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**Turnout in the 2006 Mexican Election:
A Preliminary Assessment**

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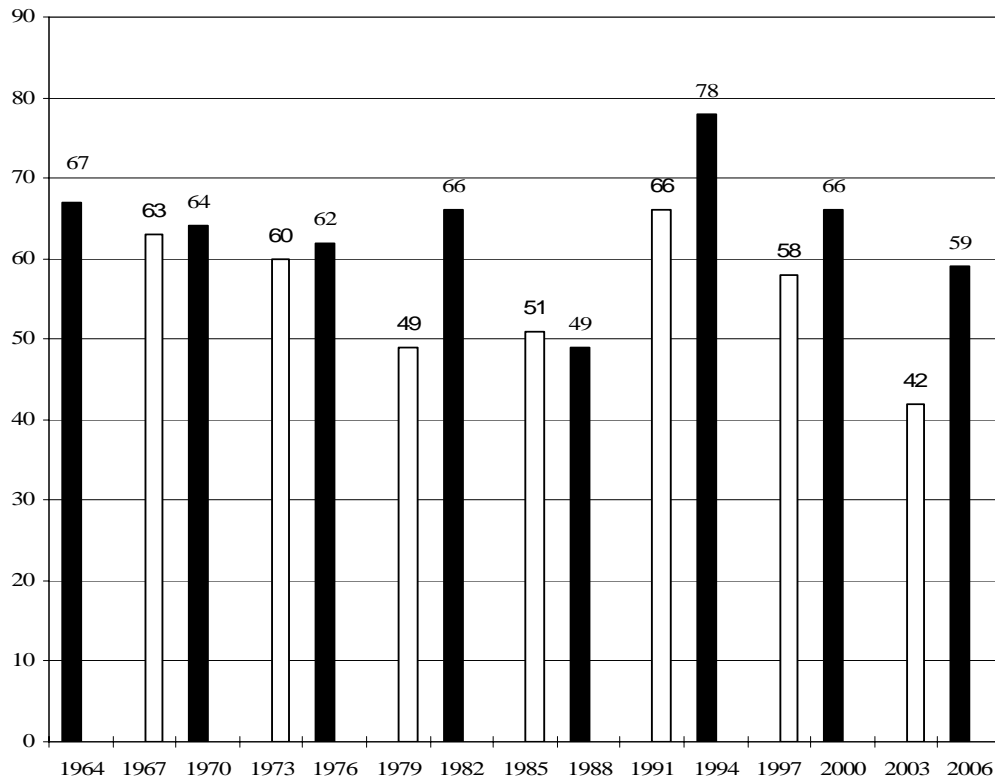
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In this paper I will offer a preliminary assessment of the role of turnout in the 2006 Mexican elections. The data on which this version of the paper relies are preliminary and hence any conclusions offered are similarly tentative. While in 2000 turnout—or more precisely, the failure of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to mobilize its base—had very important consequences for the outcome of that pivotal election (Klesner and Lawson 2001), patterns of turnout in 2006 do not seem to have played a central role in the result in 2006.

A first point of assessment of turnout in 2006 pertains to its volume: while more voters cast ballots in 2006 than ever before, the turnout rate was down for the second straight presidential election, from 78 percent in 1994 and 66 percent in 2000 to 59 percent in the elections just concluded (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Electoral Participation in Mexico, 1964-2006
Turnout by Registered Voters



While 2006's 59 percent turnout shows a decided improvement over the 42 percent who voted in the 2003 midterm elections, recent elections have demonstrated a decided dropoff in turnout in midterm elections (see Figure 1, where the white bars depict midterm results and the black bars presidential election years). Scholars of Mexican electoral politics date the emergence of competitive electoral politics to the electoral reforms completed in 1990, 1993, 1994, and 1996. Since the time of those reforms, a

clear downward trend in turnout by registered voters is evident.¹ Given the high stakes of the 2000 election, when regime change of a sort was on the line, and the closeness of the 2006 election, declining turnout would seem a paradox, although it does mirror declining rates of *electoral* participation in many other societies.

