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## Mexico's Historic 2024 Election Campaign Enters the Final Stretch



Photograph Source: 龙2000 – COO

Amid bots, bombast and border bullying, Mexico's general election campaign kicked off March 1. An estimated 98.9 million Mexicans, up from 89.1 million in 2018, will be able

to cast ballots June 2 for a new president, Congress, state lawmakers, local officials and nine governorships, including the powerful Mexico City position.

According to the National Electoral Institute (INE), regulator and organizer of the country's elections, nearly 20,000 offices nationwide are up for grabs.

Unless the world turns upside down (a possibility in these times), it's almost certain that a woman will be elected president for the first time in Mexico. Competing for the top job are 62-year-old Claudia Sheinbaum, former Mexico City governor and the standard bearer of the three-party Sigamos Haciendo Historia (Let's Continue Making History) coalition that supports the left-leaning policies of outgoing President López Obrador (AMLO), and Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz, a 61-year-old former Fox administration official who's the hopeful of a three-party center-right coalition, Fuerza y Corazón por México (Strength and Heart for Mexico).

Numerous Mexican polls give Sheinbaum a wide lead. A career politician, 38-year-old Jorge Álvarez Máynez, is running on the ticket of the centrist Citizen Movement (MC) party. Yet the male presidential contender faces a tough admittance to the main ring in a political slugfest held during an era that is popularly dubbed "the time of the women."

Not helping Álvarez's prospects is a key politician in the MC, Jalisco Governor Enrique Alfaro, who's declared he will not participate in the presidential campaign. Alfaro is a fierce critic of the party leadership's current direction and strategy, dismissing it as replete with fluff and foolishness.

Essentially, the races for the presidency and congressional seats boil down to a referendum on whether to continue forward with López Obrador's Fourth Transformation (4T). The 4T's components include reasserting state control over key economic sectors, curbing corruption and cutting governmental fat, reaffirming national sovereignty, and redistributing wealth to the lower-income, majority sectors of the population.

While the transcendental figure of AMLO looms large over state and municipal races, an array of local issues, personalities and politics will have major influences on the campaigns and their outcomes. The national party coalitions that back the presidential candidates may or may not repeat at state and local levels, where there is a stronger tendency for the parties to go it alone.

Both Fuerza y Corazón por México and the MC might be characterized as the "neo-liberal light" opposition.

A prominent Gálvez supporter, Enrique de la Madrid, former tourism secretary and son of President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88), recently synthesized the opposition's

philosophy on national television when he criticized “officialdom” for being wedded to state control and an anti-free enterprise bent at a time when demographic changes foreshadowing the end of Mexico’s youthful “demographic bonus” require robust economic growth.

Nonetheless, given the overwhelming popularity of AMLO’s new social programs that benefit the elderly, low-income students and small farmers, the opposition is loathe to openly attack them, much less propose their dismantlement as conservatives in the U.S. do. Gálvez pledges to support the programs, and even do better than AMLO or Sheinbaum in serving the elderly.

Insecurity is the big card wielded by the opposition. With violence connected to organized crime still submerging regions of the country in blood, terror and forced displacement, the opposition is zeroing in on AMLO’s “Hugs not Bullets” approach. It’s no accident, then, that Gálvez kicked off her campaign in Fresnillo, Zacatecas, recently rated Mexico’s most insecure municipality in a public perception poll conducted by the federal statistics and census agency INEGI.

Later on the day of March 1, Gálvez moved on to Guanajuato, another violence torn state. During her jaunt in the cradle of Mexican independence, Gálvez pricked her finger and with a dab of blood signed a notarized document promising to not slash the existing social programs. For good measure, she vowed to lower the eligible retirement age to 60 instead of 65.

Sheinbaum, on the other hand, proposes granting women aged 60 to 64 a bimonthly half-pension until full retirement so females can enjoy “greater autonomy.” Upping the ante, the old Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), which ruled Mexico for decades but is now part of Gálvez’s coalition, is running television spots promising youth aged 19-25 nest eggs totalling approximately \$7,140 payable in three installments over six years.

Not to be outdone in the media messaging, underdog Álvarez began his uphill run in Lagos de Morena, Jalisco, a municipality likewise plagued by violence. Whether or not someone was sending a message of their own to Álvarez, seven bodies were reported scattered around Lagos de Morena in the hours before the candidate’s appearance.

Sheinbaum includes bolstered security initiatives in a list of 100 actions she vows her government will undertake to deepen and extend AMLO’s program of political and social reform, based on his political philosophy of Mexican humanism.

Back on the security front, the physical safety of candidates, especially at the local level, is again emerging as a concern. The narco-ridden states of Michoacan and Guerrero rank

high among the hot spots. Adrián López Solís, Michoacan state prosecutor, was quoted by *Aristeguinoticias* blaming February's murders of two primary candidates for mayor of the town of Maravatío (one from the PAN and the other from AMLO's and Sheinbaum's Morena party) as stemming from the intention of criminal groups to "take them out" of the electoral race in order to secure political control and have a free hand in controlling the police and exploiting public resources.

