

11-9-2011

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### Recommended Citation

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<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5839>

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## Effort Emerges to Ban Bullfighting in Mexico City, Other Parts of the Country

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Culture and Socioeconomic Issues

Published: 2011-11-09

Emboldened by a recent decision by the Spanish province of Cataluña to ban bullfighting, the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM) has launched a campaign to ban the traditional practice in Mexico. The PVEM's main effort has been in the Mexico City legislature (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF), with the focus on securing a ban on bullfighting in Mexico City. But initiative proponents are hoping to extend the ban throughout the country and to introduce an initiative to this effect in the Senate.

### *Proponents encouraged by similar ban in Cataluña, Spain*

Most experts agree that the PVEM is fighting an uphill battle, given that bullfighting is so closely identified with Mexican culture and tradition. But proponents point out that there is a precedent. The provincial parliament of Cataluña in Spain—the country that passed on the tradition to Mexico and Latin America—voted to ban bullfighting in July 2011, and this could serve as an example of what is possible in Mexico. The ban in Cataluña, which takes effect on Jan. 1, 2012, resulted in the closure of La Monumental bullfighting venue in Barcelona.

The PVEM said there have been successful efforts to ban bullfighting elsewhere in Latin America. Ecuador has totally banned the spectacle, while three municipalities in Colombia and one in Venezuela no longer allow bullfighting.

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"Bullfighting has been eliminated in other countries," said Deputy Raúl Antonio Nava, coordinator of the PVEM delegation in the ALDF. "People are saying that [bullfighting] is a great tradition in our country. But if a tradition is flawed, then we must change."

The PVEM effort to ban bullfighting in Mexico City is led by ALDF Deputy Norberto Ascencio Solís and Nava, with the support of Deputy Cristian Vargas from the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

A similar campaign to ban bullfighting has also appeared in Querétaro state in central Mexico, where 500 protestors marched through the state capital of Querétaro City in mid-October to demand an end to the practice. Protestors also hope to convince the Querétaro state legislature to implement a ban on bullfighting.

In the federal Senate, PVEM Sen. Jorge Legorreta Ordorica is preparing an initiative and has sought advice from Plataforma Prou and Proyecto de Protección Animal, the organizations that led the campaign to ban bullfighting in Cataluña and that are continuing the fight elsewhere in Spain. Despite the ban in Cataluña, 15 of Spain's 17 regions have not outlawed the practice. The only other existing ban is in the Canary Islands.

The efforts in Mexico City, Querétaro, and in the Senate also have strong support from domestic animal-rights groups such as the Asociación Mexicana por los Derechos de los Animales (AMEDEA) and Activistas por la Defensa Animal (ADEA). AMEDEA held a demonstration at Mexico City's Plaza de Toros México bullfighting venue. Members of the organization held a symbolic ceremony to shut down the stadium by placing green paper chains at its entrance.

Activists said they are willing to debate the issue with those who oppose the ban, including ranch owners who raise the bulls. "We will debate them whenever and whenever the want," said ADEA president Roberto Olvera. "We are willing to exchange points of view."

PVEM legislators in the ALDF said they have taken some polls, and a large majority of respondents oppose bullfighting. "Our surveys show that 80% of those polled do not want bullfights," said Nava. "We have to listen to the voice of the majority."

PVEM legislators did not disclose details about the polls and how respondents were selected.

### *Opponents cite economic consequences*

The greatest obstacle to a ban on bullfighting in Mexico is the economic consequences of taking such a step. There are 184 ranches in 25 states in Mexico that raise bulls specifically for bullfights, known as corridas. There are also 20 schools that train bullfighters for the fiesta brava, another term used for bullfighting traditionally held on Sundays. In addition, the move would imply closing the Plaza México, one of the largest bullfighting venues in the world.

