Mexico 2006 Scenarios of Competition[1]

Jorge Alcocer V.*
Armando Robinson Álamo**

In July 2005, issue 149 of the magazine *Voz y Voto* (The Right to Speak and Vote) published the first version of the prospective model for Mexico's 2006 presidential elections it has been developing for several years with the Center for Studies for an Alternative National Project. It dealt with the trends derived from each party's vote counts from 1994

to 2003 and the surveys produced by the main polling firms and the media.

The second exercise, published in this article, incorporates local elections from 1994 to 2005 and polling data up until the December 2005 to January 2006 Christmas "truce of silence", when the three largest parties' presidential candidates had already been nominated. In contrast with the first exercise, we now incorporate factors that seek to reflect each presidential candidate's possible impact on overall party trends and one other important element: the

* Editor-in-Chief of *Voz y Voto* magazine.
** Researcher at the Center for Studies for an Alternative National Project (CEPNA).

two electoral coalitions approved by the Federal Electoral Institute. In this sense, the prospects for Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador were calculated on the basis of the historic voting record of the parties that form the "Alliance for the Welfare of All" coalition (the PRD, the Workers Party [PT] and Convergence); the same procedure was followed for the "Alliance for Mexico" coalition, made up of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (PVEM).

In the last two presidential elections (1994 and 2000) increased party competition during the campaigns did not change opinions about who the probable winner would be.[2] But, in the current campaign, which will end with the balloting on July 2 this year, it has become commonplace to say, with no proof whatsoever, that any of the three main candidates could win the presidency for the term beginning December 1, 2006 and ending November 30, 2012. This idea is accompanied by a prediction that the electorate will divide into three practically equal parts. "Whoever wins the 2006 presidential elections," say the futurologists, "will win by a maximum of one percent." If, as is also anticipated, at least 50 percent of the 35 million registered voters go to the polls, one percent would mean a win by 350,000 votes.[3]

These kinds of predictions and figures have been the basis for constructing catastrophic scenarios for Mexico, including possible conflicts after the elections in which one or more of the defeated candidates could refuse to recognize the victor.

In this article, we intend to present empirical evidence that points to

> Our central hypothesis is that nothing indicates that the most probable outcome of the next presidential elections is the vote being equally divided among the three main contenders.

other, less extreme scenarios without arguing that the conflict could not arise because the possibility of its occurring and its intensity is inversely proportional to the size of the difference between the first and second places in the balloting.

Our central hypothesis is that nothing indicates that the most probable outcome of the next presidential elections is the vote being equally divided among the three main contenders.

The Party System

The current party system is made up of eight national organizations registered with the electoral authorities.[4] By law, only national political parties can register candidates for federal election. There is no place, therefore, for independent candidates or for other non-registered organizations to run candidates.

However, under federal law, two national electoral coalitions have been registered that have fielded common candidates for all elected posts.[5] There are five presidential hopefuls for 2006, then: Roberto Madrazo Pintado for the coalition "Alliance for Mexico"; Andrés Manuel López Obrador for the "Alliance for the Welfare of All"; and the three candidates for the parties with no coalition, Felipe Calderón Hinojosa for

the PAN, Patricia Mercado for Alternative and Roberto Campa for New Alliance.

This means that there are three central contenders and two marginal ones (those fielded by the two newly registered parties, whose main challenge is to get enough votes to maintain their registration and rights, at least two percent of the national vote each). Based on prior federal election results, we can predict that together, the two newly registered parties will get between three and four percent of the vote. Therefore, between 96 and 97 percent of the votes will be distributed among the main contenders.

If we pay heed to popular thinking, divvying up the vote into three nearly equal parts would mean that the winner would get 33 percent of the votes, the runner-up, 32 percent and the candidate to come in third, 31 percent. Many more combinations could be used, but let us use this one, which illustrates the consequences of there being a one-point difference between each contender.

At the time this article was written, no poll in Mexico predicted this. But the most important fact is that there is no prior empirical evidence to back up this hypothetical result. That is, we have no proof that the electorate would behave dividing its votes in three almost equal parts. What is more, we

do not even know of a case in which the winner and the runner-up in a presidential election had almost equal vote counts.

What the historical data from the 1988, 1994 and 2000 presidential elections show is a distribution of votes between the two main contenders with a significant advantage for the victor, leaving the party in third place with a high vote count, but not nearly as much as the first and second places.[6] The results of the 1991, 1997 and 2003 mid-term elections confirm this trend.[7] In addition, the vote distribution in the many gubernatorial elections held during this period confirms the model of competition between two parties, with a third left far behind. In several cases of hotly contested state elections, the difference between the winner and the runner-up was minimal (Tabasco, Colima, Veracruz, Sinaloa, Tlaxcala, Zacatecas, Sonora and Mexico City's Federal District).

