

Mexico 2012

The six-year Presidential term that awaits us

By Dr Daniel Vázquez

LAST JULY 1 THERE took place presidential and parliamentary elections in Mexico. Enrique Peña Nieto was elected, the candidate of the formerly hegemonic Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) that after eighty years in power (1920-2000) and two alternation governments in charge of the right wing National Action Party (PAN) (2000-2006 and 2006-2012) is back on the presidency.

There are many topics related to the events before and after the presidential election. One was the performance of PRI's governors regarding the lack of transparency at the local level and the arbitrary use of the public resources, which caused the accusation of thousands of bought votes around the country (there is no official data on this, but estimates go from 5 thousand to 250 thousand votes obtained in exchange for money). Another was the virtual inexistence of the electoral bodies –especially the Specialized Office for the Attention of Electoral Offenses (FEPADE)– either before and after the election. Also, there were the actions taken by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, candidate of the centre-of-left Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) who finished second in the election and did not accept the results. And last but not least, the performance of the polling companies that overestimated the votes for Enrique Peña Nieto by 5-15%.

To sum up, there are many relevant aspects to be analysed in this election. However, beyond the topics around this juncture, it is worth asking ourselves: which patterns are going to shape Mexican politics in this PRI's comeback to power? What kind of six-year term we have got ahead?

What kind of six-year term is waiting for us?

I think there are some patterns that were born during PRI's governments, which were kept by PAN's governments, and which will shape the PRI's return in the next six-year term: a “tropicalized”-neoliberal-capitalism, an institutional design based in the logic *corruption-complicity-impunity*; and a political functioning based on *corporatism-co-optation-selective repression*. Let us see each of them.

1. INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC

THE INITIAL READING OF THE PARTISAN left on what was going on around the elections was that everything was part of a plot: an implicit agreement between the polling houses, the PAN's led federal government, the PRI's presidential candidate, the owners of the two main media's corporations in Mexico that possess 100% of open TV signal, the councillors of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), and the magistrates of the Electoral Court of the Judicial Power of the Federation



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(TRIFE), in order to guarantee the victory of Enrique Peña Nieto through fraud orchestrated before the elections through a massive vote buying. On the one hand, it is certainly true that the PRI governs the majority of the states of the federation (over 70%) and that there is little transparency in these governments where it is common the arbitrary use of public resources. (In this sense, it is not surprising that there was a wide mobilisation of the local state's structures favouring Enrique Peña Nieto's candidacy.) On the other, it is mistake reading the actions of autonomous organs such as the IFE or the TEPJF in terms of a plot. On the contrary, the performance of these two organs must be observed through the series of institutional incentives that, in

general, permeate all the logic of government in Mexico. Worse than a conspiracy, there exists an institutional design guided by the logic of *corruption-complicity-impunity*.

The different institutional players of Mexican politics work under logics of systematic violation of rights whether to "find criminals" or to "win elections" (the current president Felipe Calderón characterized the disputed election he won in 2006 as "haiga sido como haiga sido", which roughly translates as "[I won] no matter how"). What could be observed in the Mexican political performance is an organisational structure that informs the common sense of political action through a pattern of *corruption-complicity-*



impunity. Under this logic, it is easier to follow the illegal path than the legal one to carry out state action; execute “fake” arrests in popular neighbourhoods to increase the number of detentions; “sow” evidence both to enlarge data regarding recovered weapons and to support legal accounts; keep low standards of transparency and accountability in the states of the federation to make discretionary use of public spending via clientelistic and corporatist policies that enable the conditioning of votes; show artificial police action in TV (portrayed as real) to create the perception of an efficient security policy; etc.

It is worth asking ourselves: does this logic applies to all government institutions, including autonomous organs that seem very professional such as the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation (SCJN), the Federal Institute of Access to Information (IFAI), the IFE, and others? Fortunately corruption does not prevail in this newly formed institutions, where a different logic operates: that of complicity-impunity that needs the organisational performance to focus on making believe that “everything’s all right.” It seems that the “feeling of normality” has become a relevant pillar in the Mexican institutional logic when it comes to seek political legitimacy. Instead of conducting deep investigations that render visible –though scandalous- the structural problem of corruption in governmental functioning, the internal watchdogs are more focused on making us believe that everything is OK. This logic explains why even the Electoral Councillors linked to “leftist thought” quickly declared that this year’s elections were “exemplary”, that everything was very well. Worse, even after judicial proceedings the TEPJF simply concluded that there were not any proofs of vote buying, not a single one, although the reality exceeded it completely. Another example: facing the massive outflow of capitals during the first half of 2012 –which in this occasion four folded Foreign Direct Investment, the Central Bank (Banco de México) –another autonomous organ- declared that this outflow was “normal”, for we live in a free market.

