The 2000 Presidential Elections and the Zapatistas

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The 2000 Presidential Elections

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A Brief History of Mexico

1521 the Aztec and Mayan civilizations conquered by the Spanish, followed by 300 years of oppression and exploitation (ferdium, silver, plantations) of Mexico as a Spanish colony.

1720s. Disease and overwork reduce Indios from 12 million in 1520 to 1 million.

1810 first anti-Spanish revolt, demand of land redistribution, suppressed.

1814 second revolt, suppressed but guerilla warfare continued.

1821 Guerrero revolt.

1823 Mexico becomes a republic.

1845 annexation of Texas by U.S., followed by defeat of Mexican forces and 1848 annexation of Utah, Texas, Nevada, California, New Mexico, Colorado.

1855-1876 Reform Period, new, liberal constitution.

1876 Porfirio Diaz seizes power and establishes power monopoly, Porfiriato.

1910 Mexican revolution started by middle class under leadership of Francisco Madero, later joined by peasants under popular leadership of Pancho Villa and Emilio Zapata.

1920 Demobilization of the masses by the new regime with crush of Villa and Zapata forces.

1929 The “Revolutionary Party” (now PRI) is established as outcome of revolutionary nationalism and rules Mexico for 71 years!

Overview of Mexican Politics

- Until the late 1980s, Mexico’s official party-government system was the most “stable” regime in Latin America.
- Inclusive. State corporatism, i.e. incorporation and cooptation of mass organizations within the “official” party.
- BUT, Regime Stability has been the top priority! As confronted with un-cooptable opposition (Students in 1968, the Political left 1987-1994, Zapatistas since January 1, 1994), the regime responded harshly.

Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)

- Deeply institutionalized party.
- Main mission of the PRI
  -- has never been to aggregate or to articulate demands and turn these into policies.
  -- has been to keep regime stability through “state corporatism” and “patron-client relationships.”
- It has not truly competed for power until the late 1980s thanks to some incumbency “advantages.”

PRI Advantages

- Enjoyed “unlimited” access to government funds to finance its campaigns.
- Benefited from a vast network of government patronage, through which small-scale material benefits could be delivered to a large segment in society!
- Privileged access to mass media.
- The electoral law guaranteed PRI control of the institutions that administered elections. Gave the PRI the ability to cheat and get away with it.
Concerns about Regime Stability

1968. Bloody repression of a student protest movement in Mexico City by the President Gustav Diaz on the eve of the 1968 Olympic Games.

1980s. Change of Demographics! Massive urbanization. Decline of support for PRI!


Concerns about Regime Stability

For the first time, PRI faced a serious challenge from one of the opposition parties (PRD) in 1988 elections---until 1988 elections opposition parties existed to “legitimize” the Mexican regime.

Ex-PRI Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, heading a coalition of minor leftist and nationalist parties: officially credited 31.1% of the presidential vote.

Huge electoral fraud! They even announced the preliminary results 6 days after the elections.

Conflict in Chiapas

New Year’s Day 1994. Chiapas, Mexico’s most underdeveloped and politically backward state.

An estimated 2000 primitively armed but well-disciplined Indian rebels took control of four isolated municipalities and declared war on central government!

Clashes with Mexican army, at least 145 dead, a cease-fire has been negotiated in 12 days.

Zapatista demands for social justice and democracy reminded middle and upper classes, and foreign governments and investors of persistence of political repression, human rights violations, extreme poverty and inequality in Mexico.

Conflict in Chiapas

“Cathedral Talks” hosted by Bishop Ruiz. No agreement.

Second Official Attempt to a dialogue between Zapatistas and Secretary of State.

Mexican military launched an offensive to capture the EZLN leadership. EZLN took this as a “betrayal” of a nascent process of peace.

National and international condemnation of Zedillo for using the “military” option. Called off the offensive and agreed to formalize a peaceful solution.

San Andres Peace Talks

Law for Dialogue, Reconciliation and a Dignified Peace in Chiapas. ---Attending to the causes that originated the conflict

---Reconciliation of the demands and interests of the Chiapan society

---Promotion of social welfare

San Andres Peace Talks. 6 tables.

