



**IV ANNUAL MEETING OF
ELECTORAL AUTHORITIES**

**REGULATING AND PROMOTING
ELECTORAL OBSERVATION IN MEXICO**

TBILISI, GEORGIA

FEBRUARY 2014



1. The background

- How to build trust and credibility when elections are widely perceived as fraudulent?
- That was the big challenge that Mexico faced after a reiterated crisis of trust in the elections hit bottom in 1988
- In order to cope with and reverse a highly critical political situation a wide consensus emerged: the electoral institutions, laws and procedures had to be fully revamped.



2. The origin

- A long cycle of constitutional and legal amendments that gradually but dramatically changed most of the major components of the Mexican electoral regime started in 1989-1990.
- A key legislative piece to complement and facilitate the efforts deployed to legitimize the new electoral institutions and processes was introduced shortly before the 1994 national elections: legal recognition of the electoral observation. This, under an unorthodox approach.



3. The terminology

- The electoral observation status was granted as a solely right for Mexican citizens. Thus, a different term had to be coined to designate foreign observers: international visitors.
- For practical purposes, there are no major differences between both terms. However, there are a few formal and procedural differences that are worth pointing out.



4. The differences

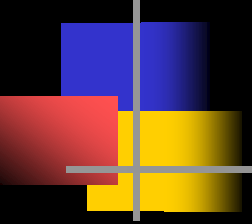
- Being a national or domestic observer is a right of Mexican citizens (granted by law) that has to be exerted according to terms defined by the EMB before the start of each electoral process.
- Being an international observer/visitor is a possibility that might be offered to foreigners on every election, according to a decision taken and under terms defined by the EMB (Federal Electoral Institute - IFE).



5. The requirements and proceedings

- To acquire legal status and to be able to undertake any observation activity, both nationals and internationals, have to be timely and duly accredited by IFE.
- Requirements and proceedings (R&P) for accreditation have to be clearly defined and made public by IFE.
- R&P are relatively easy to meet but tend to be stricter for nationals: they have to attend a training course and submit a financial report one month after the elections.

6. Rights

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- To observe all stages of the electoral process in any part of the national territory.
 - To request and receive all the relevant information from IFE (internationals may request interviews with electoral officers and party representatives).
 - Access to all polling stations to observe polling and counting.

7. Constraints



Role of observers is clearly delimited. They cannot:

- Replace any election officer or polling staff or hinder or interfere in any of their activities.
- Show support or preference for any party or candidate, or declare a winner of the contest.
- Defame electoral institutions, authorities, parties or candidates.



8. Rationale and expectations

- To foster credibility, every single decision taken or activity undertaken by IFE should abide to the law, but also be open to public scrutiny and debate.
- Observers are in a key position to provide a sound and grounded (yet impartial) testimony of the features of the electoral process.
- How to promote high standards in observation and better serve the needs of the observers?



9. The device envisioned

In order to promote high standards in domestic observation, a support fund with Governmental contributions is created for every election. The fund is administered by UNDP Mexico to:

- Provide free technical advice and assistance to observers through a UN pool of experts.
- Partially finance observation projects submitted by national organizations, which are reviewed and approved by a panel of independent experts.



10. The support fund

- It has operated in every single national election since 1994.
- Until 2006, it operated exclusively with Government contributions. In 2009 and 2012, IFE made additional contributions.
- In 2009, access to resources was extended to national academic institutions, and in 2012 to international organizations to conduct comparative studies on specific issues or areas of interest.



11. The fund in figures

	NOA	# ORG	#OBF	%NOB	FUND
1994	81,620	251	12	37%	4.7
1997	24,391	143	24	73%	1.5
2000	38,433	215	30	78%	4.3
2003	14,489	123	21	67%	1.3
2006	25,321	211	26	62%	3.7
2009	18,123	147	26	29%	1.9
2012	32,716	226	43	27%	3.8



12. International observation

- It has been encouraged and welcome in every single national election since 1994.
- IFE has established contacts and links with many stakeholders, and provides them with updated information on a regular basis.
- IFE's IAU elaborates, translates and circulates a special dossier with comprehensive and accurate, yet brief and clear information about the electoral regime in the light of every national election.



12. International observation

- Meetings with top or key IFE officers are arranged upon request.
- Briefings for diplomatic staff or groups of observers are conducted on a regular basis during the electoral period.
- Useful information is regularly provided via the website.
- A special open line of communication with MOFA is dedicated to address any inquiry from the Mexican diplomatic staff deployed abroad.



13. Peer observation

- It is common practice in Latin America to invite one's peers in the region for a short technical observation mission.
- IFE has expanded the invitation to international organizations and peers from other regions.
- IFE also designs special programs that include exchanging experiences in key areas from a comparative perspective and interviews with presidential candidates.
- Submission of reports is welcomed and encouraged.



14. Final remarks

- Elections in Mexico have become highly competitive. The presidential race in 2006 was decided by an extremely narrow margin: 0.56% out of nearly 40 million votes cast.
- Electoral regulations are dense and highly sophisticated. They make big emphasis on equity in the contest (playing the level field).
- Despite the efforts, a culture of acceptance of defeat has not become ingrained. There is ample margin for allegations and complaints.



14. Final remarks

- Allegations of fraud or manipulation to dismiss some results have not been (fully) endorsed by major organizations of domestic and international observers.
- IFE has established an open-door policy towards observers and has promoted cooperative and fruitful cooperation with many organizations. No “blank check” is expected.
- Invitation to the first-ever trilateral seminar, in Mexico next May.