

OUR VOICE

It is still early to definitively predict who will win the United States November elections. It should be said, however, that in the last six weeks, from around mid-August, electoral trends clearly and steadily favor President George W. Bush. Senator Kerry's campaign lost momentum when he declared August 9, when the final report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States (commonly known as the 9/11 Commission) came out, that he, too, would have given the order to attack Iraq. If we consider his attacks in the early stages of his campaign and his current criticisms of the war, this contradiction is paradoxical, and it is even more surprising that Kerry has hurt himself in this way without his advisors taking any preventive action, bringing into question his campaign platform.

On the other hand, we should also recognize that the unjust attacks on Kerry by the Swift Boats Veterans for Truth were a decisive factor in his drop in the ratings. The last important event that contributed to weakening the Democratic senator was the attack against him by Bush himself, Rudolph Giuliani, Richard Cheney and other speakers at the Republican Convention, as well as the Republican strategy of turning the Iraq war and the war against terror into their main campaign weapon. All this has left John Forbes Kerry very badly placed. In such a polarized political environment, with a messianic, warlike discourse firmly entrenched in the White House, and after deciding to turn himself, like Bush, into a war candidate—even if a pacifist one—by placing the accent on his virtues as a Vietnam-decorated war hero, Senator Kerry has suffered from the impact of negative publicity about this central aspect of his candidacy, which has substantially affected Democratic rank-and-file morale. The damage was done. And after managing to maintain an average four-point advantage for a few months, which, though fragile, was important, Kerry seems to have been left behind by Bush, perhaps irreparably.

It is important to mention that one of the reasons the Democratic candidate is behind is that his strategy centered on an anti-Bush message, which seems to have been insufficient for improving his electoral possibilities. We should also recognize that the Republican strategy centering its discourse on the war and terrorism affected the Democratic Party agenda, forcing it to also concentrate on the same issues, although at a disadvantage. Kerry's many efforts to bring up questions like education, the economy or health care in the electoral debate have been unfruitful. Also, Kerry seems to have made a big political error: including an enormous number of issues on his electoral agenda at the same time that he lacks a central message that seems authentic to potential voters.

As if this were not enough, the senator from Massachusetts is encountering serious difficulties in positioning himself in states that will play a key role in the Electoral College, like Pennsylvania (21 electoral votes), Ohio (20 votes), Florida (27 votes), Wisconsin (10 votes), Colorado, Maine and Nebraska (9, 4 and 5 votes respectively, distributed proportionately in contrast to the other 47 states and D.C.). Kerry also seems to be facing serious problems among women and young people. According to *The New York Times*, the Democrats are desperately currying the favor of women voters, which recent polls say has dropped off (48 percent for Bush and 43 percent for Kerry). In the framework of defense and national security policies, which have paid off for the president, all women (married women tend to be Republicans and single women tend to be Democrats) are particularly susceptible to the issue of terrorism. Thus, recent polls show that 48 percent of this important segment of the electorate trusts Bush more than Kerry to protect them (only 29 percent). On top of all this, middle-class mothers, traditionally undecided, also seem to be supporting the Republicans. Obviously, if Bush has always enjoyed a majority of men's votes, it is fundamental that Kerry recoup women's votes. If we look at the 2000 elections, when most men voted for Bush and women for Gore (54 percent to 43 percent), it is easy to see that if this trend is not reversed, if the Democratic Party does not recover its hardcore electorate and if President Bush consolidates his current ratings at the polls, the result will be a real disaster for the Democrats.

According to an ABC-*Washington Post* poll taken after the Republican Convention, young voters between the ages of 18 and 24 increased their support for Bush by 14 percent (going from 32 percent to 49 percent), decreasing their preference for Kerry in the same proportion (dropping from 63 percent to 49 percent). However, what may be an advantage for Kerry is that this segment of the electorate continues to be part of the “undecided” voters.

Evidence shows that the war has dominated the electoral and political atmosphere in the United States and has changed traditional trends among U.S. voters. The October debates will be decisive in determining whether President Bush consolidates his lead or Senator Kerry manages to recover his lost advantage, or if election results as close as the 2000 balloting cause a constitutional crisis that forces Americans to seriously discuss the radical modification of an electoral system that today seems completely out of date.

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In this issue, we have included four contributions on the upcoming elections by Mexican specialists on Mexico-U.S. relations and U.S. domestic politics. Our aim is to offer a Mexican perspective of an event that will have important repercussions in many arenas, among them some that affect Mexico very directly. Leonardo Curzio reflects on the national security proposals in both of the main parties’ platforms and about the impact that they might have on Mexico. César Pérez Espinosa centers his analysis on the increasing trend among U.S. voters to opt for conservative candidates and policies, leading to a strengthening of the Republicans in both houses. Alejandro Becerra dissects Kerry’s political career, pinpointing the few times he has mentioned Mexico, showing that even though the bilateral agenda and its problems are not precisely one of his top priorities, he is sensitive to matters like aid for Third World development, the fight against world poverty and immigration policies that can lead to the legalization of undocumented residents in the United States. Finally, Antonio de la Cuesta and Jesús Velasco Grajales take a long hard look at Bush’s policies and Kerry’s campaign speeches about relations with Mexico to show that the victory of one or the other does not indicate a clear advantage for our country.

