

A critical assessment of the electoral integrity of the federal electoral process of Mexico of 2024

Introduction

The following paper will provide an early assessment of the integrity of the last federal electoral process of Mexico in 2024 through qualitative (interviews, narrative research, social media testimonies, documents, journalistic articles, etc.) and quantitative (official statistics, surveys, charts, etc.) data that could be fit to answer satisfactorily the indicators developed by the Electoral Integrity Project.

The argument of this paper consists on that, due to the extensive and intensive irregularities observed throughout the last federal electoral process of Mexico, its results could perfectly be declared invalid, and that these irregularities prove that Mexico is actually transitioning from an electoral to an illiberal democracy, in which apparently democratic elections are regularly held, but they are far from being fair and free.

Unfortunately, this transition also implies the weakening of constitutional democracy in Mexico, since the due checks and balances that should exist between the different branches of government will be more difficult to achieve in this new context, as well as their necessary accountability and transparency.

A. Irregularities within the federal electoral process of Mexico of 2024

The last federal electoral process of 2024 in Mexico has been the most questioned, challenged and disputed in the last twenty seven years (since 1997). From vote buying and pregnant ballot boxes to criminal violence, extortions, illegal detention of candidates, the burning of polling stations, the destruction of electoral packages, all these actions were among the most frequent illegal practices challenged in this process.

There were also legal complaints about thousands of polling stations that did not report any single vote for the PAN, or whose original official functionaries were replaced by sympathizers of MORENA, or that many were opened quite late on election day, or about the stealing of many ballot boxes, or about the presence of very few electoral

observers reviewing the process, or about the actual impediment to hundreds of thousands of Mexicans abroad to cast their vote, etc.

On the other hand, there were even testimonies in social media about the corruption of subordinate functionaries of the INE by the current regime who had been encouraged to steal and destroy several ballot boxes, and even the report that there had been an infiltration of Cubans in key positions of the INE in order to accomplish a cybernetic electoral fraud in favor of the party coalition ‘Sigamos Haciendo Historia’.

In fact, the journalist Claudio de la Lata even explained the details of this presumed electoral fraud:

‘¿Cómo hicieron el PREP? Agarraron únicamente las actas donde ganaba Claudia y todas las actas en el extremo derecho superior tienen los datos de la casilla y la entidad federativa, entonces agarraron nada más las que Claudia ganó y las clonaron. Fueron diecinueve mil actas donde ganó Claudia y las clonaron como ocho, nueve, diez veces, y las cambiaron de estado: les cambiaron otra casilla, distrito y estado, y como eran tantas, pensaron que no se iban a dar cuenta... Hay unas copiadoreas muy poderosas...’

Even more the civic association, called *La Carpeta Púrpura*, claims that the statistical Law of Benford proves the electoral fraud allegedly committed by the very same INE, since in the official results of the presidential elections published by the INE there was a discrepancy from 2 to 1 in terms of their awaited pattern:

‘La distribución de los primeros dígitos es bastante asimétrica, la frecuencia esperada para números que empiezan por 1 es casi del 30%, para el 2 es un poco más del 17%, para el 3 es algo más del 2%, y para el resto disminuye’.

Based on these official results published by the INE, it is possible to realize that Mexican people ‘suddenly’ did not punish MORENA and its party allies in electoral terms, despite that their popularity had been at their lowest point by May 2024:

Year	Votes for AMLO	Competing party	Type of Election
2006	14,859,350	PRD	Presidential
2012	15,848,827	PRD	Presidential
2018	30,113,483	Party coalition ‘Hagamos Historia’	Presidential

2021	16,759,917	Party coalition 'Sigamos haciendo historia'	Presidential
2024	36,924,519	Party coalition 'Sigamos haciendo historia'	Presidential
2024	32,316,689	Party coalition 'Sigamos haciendo historia'	Chamber of Deputies

Source: *La Carpeta Púrpura* in X

As it can be observed in this chart, apparently Claudia Sheinbaum won more than 20 million of votes than in 2021, and more than six million of votes than in 2018, and these official statistics contradict completely the loss of popularity that the MORENA party coalition experienced throughout AMLO's *sexenio*.

Even if the first comparison may not be regarded as fair, since we are comparing a middle term election *versus* a Presidential election, still the difference of votes is more than 100% in favor of Claudia Sheinbaum, which is either consistent with the loss of popularity of the MORENA party, which had been manifested in the middle term election of 2021.