Until the post-electoral wave of the Mexico 2006 Panel Study becomes available, the evidence with which we might assess turnout is of two forms, neither perfect for determining who voted and why. First, we have aggregate data provided by the IFE on its website, with which we can attempt an ecological analysis of patterns of electoral participation.² Ecological analysis is always threatened by the propensity to commit the ecological fallacy. In addition, with *municipio*-level data, which have a large N (>2,400), there are analytical challenges associated with appropriately weighting the dataset (because the size of *municipios* ranges from under 1,000 in some Oaxacan *municipios* to over two million in Guadalajara). Electoral-district data, in contrast, suffer from the challenges associated with accurately aggregating census data to the electoral-district level. At this stage, I will use *municipio*-level data in this analysis.

Second, the first two waves of the Mexico 2006 Panel Study (in October 2005 and May 2006) asked respondents about their likelihood of voting.³ Hence, we can assess the likelihood of individuals turning out on election day—and here I will use the May 2006 wave of the panel survey—as well as changes in their self-assessed likelihood of voting over the course of the campaign.⁴ Of course, these are simply self-assessments of the likelihood of voting, which suffer from a social desirability bias associated with the citizen's responsibility to vote. However, in neither wave did the percentage of respondents who said they were sure they would vote exceed two-thirds of the sample.

To begin with the aggregate data analysis, Table 1 presents a simple model of turnout using one modernization variable (percent of a *municipio*'s inhabitants with post-primary education), one variable measuring religion (percent Catholic), and the percent of the vote going to each of the three major parties. I use only one modernization variable because other modernization variables are highly correlated with this education measure and thus introduce multicollinearity in the model (subsequent iterations of this analysis may include a factor analysis to produce a modernization index). Similarly, the party vote shares are introduced in sequential versions of the OLS estimate because they are highly intercorrelated.

¹ Here I use the registered electorate (*lista nominal*, in Mexican terms) as the base for calculating turnout. Since the aforementioned electoral reforms, Mexico's electoral authority, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) has been charged with registering all potential voters. While the IFE's efforts have by no means been perfect, the agency has succeeded in registering a very high percentage of eligible voters and its electoral rolls for a given year provide more accurate figures of the electorate for a given state, electoral district, or county (*municipio*) than population estimates for those years between decennial censuses.

² The IFE provided electoral section-level data at http://www.ife.org.mx/documentos/computos2006/index_computos.htm, which can be aggregated to the *municipio* or electoral district levels. Here I use the *municipio* level (N>2,400).

³ In contrast, the post-electoral wave provides an interviewer-verified question about whether the respondent voted.

⁴ The question offered the respondent four choices: certain to vote, likely to vote, not likely to vote, certain to *not* vote.

Table 1
Determinants of Turnout in the 2006 Mexican Election

	<i>B (s.e.)</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>B (s.e.)</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>sig.</i>	<i>B (s.e.)</i>	<i>Beta</i>	<i>sig.</i>
Constant	0.35 (0.01)		0.000	0.34 (0.01)		0.000	0.38 (0.02)		0.000
% Catholic	0.19 (0.02)	0.20	0.000	0.17 (0.02)	0.19	0.000	0.16 (0.02)	0.17	0.000
% Post-Primary Education	0.24 (0.01)	0.46	0.000	0.22 (0.01)	0.43	0.000	0.22 (0.01)	0.43	0.000
PAN %	-0.05 (0.01)	-0.10	0.000						
PRD alliance %				0.05 (0.01)	0.11	0.000			
PRI alliance %							-0.02 (0.02)	-0.03	0.206
Adjusted R ²	0.27			0.27			0.26		

N=2,426 *municipios*. Dependent variable is % of the lista nominal voting in the federal deputy elections. Cases are weighted by population.