On March 3, Alfredo Alfredo González Díaz, Díaz, a mayoral primary candidate for the municipality of Atoyac de Alvarez in Guerrero's Costa Grande region, was murdered by gunmen. González was associated with the Labor Party (PT), which is a supporter of the 4T and a member of Claudia Sheinbaum's electoral coalition. According to the Guerrero news outlet *El Sur*, Manuel Eugenio Arriaga Rosendo, PT mayoral primary candidate for the municipality of Cualac, was earlier slain in January.

Historically a municipality dedicated to the production of coffee and other crops, Atoyac is likewise known for its guerrilla and popular insurgencies, hundreds of still unresolved disappearances at the hands of Mexican security forces during the government's counterinsurgency campaign against leftist guerrilla forces during the 1970s, and the cultivation of first opium poppies and later, coca leaves for cocaine.

### **On the Trails of History**

Kicking off her campaign March 1 in Mexico City's Zocalo plaza before tens of thousands of supporters, Sheinbaum rattled off the 100 actions list and praised AMLO for being a pivotal figure who changed the course of Mexican history.

"He showed us not to grovel in front of the power of money and trust in the people and their dignity," Sheinbaum said. "I anticipate that the end of his administration will be spectacular."

In a post-rally interview on Milenio television, Sheinbaum framed her lengthy platform points around the general areas of public-private investments, social well being, environmental protection, education, healthcare, and "shared prosperity."

Clearly a woman on a mission with history, Sheinbaum touched on her personal trajectory from a young social activist to the likely first woman president in Mexican history. Besides her political credentials, Sheinbaum holds an energy engineering doctorate. She served as environment secretary when AMLO was mayor of Mexico City in the early 2000s, and was among the members of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change awarded a Nobel Prize in 2007.

From 2018 to 2023, Sheinbaum oversaw the governance of Mexico City, no small feat for anyone.

Reminiscent of López Obrador, who began his successful 2018 presidential run at the Benito Juárez Monument in Ciudad Juárez, Sheinbaum arrived in the Mexican border city March 2, where she met with supporters, business leaders, reporters and maquiladora industry workers.

“I made the decision to come first to Ciudad Juárez, the most beautiful border in the world, because it is here where the country begins,” Sheinbaum said to thousands gathered at the Juárez Monument.

“Here where Benito Juárez came to defend the country against the French invasion, and in a place which is a symbol of violence against women, the first woman president of Mexico had to initiate her campaign.”

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Although matters of gender, equity, social justice and public safety loom large in the 2024 elections, international relations, especially with the United States, likewise are shaping the Mexican elections. Foreign influence in Mexican elections is nothing new, but with U.S. elections also underway this year the two political transitions are intertwined not only by the calendar but in theme and tone as well.

Since the beginning of the year, a dizzying parade of foreign press stories alleging narco money in previous López Obrador campaigns, countercharges by the Mexican president, cell phone number leaks targeting reporters and Mexican politicians, political attacks against AMLO traced to Argentine bot farms, friction over Mexican steel exports to the U.S., and new Canadian visa restrictions for Mexican nationals have the news cycles in full tilt boogie.

On February 29, the day before the Mexican general election campaign commenced, President Biden and former President Trump staged competing visits to the U.S. Mexico border, which for all of President Lopez Obrador’s earlier appeals for his country not to become the piñata of U.S politics, is again a big election year prop in the political theater of El Norte.

In particular, Trump has retrieved the rhetoric he found successful with his base in 2016, comparing migrants and refugees with criminals and crazies while denouncing an “invasion” of the United States. Stirring the pot further, both Republican Speaker of the

House Mike Johnson and former Trump national security official Chad Wolf, the latter in comments made on CNN, urged a return to the Trump era policy of Remain in Mexico for asylum seekers.

South of the border, Johnson's comments that Washington should tell Mexico what to do because "we are the United States" sounded like a ghostly recording from the Big Stick era of U.S. intervention in Latin America.

### **Voices from Now and Then**

Finally, a network of Mexican civil society organizations released a recent statement that emphasized the importance of fundamental issues which often get downplayed in the heat of political campaigning.

Scores of indigenous, environmental, human rights, health care professional, community and small producer organizations published the one-page statement in *La Jornada* daily demanding that "candidates to posts of popular election prioritize public health, the environment, human rights and the rights of original peoples above those of private interests."

The activists called on Mexican candidates to reveal any relationship with private sector interests, abstain from participating in decisions when a conflict of interest exists, and uphold the supremacy of scientific evidence over commercial interests.

The signatories of the statement included the Baja California Association of Nutritionists and Dieticians, Rio Sonora Basin Committees, Greenpeace Mexico, Guerrero's Tlachinollan Human Rights Center of the Mountain, Ejido Union in Defense of Maya Territory, and the anti-GMO No Corn, No Country campaign, among many others.

Meanwhile, outgoing President López Obrador must comply with election rules that prohibit him from openly backing candidates or publicizing his government's achievements during the period leading up to June 2. Consequently, the Mexican president said he will devote part of his morning press conferences to readings of Mexican history and historical figures.

"How are we going to envision the future, a better society if we are not inspired by our fertile history?" AMLO asked. "How do we advance without ideals, without principles. It is necessary to seek an ideal, a doctrine, a dream to make it reality..."

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