No wonder opposition parties submitted around one hundred and ninety one challenges against the results of the last federal elections, nonetheless, opposition parties have not disclosed completely in the public sphere the breath, the extension and the depth of the irregularities experienced in this process.

Nonetheless, in order to annul these elections, opposition parties should invoke the *abstract causal of invalidity* and prove that these irregularities were systemic and decisive to affect seriously the principles that should guide electoral processes in Mexico: certainty, equity, freedom, objectivity, legality, constitutionality, and impartiality, which are protected by articles 39, 41, 99 and 116 of the Mexican Constitution.

In fact, several irregularities that affected deeply the integrity of the last federal electoral process of Mexico in 2024 had been sowed from the very first day that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO) took power in 2018. Indeed, from the beginning of his presidential term, López Obrador started to use strategically social programs and

fiscal federalism to increase substantially the chances of his party coalition to win federal and state elections throughout the country.

Furthermore, from his very first day in power, the morning conferences of President Obrador enjoyed extensive news media coverage, therefore his personal interpretation of Mexican politics as well, which, since then, has systematically compromised the due political neutrality of the Mexican mass media.¹

However, perhaps the most serious electoral irregularity that has taken place in Mexico since 2018, but especially in 2024, has been the shameless intervention of organized crime to influence decisively the outcome of all kinds of elections, but especially of local elections. And this barefaced intervention, along with a weak law enforcement system, has restricted seriously the free exercise of civil liberties and political rights of many Mexican citizens.

Furthermore, after the renewal of the President counsellor and other two counsellors of the Mexican Electoral Commission (INE) in 2023, the impartiality of this Commission became seriously compromised and questioned by a large sector of Mexican civil society, as well as their due capacity of effectively enforcing the principles that have historically guaranteed a threshold of integrity of the electoral processes in Mexico, namely, *objectivity, certainty, professionalism, freedom, and equity*.²

Indeed, President López Obrador attempted several times during his *sexenio* to transform the Mexican Electoral Commission (INE) through a constitutional amendment that allegedly subverted the principles that had secured a threshold of electoral integrity in Mexico since 1996, however this constitutional amendment has not been successful so far.

On the other hand, Claudia Sheinbaum started, in real terms, her presidential pre campaign in 2021, immediately after the federal mid-term election day in 2021, and since then she enjoyed the wide support of the Mexican state apparatus, the strategic use of social programs and fiscal federalism, the MORENA's infrastructure, an extensive news coverage, as well as the open endorsement of President López Obrador to succeed him in the Mexican Presidency.

¹ Both print and broadcasting media have widely diffused the content of the daily morning conferences of AMLO since December 1st, 2018, whereas the voice of the political opposition has been occasionally covered.

² Indeed, some close relatives of Guadalupe Taddei Zavala, the new head of the INE, experienced some proximity with President López Obrador, which has aroused some suspicions that she could experience some conflict of interests in her new post, through the manipulation of the INE apparatus in favor of the party coalition of MORENA.

All these inequitable circumstances described above lasted until the election day of 2024, and arguably undermined the principles of free and fair elections in Mexico. Moreover, the political rights and civil liberties of millions of Mexicans and of thousands of competing nominees in this process, especially at the municipal level of government, were severely restricted by the illicit intervention of organized crime in favor of those nominees who best defended their interests once elected, and this kind of intervention could be considered in itself a sufficient legal condition to annul the federal and local elections of 2024, since it overrode the principles of freedom, equality, equity, impartiality and objectivity that should prevail in electoral processes.

Moreover, even before the official beginning of the pre-campaign and campaign periods, legal complaints about the exceeding spending limits, the clientele allocation of social programs, and the extensive and intensive mass media news coverage of the activities of proselytism of Claudia Sheinbaum, had been submitted by some opposition parties to the INE.