As earlier studies of the post-1988 elections have shown (Klesner and Lawson 2001; Lawson and Klesner 2004), turnout in 2006 was higher in areas where the electorate has a higher average level of education. Similarly, where a higher percentage of the population is Catholic, the percentage of the population that went to the polls was higher. As the beta weights indicate, education is the strongest driver of turnout at the aggregate level. In alternative formulations of the model, the literacy rate similarly has a strong positive impact on turnout, but not as strong as the post-primary education rate. Likewise, the marginalization index produced by Mexico's National Population Council (CONAPO) is strongly related to turnout at the aggregate level—more marginalized *municipios* have lower levels of electoral participation.

Controlling for the level of socioeconomic modernization and religion, *municipios* where the PAN performed better had lower turnout rates, while those where the PRD performed better had higher turnout rates. The PRI vote share had no statistically significant relationship to electoral participation. In contrast, in 2000 PAN performance varied positively with turnout while PRI performance varied inversely, an important explanation for the Fox victory.

By turning to the individual level we avoid many of the limitations associated with multicollinearity and we can add many individual-level demographic and socioeconomic characteristics as well as attitudes to the explanatory model. Past studies of turnout using survey data have tended to conclude that the following factors explain turnout in Mexico (see Moreno 2003: 150-163; Buendía and Moreno 2004: 61; Lawson and Klesner 2004; Buendía and Somuano 2003):

age – in Mexico as in most nations, younger citizens are less likely to vote than their elders;

education – those with higher levels of education participate more than those who are less educated;

church attendance – those regularly attending church services are more likely to vote than those who stay away from religious services;

participation in political and social associations – those who participate in other social and political organizations are more likely to turn out to vote than the uninvolved, i.e., social capital makes a difference;

political sophistication – those more knowledgeable about politics are more likely to vote than those who know little about public affairs;

confidence in political institutions – those more confident about the integrity of major representative and other governmental institutions are more likely to vote than those cynical about major national political institutions;

partisanship – those with strong partisan identity are more likely to turn out than those with weak partisan identity or independents;

confidence in one's preferred candidate's probability of winning;

media exposure – those who follow the news in the media are more likely to vote;

expectations about fraud – those who have questions about the integrity of the election and of the electoral authorities (the IFE) are less likely to vote; and

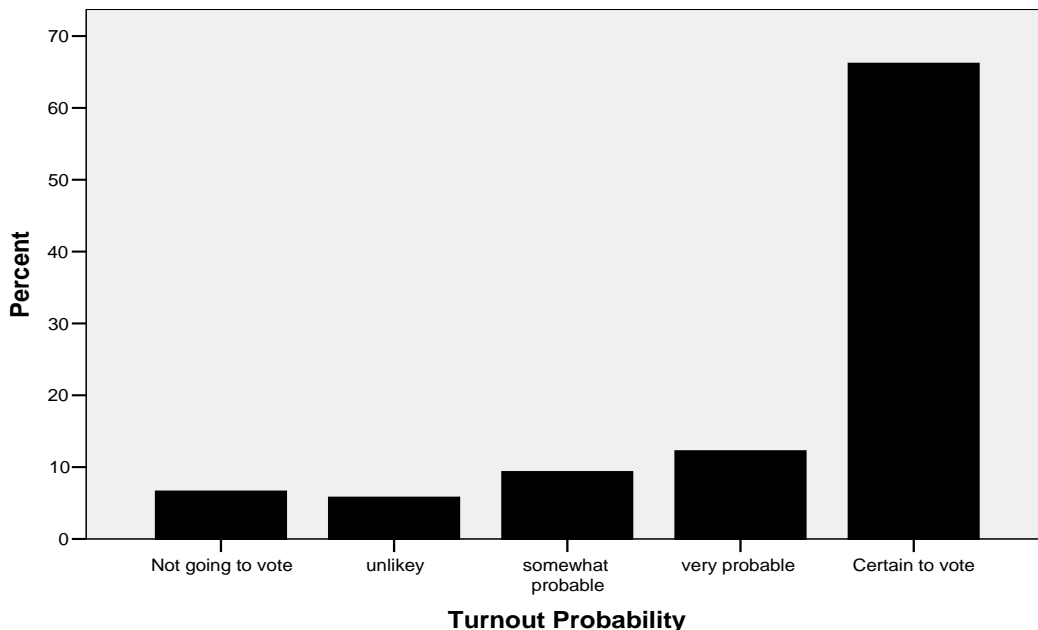
interest in politics – those with strong interest in politics and who follow political affairs tend to vote more often than those without much interest in politics.

