

Morena's presidential candidate Claudia Sheinbaum maintains commanding lead after first Mexican presidential debate

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On April 7, Mexico's two leading presidential candidates held the first of three televised debates. The candidates are Claudia Sheinbaum of the ruling MORENA (National Regeneration Movement) party of current President Manuel Andres López Obrador (known as AMLO), and Bertha Xóchitl Gálvez of the Strength and Heart for Mexico electoral alliance. The alliance consists of three long-established Mexican political parties, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which until 2000 ruled Mexico for 70 years, the right-wing National Action Party (PAN), and the nominally social democratic Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), from which AMLO exited in 2012 to form MORENA.

Gálvez was widely viewed as having performed poorly, fumbling both in articulating her political and social proposals, and in her edgy if not shrill attacks on Sheinbaum. After the debate Gálvez conceded that her performance had fallen flat, attributing it to not trying to "be herself."

Sheinbaum is a scientist with a Ph.D. in energy engineering who was previously Secretary of the Environment in Mexico City under AMLO. She was vulnerable due to the serious metro collapses that occurred when she was head of Mexico City's government, and for not addressing the burgeoning crisis with Mexico City's water shortage and sinking land. Gálvez failed to attack on these fronts.

Gálvez gained nothing in polling after the debate, which shows her with 34-36 percent to Sheinbaum's 58-60 percent, or around 24 percent behind the frontrunner. Two more debates are scheduled, for April 28 and May 19, but Sheinbaum's lead going into the June 2 election at this point appears insurmountable.

The third candidate participating in the debate, Jorge Álvarez Mányez of the Citizens' Movement Party, which pushes what it calls a "social market economy," polled 5-6 percent after the debate, gaining a couple of points.

If anything, the PAN and PRI have lost even more support since AMLO's landslide victory in 2018, and his prior party the PRD is all but politically moribund.

AMLO's tepid social programs—modest cash transfers and wage and pension increases that reached 130 million—have nonetheless been popular. So Gálvez, who has a libertarian and high tech bent, insists she will maintain AMLO's social programs. Sheinbaum, as AMLO's hand-picked successor, more credibly claims she will continue them.

Some on the US right, such as the *Wall Street Journal* editorial board, are reflexively prone to throw barbs at AMLO—for example, for giving Mexico's national oil company Pemex preference over American oil companies, occasionally lending rhetorical support to Venezuela and Nicaragua, and refusing to attend the Summit of the Americas hosted by the United States in Los Angeles in 2022. More sagacious layers of the American oligarchy and their government servants, however, have appreciated AMLO's cooperation on a number of fronts.

A prime example is AMLO going to bat for Biden over the last year on reining in mass migration of waves of the poor from Latin America and the Caribbean.

The US has likewise appreciated what AMLO has called "republican austerity," with large-scale spending largely directed to only a few pet projects, such as the "Maya train" in southern Mexico, or Pemex's Dos

Bocas oil refinery, and on the military. It likewise looks favorably on the tight ship run by Mexico's Central Bank, which has kept interest rates high.

Most important to US imperialism has been AMLO's promotion of a favorable climate for US investment in the country. Washington increasingly looks to Mexico as its junior partner in waging economic war against China, and a platform for nearshoring production previously based in China.

By way of example, Elon Musk's Tesla is investing billions in a plant near the industrial center of Monterrey in northeast Mexico.

AMLO had done nothing to step on the toes of the Mexican oligarchy, or its 14 billionaires. Several of them continue to massively skirt their tax obligations. He has been on very friendly terms with Caros Slim Helú, the 11th-richest person in the world, and the wealthiest in Latin America, with a net worth of \$105 billion, or about 7 percent of Mexico's GDP.

Sheinbaum, AMLO's hand-picked successor, will not change course. She has vowed not to increase or create new taxes on the rich and corporate profits, which can only mean that social programs will be the first casualties of shocks from the turbulent global economy and demands for greater military spending. An alliance of NGOs led by Oxfam Mexico estimated that simply maintaining the existing access to healthcare, education, elderly and infant care and green energy programs requires a spending increase equivalent to 5.5 percent of GDP.

The real role AMLO has played is to repress the class struggle in Mexico and keep wages low.

The pseudo-left will nonetheless sing AMLO's praises. For example, The U.S.-based Democratic Socialists of America recently held an online conference where it lauded him to the skies.

The DSA and its ilk are middle-class organizations that cannot even begin to envision the Mexican working class waging a struggle for power. But it is only through the world socialist revolution that the widespread suffering of the Mexican masses will end.



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