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Opinion Polls Show High Rate of Disapproval for President
Enrique Peña Nieto’s Administration

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President Enrique Peña Nieto is not only facing a crisis of confidence among the electorate but also in the business community. The president has been hammered by the crisis that resulted from the disappearance of 43 students from a teachers college (Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa Raúl Isidro Burgos) in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, in September 2014 (SourceMex, Oct. 15, 2014, and Dec. 3, 2014), multiple charges of corruption involving family members and his close collaborators (SourceMex, April 29, 2015), and the perception that his administration was behind the firing of popular journalist Carmen Aristegui earlier this year (SourceMex, March 25, 2015).

A survey published in March by the editorial company Grupo Reforma, which publishes the daily newspapers Reforma and El Norte, indicated that the president’s popularity has remained constantly low since the end of 2014, when his approval rate reached the lowest level for any president in 19 years. Former President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000) had very high disapproval ratings during the second year of his administration during the height of an economic crisis (SourceMex, Jan. 3, 1996).

The Grupo Reforma poll, which surveyed 1,200 citizens and nearly 1,100 opinion leaders, found an approval rating of only 39% for Peña Nieto, and a disapproval rate of 57%. Those percentages are nearly identical to the poll released by Grupo Reforma in December 2014.

The data published by Grupo Reforma in December differed slightly from another poll commissioned by the daily newspaper El Universal. That survey, conducted by the polling organization Buendía & Laredo, showed the president with a 41% approval and 50% disapproval rate. This poll was conducted among citizens who are registered to vote.

Regardless of the differences, both polls showed a sharp increase in the disapproval rate for the president among Mexican citizens during the past year and since he took office in December 2012. Peña Nieto began his presidency with an approval rate of 61% and disapproval of 31%. By April of 2013, the approval rate declined to 50%, but the disapproval levels remained at 30%, according to Grupo Reforma.

As recently as December 2013, the president’s approval rate held at 50% and disapproval at 37%, said the Buendía & Laredo survey.

Responding to the Buendía & Laredo’s survey in December 2014, spokespersons for the administration acknowledged that the killing of the students in Ayotzinapa had a significant impact on the perceptions of the president. "[The numbers] reflect in a very clear manner the discontent of citizens about our current situation," presidential spokesman Eduardo Sánchez told reporters in December.

"We are listening to the citizens, we are conscious [of the Ayotzinapa situation] and share the sense of discontent regarding what is occurring," said Sánchez, who pointed out that the government is taking broad steps to "avoid acts of violence and guarantee tranquility."
Poor marks from business leaders

Mexico’s sluggish growth rate, hurt in part by the weak global oil market at the beginning of the year (SourceMex, Feb. 4, 2015), has not helped the president. Even though oil prices have rebounded, revenues remain low. A recent survey by the Banco de México (central bank) among economists showed an average forecast of 3.1% GDP growth in 2015, compared with earlier forecasts of almost 3.3%.

Analysts agree that the political instability in Mexico might play a role in the private sector’s less optimistic view of the economy. "Recent domestic developments involving widely reported acts of violence, allegations of official corruption, low oil price environment, and the sluggish performance of the economy may have started to dent confidence indicators," Alberto Ramos, chief Latin America economist at Goldman Sachs Group Inc., told Bloomberg news service in March. "This may turn consumers and businesses more defensive and potentially handicap the pace of the ongoing economic recovery."

Still, Peña Nieto’s handling of the economy also earned him poor marks among the business community. A poll by Roberto Cabrera, head of the industry and markets division of KPMG, showed 88% of the 716 executives surveyed gave the president poor marks for his economic leadership in 2014. The results of the poll were released in April of this year.

The executives included company presidents, chief executive officers, members of board of directors, and vice presidents from 17 industrial sectors, including financial services, telecommunications, transportation, health, the automotive industry, and manufacturing.

Some 69% of the respondents said the Mexican government’s handling of economic and political affairs had a direct impact on their company. Furthermore, 49% pointed to a reduction in consumer confidence as a reason why their company suffered poor results.

Another major complaint from the business sector was the tax reform proposed by Peña Nieto and approved by Congress in 2013. The plan included a 10% tax on capital gains, applying the national value-added tax (impuesto al valor agregado, IVA) to the border states, and imposing a 5% tax on junk food and soft drinks (SourceMex, Sept. 18, 2013, and Oct. 23, 2013).

"Some 93% of respondents said the new tax structure does not promote investment, and another 85% said they would like a system that contains more indirect taxes and an IVA on food and medicines," financial columnist Maricarmen Cortés wrote in the daily newspaper Excélsior.

Blogger Liébano Sáenz, who served under former President Ernesto Zedillo (1994-2000), pointed to another survey by Gabinete de Comunicación Estratégica (GCE), which measured the level of confidence in 56 public and private institutions in Mexico. The survey, which polled 6,000 people, was prepared for affiliates of the Cámara Nacional de la Industria de Transformación (CANACINTRA), many of which are in the Mexico City area, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. "The results were very worrisome and confirm that the problem of a lack of confidence is very serious [in Mexico]," wrote Saenz.

Among the findings was a concern among respondents that democracy in Mexico has taken a step back. Furthermore, half the young people (18 to 30) surveyed raised concerns that the country has
stagnated. "The highest percentage of those who thought the country is in retreat involved those with a higher education," said Sáenz.

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