Most surveys do not ask the questions necessary to tap the full set of variables listed above. Nor does the Mexico 2006 Panel Study, but it does provide several questions about partisanship, political interest, attention to the media, and expectations of fraud so that a relatively complete model of participation can be posed at the individual level. Tables 2 through 4 offer alternative versions of that model.

The dependent variable in the ordered logit models reported in Tables 2 through 4 is the respondent's self-reported likelihood of voting in May, where the response choices offered are certain to vote, very likely to vote, somewhat likely to vote, unlikely to vote, and certain not to vote. Figure 2 illustrates the distribution of responses to the question asking the likelihood of turning out. The explanatory variables include the following socioeconomic and demographic characteristics: age, sex, marital status, skin color (recorded by the interviewer as a means to tap ethnicity), income, education, urban or

rural residence, and union membership of the respondent or his/her spouse. The Mexico 2006 Panel Study also provides indicators of religion and frequency of attendance at religious services. I created three dummy variables from these two indicators to allow us to identify Protestants, non-believers, and Catholics who regularly attend mass (weekly or more frequently); the default category is hence all other (other religions and less- or non-observant Catholics). In addition, I created a scale variable to tap political engagement, calculated by adding the responses to the questions about interest in politics, frequency of discussing politics, and how close the respondent was following the 2006 campaign. The survey posed two questions that would measure respondent views about the integrity of the election process, one that asked whether the respondent expected there would be fraud in the election, the other that asked whether he or she believed what the IFE stated. Because the two are closely related statistically, I included only the question about anticipated electoral irregularities. One way of tapping feelings about the campaigns and the electoral process is to chart changes in the respondents' views of the three major candidates on feeling thermometers. Thus I include three variables that measure the difference in the respondent's feeling thermometer score for each candidate – Felipe Calderón, Andres Manuel López Obrador, and Roberto Madrazo – between October and May. Lastly, to tap partisanship, a question about partisan identity, which includes a follow-up about how strongly one identifies with the party mentioned, permits us to construct two different variables: a party ID variable and a partisan intensity variable. In addition, we can use an additional question that asks how likely the respondent thinks it is that each candidate will win the election to create yet a third variable: the respondent's assessment of the likelihood that one's preferred candidate will win the election.

Figure 2: Turnout Probability, May 2006



Because the latter three variables all tap different aspects of the partisanship question, they cannot be jointly entered into the model as separate independent variables. Instead, I pose three different versions of the turnout model, the first (Table 2) using intensity of partisanship as an explanatory variable, the second (Table 3) using the anticipated likelihood that one's preferred candidate will win, and the third (Table 4) just using party ID (which includes both strong and weak party identifiers). The default category for the last of these estimations is hence all non-PRI, non-PAN, and non-PRD identifiers – independents, those identifying with minor parties, and those who did not know or refused to answer.

In all three versions of the model, the following socioeconomic/demographic variables are statistically significant: age, marital status, education, and union membership. As we would expect, older Mexicans were more likely to say they planned to vote. Those in marriages (as opposed to those who are single, separated, divorced, widowed, or in free unions) and hence with some level of family stability are more likely to say they would turn out on election day. The more highly educated report they will vote more often than do the lesser educated. And those in organized labor unions or whose spouses are union members are more likely to indicate that they plan to vote. In addition, in one version of the model (version 2), the variable indicating those with white complexion, and hence those likely to regard themselves as white (as opposed to mestizo, Indian, or black), is statistically significant, and in another version (1) it approaches statistical significance at the .10 level. This suggests that white Mexicans (something of a proxy for those of the upper and upper-middle classes) were more likely to plan to vote.