All this makes it possible to put forward the following three facts:

1. The system of competition, which seems to be multi-party, is in reality bi-polar, with a third party left way behind and two or more small, marginal parties. This is the case both on a national and a state level.
2. The PRI continues to be the only party with a national presence. Although the PAN has grown significantly in recent years, it continues to get very few votes in several states of Mexico's South-southwest.
3. From its foundation in 1990 until 2003, the PRD has never gotten more than 25 percent of the national vote in federal elections, and its strength is concentrated in only a few states (Mexico City, Michoacán, Zacate-

The system of competition, which seems to be multi-party, is in reality bi-polar, with a third party left way behind and two or more small, marginal parties. This is the case both on a national and a state level.

cas, Baja California Sur and Guerrero). Its electoral weakness in central, northern and Pacific-north states is a constant.

In the *Voz y Voto* issue mentioned at the beginning of this article, we offered scenarios designed on the basis of the highest percentages achieved by each of the three large parties in federal and state elections between 1994 and 2003. What we obtained was revealing, although contrary to widespread, prevalent public opinion in Mexico: if in 2006, the PRD and its presidential candidate, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, repeated the party's best historic vote count state by state, they would come in in third place on July 2. A later study by the Consulta Mitofsky polling firm came up with the same results.[8]

Naturally, it is possible that López Obrador's popularity, which has shown up in the polls for months now, will make it possible to turn around the decision of more than six million citizens who have never voted for the PRD, to the point of giving him 33 percent or more of the national vote. The fact that Vicente Fox achieved this turnaround in 2000 argues in favor of this scenario: if it happened once, it can happen again.

In 2000, when Fox (the PAN-PVEM candidate) won the presidency, his

party, the PAN, had already approached 10 million votes in the previous presidential election. It also sat in the governor's seat in seven states nationwide and held more than half the city halls of the country's most populated municipalities. In contrast, in 2006, the PRD has gotten less than 15 percent of the vote in more than two-thirds of the states, including some of the most modern, populated ones like Nuevo León, Coahuila, Chihuahua, Baja California, Sonora, Sinaloa, Jalisco, Puebla and Guanajuato. In the state with the largest number of registered voters, the State of Mexico, in the 2005 local elections, the PRD came in a distant third. In the 2000 presidential elections, the PRD candidate, supported by other smaller parties, received a little over six million votes.

In summary, without totally discarding a possible turn-around in preferences and voting by millions of Mexicans, we want to warn about the strength of prior trends which, without being inescapable, do seem a sign indicating what could happen in Mexico on July 2, 2006.

SCENARIOS

In 1991 we published the first results of our prospective model which, with the passage of time and the very diverse

changes that have come about since then, has been strengthened and perfected.[9] Thanks to advances in democracy that make reliable results possible, to generalized use and the spread of polling and to advances in technology, we now are able to create numerical simulations of the results of practically any federal or state election in Mexico.

The model's methodological bases can be consulted in issue 149 of the magazine *Voz y Voto*. We would only like to state that for the following scenarios, we have considered previous federal and state election results as a first factor of importance, so that the dominant element in this exercise is voters' inertia. National polls about voters' intentions for 2006 carried out or published by Mexico's most prestigious companies and media are part of the data incorporated into the model. To consider the effect of having created the two coalitions, we added together the historic results of the PRI and the PVEM, and those of the PRD with those of the PT and Convergence. We have also factored in "subjective" issues that, though supported by prior results, are very optimistic: we are supposing that both the PAN and the PRD would have a very high possibility of repeating in July 2006 their best historic percentage from the years 1994 to 2003 and that, in addition, in some states, the PRD would enjoy a plus derived from its presidential candidate's charisma.

Let us examine the model's results, starting with the most favorable for the "Alliance for the Welfare of All," made up of the PRD, PT and Convergence, headed up by López Obrador.