On the other hand, the irregularities experienced on the election day (June 2nd) of 2024 were numerous and could be considered systemic and very serious, despite not being covered thoroughly by the news media, which did not care less about the impact of these irregularities in the overall integrity of the last federal electoral process.³

Main irregularities of the electoral process of 2024

Ex Ante	Pre campaign and campaign periods	Election Day	Qualification of the Process
a. Widespread propaganda of the internal process of selection of Presidential nominee.	a. Open intervention of organized crime to benefit those nominees aligned to their interests.	a. Open intervention of organized crime in favor those nominees aligned to their interests.	a) No sufficient information from executive authorities to judge the fairness of the process.
b. Open endorsement of			b) Threats and pressures from the State apparatus

³ For example, according to Marko Cortés, President of the PAN, there were at least 1,888 shoes polling stations (in which there were no votes for the nominees of the opposition), 2,468 polling stations in which the MORENA coalition obtained around 90% of votes, several polling stations burned by criminal organizations in several states, extensive vote buying practices, systemic intimidation of voters by organized crime in States like Chiapas, many pregnant ballot boxes (in which there were more votes casted than the number of people entitled to vote), serious mistakes in vote counting in several polling stations, widespread destruction of electoral packages, etc. On the other hand, through social media, mainly X, there were also reports of a cybernetic attack that had hacked the official results of Mexico City's elections, and of functionaries of the INE working openly for the MORENA coalition through their active involvement in the destruction of those ballot boxes that had threatened the triumphant expectations of this coalition.

AMLO in favor of Claudia Sheinbaum. c. Widespread coverage of news media of proselytist actions of Claudia Sheinbaum. d. Public disbursements to support proselytist actions of Claudia Sheinbaum. e. Strategic use of fiscal federalism and social programs to benefit MORENA's nominees.	b. Strategic use of social programs to support MORENA's nominees. c. Exceeding public spending limits. d. Widespread and partial news coverage of Claudia Sheinbaum proselytist actions.	b. Vote buying over electoral institutes and tribunals. c. Several polling stations in which there were not a single vote for opposition parties. d. Destruction of electoral packages. e. Burning of polling stations. f. Serious mistakes in vote counting. g. Late opening of polling stations. h. Lack of training of electoral functionaries. i. Use of the state apparatus to impede the surveillance of the process by opposition representatives.	c) Irregular functioning of the TEPJF: Deliberate missing of two vacancies to fill its plenary session. d) Partiality of rulings against opposition nominees.
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Electoral Integrity and Democratization Processes

Electoral integrity is one of the most serious dimensions of democratization processes across the world. Indeed, there cannot be a true process of democratization without a threshold of electoral integrity in the respective country, and there cannot be true electoral integrity without an institutional design that effectively upholds the rule of law within the respective Constitutional State.

For this reason, electoral integrity is threatened wherever and whenever there are no appropriate checks and balances among the different branches of government within the Constitutional State, since without proper checks and balances the executive usually overrides the electoral law to preserve and increase its power.

In other words, electoral integrity depends on the strength of the rule of law, and this latter strength depends on the equilibrium of power between the different branches of government of the Constitutional State, or expressed in different terms, the rule of law

depends on a true constitutional democracy that could effectively protect against the abuse of power of any branch of government against the human rights of the people. This is perhaps the most important lesson that the Mexican case could teach us regarding the attainment electoral integrity.

Electoral Integrity and Illiberal Democracy in Mexico

From July 2nd 2018 Mexico has been experiencing an accelerated process of political concentration of power in the executive which some authors would call regime retrogression (Huq & Ginsburg, 2018). In this way, it seems that Mexico is going through a process of regime change, such as the one described by Fareed Zakaria (1997) in his famous research article entitled '*The Rise of Illiberal Democracy*', since 'democracy' (popular vote) is courted in this country, but not constitutional liberalism.

In other words, Mexico is experiencing an autocratic regression through the disruption of constitutional democracy, that is, through the disruption of the appropriate checks and balances within the Mexican presidential system of government, and this disruption brings about, as one of its most important casualties, the widespread erosion of the rule of law that secure the integrity of electoral processes in this country.

The question is: To what extent the erosion of the rule of law has disrupted electoral integrity in Mexico? As an illustration of the increasing negative effects of this erosion, in July 8th, 2024, Edmundo Jacobo Molina, the former Executive Secretary of the INE, published a journalistic article at 'El Financiero' newspaper, in which he assured that federal authorities, such as the SAT (the Mexican Revenue System), the UIF (the Financial Intelligence Unit of the Mexican Treasury), and the CNBV (The National Agency of Banks and Stocks), had not provided requested data from the Mexican Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF) to elucidate clearly the real expenses of MORENA in the last electoral process.

