

# Elections in Mexico: A lesson for the future

By GERARDO DE LA CONCHA

## News Analysis

The Mexican elections last Sunday, to decide 12 state governors, has given a clear signal about the country's future.

The ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), the centre-left party, which has governed Mexico for 70 years, won nine of the 12 seats. While it started out in 1929 as a revolutionary socialist party, the PRI has over the years tilted more and more towards the centre. It won in Quintana Roo, Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, Veracruz, Tamaulipas, Durango, Chihuahua, Aguascalientes, and Zacatecas.

A coalition of the centre-right National Action Party (PAN), of which both President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and incumbent President Felipe Calderon stem from, and the leftist Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) accompanied by other smaller parties with leftist ideologies, won in Oaxaca, Puebla, and Sinaloa.

The election can be seen as a forecast of the upcoming presidential elections in 2012, in which PRI appears to be headed for an easy victory. The most favoured candidate is PRI member Enrique Peña Nieto, current governor of the state of Mexico. The state is Mexico's second most dynamic economic entity, surpassed only by the capital Mexico City.

Surveys show that Nieto is highly favoured, leading with a comfortable 52 percent, which amounts to 37 percent above any other candidate. Even if this margin narrows, percentages will probably still remain ample.

However, the PAN-PRD coalition used all the resources at their disposal to weaken PRI, since the state elections are seen as foreshadows of the presidential elections.

The first measure taken against PRI was the formation of an alliance between PAN and PRD, which have different ideologies. PRD did not recognize the legitimacy of President Felipe Calderón (PAN), who



VICTORY VOTE: Egidio Torre Cantu (L), Mexican candidate for governor of Tamaulipas state from the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and his father Egidio Torre Lopez celebrate the victory in Ciudad Victoria on July 4. PRI won nine out of 12 governor seats in the elections. LUIS ACOSTA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

beat its leftist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the controversial presidential elections in 2006. However, PRD is now PAN's strongest ally.

Then, according to PRI complaints, state security resources were used to provide PAN leader

César Nava with illegal recordings of compromising conversations of PRI governors. Nava disseminated the recordings to favour his party.

A media campaign including Internet and social networks, dedicated to denigrating PRI candidates, brought up past actions of

PRI, to repudiate PRI and party sympathizers.

It was also observed that through economic and logistical measures, government apparatus at the federal level were used to support candidates opposing PRI.

The violence currently engulfing

the country in its war on drug trafficking, carried out by the federal government, took the life of PRI gubernatorial candidate Rodolfo Torre Cantu in Tamaulipas in June. Torre was shot, presumably by a crime organization, together with four of his aides, in an act that shocked

Mexican society.

PRI, being the main government opposition party and a viable contender for the executive branch, now feels insulted and threatened, despite winning nine governor seats. The coalition, made to prevent a resumption of PRI power, celebrated its triumph in three states where PRI was defeated, thanks to its hardline anti-PRI strategy.

## NEVERTHELESS

### APPEARANCES WIN

In Oaxaca, the PRI governor fought with PRI political groups, dividing and debilitating the party with the imposition of an unpopular candidate.

Puebla was a similar case with the added help of the powerful Teachers Union.

In the case of Sinaloa, the other state lost by PRI, the gubernatorial winner was a popular PRI senator, who, when he could not obtain candidacy in the party, joined PRD-PAN.

Although PRI would do well to learn lessons from its errors, which determined more of the election outcome than its opponent's strategy, the government and the coalition of anti-PRI parties shouldn't delude itself with its triumphs on this occasion.

PAN had counted on a strategy of political denigration to win, including challenging the validity of PRI wins; victory became the party's obsession. But in this circumstance, one fact bears reflection: In the regions where the war on drugs is most hard-fought, Chihuahua and Tamaulipas, people didn't support PAN, they powerfully elected PRI, at a ratio of 2 to 1. Now it's time to think over the message from those voters and whether they are repudiating a failed strategy against cartels, in a spiral of violence, insecurity, and uncertainty.

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Outside the city walls of Visby, Sweden, 2009. PIRJO SVENSSON/THE EPOCH TIMES

## Charming medieval city becomes modern political hub

By BARBRO PLOGANDER  
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GOTHENBURG, Sweden—Visby, a small medieval town on Gotland Island in the Baltic sea off the south-east coast of Sweden, will turn into the largest political hub in Sweden next week, attracting all political parties, over 700 NGOs, hundreds of journalists, and thousands of holiday-making Swedes.

The remarkable event, called Almedalsveckan or Elm Valley Week, is a tradition dating back 40 years. Political parties will present their agendas and NGOs will display their programs.

Swedes travel by the thousands to the island for a chance to chat with their political representatives while on holiday, and journalists flock there to capture the latest political quarrel.

Many people come to Visby to listen to speeches, attend seminars, mingle, and eat pancakes with saffron and salmonberry jam with whipped cream, a special Gotland dessert.

