decree rather than allowing the legislative branch to amend the proper laws governing fair access to the media. "With its stubborn move to implement these new regulations, the IFE...is promoting a polarization and a poisoning of the environment just three months before the official launch of the 2012 campaign," said Contreras.

Some business organizations offered similar thoughts. "We Mexicans do not want the communications media saturated with rebuttals, a limitation that is going to make true public debate impossible," said COPARMEX president Gerardo Gutiérrez Candiani.

Gutiérrez Candiani said the IFE has become more of political instrument for the parties rather than an agency to serve the citizens. "We also don't want an IFE that answers to the whims of the parties and neglects its vital role of representing the citizens," said the COPARMEX official.

Is México state election a weathervane for 2012?

If the new regulations are allowed to stand, one trend that could develop during the campaign is a barrage of negative advertisements against the PRI. While it's still very early, the general consensus is that Peña Nieto will get the PRI nomination, even though Sen. Manlio Fabio Beltrones remains in the picture. And many public-opinion polls indicate that Peña Nieto would easily beat the possible candidates for the PRD-led center-left coalition and the PAN if the election were held today.

The center-left candidates, López Obrador and Ebrard, have taken steps to ensure that the coalition that they represent, which also includes the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), is not divided at the time of the elections. The two candidates, who have agreed to hold two debates, reached an accord in late June by which the one who appears to have the greatest acceptance from members of the three center-left parties in September or October of this year would get the nomination.

Ebrard has said that, even though he and López Obrador agree on a lot of issues, he has greater acceptance among independents and could also attract crossover votes from other parties ([SourceMex, May 4, 2011](#)). López Obrador, who very narrowly lost the 2006 election to Calderón, believes that his populist style offers the best path to attract large number of votes to the center-left coalition.

Peña Nieto's fortunes rest partly on Sunday's election in México state. The result is important because a victory by a member of his party in his home state would signal that the outgoing governor remains popular. Another important factor is that México state is home to about 13% of all registered voters in Mexico.

A number of public-opinion polls indicate that support has been increasing steadily for PRI candidate Ávila. In a public-opinion poll by the Mexico City daily newspaper on June 17-19, 59% of the voters surveyed intended to vote for the PRI candidate compared with 27% for Encinas of the center-left coalition and 14% for Bravo Mena of the PAN.

The PAN and the PRD had talked about forming a coalition and even sponsored a plebiscite among state voters to determine if the alliance should go forward ([SourceMex, Jan. 12, 2011](#)) and ([Feb. 9, 2011](#)). But the plan unraveled, partly because the two parties could not agree on a common candidate ([SourceMex, March 30, 2011](#)). Even so, it appears unlikely that a unity candidate could have beaten the PRI.

"The sum of the votes for [Encinas and Bravo Mena] would total 41%, which would be insufficient to surpass the 59% received by Ávila," said .

Some political observers suggested that the center-left coalition is already prepared to challenge the election on a technicality. "The PRD has already asked the TEPJF to cancel Ávila's registration for supposedly breaking electoral rules by holding rallies before the official start of the campaign," columnist Leo Zuckermann wrote in .

In a decision handed down just days before the election, the TEPJF ruled that there is some evidence that Ávila might have bent the rules but that any violations "had only a minor impact on the possible voters in México state."

Zuckermann wondered how the PAN would react if the center-left coalition decided to challenge the results. "Will the PAN join the left to repudiate a likely PRI victory? If so, will México state become a test case for the upcoming presidential elections in 2012?"

-- End --