

Lopez Obrador maintains large lead in Mexican presidential election polls

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Campaigning in Mexico's election officially ends Wednesday, June 27, with the election set for Sunday July 1.

In an extensive analysis on Thursday of polling results, Spain's *El Pais* newspaper had Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), presidential candidate of the National Regeneration Movement (Morena) and its electoral coalition, at around 50 percent, leading candidate Ricardo Anaya Cortés of the right-wing Authentic National Party (PAN) and its electoral coalition by about 23 points. In third place was José Antonio Meade of the ruling Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) and its coalition.

El Pais concluded that these numbers meant that AMLO had a 95 percent chance of winning. This confirmed similar polling results over the previous two months.

Bloomberg's "Poll Tracker" amalgamation of what it considers to be reliable polls yesterday had AMLO down about 3 points (and Meade up about 4), but that minor dip does not suggest a change in the final result.

What was new in the *El Pais* analysis last week was that the Morena coalition was threatening to "run the table" in the federal election. That is, it had a better than even chance of winning a majority in the Chamber of Deputies of the Mexican Congress, and at a least an even chance of capturing the Senate.

As to the ruling PRI and its two coalition parties, the Green Party and the National Alliance Party (the PANAL, with origins in the corrupt National Union of Education Workers, the SNTE), they would end up comprising the smallest block in Congress.

Last week some prominent candidates of the PAN's coalition partner, the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), whose presidential candidate in 2006 and 2012 was none other than AMLO (before he left to form Morena), and of the PRI's coalition party the Greens, began to jump ship and call for a vote for AMLO. For example, Antonio Sola, who mounted the PAN's effort to brand López Obrador "a danger for Mexico" in the 2006 election campaign, now backs the front-runner.

What were the equivalent of post-mortems in advance of this Sunday's vote also began to appear in the Mexican press last week.

Not only was the likely election result said to be a mandate on corruption under the PRI and president Peña Nieto, as well as on the continued staggering levels of violence (over 100,000 murdered over the last six years, following on like numbers of murders under the prior PAN presidency of Felipe Calderón), it was said that the PRI was demoralized and beset by deep infighting.

Effectively conceding PRI's defeat, Foreign Minister Luis Videgaray, a disciple of, and continuing collaborator of ex-PRI president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, was allegedly negotiating with

López Obrador's team to save most of the structural reforms adopted under Peña Nieto's "Pact for Mexico"—the oil and energy privatization, education "reform," and the like—in exchange for further rapprochement with Mexico's business elite.

Videgaray last year had convinced Peña Nieto to push Meade as the PRI candidate instead of the party favorite, Interior Minister Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, even though Meade was not a party member, and had previously served as a minister under Calderon's PAN presidency. Many PRI activists did not go to bat for Meade.

Videgaray also convinced Peña Nieto to meet in March to discuss the terms of a new NAFTA deal with his back channel White House contact, Trump's son-in-law Jared Kushner, interfering with the efforts of the nominal head of the Mexican NAFTA negotiating team, Secretary of the Economy Ildefonso Guajardo. No sooner had that meeting occurred than Trump cut off direct negotiations because Peña Nieto entreated him to say that Mexico would not pay for Trump's immensely unpopular border wall, in order to bolster the PRI's election chances.

On June 5, Videgaray negotiated directly with US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to try to resolve the differences arising from the tariffs recently decreed by Trump. Guajardo ignored that effort and promptly imposed reciprocal tariffs on American products. Now Trump says he will negotiate separate pacts with Mexico and Canada.

Many high and mid-level party members, including the president himself, fear they will be prosecuted for corruption, given that fighting corruption has been López Obrador's principal campaign theme. The PAN's Anaya has also said he will prosecute corruption, and unlike AMLO, who has waffled on the question, Anaya has declined to say that he will not prosecute the president.

The PRI is clearly in an existential crisis. Some commentators suggest that despite ruling Mexico from 1929 to 2000, and then again for the last six years, the party's power and influence are withering, and that it may even not survive.

But the PRI is not the only party in crisis.

The PAN itself is deeply split. Prominent PAN officials accused Anaya of rigging the party's nomination. As a result, Margarita Zavala, the wife of PAN president Calderón, decided to run as an independent. She has refused to support Anaya now that she has dropped out of the race, as have her husband and his PAN predecessor, Vicente Fox.

The PAN's more conservative flanks object to Anaya proposals, such as raising the minimum wage and a guaranteed minimum income. They also object to his failure to disavow certain positions of the PAN's coalition partner the PRD, such as those in favor of gay rights and abortion.