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And some businesses and people involved in the bullfighting industry have criticized the efforts, suggesting that legislators have more important matters to consider than a ban on the practice. Sergio Hernández Weber, who owns Rancho Seco and Cuatro Caminos in Tlaxcala state, two of the most prestigious bull-breeding operations, suggested the proponents are more concerned with politics than animal welfare. "I regret that this issue has taken such prominence because our politicians are talking about pushing legislation on irrelevant matters instead of considering important issues like public safety or improving our economy," said Hernández Weber.

Others who make a living from the bullfighting spectacle agreed with the contention that there is political motivation to the ban, especially in the timing of the legislative proposal. He said those proposing the ban are acting out of ignorance. "There is much talk and little knowledge [about the industry], and that's why this is a political maneuver," said Eduardo Maya, a broadcaster for the radio program El ABC de los Toros. Maya described bullfighting as a means to promote "culture, transfer knowledge and tradition, and educate new generations."

Opponents took issue with the contention by Maya and others that bullfighting is a cultural activity that must be preserved. Some supporters of the spectacle describe bullfighting as an art. "An art cannot sacrifice a living animal that has feelings," said Ascencio Solís.

Jesús Zárate, another bullfighting broadcaster, offered a different interpretation of public opinion regarding the practice. "Defending bulls is not a topic of deep public discussion," he told CNNMexico. "If you prohibit the corridas, you will ensure that breeding these types of bulls will cease to exist."

But Zárate also suggested that the ban in Barcelona would have a far-reaching effect on the bullfighting industry in Latin America, forcing an evolution that will make the sport more appealing to the public. "I believe that many things will change and that the fiesta brava will be different in three years than it is now," the broadcaster said without offering details.

Spain is leading one of the changes, which is to discontinue showing live bullfights on television in order to shield children from another source of violence.

And animal-rights proponents suggest that bullfighting promoters are using the economic argument to bolster their position when the reality is that other activities that they manage such as concerts and motorcycle races draw a larger audience. "[The business owners] know that the corridas are not what is creating jobs but other shows such as concerts and motorcycle races," said Larios.

And while a segment of the population closely follows the corrida, proponents of the ban point out that its popularity is dwindling around the world. In a recent article entitled "The Fiesta is Ending," Spain's El Pais newspaper said changing tastes and economic difficulties, particularly in small towns, have resulted in a 34% decline in the number of bull-related festival events between 2007 and 2010.

### *Legislative effort stalled in Mexico City*

For now, the effort to ban bullfighting has stalled in the ALDF. The measure, known as the Ley para la Celebración de Espectáculos Públicos, was scheduled for consideration on Oct. 5, but the session was postponed indefinitely because of a lack of quorum. No date was set to reconsider the initiative.

For the measure to succeed in the ALDF, the initiative would need the backing of a large segment of the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), which has a plurality in the Mexico City legislature. The PRD delegation in Mexico City has been noncommittal, and some reports say the party is divided on the issue.

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Among those who have spoken out against the measure are members of the center-right Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), who argue that a vote cannot proceed without a study measuring the economic impact of a ban. "An important productive chain would be affected by a ban," said Carlos Flores Gutiérrez, a PAN member who chairs the committee in which the measure would be considered. "We are talking about hundreds of families who would face unemployment. This is a serious matter."

For now, the administration of Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, a member of the PRD, is staying out of the debate, saying that the mayor will not take a position until enough evidence to back the proposal is presented by the PVEM and the one PRI deputy.

And, in contrast to the PRD's position in Mexico City, members of the center-left party in Jalisco state are taking a proactive stance against a ban on bullfighting. PRD legislators in the western state plan to introduce a resolution in the Jalisco legislature declaring bullfighting cultural patrimony.

The resolution seeks to use the criteria defined by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) to declare bullfighting a cultural and natural heritage of Jalisco state. The resolution plans to highlight two locations historically linked to bullfighting: the Rodolfo Gaona venue in the community of Cañadas de Obregón, which has existed since the colonial period, and El Centenario in the municipality of Tlaquepaque, where bullfighting has been held since the end of the 18th century.

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