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Politics News

The Trump Effect on Mexico's Political Scene

Like no other U.S. presidential election in modern times, the stunning victory of Donald Trump is shaking up Mexico's political scene and shaping the ground for the country's own presidential transition in 2018.

Especially if the U.S. president-elect makes good on his promises to deport undocumented immigrants, build a bigger border wall and toss out the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), questions of the U.S.-Mexico relationship and Mexican sovereignty will likely play much bigger roles in the next presidential and congressional Mexican elections than in previous ones. Whiffs of a political shift are in the air.

The post-election plunge in the value of an already weakened peso, which hit a low of 22.50 pesos to the dollar at some money exchange houses in Ciudad Juarez the morning of November 9 before settling back towards the 20 peso rate of exchange, coupled with a downturn in the Mexican stock market, exhibited the widespread apprehension over Trump's victory. Banco Santander analysts predicted a volatile peso until the economic plans of the new U.S. administration are known.

Senior members of the Pena Nieto administration downplayed the negative significance of the November 8 U.S. election, with officials such as Finance Secretary Jose Antonio Meade and Bank of Mexico head Agustin Carstens stressing Mexico's macroeconomic indices. Quickly moving to calm national nerves, President Pena Nieto reported that he and Trump had a "cordial" telephone conversation November 9 and mutually agreed on the need for a new binational agenda. A possible meeting between the two leaders could happen before Trump's January inauguration, according to La Jornada daily.

But Trump's triumph elicited other political reactions more suited to a national emergency- or an upcoming Mexican presidential election. Notably, Mexico's two leading 2018 presidential hopefuls made back-to-back public statements in the hours surrounding the U.S. vote. In a Facebook message posted the evening of November 8, the left-leaning Morena party's Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador called on Mexicans to stay tranquil.

“There will be no bigger problems because we are going to make use of our right of sovereignty, whoever is in the presidency of the United States,” the former Mexico City mayor said. Eight hours later, in a video uploaded to social media, the conservative National Action Party’s Margarita Zavala, who had earlier expressed desire for a Hillary Clinton victory, released her own message without mentioning Trump’s name.

“This is the hour of uniting all of us to defend all we have achieved and all that we are as a country. We are a strong nation that could assume a strong position of respect before any nation of the world,” the wife of ex-president Felipe Calderon said. “Let’s not forget who we are: We are Mexico.”

Trump’s victory proved to be the occasion for another potential presidential candidate, Nuevo Leon Governor Jaime “El Bronco” Rodriguez Calderon, to blast off a trial balloon via Twitter.

Mexicans across the political spectrum voiced alarm at Trump’s triumph. Jorge Castaneda, who served as foreign minister during the administration of President Vicente Fox, termed the Republican candidate’s victory “a catastrophe for Mexico.”

Saying he doubted Trump would deport an estimated 11 million undocumented residents of the United States, Castaneda nonetheless predicted the new U.S. president would deport about two million Mexicans, a number similar to the Obama Administration’s deportation record. The U.S. election results “demand that Mexican elites lend more attention to the bilateral relationship,” Castaneda said.

“The abhorrent thing that is sick and crazy is that Mexico is at the center of the U.S. campaign and we don’t do anything.” The Mexican academic also predicted that Trump would seek to renegotiate but not scrap NAFTA, and add to the size of a border wall that in fact already exists on sections of the line between the U.S. and Mexico.

Javier Corral, the new governor of the border state of Chihuahua, said he would reach out to the Pena Nieto administration, fellow border governors and Chihuahua-born migrants, many of whom live in California, Texas, New Mexico and Colorado. While deploring the U.S. election as scary, Corral said it was also time to refocus discussion on immigration, push border economic development and protect Mexican immigrants in the United States from persecution.

“The government of the Republic, the president of the Republic, should turn their eyes to see the northern border at this moment as a strategic bastion,” Corral added.

Civil society organizations also began weighing in on the Trump victory. Based in Saltillo, Coahuila, Casa del Migrante urged Mexico City to establish a “diplomatic and political counterweight” with other Latin American nations for the purpose of protecting their nationals in the United States.

Appealing for consistency in principle and practice, the migrant assistance and advocacy organization proposed a revamping of Mexican immigration policies,

“It is more important now than ever for the Mexican State to change its restrictive migration policy into one that takes up the challenge and opportunity of transforming this country back to what it once was: a Mexico disposed to protect and give entrance to all human beings that need its protection,” Casa del Migrante stated.

Sources: La Jornada, November 10, 2016. Articles by Israel Rodriguez, Rosa Elvira Vargas and editorial staff. Aristeguinoticias.com, November 9, 2016. Article by Isaias Robles. Arrobajuarez.com, November 9, 2016. Lapolaka.com, November 9, 2016. El Universal, November 8, 2016. El Diario de Juarez/El Financiero, November 8 and 9, 2016. Proceso/Apro, November 8 and 9, 2016. Articles by Alvaro Delgado, Juan Carlos Cruz Vargas, Mathieu Tourliere, Luciano Campos Garza, and editorial staff.

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