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FEATURED Q&A

Will Next Sunday's Election in Mexico Be Free and Fair?



Andrés Manuel López Obrador is leading in polls ahead of Mexico's presidential election on Sunday. However, the campaign season has been marred by killings, and corruption remains a concern for some election observers. // File Photo: López Obrador.

Q Mexicans go to the polls on Sunday for the country's presidential, legislative and local elections. Corruption has been among the most prominent issues in the campaign, as the country's federal electoral tribunal recently found financial irregularities in Jaime Rodríguez's candidacy and at least 14 former and current governors are under investigation for corruption charges. Moreover, 36 candidates have been killed since September, marking the most violent election season in the country's recent history, The Washington Post reported. While Mexico places last among OECD countries in Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index, it has implemented the National Anti-Corruption System since 2016 in an attempt to reduce corruption. Has the anti-corruption system been successful? How are the Mexican authorities prepared to fight corruption, and what role can journalists and civil society organizations play? Will Mexico's elections be considered free and fair?

A Erich de la Fuente, partner and CEO for the U.S. operations of Llorente & Cuenca: "Sunday will be a historic day in Mexico; 89 million citizens will be called to vote in an election that will decide the next Mexican president, 500 members of the Chamber of Deputies, 128 members of the Senate and eight governors. Those newly elected or re-elected will likely take part in pushing forward an agenda of political reform, including an economic transformation that will lead negotiations with the United States on NAFTA. According to a 2017 survey by the Pew Research Center, corruption is the second-biggest concern for Mexicans, preceded only by crime. These issues have set the

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TODAY'S NEWS

ECONOMIC

Argentine Drought Cuts Deep Into April Growth Rate

A 30 percent decline in agricultural output due to a severe drought caused Argentina's economy in April to shrink for the first time in more than a year.

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BUSINESS

Jamaican Officials Raid Petrojam Offices Over Graft

The head of the opposition People's National Party, Peter Phillips, has called for the resignation of Energy Minister Andrew Wheatley over the case.

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POLITICAL

Pence Strikes Firm Tone on Latin America Tour

Speaking alongside Brazilian President Michel Temer in Brasília on Tuesday, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence issued a warning about immigration, calling on "all the nations" of Latin America to respect U.S. borders, saying, "If you can't come legally, don't come at all."

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Temer (L) and Pence. // Photo: @VP via Twitter.

POLITICAL NEWS

Pence Strikes Firm Tone on Migration, Venezuela on Tour

Visiting Brazil on Tuesday, U.S. Vice President Mike Pence issued a warning about immigration, calling on “all the nations” of Latin America to respect U.S. borders, The Washington Post reported. “Don’t risk your lives or the lives of your children by trying to come to the United States on the road run by drug smugglers and human traffickers,” Pence said. “If you can’t come legally, don’t come at all,” he added at an appearance in Brasília alongside Brazilian President Michel Temer. Pence’s swing through Brazil, Ecuador and Guatemala this week comes amid intense public debate over President Donald Trump’s immigration policy, which has resulted in more than 2,000 migrant children, including some infants, being separated from their parents and placed in detention centers far from their families. In remarks ahead of Pence’s statement, Temer expressed concern over reports of the separations of Brazilian migrant children and their parents in the United States, which he called an “extremely sensitive issue in the eyes of the Brazilian society,” according to the report. Seventeen states, including Minnesota, Washington, New York and California, on Tuesday sued the Trump administration in an effort to force officials to reunite migrant families who have been separated at the U.S.-Mexico border, CBS News reported. The states, all of which are led by Democratic attorneys general, joined the District of Columbia in filing the lawsuit in a federal court in Seattle. The case marks the first legal challenge by states over the practice. A federal judge in California late Tuesday ordered a halt to most family separations at the U.S. border and the reunification of all families that have been separated, CNN reported. The court order specifically requires federal officials to stop detaining parents apart from their minor children and reunify all separated families within a month. Meanwhile, in Brasília, Pence also focused on Venezuela, thanking

Brazil for welcoming Venezuelans fleeing their country’s collapse, announcing that the United States will provide nearly \$10 million more to support Venezuelan migrants, including \$1.2 million that will go to Brazil, the Associated Press reported. “Venezuela’s collapse is creating a humanitarian crisis leading to widespread deprivation, the denial of basic services and starvation,” Pence said. “It has spurred the largest cross-border mass exodus in the history of our hemisphere.” Pence heads next to Ecuador, where he is scheduled to meet with President Lenín Moreno, followed by Guatemala, where he plans to meet with other Central American leaders to discuss the immigration issue.