Molina also explained that the TEPJF had not solved correctly the core of the disputes presented by the opposition parties, thus that it had not dealt with legal certainty these controversies. However, this author also affirmed that the President and the Congress not only had not appointed the two missing magistrates of the TEPJF to solve legitimately the legal challenges from the federal electoral process of 2024, but even worse, that they had promoted an impeachment trial against a federal judge who had commanded them to fill these vacancies as soon as possible.

All these facts may reveal that Mexico is already experiencing the lack of independence and autonomy of its judicial power, perhaps more seriously than in the peak of the authoritarian PRI regime. Furthermore, Molina also affirmed that sub national electoral tribunals had been partial in favor of the MORENA coalition through their rulings on the legal challenges submitted by the opposition parties, and that threats and blackmails from the MORENA coalition against judicial and administrative electoral authorities were becoming decisive, or at least quite influential, to validate the results of the presidential, the state, and the local elections of 2024. As we can easily infer, all these actions overrode meaningfully the rule of law in the last federal electoral process.

On the other hand, along with the traditional strategies that the PRI regime used last century to maintain its authoritarian regime, such as clientelism, patronage, repression, media control, the MORENA coalition is nowadays practicing ‘new’ tactics to strengthen their authoritarian regime in Mexico: a) polarization, b) misinformation, c) organized crime’s violence, d) the disruption of constitutional democracy, e) the corruption of opposition leaders, and f) ideology radicalization.

Nonetheless, Magaloni (2008) highlights the significance of clientelism and patronage as elementary strategies to sustain an authoritarian regime in Mexico, due to the fact that in the past the PRI had ‘made millions of ordinary citizens vest their interests in the survival of the autocratic regime’ and that the choices of this people had been ‘constrained by a series of strategic dilemmas that compelled them to support the autocrats’.

The truth is that both clientelism and patronage have disrupted the democratic form of government in Mexico, and their wide practice constitutes a signal that people in this country do not enjoy sufficient equality, freedom and maturity to hold free and fair elections. Therefore, very easily Mexico has fallen into demagoguery due to the decisiveness of both practices in the outcome of ‘democratic’ elections.

In this sense and based on Magaloni (2008), as long as clientelism and patronage remain widely practiced in Mexico, electoral integrity in this country will always be compromised. On the other hand, Díaz Cayeros, Estévez & Magaloni (2016), have recalled that poverty relief programs in Mexico usually boost the ‘popularity’ of its authoritarian regime, since the short-term ‘rational’ view of poor people usually sustains the long-term continuity of this kind of regime.

Nonetheless, as Wright and Bank (2016) affirm, autocratic regimes usually fund poverty relief programs, as effective strategies to win elections and remain in power,

through ‘non-tax revenue’ (usually the oil industry) and ‘unearned foreign income’ (public debt).

However, Mexico is currently going through the concurrence of more factors than clientelism and patronage (criminal violence, misinformation, polarization, the disruption of constitutional democracy, etc.) that encourage the loss of electoral integrity. Certainly, the integrity of the last (2024) federal electoral process in Mexico was seriously questioned by an important sector of Mexican civil society.

Nevertheless, the party coalition ‘*Sigamos Haciendo Historia*’ prepares, for the following *sexenio* (2024-2030), revolutionary constitutional amendments that centralize even more power in the Mexican President and weaken the checks and balances within the Mexican presidential system of government.

On the other hand, civil liberties, such as freedom of speech, freedom of press and freedom of assembly, are increasingly threatened by the ruthless violence of organized crime and the harassment of some politicians; misinformation and polarization are growing in the public sphere; among other relevant indicators, these ones could very well mean serious symptoms of the transition of Mexico from an electoral to an illiberal democracy.

Conclusions

Based on some of the evidences discussed in the Mexican public sphere, the federal electoral process of 2024 in Mexico has been charged as being so irregular that it could have been easily declared invalid by the Mexican Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF) (*Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación*), since taken together all these irregularities arguably affected decisively the principles of this electoral process: *freedom, equity, objectivity, legality, constitutionality, professionalism, independence, autonomy and impartiality*.

Furthermore, the low integrity of this electoral process is leading to the reinstatement in Mexico of an illiberal democracy in which the Mexican President can easily take control of the other two most important branches of government: a) The Mexican Congress and b) the Judicial Power of the Mexican Federation, since it permitted the MORENA party and its allies to obtain a *fake* ‘qualified’ majority in the Mexican

Congress in order to carry out constitutional amendments that will encourage even more an autocratic regime in Mexico.

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