Our “North American Affairs” section continues to focus on the issue of relations between Mexico and the United States with two articles that draw a balance sheet of the first ten years of the North American Free Trade Agreement. Luis Quintana Romero looks at the institutions created to implement NAFTA, examining their effectiveness, transparency and their performance as supranational bodies and mechanisms. In the first part of a two-part article, Javier Aguilar García explores the effects of NAFTA in the maquiladora sector and the striking growth of informal employment; in our next issue, he will examine the impact of unemployment on migration to the United States.

In our “Economy” section, Pablo Ruiz Nápoles introduces us to one of the most important traits of the United States’ political and economic culture: consumerism. He does it from a theoretical perspective based on political economy to explain a phenomenon that has internationalized to the point that it is difficult to distinguish regional specificities. In this same section, we present the first of a series of articles for *Voices of Mexico* by natural resources specialist Miguel García Reyes about what may be the twenty-first century economy’s fundamental issue: the dispute over water. In this first article, García Reyes offers a general overview of the world’s water crisis and introduces what is undoubtedly the most important conflict over water for our country: the dispute with the United States over the waters of the Rio Grande.

Mexico’s national political life is starting to rev up for the 2006 presidential elections. Much of what the different parties are doing is already carried out with an eye to that overall objective. In this issue’s “Politics” section, we continue with the analysis of the internal life of each of the country’s three main political parties and their efforts to reorganize and restructure for the next elections. This time, we present an article by analyst Guadalupe Pacheco about the Institutional Revolutionary Party and its transformation from a mass hegemonic corporatist party with vertical decision-making processes and discipline, into one that has had to adapt to the new circumstances of political competition. Undoubtedly, one of the issues that will be determinant in the 2006 elections is public security, which urgently requires solutions and which growing sectors of the population see as closely

linked to corruption. Luis González Placencia not only lays bare media myths about the size of the problem but also defends the idea that society's totally understandable concern about it, which creates a feeling of helplessness and vulnerability, should not be an excuse for "hard line" policies, like the reinstatement of the death penalty.

Mexican society has organized around many different issues, including insecurity and free trade. Our "Society" section in this issue opens with an article by researcher Ariadna Estévez, who introduces us to the theoretical and ideological reasons that led to the emergence of civic and social movements against NAFTA. In what may well be categorized as a boom of civil society organizations in Mexico, the NGOs centered on free trade joined together first around democratic demands and later, when Mexico's democracy began to mature, around human rights issues. On the same matter, writer and analyst Pedro Félix Gutiérrez presents a panorama of the institutionalization of civil society organizations in Mexico through the creation of rules and laws by the state, which recognizes their importance.

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In this issue, we have dedicated the "Art and Culture," "The Splendor of Mexico," "Museums" and "Literature" sections to the state of Tabasco. The large Usumacinta and Grijalva Rivers crisscross the state, creating a landscape in which water has been the main protagonist and green its main color. This warm, humid land has propitiated a singular wealth of flora and fauna and was chosen by important pre-Hispanic peoples for building their imposing cities. In colonial, independent and modern Tabasco, for a long time the rivers were the only means of communication and at the same time, the main reason for its isolation. There is no risk in saying that much of what today's Tabascans are is determined by a culture of water. Examples of this are to be found in our "Art and Culture" section: we begin with the engravings of Férido Castillo. Journalist Roberto Ponce tells us about this unique artist for whom Tabasco could not be understood without its scenes of water and vegetation. Equally, Norma Domínguez explains how the indigenous youth of Tamulté de las Sabanas run their own painting school, which has been operating for ten years. Lastly, Leandro Soto describes another example of the talent of Tamulté's youth, the indigenous contemporary dance group, Nikamba, which has established with its art a dialogue that embraces its own traditions.

"The Splendor of Mexico" opens with two ancient cultures: the great mother Olmec culture and the Mayan culture, whose grandeur is representative of the development achieved by our pre-Hispanic ancestors. Lorenzo Ochoa writes of the La Venta Museum-Park and the Comalcalco archaeological site, which serve as a framework for the description of the endeavors of these cultures in Tabasco. Rodolfo Uribe reflects on the rhythm and the heart of the swamp that have determined the lives of both ancient and modern inhabitants of Tabasco in their efforts to "live outside the water." Lastly, Jorge Priego brings us back into the modern world to talk about Tabasco's regional cuisine, a fusion of indigenous and Spanish cooking, plus the popular wisdom of mothers and grandmothers, with its wealth of ingredients and recipes, little known outside the state.

Tabasco is famous for its literature, with the name of poet Carlos Pellicer Cámara first and foremost. Pellicer's love for his homeland and its culture took him into archaeology and anthropology, and it is to him that we owe the projects of the La Venta Museum-Park and the valuable collection of pieces from Mexico's main pre-Hispanic cultures that are the pride of the Carlos Pellicer Cámara Regional Anthropology Museum in the city of Villahermosa, described in our "Museums" section.

Tabasco's new literature has in Teodosio García Ruiz one of its most irreverent and outstanding representatives. An essay by Miguel A. Ruiz Magdonel about this poet and a selection of fragments of his poems are irrefutable proof.

This issue's "In Memoriam" section pays homage to the life and achievements of Gastón García Cantú, outstanding intellectual, university and government official, whose work will live after him.

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