Observant Catholics, Protestants, and non-believers were all more likely to report planning to vote than less- or non-Observant Catholics and others. Observant Catholics and Protestants would be more likely to be exposed to exhortations from the pulpit to fulfill their responsibility as citizens by voting. To some extent, those regularly attending Catholic mass and those Protestants who belong to a strongly identified (perhaps more by the members than by outsiders) religious community draw on a type of social capital such as measured in other studies by involvement in community and social organizations. Non-believers tend to be found among the more highly educated, whom we've learned already tend to vote at higher rates than the lesser educated.

Not surprisingly, the politically engaged – those who are interested in politics, who discuss it frequently, and who followed the campaign closely – were much more likely to report that they planned to vote than the non-engaged. The individual measures making up the political engagement scale similarly show a strong positive relationship with reported likelihood of voting when run separately, but a high degree of inter-correlation led me to create a scale variable.

Table 2
Predictors of the Likelihood of Voting, May 2006
Model 1

<i>Explanatory Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>exp(B)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Age	0.03	0.01	19.84	1.03	0.000
Male	-0.06	0.16	0.13	0.94	0.720
Married	0.70	0.17	16.12	2.02	0.000
Color: White	0.38	0.24	2.55	1.47	0.110
Color: Light brown	0.20	0.18	1.27	1.22	0.260
Income	0.00	0.04	0.01	1.00	0.928
Education	0.17	0.05	11.94	1.19	0.001
Rural	0.11	0.19	0.32	1.11	0.574
Union family	0.69	0.32	4.85	2.00	0.028
Observant Catholic	0.52	0.18	8.69	1.69	0.003
Non Believer	0.90	0.36	6.15	2.45	0.013
Protestant	0.74	0.33	5.11	2.09	0.024
Political engagement	0.26	0.04	49.54	1.30	0.000
Expectation of fraud	0.19	0.10	3.28	1.20	0.070
Change in opinion of Calderón	0.01	0.03	0.19	1.01	0.661
Change in opinion of AMLO	0.02	0.03	0.49	1.02	0.483
Change in opinion of Madrazo	-0.03	0.03	0.96	0.97	0.327
Strong Partisan	0.67	0.25	6.96	1.96	0.008
Weak Partisan	-0.02	0.19	0.01	0.98	0.920
-2 Log Likelihood		Chi-Square	Sig.	Pseudo R-Square	
Intercept Only	1755.99	230.14	.000	Cox/Snell	0.23
Final	1525.85	N=897		Nagelkerke	0.26

Ordered logit estimation. Source: Mexico 2006 Panel Study, October and May waves.

In terms of perceptions of electoral integrity, those expecting fraud were much less likely to vote than those who expected the elections would be clean. When the question asking about the respondent's view of the IFE was substituted for the fraud question, it too proved statistically significant – those who trusted the IFE were more likely to report that they were likely to turn out on July 2. In contrast, the variables that tap changes in the respondent's opinion of the three major candidates did not reach statistical significance, suggesting that these variables may not adequately tap perceptions about the quality and character of the campaign.

Table 3
Predictors of the Likelihood of Voting, May 2006
Model 2

<i>Explanatory Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>exp(B)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Age	0.03	0.01	20.65	1.03	0.000
Male	-0.13	0.17	0.53	0.88	0.467
Married	0.75	0.19	15.90	2.11	0.000
Color: White	0.52	0.26	4.02	1.69	0.045
Color: Light brown	0.16	0.19	0.69	1.17	0.407
Income	-0.02	0.04	0.22	0.98	0.639
Education	0.17	0.05	10.64	1.18	0.001
Rural	0.09	0.20	0.19	1.09	0.662
Union family	0.92	0.37	6.20	2.50	0.013
Observant Catholic	0.53	0.19	8.03	1.70	0.005
Non Believer	1.08	0.40	7.28	2.94	0.007
Protestant	0.93	0.37	6.32	2.53	0.012
Political engagement	0.27	0.04	45.98	1.31	0.000
Expectation of fraud	0.22	0.11	4.08	1.25	0.043
Change in opinion of Calderón	0.01	0.03	0.25	1.01	0.615
Change in opinion of AMLO	0.00	0.03	0.00	1.00	0.963
Change in opinion of Madrazo	-0.01	0.03	0.25	0.99	0.619
Expected probability that preferred candidate will win	0.29	0.15	3.97	1.34	0.046
-2 Log Likelihood		Chi-Square	Sig.	Pseudo R-Square	
Intercept Only	1755.99	230.14	0.000	Cox/Snell	0.23
Final	1525.85	n=808		Nagelkerke	0.26

