

Mexico's Historical 2024 Presidential Elections

Written by Franco Laguna Correa

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FRANCO LAGUNA CORREA, MAY 30 2024

On 2 June, Mexico will send to the polls millions of voters in a historic election. Even though the two forerunners, Claudia Sheinbaum and Xochitl Galvez, both women, respectively represent opposite political coalitions, the most powerful outcome of the upcoming elections will be a solid blow to Mexico's male-dominated culture. Mexico not only has a long-lasting tradition of macho culture, but also of fostering autocratic regimes more focused on framing the presidential figure than tackling national issues. Issues such as these are precisely what makes the upcoming election historic, as it is concerned with both global issues such as climate change, and systemic practices that have been regarded in Mexico as pillars since it gained independence.

One of the main challenges for Mexico's next president will be unavoidably related to the current autocratic government of once regarded charismatic Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (or AMLO, as his followers call him). AMLO's government at first aimed at eradicating systemic corruption and organized crime, both sociopolitical issues that have brought consequences to all the tissues of Mexican society. Nevertheless, Mexico has been recently involved in scandal due to providing refuge to Jorge Glas in the Mexican embassy in Quito, Ecuador. Glas is facing a sentence of six years in jail for corruption in connection to the Odebrecht case. While there is an ongoing debate about the issue, the fact that the Mexican government granted refuge to the former Ecuadorian vice-president is serving as the final leitmotiv of a Mexican government that throughout six years constantly betrayed its mission to eradicate corruption.

Moreover, AMLO's six years in government adhered to the populist wave that is shaping politics worldwide. AMLO assumed his role as an autocratic leader more focused on giving his now seen as traditional daily morning debriefings (or "mañaneras," as they are called in Mexican Spanish) with the press to candidly talk about national issues, but that most of the time were quotidian harangues in defense of his government's rationale. Many critics and members of the electorate wonder if the next president will incorporate such daily morning briefings into her agenda, thus attracting attention only to the presidential figure, or if she will depart from this autocratic practice to begin a process of redistribution of the presidential media power to other government levels.

It is not surprising that climate change and global warming figure among the top issues that the new electorate is pushing forward in search of alternative and innovative approaches to systemic issues in Mexico. Ranging from agricultural devastation to water scarcity, there is an evident shift in the Mexican public opinion. Younger generations are slowly transitioning from focusing on drug trafficking and national corruption to global ecological crises that are also affecting a nation like Mexico, whose capital city is the most populous of North America. Heat and water scarcity are already affecting Mexico's agricultural sector to the crucial point that millions are already suffering the consequences.

For instance, tomatoes have experienced unprecedented price rises due to both global warming and organized crime. It is well known that drug cartels charge special fees to keep agricultural workers "safe" during the harvesting season. Organized crime has indeed spread its coercive practices to all agricultural sectors in Mexico, to the point that drug cartels are perceived as *sine qua non* characters of the national economic landscape. While this phenomenon was already an ongoing issue during former regimes, during AMLO's government this sociocultural phenomenon has acquired the status of systemic. The current regime has implemented relaxed measures against organized crime and has also abandoned the Mexican countryside, leaving it in the hands of drug cartels.

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Also, water scarcity is affecting most of Mexico, with the case of Mexico City already underlying that this phenomenon. Private companies are already working on projects to tackle the crisis in Mexico City by focusing on city planning and neighborhood needs. Nevertheless, the overexploitation of the main aquifer of the Mexican capital has been sinking the city's infrastructures. In addition, aquifer overexploitation is also leading to deeper extractions, which in turn are also contributing to the pollution of the city's aquifer supplies that provide water to Mexico City's most populous counties. Complaints have been filed in relation to polluted water in residential neighborhoods and water insecurity in the most populated counties of the city.

However, authorities have not yet determined its cause. This situation has brought the water crisis to the main stage in the presidential debates. Claudia Sheinbaum, who appears as the favorite to win the presidential election in early June, has avoided talking about this environmental and infrastructural issue by suggesting that, despite the shortages, water supplies are guaranteed in Mexico City and that residents should not worry about it. Nevertheless, reality is already pointing at a very different scenario, with scientists and specialists suggesting that "parts of the city are sinking an average of 10 inches every year, making Mexico City more vulnerable to social risks and earthquake impacts". Besides, water authorities and some experts have suggested that the water reservoirs of Mexico City could reach a day of total exhaustion over the course of the next six years.

Mexico's political system has left aside for decades the pending task of decentralizing political power and infrastructural development from Mexico City. Even though other major Mexican cities, such as Monterrey and Guadalajara, have entered the national stage in recent years, Mexico City monopolizes foreign investments, among other funding. Even though foreign financial interests are backing the entrance of Mexico City into the cohort of global capitals, this financial phenomenon is only exacerbating the allocation of resources to the capital.

Even though one of the anthems of the current government has been the access of equal opportunities for everyone, Mexico has nurtured cultural nepotism and economic and intellectual segregation as practices accepted and sanctioned at the institutional level. The arrival to power of the apparently new party MORENA has created, from the general public perspective, the illusion that minorities in Mexico are now enjoying more access to intangible forms of power – thus justifying the popularity of the MORENA party among the least privileged in society. Yet, recent studies suggest that poverty went up in Mexico during the last six years, and that AMLO's policies hurt the poor the most. In addition, internal and global migrations to the main urban spaces in Mexico are also exacerbating both xenophobic and populist responses.

Many of AMLO's critics underline that his "erratic and authoritarian" government has been exacerbated by the fact that "he is subverting the institutions that have upheld Mexico's democratic achievement—above all, the country's admired and independent elections system". Many public sectors anticipate that, no matter what is the outcome of the upcoming elections, the election process itself will trigger waves of violence throughout the country. The preamble of the upcoming electoral journey has been determined by a wave of assassinations of multiple local candidates. So far this year, "at least 28 candidates have been attacked, with 16 killed, according to data through April 1 from the research group Data Cívica, a figure set to outpace even the bloodiest election cycles in Mexico's past". Amidst this scenario, Mexico appears unable to orchestrate the full extent of the democratic spectacle that voters were expecting.

Besides the challenges mentioned above, the next *presidenta* will assume the difficult task of voicing the demands of Mexican women. In addition, amidst the historical event of being the first Mexican female president, she will lead the search for a cohort of new political leaders. This is crucial in order to enact state-wide measures to tackle both violence against women in effective ways and the dismantling of drug cartels as powerful actors that block democratic deepening. Besides, the *presidenta* will be in charge of attracting foreign investment to develop sustainable forms of energy as nation-wide sources of green energy. Furthermore, as the Mexican economy grows, the next government will have to successfully incorporate new generations into a workforce that meets global demands. Finally, the upcoming government will be in charge of designing sustainable responses to global migrations to Mexican urban spaces, including the preparedness of shelters to tackle this phenomenon through humanitarian and lawful strategies.

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About the author:

Franco Laguna Correa is an Interdisciplinary Research Associate at the University of Pittsburgh. Formerly, he was Assistant Professor of Latinx Cultural and Literary Studies at the University of Denver. He's published various monographs on Latin American and Mexican subjects, and various award-winning literary works. He can be followed on Twitter at @FrancoMilitia.