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# Fair Elections in Mexico: Much Ado about Nothing?

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Abstract. Competing definitions of fairness may induce furor over the fairness of elections.

In Mexico, the fairness of the recent primary elections of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has been attacked by all candidates except the winner. Attacks have also been launched by domestic and international analysts and pundits. How fair are these attacks on fairness?

One definition of fairness is that all individuals in a polity have an equal opportunity to become a candidate. This was certainly not the case in Mexico. Given the criteria one had to follow to be an eligible candidate, only a few members of the PRI had even an outside chance of making it onto the ballot. Of course, the same applies to all representative democracies, including the United States (US). In almost all cases, money--necessary to make it onto the ballot, to become a viable de facto candidate, or to effect the seemingly infinite variations of subverting electoral finance reforms--seems to be the great unequalizer. (The advocacy that all citizens have equal opportunity to follow a life path that will yield a political candidacy is an abstraction devoid of the realities of everyday life--viz., the convergences of accidents and fates that set often imponderable constraints on opportunities.) In fact, the few who transcend these constraints are less exemplars of the mythology of equal opportunity than subjugators of the masses who introject and identify with the mythology.

Another definition of fairness is that all candidates have equal opportunity and equal access to the assets necessary to run a competitive campaign. Again, this was not the case in Mexico. The winning candidate--Francisco Labastida Ochoa--had a significant advantage in money and the many variants of support stemming from an incumbent party that was de facto behind him--irrespective of some support for the other candidates. In fact, Labastida was rumored to be the favorite of the incumbent--President Ernesto Zedillo--according to the Mexican news media. Of course the same problems are present in all representative democracies including the US. (In fact, doesn't Vice President Gore have the significant support of President Clinton--although such close support may be less than helpful given some elements of the President's political past?) These problems are largely due to--again--the seemingly infinite variations of subverting electoral finance reforms and other reforms bearing on garnering support.

Yet a third definition of fairness is that outright corruption, fraud, and intimidation do not occur or occur at a functionally minimal level. Although these threats to electoral integrity and validity are present in all representative democracies, they were probably less operative in the recent PRI primary--the first ever PRI primary--than in any previous Mexican governmental election.

A fair conclusion might be that the PRI primary was as fair as many in many other representative democracies and fairer than any in previous Mexican electoral history. (See Folger, R., et al. (1996). Elaborating procedural fairness: Justice becomes both simpler and more complex. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22, 435-441; Mansour-Cole, D.M., & Scott, S.G. (1998). Hearing it through the grapevine: The influence of source, leader-relations, and legitimacy on survivors' fairness perceptions. *Personnel Psychology*, 51, 25-54; Mexico's fair elections. (November 12, 1999). *The New York Times*, p. A30; van den Bos, K., et al. (1999). Sometimes unfair procedures have nice aspects: On the psychology of

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