ECONOMIC NEWS

Argentine Drought Cuts Deep Into April Growth Rate

A 30 percent decline in agricultural output due to a severe drought caused Argentina’s economy in April to shrink for the first time in more than a year, Reuters reported Tuesday. New data from INDEC, the state statistics agency, showed the economy contracted nearly 1 percent in April, as compared to the same month a year before. The economy shrank 2.7 percent in April from March. The drought, which shriveled corn and soy crops, both key exports, erased 3.78 percentage points from total GDP growth, Goldman Sachs analyst Alberto Ramos told clients in a research note. While the retail, manufacturing and real estate sectors each grew relatively strongly in April, the current account balance posted a large and wider-than-anticipated \$9.6 billion deficit during the first quarter of 2018, according to INDEC figures. “We expect the economy to remain soft in coming quarters,” Ramos said, noting an overall tightening of both domestic and external financial conditions. In related news, Argentina’s central bank on Tuesday held its policy rate steady at 40 percent, marking the first rate decision since a shake-up in its leadership earlier this month when Luis Caputo took over as bank governor,

NEWS BRIEFS

Jamaica Raises Minimum Wage by 13 Percent

Jamaica’s national minimum wage will go up 13 percent effective August 1, the Jamaica Gleaner reported Tuesday. The wage for a 40-hour work week will rise from 6,200 Jamaican dollars (\$47.84) to 7,000. The minimum wage for security guards is also to be increased, moving from 8,854 Jamaican dollars to 9,700. Labor Minister Shahine Robinson said the government took into account the state of the Jamaican economy, rate of inflation and ability of the employers to absorb an increase.

Facebook Takes Down Latin America Pages Ahead of Elections

Facebook said Tuesday it has taken down more than 10,000 fake pages, groups and accounts in Mexico and across Latin America because they violated the company’s community standards. “The content we’ve found broke our policies on coordinated harm and inauthentic behavior, as well as attacks based on race, gender or sexual orientation,” the social media company said in a statement. “This kind of action is especially important in the run-up to elections ... It’s why we’ve been working so hard to prevent election interference by doubling down on fake accounts that spread misinformation,” the company added.

Colombian President-Elect Visits Washington

Colombian President-elect Iván Duque will arrive in the United States today for his first international trip since he won a runoff election June 17, EFE reported. His communications office did not release details on his agenda in Washington. Duque and U.S. President Donald Trump spoke on the phone after Duque’s victory, discussing the South American country’s security challenges, according to White House Press Secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders.

replacing academic Federico Sturzenegger. Central bank officials said Tuesday the hawkish stance on interest rates will continue until they are certain their target of 17 percent inflation in 2019 is on track to be met. The administration of conservative President Mauricio Macri has put in place a series of pro-market economic measures, backed by a \$50 billion International Monetary Fund stand-by agreement, which has proven to be unpopular domestically. A general strike led by Argentina's largest labor union confederation shut down trains, subways, flights and buses on Monday, Clarín reported. The General Confederation of Workers, or CGT, called only for workers to strike, but more radical groups blocked access to Buenos Aires in a series of demonstrations, Agence France-Presse reported.

BUSINESS NEWS

Jamaican Authorities Raid Petrojam Offices Amid Graft Allegation

Jamaican authorities raided the offices of state-run oil refinery Petrojam on Tuesday following allegations of mismanagement, corruption and nepotism, the Jamaica Gleaner reported. Teams from Jamaica's Major Organized Crime and Anti-Corruption Agency,



Wheatley // File Photo: @Aowheatley via Twitter.

or MOCA, and the government's new Integrity Commission confiscated documents and computers. Opposition leaders in Jamaica's parliament have been holding hearings into the allegations, which suggest Petrojam officials spent \$40 million more on a bid from a Chinese

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tone of the electoral campaign debate, and Mexico's new president will need to play a central role in addressing this issue in the country's institutions. Andres Manuel López Obrador, the presidential candidate whose campaign message addresses citizens' anti-corruption and anti-establishment sentiment, is leading the polls and is likely to win the presidential election. His support comes from his base but also in large part from disaffected voters who have lost trust

I am certain that Mexico will have elections that are free and fair."