Ordered logit estimation. Source: Mexico 2006 Panel Study, October and May waves.

In other versions of the model, I included the source questions for the variables about change in perceptions of the candidates – i.e., the perceptions of each of the three candidates on a ten-point feeling thermometer. Positive perceptions of Calderón increased the likelihood of turnout, but perceptions of López Obrador and Madrazo had no effect. Similarly, positive feelings toward the PAN increased the likelihood of voting, but views of the PRD and the PRI had no impact in this model. These latter parallel findings for the 2000 campaign based on the Mexico 2000 Panel Study (Klesner and Lawson 2001; Lawson and Klesner 2004). At an earlier stage in the analysis I also included as explanatory variables questions that asked whether the respondent had been visited by door-to-door canvassers for the candidates and whether he or she had received gifts from any party or candidate. Neither proved to have a statistically significant relationship to likelihood of turnout.

Table 4
Predictors of the Likelihood of Voting, May 2006
Model 3

<i>Explanatory Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>s.e.</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>exp(B)</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Age	0.03	0.01	21.18	1.03	0.000
Male	-0.12	0.16	0.61	0.88	0.435
Married	0.61	0.17	12.80	1.84	0.000
Color: White	0.31	0.23	1.80	1.37	0.180
Color: Light brown	0.17	0.17	0.91	1.18	0.341
Income	0.00	0.03	0.00	1.00	0.947
Education	0.15	0.05	9.34	1.16	0.002
Rural	0.11	0.19	0.36	1.12	0.547
Union family	0.63	0.30	4.44	1.89	0.035
Observant Catholic	0.27	0.04	56.69	1.31	0.000
Non Believer	0.17	0.10	2.90	1.19	0.089
Protestant	0.56	0.17	10.33	1.75	0.001
Political engagement	0.67	0.33	4.12	1.95	0.042
Expectation of fraud	0.78	0.32	6.09	2.18	0.014
Change in opinion of Calderón	0.00	0.03	0.00	1.00	0.981
Change in opinion of AMLO	0.00	0.03	0.01	1.00	0.911
Change in opinion of Madrazo	-0.02	0.03	0.53	0.98	0.468
PANista	0.47	0.22	4.59	1.61	0.032
PRIista	-0.05	0.23	0.04	0.95	0.838
PRDista	0.18	0.21	0.70	1.19	0.402
-2 Log Likelihood		Chi-Square	Sig.	Pseudo R-Square	
Intercept Only	1815.71	217.19	0.000	Cox/Snell	0.21
Final	1598.52	N=920		Nagelkerke	0.24

Ordered logit estimation. Source: Mexico 2006 Panel Study, October and May waves.

In terms of partisanship, those with strong party identification proved to be more likely to say they planned to cast a ballot than weak party identifiers or non-party identifiers (i.e., independents and those who did not know or refused to answer). Similarly, those *prístas*, *panistas*, and *perredistas* who expected their candidate to win were more likely to be planning to vote than those who said thought their was unlikely to win or sure to lose. Of the simple dummy variables indicating partisan ID used in version 3 of the model, only the one for PAN party ID proved to be significant, and *panista* party ID was positively related to the expected likelihood of voting. This latter finding runs counter to the findings for 2000 reported by Buendía and Somuano (2003: 303, 320) based on the 2000 Comparative Study of Electoral Systems survey and to the aggregate data analysis reported above in Table 1 but is more in line with the findings of Moreno (2003) and Klesner and Lawson (2001; also Lawson and Klesner 2004). These discrepancies could be due to problems associated with ecological inference or with relying for this version of this study on questions about the respondent's *anticipated*

likelihood of voting. We will have to await the validated evidence of the post-election wave of the panel study for further evidence here.

