

# OUR VOICE

Since July 2, Mexico has been immersed in the worst post-electoral crisis in the history of its young democracy, which has been severely challenged by some of the very political actors who participated in the elections. Since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) came into effect in 1994, Mexico has concentrated on carrying out a series of far-reaching reforms that have led the country through a profound transformation of its macro-economic variables. While this dynamic imposed enormous challenges on micro-economic aspects of sustainable development, such as the distribution of the positive results of growth and other fundamental factors that would lead to horizontally sharing the benefits of integration, these either were not achieved or were not pursued with appropriate strategies. After the 1988 political crisis caused by another severely questioned presidential election, the opening of the Mexican economy had been perceived by a broad spectrum of national and international analysts as the preamble for achieving the country's political-institutional modernization. At the same time, it would create the structural basis for a solid economy, well prepared to withstand the transformation of the economic variables aimed at achieving a beneficial exchange for a country with enormous deficiencies, as well as the polarizing realities of North-South development and underdevelopment throughout its territory. Today it has been proven that the benefits of economic development have not resolved either fully or relatively the economic sufferings of the most vulnerable sectors of the population.

On the other hand, there is general consensus that political modernization, with the creation of institutions like the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and the Federal Judicial Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF), has been implemented seriously, with efforts on the part of many, with enormous economic investment and with the agreement of all the important political actors involved in the process as well as that of other broad sectors of the population. What is more, this recognition has been widely shared by different international actors, among others, our two partners in NAFTA.

The initial result of the 2006 election was the IFE's announcement of National Action Party (PAN) candidate Felipe Calderón as the winner by a narrow margin. As everyone knows, this result has been questioned by the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) through a well considered, premeditated, orchestrated mobilization using rituals that we thought had been left behind in our country like the personality cult and caudillo and authoritarian tactics that threaten defiantly to destroy the legal framework of Mexico. This all began even before the votes had been counted twice as stipulated by law, during the first week of July. The TEPJF has now ordered that the process go through a new judicial stage: recounting the ballots in a representative proportion of the electoral map, where the PRD has pointed to its most important doubts, in regions that Calderón clearly won and where, according to the denunciations, presumably there were anomalies, or what that party frivolously calls "electoral fraud." If the recount confirms the original figures, —as appears to be the case now that it has finished—, obviously all the doubts could be cleared up in order to satisfy the most interested party, the PRD, in de-legitimizing the entire process —mostly without any basis. Or, if the recount uncovers significant anomalies, which at the point appears unlikely, another stage of this crisis could begin. In any case, we trust that the final result will mark the beginning of the recovery of the stability that is highly valued by most of Mexico's citizenry.

The issue, then, is whether the political and social stability the country needs to continue advancing in its process of economic and political modernization can be preserved. This is where the great paradox lies: an important, though insufficient, reform of the political-electoral institutions has been undertaken, only, in the framework of a post-electoral crisis like the one we are experiencing, to have it disregarded by one of the parties involved, which bases its political opposition on the fact that serious conditions of intolerable social polarization exist that have not been resolved by the model of development implemented since 1994. Clearly, the terrain of political argumentation has been invaded, inappropriately in this post-electoral juncture, by a critique of the economic model, which has certainly demonstrated its weaknesses in redistribution over the last 10 years. We consider it necessary, however, to emphasize that this thorny problem has to be resolved in the framework of a debate of ideas among all the actors, precisely in a clearly stable political arena. In this way, this critique, which involves de-legitimizing everyone who disagrees, has given rise to not recognizing the electoral process as legitimate. It should be said that the advance of democracy presupposes the acceptance by all actors committed to it that the country cannot function on

the basis of this kind of blackmail exerted by a public institution, a member of the state supported system of political parties.

This is why it is so vital to reiterate what we have mentioned in this and other spaces about the enormous importance of a good resolution of the Mexican electoral process if we expect integration with the United States and Canada to prosper and to begin a higher stage than the one it is in today. Therefore, even amidst Mexico's political crisis, it is fundamental that our two main trade partners send unequivocal signs of support to the Mexican electoral process and its institutions in order to help insure that in the short and medium terms, whoever is declared president-elect can have the tools he needs to solve the economy's most urgent tasks. These pronouncements could be fundamental for creating a political climate based on a spirit of broad collaboration among the political and economic actors that will allow us to come to consensus about the way forward for our foreign policy and our process of integration, thus providing the confidence needed to all those involved that the country will continue its march forward. This observation itself would be sufficiently important given the critical moment we are going through, that in the case that it became unstable, would undoubtedly affect the entire region. However, it is even more crucial since after political alternation in 2000 (which was smooth compared to the current process, and, despite its later unfortunate failings, an important democratic advance for Mexico), there was not the due recognition, mainly by Washington, of its trade partner's significant political advance. Only a short time before, Mexico had been submerged in an authoritarian single-party regime, which we are discovering today, after almost six years of governmental political somnolence, is still there, although with different forms and colors, alive and very possibly ready to begin to start kicking.

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In our "Politics" section, precisely, we include two articles written just before the elections dealing with what promised to be a close, polarized vote. Both show us some of the problems that our young electoral system still suffers from, and point out the undeniable, substantial advances of our democratic transition, above all with regard to its institutional design. Ricardo Raphael wrote about the process of the political campaigns, in which, he maintains, the three main forces based their publicity on polarizing messages and mutual criticisms, leaving to one side government platforms. The rich vs. the poor (PRD), old vs. young (PAN) and extremists vs. centrists (PRI) were the axes of a dirty war that ended up by profoundly dividing Mexican society. In his article, Jorge Javier Romero reflects about some of the political system's continuing democratic deficits that should be recognized and overcome to advance in the consolidation of democracy. Among them are the excessively long electoral campaigns, the main political parties' lack of political will to carry out and deepen the reforms necessary for governability, as well as the anti-democratic increase in prerequisites for allowing new currents and parties to participate in elections.