It is clear that, even supposing that this coalition maximizes its results state by state and granting it its additional advantage because of its candidate's popularity in states like Mexico, Guerrero, Tlaxcala, Tabasco and Yucatán, the highest probable vote count would be 33.2 percent, with its lowest at 31.4 percent and the intermediate estimation at 32.3 percent. But even in the most favorable scenario for the PRD, these numbers are lower than what the PRI would get. Even if the PRD registered the highest possible number of votes, it would be lower than the PRI's lowest projected vote count of 35.8 percent. This means that if the inertia of the past predominates, the PRD would come in second, pushing the PAN into third place. It should be pointed out that in this scenario, the difference between the winner and the runner-up might be minimal, opening the door to a possible post-electoral conflict.

In the second scenario, we have eliminated the subjective factors favorable to the PRD, maintaining only its current trend. The other difference is that in this second scenario, using only the trend of inertia, we suppose that it was the PAN and its candidate that achieved their best results, leaving out of the equation the coalition with the PVEM for the elections between 1993 and 2003. We also suppose that the PRI will perform exactly as its inertia indicates.

In this scenario, the possibility of a win for Felipe Calderón and the PAN is established in a single hypothesis: the PAN would get its maximum number of votes (38.3 percent) and the PRI would get its minimum (38 percent), with a bare 0.3 percent difference. However, if the PAN and the PRI both got their minimum number of votes (36.1 percent and 38 percent respectively), the PRI would come out the winner. The PRD would break the 20-percent barrier, but even if it did its absolute best (22.7 percent), it would still be 10 percentage points below the PAN or the PRI, whichever of the two secured the victory.

In the third scenario, we have given the PRI the advantage, supposing that, in alliance with the Greens, in 2006 it will be able to achieve the best cumulative result reached in the last two federal elections.

In this scenario, the PRI would win by a comfortable margin, beating the PAN in any of the possible combinations. As is clear, if the PRI achieved its maximum result of 40.8 percent and the PAN ended up with 33.6 percent, its minimum, there would be a seven-point difference. In the inverse situation, if the PRI got its minimum and the PAN its maximum, the PRI would still have a four-point advantage over the PAN. The PRD vote would be between 23 and 25 percent, confirming the positive effect of its presidential candidate on its vote count.

Despite its defeat in the 2000 presidential elections, the PRI has consistently been the party with the highest vote in state elections since then and in the 2003 mid-term elections.

CONCLUSIONS

In our first scenario, inertia seems to predominate over charisma and subjectivity. Even if López Obrador and the "Alliance for the Welfare of All" are given the plus that the polls for the last year gives them, they would come in second, with the PRI coming out on top, although possibly in a close race. The PAN would pay the price of the polarization between its rivals and would come in third.

In the second scenario, the PAN would maximize its possibilities of entering into frank competition with the "Alliance for Mexico" coalition, which includes its erstwhile ally, now a competitor, the PVEM, calculated to have contributed four percentage points to Fox's vote count in the 2000 presidential elections. The PRD would come in third, several points behind the winner and runner-up.

In the third scenario, the PRI would capitalize on its recent electoral history and its alliance with the PVEM, coming out the winner by a considerable margin. In this case, competition for second place would be heavy, although the model indicates that the PRI's strength would have more damaging collateral effects for the PRD than for the PAN, explained by the existence of an important segment of voters whose preferences include either of these two parties. In other words, the PRI and the PRD are fervently competing for a group of voters whose first choice is their rejection of the PAN.

We would like to re-emphasize our initial warning: the scenarios presented here are only statistical prospective exercises. They are not predictions, much less auguries or prophesies. The strength of the PRI in the three scenarios can be explained by the importance in the model of each party's vote counts in the recent past. It should be remembered that despite its defeat in the 2000 presidential elections, the PRI has consistently been the party with the highest vote in state elections since then and in the 2003 mid-term elections. For the same reason, the PAN and the PRD, even with the optimistic suppositions we have incorporated to arrive at their best scenarios, are negatively affected by their specific recent electoral histories.

The PAN is hard hit by its poor results in several states in Mexico's South-Southeast, like Oaxaca, Guerrero and Tabasco. During the five years it has occupied the presidency, it has seen a lower than 10-percent vote count in several states, which has not happened to the PRI as an opposition party.

The PRD is limited by the inertia of its structural weakness in almost all of the North and in a good part of Central Mexico. It seems only remotely possible that it go from under 10 percent of the vote in states like Nuevo León and Coahuila, Baja California and Guanajuato to break the 30-percent barrier. If we add that in 15 of the 32 states in 2003, the PRD got less than 15 percent of the vote, the difficulties it faces in aspiring to win the July 2006 presidential elections, even with a coalition, become understandable.