While in the last presidential debate Anaya unconvincingly accused AMLO of corruption in awarding public contracts when he was Mexico City's mayor, Anaya himself has been accused of two separate incidents of corruption by PRI officials. One incident captured in a widely-disseminated video of two businessmen discussing how Anaya allegedly laundered campaign finances.

As the *El Pais* analysis last week and the Bloomberg poll yesterday suggested, Anaya is not closing ground on AMLO, and AMLO's recent small decline seems to have favored Meade instead.

The PAN's coalition partner, the PRD—AMLO's former party that once claimed to be social democratic—now appears to be little more than a shell of its former self. The *El Pais* projection has the PRD winning only around five percent of the seats in the Chamber of Deputies, down from about 20 percent in the 2012 election. Its embrace of Peña Nieto's massively unpopular policies and of the right-wing PAN are effectively leading to its demise.

What does all this portend should López Obrador and Morena in fact prove victorious on Sunday?

Accusations in the bourgeois press that AMLO will undo Mexico's "advances in democracy" and govern in an "authoritarian"—some even say in a "Peronist"—manner, are falling flat. While almost no one credits these old warnings, they are still peddled on the editorial pages of the *Wall Street Journal* and in other right-wing media, which brand him as a "populist demagogue" who will institute "socialism" a la Hugo Chávez.

AMLO recently made his peace with the country's billionaire business leaders, and he soothed concerns in meetings with international bankers, and with titans of finance, such as billionaire Larry Fink of BlackRock, the world's largest investment manager.

López Obrador has assured one and all that he believes in the free market, that he will not expropriate or re-nationalize industries and banks, that he will keep his hands off the central bank, let the Mexican currency float freely, not raise government debt to promote social spending—instead paying for social programs by reducing funds siphoned off by corruption and lowering government salaries—and that he will not end Mexico's energy reform and privatization. Finally, he has said that he will accept a renegotiation of NAFTA if the current administration accomplishes that before he takes office in December.

Most financial analysts opine that any effect on the peso from his prospective victory has already been factored in by financial markets.

AMLO's social proposals—investing more in education and health care, scholarships for youth, government programs or funding to employ youths and agricultural subsidies to small farmers—will at most be modest in scale, even if approved in Congress.

Still the claim is made that AMLO will return Mexico to the policies that preceded the implementation of the "neoliberal" economic program imposed under presidents Miguel de la Madrid and Carlos Salinas de Gortari in 1982-1994.

That involved a turn away from nationalism: the encouragement of foreign investment, free trade policies, reduction of tariffs, mass privatizations of state-run companies such as the national telephone company and banks, the lowering of subsidies to national industry, entry into NAFTA, the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the end to the redistribution of land provided for by the Mexican constitution.

Critically, cooperation with the United States was greatly increased on economic, financial and security and military policies. These policies were consolidated thereafter under subsequent PRI and PAN

presidencies.

Compared to the policies of economic nationalism of the preceding four decades, the past three decades have witnessed marked increases in rates of poverty, unemployment and underemployment in the "informal" economy, stagnating wages and purchasing power and massive growth of inequality. Millions went to the United States in search of work. During that same time period, the growth of the Mexican economy has badly lagged behind that of countries such as South Korea and China.

Morena's website vaguely asserts that liberalization of the economy has created a "regime of oppression, corruption and privileges," and that it is the work of "a true Mafioso state built by a minority of concentrated political and economic power in Mexico."

López Obrador holds up as one of his icons former president Lázaro Cárdenas, who founded the PRI and pursued a nationalist policy of populist reforms in the 1930s, including the nationalization of Mexican oil. Many, making an implied allusion to Trump, say he will pursue a policy of "Mexico first."

AMLO's point of departure is in fact more nationalistic in orientation. He may favor greater protection of Mexico's resources, reduction of certain imports in favor of production in Mexico, as well as domestic business sectors over foreign businesses.

He may well reduce cooperation with American imperialism, especially given the increasingly aggressive policies of the Trump administration on immigration and trade.

But, in the final analysis, AMLO's repeated assurances to the oligarchs, and his tepid proposals for reform, prove that he has nothing to offer to the Mexican working class. If anything, he can only sow illusions that a Mexican capitalism "with a human face" somehow can be reformed in the interests of the Mexican masses.

Any belief that AMLO will return to the nationally oriented economic program of Cardenas is a pipe dream. Globalization of the economy has completely eroded the prior limited foundations of any such policy.

Only the working class, uniting on an international basis to take power and end capitalism, can provide any way forward.



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