Among the medieval stone houses

and the few modern buildings, activities carry on from morning till night. The hundreds of organizations will hold more than 1,300 events in the form of seminars and debates on current affairs. All activities and attractions are free of charge and open to all.

Political party leaders address their voters with particular eagerness, this year being an election year for municipalities, county councils, and Parliament.

While the political issues addressed may be serious, the atmosphere is relaxed. In previous years, high-level politicians could be seen mingling freely with the Swedish people in the park.

The tradition started in 1968 when then Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme, who had a summer house on the island, was persuaded to give an unplanned speech to Gotlanders and tourists.

He did so standing on the trunk of an old truck in Almedalen, or the Elm Valley, a park located outside the city walls. This became a yearly event when the prime minister could meet and talk to his voters

during his vacation.

Thirteen years later, leaders of all political parties in Sweden started going to Visby to make speeches, thereby turning the medieval city into an annual political meeting place.

When Palme was assassinated in 1986, many politicians felt that there was a connection between making speeches in Almedalen and the late prime minister. Out of respect, many abstained from making a speech during Elm Valley Week for the first few years after his death.

The Elm Valley event has grown dramatically. Today, it has become the largest temporary political hub where democracy and openness provide all those who want to debate social issues the opportunity to participate, says the Gotland Municipality, the host of the event.

Visby is a UNESCO Heritage Site. It has a well-preserved city wall surrounding it. Inside the old city there are more than 200 historic stone buildings lining the ancient stone streets. One of Sweden's most visited destinations, Swedes call it "the city of roses and ruins."

## Pity the Brits

BRITAIN CONTINUED FROM P1  
The British talk about "football coming home." Cricket is loved in many countries around the world, but its beating heart lies in the carefully tended pitches of this green and pleasant land. Rugby is played par excellence in schools in the southern hemisphere, but here young boys play it in the school where it was invented, in a town called Rugby. Imagine America losing on the world stage at American football. And baseball. Regularly.

Wimbledon, at the All England Club, is arguably the greatest tennis tournament in the world, stretching back over 100 years. The origins of the modern game are said to be British. The whole tournament is synonymous with Britishness: strawberries and cream, iced Pimm's, green lawns, lashings of rain, and a stiff dress code.

Yet there hasn't been a British (let alone English) winner since 1936. But every year when the tournament swings around there is excited talk of the potential British winners. And every year there is a great inquiry into the reason why we fail so dismally each year.

The uncomfortable mismatch between the rich inheritance and current reality is still reflected on the world stage.

Just as Britain still scoops victories in cricket and rugby, it still punches well above its weight internationally. A member of the G8, the G6, and a nuclear power, with the power of veto at the United Nations, it still carries the stripes of its war days. But the power always seems to be a vast inheritance gradually worn away with each generation of spending.

The British economy was hit hard by the global recession, and may have to drop several more notches in its international standing.

As in sport, the nation still regards itself as a big player on the world stage, but its reach perhaps now exceeds its grasp.

The subtle sense of entitlement—and of a falling potency as a world power—is strangely offset by a lack of ostensible celebration of national identity. The Union Jack doesn't adorn government buildings as the Stars and Stripes does in America.

There is no July 4 equivalent over here. As a nation, we don't rally together under a flag and celebrate our national identity. We don't have a national quotable set of guiding principles. The last time the country was invaded was nearly 1,000 years ago. The nation has gradually evolved over a millennium, and doesn't ostensibly centre around a particular historical moment, battle, flag, or phrase.

It would probably do the nation the power of good to have its own equivalent of July Fourth, to lift the national spirits in these dark times of economic struggle and footballing failure.

But the sad thing is that our very Britishness won't allow us to do it.

Britishness is a subtle pervasive set of qualities that is implicit and never explicit. Understatement, restraint, and a stiff upper lip don't lend themselves to exuberant nationalism. Celebrate Britishness? Er, sorry old chap, that wouldn't be very... ahem... British... now would it?

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## French Parliament debates controversial burqa ban

BURQA CONTINUED FROM P1  
The Islamic Human Rights Commission said in a press release that the bill is "simply the latest in a line of racist policies and laws that target Muslims, and in particular Muslim women."

Judith Sunderland, a senior researcher at Human Rights Watch in Western Europe, described the bans as a "lose-lose" situation. "They violate the rights of those who choose to wear the veil and do nothing to help those who are compelled to do so," she said in a release.

However, Sarkozy decided to go through with the bill, even after warnings from the French Catholic Church and the state council that the bill could be a breach of the country's human rights laws. In fact, Sarkozy expects to easily push the bill through.

The law will not only apply to approximately 2,000 French women who wear the burqa, but also to tourists who visit wearing the full veil. Any woman wearing one in public will be fined, and a warning letter sent to their homes. The government also reserves the right to deny citizenship to immigrants who fail to follow the law.

In April, Belgium became the first country to ban Islamic veils such as the burqa and all other clothing that obscures the identity of the wearer in public places. Violators can face fines of between \$20 and \$33, or serve up to seven days in jail. The law can also be applied to demonstrators who try to conceal their faces.