

# Mass student protests hit media bias in Mexican elections

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The run-up to Mexico's July 1 elections has been suddenly overshadowed by a nationwide student protest movement denouncing the political bias of the country's privately owned mass media.

This movement was triggered by a May 11 spontaneous student protest at the Jesuit-run *Universidad Iberoamericana* in Mexico City targeting Enrique Peña Nieto, presidential candidate for the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which until 2000 had exercised a monolithic rule over Mexico for seven decades.

Students forced the candidate out of the university, jeering him over his role in state repression during his tenure as governor of the State of Mexico. Throughout a PRI campaign rally at *Iberoamericana*, students demanded that Peña address the 2006 assault by 3,500 federal and state security forces against the population of San Salvador de Atenco [300 inhabitants] in the State of Mexico, in reprisal for this community's opposition to the building of an airport in nearby Texcoco.

Eyewitnesses to the military-style assault reported that police surrounded the community and then went systematically from house to house accompanied by hooded informants and police dogs. They looted homes and indiscriminately brutalized people, arresting some 200 people, many of whom were beaten and tortured.

Among the Human Rights observers present that day was Alexis Benhumea, an economics and dance student at the Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM), who was fatally wounded by a tear gas grenade. Thousands of Mexico City students attended Benhumea's funeral. The outrage over the impunity surrounding the killing and the repression continues six

years later as evidenced by the protest at *Iberoamericana*.

In response to the protest, Peña defended his role in the brutal police operation, insisting that it was justified, and that he would not shirk from future acts of repression.

"I repeat with emphasis that I made this decision—for which I assume personal responsibility—to re-establish order and peace by means of the legitimate right of the Mexican State to use public force," said Peña.

Peña's remarks were by no means "off the cuff", but rather carefully crafted to signal to the Mexican bourgeoisie and Wall Street that he is up to the task of repressing students and workers. Similar language had been used in 1968 by then President Diaz Ordaz to justify the Tlatelolco massacre of hundreds of unarmed students on October 2 1968.

Outraged by the candidate's response, students began chanting "coward," "assassin," and "we feel it, we feel it, Enrique is a delinquent" [*se siente, se siente, Enrique es delincuente*] and demanded that Peña leave the campus. The candidate left the university, shielded by security and pursued by angry students.

The Mexican TV duopoly—Televisa has a 70 percent market share, TV Azteca, 25 percent—promptly parroted the PRI line that the protesters were not genuine students, but political operatives, planted by supporters of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), whose candidate is Andrés López Obrador, former Mexico City Mayor and a long time political operator.

A YouTube video in which 131 students identified themselves with their university IDs to prove that they were neither in the pay of the union bureaucracy or agents of the political opposition (*ni porros ni acarreados*) went viral, with more than one million hits the first week.

Thousands of others posted videos and text messages on Youtube, Facebook and Twitter defining themselves as the 132<sup>nd</sup> student, giving the movement its name, #YoSoy132 [I am 132]. Angry students used social networks to denounce the corrupt relationship between the Peña campaign and the media conglomerates—particularly the TV duopoly.

On May 19, there were #YoSoy132 protests in 20 Mexican cities. In Mexico City tens of thousands marched in the Central Plaza. Beyond the numbers, the assembly attracted a broad swath of Mexico City's society. This included thousands of workers angry over a succession of governments that have waged an assault on jobs, education and living standards.

The explosive show of popular support for the students and rejection of Peña is a sure sign that beneath the insipid rhetoric of the election campaign, Mexican society is a powder keg waiting to explode.

#YoSoy132 has focused on the demand for “democratization” of and “transparency” within the mass media, reflecting the illusion that Televisa, TV Azteca and other media oligopolies can be pressured into not acting in the interest of the wealthy and their political parties and providing objective and reliable coverage of the upcoming elections.

Much like the Spanish *Indignados* and the Occupy Wall Street movement in the US, #YoSoy132 eschews a political perspective, insisting that it does not support any candidate or party and rejecting the struggle for socialism.

Initially, the media monopolies escalated their campaign against the student protests. TV giant Televisa denounced the use of Twitter to “promote the dictatorship of hate” and accused the students of being manipulated by Peña's political opponents. Faced with the growth of the protest movement, the media changed tactics, fostering illusions that the students have made their point, and that the media will now be more responsive.

The two major networks agreed to broadcast a presidential debate, and Peña himself promised tighter regulation of the media. The *Wall Street Journal* quoted a political observer: “The protest movement has already achieved the impossible: forcing Televisa to cover an insurrection by young people.”

This should fool no one.

No more can the capitalist media rid itself of its

corporate masters than the proverbial leopard shed its spots. A media at the service of the people requires, at a minimum, that the Televisa/Azteca duopoly be expropriated without compensation, broken up and run in a democratic manner in the interest of the working class. The prerequisite for that is a workers' government armed with socialist policies.

Despite protestations to the contrary, the rejection of politics by #YoSoy132 in the context of the present elections reflects illusions in, and backhanded support for, the PRD candidate López Obrador. In turn, these illusions are encouraged by support given the PRD by petty bourgeois radicals, pseudo-socialists, and sections of the trade union bureaucracy. These include the Electricians' Union (SME) and the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT.)

The lesson of the Arab Spring, the Occupy movement, and the Spanish *Indignados* is that the pretense of “no politics” invariably masks a subordination to the existing political parties and structures of the capitalist ruling establishment.

The eruption of student protests is a precursor of mass struggles by the working class, the peasants and the impoverished masses still to come. Such struggles cannot advance based upon the illusions prevailing within #YoSoy132. The Mexican capitalist class has repeatedly demonstrated its contempt for democratic principles, including in the present “drug war” militarization of society.

What is required is the building a revolutionary party of socialism and equality in the working class, a Mexican section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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