To the extent that respondents' reported likelihood of voting changed as the campaign progressed, what explains those changes? Here I will provide just a few bivariate relationships between the change in the respondents' reported likelihood of casting a ballot and potential explanatory variables, beginning with partisanship. Figure 3 shows that most respondents' remained relatively fixed in terms of their expectations about voting during the course of the campaign, although slightly more increased their reported likelihood of voting than decreased it.

Figure 3: Change in Likelihood of Voting, October 2005 to May 2006

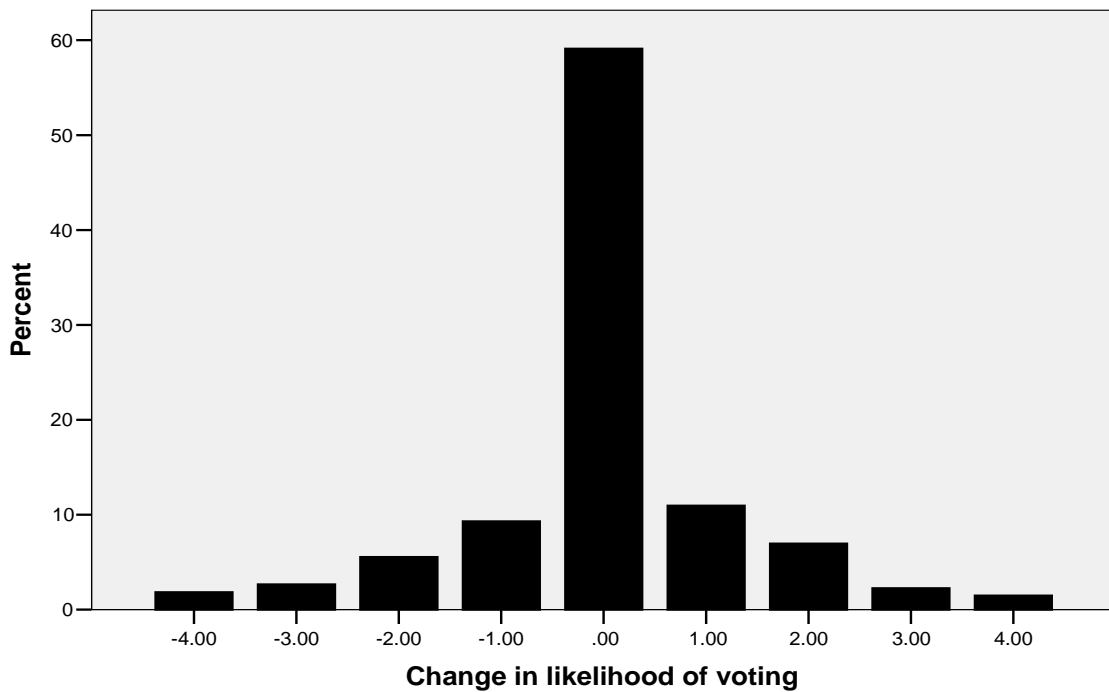


Table 5
Change in Likelihood of Voting by Intensity of Partisan Identity

	<i>Intensity of Partisanship</i>			<i>Total</i>
	none	weak	strong	
Decrease	22.1	20.7	13.7	19.2
No Change	58.7	56.3	63.1	58.8
Increase	19.2	23.0	23.1	22.0

N=1646

Strong partisans, as we might expect, were inclined to increase their likelihood of voting over the course of the campaign than those without party ID (see Table 5). As Table 6 suggests, PAN and PRD identifiers were even more likely to increase their probability of voting than others—both PRI identifiers and independents. Given that the campaign quickly evolved into a contest between the PRD and PAN candidates, this is predictable. The percentage of the partisan population willing to say that they thought their candidate was going to lose was small (see the bottom line of Table 7), but among those partisans who thought their candidate was likely or sure to lose, many more became less inclined to vote over the course of the campaign while those sure of their candidate’s probability of winning became more enthusiastic about turning out at their polling place.