First table on “indigenous rights and culture.” Talks, proposals, presentations by invited specialists and advisors, and signing of an agreement between the parties. Five more tables to go…

Peace Process Comes to a Dead End

The EZLN decided to suspend the talks UNTIL the government fulfilled the accords from table one already signed.

The government failed to fulfill the signed accords from Table one, BUT instead concentrated on the neo-liberal economic policies of development projects and public spending within the state of Chiapas. They did not take “multi-cultural politics” seriously.

The Peace process came to a dead end…
Decline of Support for PRI in 1990s

- 1990s. Devaluation of the peso, capital flight, deep recession. Mexican voters were very furious!
- Weak management of economic crisis.
- Poverty, soaring crime rate.
- Large Scale Corruption reaching into the highest levels of government.
- Drug trade.
- Thanks to the Electoral Reforms of 1994, people also believed that they could have the opportunity of “change” in the government!

The main theme of the 2000 Electoral campaign was CHANGE. The man who could best embody change was to have an important advantage.

Mexican Party System in 2000

- Some “convergence” to the advanced industrial democracies:
  - PRI does not have the support level it used to have during its peak time.
  - Two major alternatives to the PRI gained strength: PAN on the right, and PRD on the left.
  - The existence of a viable right, center and left brings the Mexican party system toward the common pattern of right-left division in many democracies.

The National Action Party (PAN)

- Established in 1939 in response to the left-leaning PRI policies in 1930s.
  - Small, elite party assuming an educational role rather than an electoral role
  - Attacked political centralism and advocated states’ rights.
  - Defended private property, smaller role for government, endorsed free trade.
  - Opposed government restrictions on Church activities, advocated conservative family values.

National Action Party (PAN)

- Principal constituency has been the urban, middle class and “socially conservative” peasants and urban working class.
- Reputation as the “asphalt party.”
- 1980s. Grown from a small, elite party to a party that believes it can and should take power.
- Preferred cooperation on “economic” policies with PRI. This accommodation paid off handsomely! The PRI government accepted electoral wins by PAN!
- By 1999, PAN governing 32 million Mexicans, 1/3 of total population at state and local levels.

Francisco Labastida-PRI

- PRI tried hard to shed its image as a “corrupt, authoritarian” party. Held an open primary to choose presidential candidate.
- Francisco Labastida
  - Promised to dispense with previous corrupt practices and to take a new, transparent approach to politics
  - Failed to distinguish himself from the previous record of PRI governments and the “dinosaurs” of the party.
  - Defeated twice in two national TV debates by dynamic and plain-speaking Vicente Fox.
- Career politician, he was not able to embody change.
Cuauhtemoc Cardenas-PRD

- Political left never had strong electoral ground in Mexico mostly because of state corporatism.
- Refused to stand for Fox despite the pressures even from his people. Appeared as a man obsessed with presidency.
- Election was for change. As a career politicians, ex-PRI member, twice-failed candidate, a mediocre Mexico City mayor.
- He was not able to embody change.

Vicente Fox-PAN

- Governor of Guanajuata, a largely conservative state in Central Mexico.
- Before launching a career as a politician, he was the President of the Coca Cola, Inc. of Mexico.
- His business background influenced his highly “direct” political style.
- His campaign slogan was simple: “Ya!” (“Change now!” or “Enough already!”)
- He promised economic policy with a “human face” and an end to corruption.

The Fox Campaign

- Very aggressive campaign, had populist tactics!
- “Friends of Fox” as a non-partisan, informal network to get support from all groups in society!
- Wrapping himself in Guadalupana (a flag bearing the image of Virgin of Guadalupe, Mexico’s national saint).
- Also declared himself at “center-left.”
- Fox offered a solution to the Chiapas Conflict; he would solve the problem in 15 minutes talking to the major protagonists!
- In another attempt at crowd pleasing, he declared that he would not accept a PRI victory of only 1-2 percentage points.

Can 2000 Elections bring about “true” Democracy?

- Fox’s victory is an essential component of Mexico’s slow democratization process, but it does not represent democracy in itself.
- Three important areas:
  ---Fox’s willingness to carry out necessary reforms
  ---Even where he is willing to deepen democratic reforms, to what extent will he be able to do that, Fox faces opposition from PRI but also PAN in the Congress.
  ---Fox’s display of some worrying tendencies toward populism.

