

Mexico – 1994 – Manuel Carrillo Poblano

Transcript

Good afternoon. This is Manuel Carrillo. I was in charge of international affairs at the Federal Electoral Institute of Mexico (IFE), the main electoral management body in our history. I have to congratulate this Georgetown University project and International IDEA for this perspective to have backgrounds and the history of the democratic transitions in different parts of the world.

In the case of Mexico, we had a very important year in 1994. I would like to talk about the basics about this year. My conversation is around three different aspects: the first chapter is about the background and the context of the elections in 1994; the second is to identify the key main challenges of the electoral management body; and the third chapter is basically what has been done to get an advantage in the different challenges that we had in 1994.

This is the first chapter, background and the context. In Mexico from 1946 to 1990, Mexico had an electoral management body [where the government] was in charge. We had elections, but this kind of elections, they were not able to create trust. Basically, in all the contests, the political parties or different candidates, complained about the lack of trust in the electoral organization in Mexico. But it was [run] by the government and the winner in, basically, the 95% of the elections in Mexico, they were won for the ruling party, it was the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional). We had a significant [economic] crash in 1988 and the [loss of] credibility [of the PRI] was huge. The opposition was very weak, but the opposition parties and candidates refused to accept the electoral results because they said that the PRI and the government made electoral fraud. Then, the government moved to have an electoral reform, to create a new EMB, in charge of organizing the elections, with no more participation of the government after that. [The EMB] is coming up to be more impartial in the independent electoral management. The creation was in 1990, and we wanted to have free elections and to invite all different political parties, NGOs and media [to the next elections].

However, in 1994, we had a very difficult year, with very many challenges. On January 1st in 1994, Mexico woke up to Guerrilla fighting, in Chiapas in Chiapas state, with Ejercito Zapatista's claim against the government and challenge of the army. They had a very violent situation. It was not too far, not too high, but it was very relevant, because in November in 1993, Mexico, Canada and the United States, signed the free trade agreement [NAFTA, now USMCA]. Therefore, we were in the focal point, not only in Canada and the United States. We had a guerilla and the candidates for President, Senate and the Deputies they were going on [campaigning]. It was very shocking for the Mexican society and for the international community, about the guerrilla in Mexico. And it was a very difficult time for us as IFE was to organize the elections. However, in March, the candidate of the PRI was assassinated.

Therefore, the August elections was very, very difficult to [organize], indeed, this is the context, therefore, that we have main points, the main challenges. It was trust in the

elections and the electoral management body, my body. Therefore, IFE was preparing some strategy to grow, to push, the credibility of the EMB.

We had, at least, some issues that, now an ordinary issue, but in the past, in 1994, they were extraordinary issues. Why? Because we created a new electoral roll, a new electoral list. We were around 45 million electors, and the second decision, very important, is to create a [voter] credential with a photograph. It was important to avoid duplication of the vote in the electoral lists and the credential with photographs to vote was some important mechanism and tool to create credibility because in all these procedures, political parties and candidates participated to create a basic consensus. Another point was to create a positive funding system to support political campaigns of all the political parties. Of course it was an inequity, but if we made an advance [progress]. Another thing, we created a professional electoral, professional service. This is a career, professional career, on electoral matters, which was, absolutely, a new situation, since, from 1946 we had elections organized by the government. Another issue was to support the electoral administration, to create the new ballots, the new mechanism for electoral results, and to clarify the preliminary electoral results, to create certainty to avoid having mistrust on the electoral results.

The last chapter is, what did we do for the international situation? Mexico pushed to create some support, funding and technical support to give special training for electoral observation. We didn't have electoral observation in our domestic elections. It was created, this base fund, to support Mexican electoral observers, and we had 82,000 electoral observers; absolutely uncommon in our history because we didn't have electoral observation previously.

Another issue: important it was to create international observation. We didn't have any international participation on electoral matters, from 1946 until 1994. We created the figure of external vote (*visitantes extranjeros*) international observation. And we have 900 observers come from 66 different countries, in different parts of the world, and we improved, as well, the trilateral conference between Canada, the United States, and Mexico. The idea was to create trust in our election, in our organization and different tools to guarantee free and fair elections. And of course, it was a very important effort to include not only for the EMBs include governments, include political parties, include NGOs, include mass media leaders, public opinion, international organizations in different parts of the world, OAS, United Nations, African Union, European Union as well. We in Mexico, at that time, we were very open to include international participation, to guarantee the trust in our electoral process

The final results, they were okay. They were a success because the candidate who won the elections, the candidate over the PRI, won with the most important turnout in Mexican history. It was around 78% of turnout. In the case of Mexico, it is not compulsory to go to vote. It's free. But in the worst case, it was very important, because we had a guerrilla war, we had a political assassination, the expectation of Mexican society. It was very, very hard. We had elections peacefully. All the candidates accepted the results, and the then-President of Mexico said that the Mexican elections were free and fair, but [that there was] inequity, and he decided to improve with some new electoral reform, to guarantee

more equity in the political contest. Therefore, this is, the short history, this experience, successful to guarantee free and fair elections and democratic elections. It is important to have democratic elections, and it is one very good exercise to improve the electoral democracy in Mexico.