Table 6
Change in Likelihood of Voting by Partisan Identity

	<i>PAN</i>	<i>PRI</i>	<i>PRD</i>	<i>None or DK/NA</i>	<i>Total</i>
Decrease	16.2	23.0	15.7	22.1	19.3
No Change	59.6	57.2	59.6	59.6	59.0
Increase	24.2	19.8	24.7	18.3	21.6

N=1697

Table 7
Change in Likelihood of Voting by Probability of Preferred Candidate Winning

	<i>Probability of preferred candidate winning</i>				Total
	sure to lose	probably will lose	probably will win	sure to win	
Decrease	30.0	35.4	18.3	12.7	18.0
No Change	65.0	41.8	60.1	63.4	59.9
Increase	5.0	22.8	21.6	23.9	22.0
% of sample	1.5%	5.8%	67.0%	25.6%	

N=1353

We might expect that those with greater attention to the media, especially in regard to political news and the election race, would increase in their reported likelihood of voting over the course of the campaign. Indeed, we see that those who followed the campaign closely (Table 8) and those who watch television news regularly (Table 9) were among those with the most fixed likelihood of voting, changing little between October and May, and more likely increasing their expectation of turning out than decreasing it. Those who didn’t follow the campaign closely to begin with and those who don’t regularly watch television news were more likely to change their reported

likelihood of voting, both to increase and to decrease that likelihood, but more to decrease it than to increase it.

Table 8
Change in Likelihood of Voting by Closeness Following Campaign

	<i>Follow Campaign</i>				<i>Total</i>
	Not at all	Little	Some	Much	
Decrease	28.4	22.3	14.0	6.2	19.4
No Change	51.8	52.3	66.0	76.2	59.0
Increase	19.8	25.4	20.0	17.6	21.6

Table 9
Change in Likelihood of Voting by Television News Watching

	<i>How frequently do you watch television news?</i>					<i>Total</i>
	Daily	Several times a week	Once a week	From time to time	DK/NA	
Decrease	14.9	16.2	21.5	28.0	42.9	17.8
No Change	65.4	60.4	56.9	46.3	42.9	60.4
Increase	19.7	23.3	21.5	25.7	14.3	21.8

Finally, those reporting that they expected the election process to be totally clean were more likely to have a relatively fixed position regarding their likelihood of turning out on election day (see Table 10). Those expecting a clean election were more likely to increase their likelihood of turning out than to decrease it. But this was also true of those who expected a fraudulent process.

Table 10
Change in Likelihood of Voting by Anticipated Cleanliness of the Electoral Process

	<i>Anticipated cleanliness of elections</i>				<i>Total</i>
	Not at all Clean	Not very Clean	More or less clean	Totally Clean	
Decrease	23.6	21.4	19.7	11.6	19.3
No Change	47.1	54.5	60.0	72.1	59.3
Increase	29.3	24.1	20.3	16.3	21.5

N=1620

Clearly there is much that we still must learn about electoral participation in Mexico, in the 2006 election as well as in more general terms. While Mexicans parallel most other nationalities in terms of the impact of socioeconomic resources and general political attitudes on turnout, the role of political mobilization remains unclear. While strong partisans clearly turn out more than weak partisans and independents, we don't have a handle on whether there is a partisan advantage for the PAN or the PRD at this point – although we do know that the PRI's formerly significant advantage has disappeared. Further analysis is also clearly called for regarding the impact of the campaign itself on turnout – while the campaign probably encouraged turnout, we don't know whether negative elements of the campaign may have discouraged voting. Certainly there are forces dampening turnout in Mexico, as in most other nations of this world, and identifying those forces is a key challenge for political scientists who study Mexican electoral behavior.

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