The Vote

- Voter Turnout: 64%
- Vicente Fox-----------------------42.5%
- Francisco Labastida--------------36.1%
- Chauuhtemoc Cardenas---------16.7%

The Fox Administration

- Faces a number of key challenges:
  ---Poverty Alleviation and Fiscal Reform
  ---State Reform (reducing the power of the President and making him more accountable to the Congress)
  ---The Chiapas Conflict
  ---Judicial Reform (personal safety has become a serious issue and this, along with human rights abuses, has led to low confidence in judicial system and police.)
The Chiapas Conflict

- The EZLN chose the presidential inauguration in December 2000 to announce their “March for Indigenous Dignity”, a non-violent rebel initiative that would see an unarmed delegation of Zapatista leaders leave their jungle bases in the south and travel to the nation’s capital in Mexico City.
- It was an effective move that from day one placed the Chiapas problem at the top of the new administration’s agenda.

The Chiapas Conflict

- A day after Fox’s inauguration, rebel leader Sub-comandante Marcos demanded the fulfilment of three non-negotiable preconditions before any new government-rebel dialogue could start:
  ---San Andres Accords signed by the previous administration be converted into law
  ---Withdrawal of the Mexican military from seven designated positions
  ---Complete liberation of Zapatista prisoners

But the Congress agreed to pass so heavily amended a version of the text (now a PRI-PAN legislative alliance) that the EZLN felt unable to recognize its validity.

The new legislation actually represented a “reduction” in the level of existing rights applicable to Mexico’s 11 million indigenous people.

After seven years of open rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico’s fragile peace process has once again stalled.

Questions about the Fox Administration

- Collusion of Fox’s party (PAN) with members of the former ruling party (PRI) effectively sabotaged the vote on the Law for Indigenous Rights and Culture—Ability of Fox to command his own party?
- Fox claims to have made every effort to accommodate the rebels allowing no deviation from the neo-liberal economic objectives of former PRI administrations.
- True to neo-liberal theory, he seeks to “open up” Mexico further to foreign investment and economic development—Willingness of Fox to deliver on any past or future agreements?
Neo-liberal Governments

- Neo-liberal governments essentially present a “challenge” to any peace process in Mexico.
- The EZLN version of the Law for Indigenous Rights and Culture provides both the legal and practical mechanisms by which indigenous culture might not only continue to survive but also flourish by placing limits on the capacity of investors and private corporations to take advantage of Mexico’s resources, both human and material.

Conflicting Views on Peace

- Having no economic value, indigenous culture is difficult for neo-liberal theory to accommodate!
- The EZLN and the current federal government hold conflicting views on Peace!
- The administration sees peace in terms of a classic neo-liberal view, as a result of the fulfillment of economic objectives rather than the result of a negotiation process.

Conflicting Views on Peace

- E.g. Plan Puebla Panama (PPP), to create the infrastructural and economic conditions in south of Mexico and Central America for regional growth and development. Fox described importance of the PPP as “thousand times more than Zapatistas or an indigenous community in Chiapas.”
- Later, Fox said this was to “develop the communities in Chipas and all indigenous communities within the national territory.”
- It is, however, the nature of this economic development the EZLN “contest.”

Who Benefits? Who Loses?

- The people of the region, including thousands of indigenous communities, have not been consulted about PPP.
- President Fox presents PPP as a plan for economic development, but the question is, development for whom?
- The EZLN thinks that PPP represents a giant step in the process of expanding NAFTA to the rest of the hemisphere, by solidifying conditions for the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas.
  ---Winners seem to be Multinational corporations. They would get abundant natural resources, with no trade restrictions, low taxes, very low-wage workforce and lax environmental standards.
  ---Losers seem to be Small farmers, indigenous communities, and workers. Besides environmental disaster, local residents would face displacement from their traditional communities.

Historical Challenge for Fox

- Fox seems unwilling to negotiate these with indigenous groups that will be affected BUT has already recognized that the new law is “deficient in many respects.”
- Zapatista uprising is a “cultural rebellion” trying to change the way both government and citizens conceive of indigenous people.
- While Fox may feel compelled to respond to the international pressures faced by the Mexican economy, historic challenge will be to find a way to secure the constitutional framework within which the survival of indigenous people can be guaranteed.