With regard to other issues, we have dedicated the "Economy" section to the analysis of the importance, impact and destination of foreign currency revenue in Mexico, the structure of which has changed radically in the last decade. Oil, exports and services, especially tourism, have ceded ground to remittances sent by our countrymen and women in the United States. In addition, the recent boom in oil prices, which in the last few years has made for additional unexpected revenue, has had an influence on Mexico's political life and economy. In his contribution, Fluvio Ruiz Alarcón explains how the current fiscal regimen for oil income has made the state-owned Mexican Oil Company (Pemex) technically, financially and administratively unviable. Cristóbal Mendoza examines how, despite the rapid increase in remittances to Mexico, making them the country's biggest source of foreign currency, most of these monies do not contribute to national development or productive investment, but are used above all for family living expenses. Lastly, Daniel Hiernaux explains how the foreign currency that comes from tourism, although it undoubtedly contributes to job creation and indirectly spurs investment in infrastructure, ends up by completing its natural economic cycle and returning larger sums to its countries of origin, given the multinational nature of most of the sector's industry.

Migration between Mexico and the United States has become important in the media this year after the discussions about different bills presented before the U.S. Congress and the thundering and certainly surprisingly large reaction by the U.S. immigrant community, particularly the Latinos, among them, the Mexicans. Journalist Jesús Esquivel contributes an article for the "United States Affairs" section in which he describes what for him is the unserious and very questionable role played in this unprecedented mass movement by the Latino media, specifically Spanish-language radio stations and their announcers.

In the section "Mexico-U.S. Relations," two respected analysts of North America present important contributions about relations among the countries of the region. Raul Rodriguez-Barocio, former CEO of

the North American Development Bank, warns of the need for profound changes with regard to regional integration in the framework of the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America. This author thinks that our country should seek to create a compensatory fund in a radically different way from the European Union if it wants to at least have a minimal opportunity of getting the support of the United States and Canada, both very reluctant to adopt the European solution for integration. For his part, researcher Leonardo Curzio presents a balance sheet of President Fox's relationship with the United States. This relationship has had its ups and down, of course with some successes, but also with many mistakes, like the Mexican government's ambivalent, lukewarm response to 9/11, which undoubtedly still has repercussions today.

In "Canadian Issues", Canada expert María Teresa Gutiérrez-Haces contributes an article about the first six months of Stephen Harper's Conservative government with an extensive preamble about his ideological origins and political career that allows us to understand his current priorities, outstanding among which is his greater interest in a rapprochement and bilateral integration with the United States than a trilateral integration that would include Mexico.

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"Art and Culture" outdoes itself looking at José Luis Cuevas, one of Mexico's most solid, creative twentieth-century visual artists. The display of his large-format sculpture series "Impure Animals" in the esplanade of University City was a wonderful pretext for Víctor Vizzuett to interview him. They talked about the origin of the pieces, the perennial influence of Kafka and the self-doubt that still plagues him every time he is about to create a new work. Complementing this vision is a text by Isaac Masri about the trajectory of "Impure Animals." The section also pays homage to Miguel Covarrubias, one of the few truly bi-cultural artists in North America, in an article by writer and diplomat Alfonso Negrín. Covarrubias's work, produced both in Mexico and the United States, and shot full of unparalleled irony, masterfully captures the cultures and idiosyncrasies of both countries.

In this issue, "The Splendor of Mexico" is dedicated to founding father Benito Juárez on the bicentennial of his birth. President of Mexico in the turbulent post-independence period, he is one of the most revered figures in our historic pantheon. Like many of our national heroes, Juárez is present in urban monuments, street and neighborhood names and museums dedicated to keeping his legacy alive. Here we offer a brief example of his presence in Mexico City. Edgar Tavares and Ángeles González Gamio contributed to this effort, the former with an article about the Juárez neighborhood, and the latter with two articles, one about Juárez Avenue and its changes down through the years, and another about some of the monuments and sculptures of great artistic value dedicated to Don Benito.

The "Museums" section is dedicated to one of the most ingenious exhibits created about the Juárez's political life during the celebration of his bicentennial. The graphic exhibition "A Page in History, Under the Brushstroke of the Opposition" shows us the other side of the coin: a Benito Juárez judged by the caricaturists of his time, who expressed with great ability and political sense the opposition's opinions about his use of power.

In this issue, we dedicate "Ecology" to the achievements of a first-rate bi-national ecological project in which the Mexican and U.S. government have collaborated very fruitfully, encouraged by the initiative of the Sierra Madre conservationist group, the Cemex cement company and local inhabitants. The El Carmen-Big Bend Ecological Conservation Corridor was recently declared a world ecological reserve.

Lastly, we dedicate our "Literature" section to the work of one of Mexico's most important twentieth-century writers: Aline Pettersson. We include an essay by literary critic Gloria Prado, who describes the author's compact, careful narrative style that displays neither too much nor too little of anything. From 1977, when she wrote her first novel, *Círculos* (Circles), until 2006, the author has published many novels, books of poems and short stories. Her most recent novel, *Las muertes de Natalia Bauer* (The Deaths of Natalia Bauer) (2006), is reviewed for *Voices of Mexico* by researcher Graciela Martínez-Zalce. As just one example of her narrative, we publish the translation of her short story "Historia a cuatro manos" (Four-Handed Story).

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