— Nicolás Mariscal

in the establishment. Many consider López Obrador's strongest opponent, Ricardo Anaya, to be a member of the current political establishment. His support stems more from voters' uncertainty or fear of where López Obrador's policies might lead the country rather than his own political voting bloc. Without a runoff vote, it is very likely that the winner will emerge without a clear political mandate. In this polarized context, a narrow victory from either candidate will test the

company for a distillation unit upgrade than a bid for the same work from a company based in the United States. The head of the opposition People's National Party, Peter Phillips, has called for the resignation of Energy Minister Andrew Wheatley over the case. "Now it is clear that the minister has breached public trust and his position in office cannot be sustained ... The minister must go," Phillips said Monday, RJR News reported. Wheatley has not responded to questions submitted by the opposition relating to the selection process for the upgrade, management compensation levels and reports of higher-than-normal

country's institutions, and political uncertainty will likely continue. To that end, journalists and civil society organizations will play a fundamental role guiding public opinion and people's expectations."

A Nicolás Mariscal, member of the Advisor board and chairman of Grupo Marhnos in Mexico City:

"Democracy in Mexico has been built and strengthened through the creation of electoral laws that have been updated throughout the years and that have helped in the creation of procedures and norms and the consolidation of electoral institutions. I am certain that Mexico will have elections that are free and fair. With respect to the National Anti-corruption System, training and generating institutional capacities to detect and sanction corruption is still ongoing. I trust that we will begin to reap the benefits in coming years. One of the most important steps that Mexico is taking is the implementation of the Anti-corruption Open Guide, which publishes different strategic databases and improves transparency and documentation. This has been possible thanks to the collaboration of the International Open Data Charter, the Inter-American Development Bank and the participation of civil society organizations such as Transparencia Mexicana and Cívica Digital. I also want to highlight the great work of the media

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staff attrition at the refinery. Jamaica's major business groups have called for an audit in order to protect the country's reputation. In a joint statement, the Jamaica Chamber of Commerce, the Jamaica Manufacturers and Exporters Association and the Private Sector Organization of Jamaica, this week called for a forensic audit of the refinery, the Jamaica Observer reported. Struggling Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA owns 49 percent of Petrojam, but Jamaica's government has said it wants to buy out PDVSA's stake, which could be worth some \$80 million, Bloomberg News reported in February.

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in the process of strengthening democracy. The systemic work of reporters and investigators has been crucial to denouncing abuses of power. Finally, I'll highlight the work of civil society organizations, which have added to Mexico's democracy with initiatives like the '3 of 3' law, requiring public workers to disclose their declaration of assets, declaration of interests and a tax return."

A **Eduardo Bohórquez, executive director of Transparencia Mexicana:** "Over the past few years, we have seen many strides made toward open government and against corruption in Mexico. None of this would have been possible without the tireless work of both journalists and civil society. The creation of the National Anti-corruption System (NAS) is a great example of how mobilization and grassroots organizing can lead to changes in policy, and how lawmakers and

“**The chief concern, both now and after the elections, is the continued closing of the civic space.**”

— Eduardo Bohórquez

civil society can work together. However, it must be noted that the NAS is just the beginning. Many more anti-corruption measures are necessary, including civil society's demand for an independent attorney general. The chief concern, both now and after the elections, is the continued closing of the civic space. This is not just a Mexican phenomenon, but rather a global one. We have

seen this happen in countries like Turkey, Hungary, and increasingly in the United States, and we have begun to see it here with increased attacks against the press, the Pegasus malware for activists, and the passing of the Internal Security Law. There is a great risk that a new government, whoever may lead it, might continue to double down on this trend, seeing civil society not as an independent critic and a potential ally, but rather as an adversary. This is something we in civil society need to push back against."

A **Paul Lagunes, assistant professor at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs:** "Andrés Manuel López Obrador is poised to win the upcoming presidential election in Mexico. He is a seasoned politician whose supporters fervently believe will tackle corruption. However, his tenure as mayor of Mexico City was not scandal free. His treasury secretary was filmed in Las Vegas gambling more than what a government salary would seemingly permit. His main political operator was soon after recorded stuffing money into his portfolio and pockets. More recently, López Obrador has built alliances with questionable individuals while failing to support Mexico's civil society in its valiant effort to promote accountability. Tackling corruption is, of course, difficult. The question is whether López Obrador will be able to learn from past mistakes, distance himself from controversial figures, engage organized civil society in a meaningful way and deliver the honest government that Mexico needs and deserves. One should hope so."

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