Heavy electoral competition seems unavoidable, with three parties occupying center stage and capturing most of the votes, barely leaving open the possibility for the two new parties that will have to compete alone. But tripartisan competition does not mechanically lead to divvying up the vote equally three ways with only a minimum lead for the winner. Only in the scenario in which the PRD and the PAN do their best is this likely, but in both cases with the PRI as the competing party.

Finally, it should be pointed out that given these suppositions and considerations, in no case does the PRI come in third, and therefore, no scenario makes the most heated competition between the PAN and the PRD.

The prospective model confirms the possibility of a change in the previous trends that had been traced in the months before the 2006 electoral process began. While Andrés Manuel López Obrador invigorates the PRD's ability to compete and Felipe Calderón's candidacy has given the PAN's expectations new life, the PRI's strength is almost exclusively based on its national presence, its more than tempered structure and its electoral recovery since 2001.

The aforementioned trends and scenarios are not immutable; as the competition advances and the campaigns

It is possible that López Obrador's popularity
will make it possible to turn around
the decision of more than six million citizens who
have never voted for the PRD.

unfold, future polls will reveal the variations in voters' preferences. **VM**

NOTES

[1] With slight style changes, this article was published in the February 2006 issue of the Mexico City-based magazine *Voz y Voto* (The Right to Speak and Vote).

[2] In 1994, the PRI maintained its advantage in the presidential election during the entire campaign, while in 2000, even though polling gave the advantage to Vicente Fox from the National Action Party (PAN), most believed that the winner would be the PRI candidate.

[3] In 1994, the PRI candidate beat his closest competitor by more than seven million votes.

In 2000, Vicente Fox beat the PRI candidate by more than 2.4 million votes and the PRD candidate by more than 9 million votes.

[4] The PAN, PRI, PRD, PVEM, PT, Convergence, Social Democratic and Peasant Alternative and New Alliance. The last two were officially registered in 2005 and electoral legislation forbids them from making alliances.

[5] The PRI and the PVEM and the PRD with the PT and Convergence, which, in addition to a presidential hopeful, must field common candidates for deputies and senators.

[6] In 1988, even given all the reservations people have about official figures, the real competition was between the PRI and the multiparty coalition that backed Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, leaving the PAN and its presidential candidate in third place. In 1994 and 2000, the PRD ended up in third place with Cárdenas again as candidate.

[7] In 1997 the PRD and the PAN received practically the same number of votes and the PRI emerged the victor. In 2000 and 2003, in the elections for federal deputies, the PRI continued in first place, followed by the PAN, with the PRD coming in third. In 2000, the PAN beat the PRI in the presidential elections, but not in the balloting for deputies and senators, which only reinforces the expectation that in 2006 none of the parties will achieve an absolute majority in Congress.

[8] "Votos duros y potenciales, rumbo al 2006" at www.consulta.com, Consulta Mitofsky's website.

[9] The first exercise of the prospective model for electoral results for a federal election, with the same methodological framework as we have produced today, was published in Mexico City's *Nexos* magazine in August 1991.

METHODOLOGY

When voters deposit their ballots in the ballot box, they are supporting a candidate. Pollsters and electoral analysts aspire to knowing as precisely as possible how voters intend to vote before the election. Given the practical impossibility of actually knowing what those intentions are, it is increasingly important to design electoral models that, although they simplify real processes, reflect the essential aspects of voters' behavior and thus explain rationally and methodically the possible way the vote will go in the immediate future.

The numerical simulation model used in this analysis is based on the historic information available about federal and state electoral results and voters' intentions and their acceptance or rejection of candidates shown more recently by polling. This makes it possible to construct a probabilistic distribution function, with its mean value and standard deviation for each party, defined as a set of voters who vote for a specific political party, according to the desired level of aggregation, by municipality, district, state or nationwide, thus defining what we will call the "elector" of the process.

The next step is to hold a virtual election. To do this, through a numerical simulation method, each "elector" decides randomly, but within the range of possibilities that defines the mathematical function that identifies him/her, whom he/she will vote for. By adding up all the votes, we obtain the result of this virtual election. That is the first step, although it is insufficient.

By design and for statistical purposes, we must generate not a value, but a new distribution function capable of defining the most probable scenario for the election under examination. This means that it is inevitable that we carry out as many virtual elections as necessary to achieve statistical validity. The final result is not a single value, but a set of intervals of values defined by the statistical margin of error, among which the most probable is picked, that is, the one in which the results of each of the virtual elections has occurred most frequently. The scenarios laid out are constructed using these most probable intervals that result from the hypotheses considered at the beginning of the analysis.