The consequences of “everything’s all right” are serious. Far from controlling, the new

accountability’s organs focus on the management of public perception as a way of portraying themselves reliable (if everything is OK is because I do a good job) and so, legitimate. What vanishes then are the forms of institutional control inherent to any democratic government; instead, “the controllers” turn into accomplices and add themselves up to the prevailing impunity. Overall speaking, the parts of the institutional design complement each other through a criteria of *corruption-complicity-impunity* that structures the whole chain of institutional action including directive, executive, and watchdog organs of government. The good thing about living in Mexico is that nothing happens, that everything works fine.

2. ECONOMIC LOGIC

THIS INSTITUTIONAL LOGIC based on *corruption-complicity-impunity* is a dynamic that manages to reproduce itself “lubricating” governmental action, which has also supported an economic functioning characterised by a “tropicalized”-*neoliberal-capitalism* (the reference to neoliberalism is to underscore a strong tendency to favour financial capital over productive one). What interests the most to the current ruling political-economic coalition is keeping the regime of free currency and market in order to preserve high profit rates and generate processes of accumulation in the international banking system. (However, there prevail high profit rates and low reinvestment rates.) This agreement around the economic model is “tropicalized” through corporatist capitalism (or crony capitalism) with strong oligopolistic tendencies. For this financial agreement to work, tropicalized, it needs the institutional inertia based on *corruption-complicity-impunity* that allows governmental organs being colonised by big business interests. Both logics function as informal institutions (processes and procedures) that give meaning to the inertial operation of formal institutions.

3. EXCLUSION AS AN OUTCOME

The two processes mentioned above –the institutional and the economic- has various consequences. A major one is the lack of an independent prosecutor’s system with research capacity (which has rendered all special prosecutors ineffective). But also there is the



absence of a Comptroller with coercive capacity on public servants; the lack of accountability and transparency in general from the federal Government and local governments; the total absence of controls on capital and the failure of regulators in the market (which have been colonized by big business interests); the maintenance of oligopolistic markets, to mention a few. Nonetheless, there is a significant point which I want to highlight that it is also a consequence of these two forms of (political and economic) interaction: the open exclusion from citizenship of the deliberation and decision about the public thing. As a consequence, the exclusion is flagrant: economic, social and also political.

From the standpoint of representative government, the party system is becoming increasingly closed and responds less and less to the interests of the public: we have lost control of the public agenda. Therefore, it can be explained that issues such as a regressive tax reform, a reform of labour flexibility or the privatization of PEMEX (the state oil company) have remained more than 20 years on the agenda.

Moreover, there is a total absence of effective citizen's intervention mechanisms in any process of accountability and transparency. Worse still, the objective of leaving out people from binding political decisions has been enhanced to the extent that governments have learned to manage the protest. Today, the repertoires of collective action (marches, rallies, strikes, sit-ins, etc) virtually have no effect on binding political decisions. Thus, what we see is an open civic exclusion both in government policy as in the ability to influence that same policy through the streets. This structure of generalised exclusion will be chronic with the political action based on *corporatism-co-optation-selective repression* typical of the PRI governments.

4. REVIVAL OF CLASSIC PRI

During their 80 years of Government, the PRI sustained its political action through a fierce corporate organization initially aimed at the urban and rural working class, brought together in the Confederation of Workers of Mexico (CTM) and in the National Peasant Confederation (CNC), a

couple which years later was complemented by the National Confederation of Popular organizations (CNOP). Through this corporate logic the PRI ran the distribution of resources and the control of social demonstrations. To the extent that a new opposition to *priísmo* ("PRI-ism") grew up, the PRI also perfected mechanisms of co-optation accompanied by selective repression that could be higher or lower depending on specific historical junctures - as in 1956 with the rail workers movement, in 1968 and 1971 with the student movement, or 1987-1991 against the nascent *perredismo* ("PRD-ism"). Certainly, the two governments from *panismo* ("PAN-ism") who were in charge of the presidency between 2000 and 2012 did not keep these patterns of political performance, but there is a clear continuity in the case of local governments led by the PRI, including the government of the current elected President Enrique Peña Nieto in the State of Mexico, where there were penalties of up to 120 years in prison to activists of a peasant's movement in Atenco. No doubt that under a new PRI rule this form of political action will come back, *reloaded* (it actually never went away, staying in local). With this logic working, the possibilities of a strong citizen mobilisation with influencing capabilities on binding political decisions seems even more distant.

Thus, these three dynamics allow us to explain much of the six-year period that awaits us: an institutional design based on *corruption-complicity-impunity*, an economic model based on a *"tropicalised"-neoliberal-capitalism*, and a governmental operation that will join and exclude actors and demands through strategies of *corporatism-co-optation-selective repression*. The future seems not pleasing at all, although, as I mentioned from the beginning of this text, these three forms of articulation of the political and economic that already exist today were formed with *priísmo* and did not go away during *panismo*, so nothing new under the Sun.

NOTE:

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