

Mexico-U.S. Scenarios

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The election that will be over in nine days has not been the most polarized in history; whoever recalls the Vietnam era knows that there are cycles in this respect, but also an enormous capacity of regeneration. That is one of America's strengths and characteristics and there is no reason to suppose that something similar would be impossible in the medium-term future. The question is what kind of relationship will ensue between the two nations.

Mexico ended up being an involuntary actor and (nearly) absent in the U.S. elections; many factors came into play to create the current electoral scenario: from technological change to migrants, by way of lousy U.S. support programs to adjust for commercial and technological change and, not at all trifling, the political scorning of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the U.S. Each and every one of the approaches and outcries that arose in that electoral race –from Sanders to Trump- are analytically disputable, but the political fact is that Mexico was, at the end of the day, an easy target of the criticism.

There are two post-electoral scenarios for Mexico and both are complex. In first place is found the possibility that Mr. Trump will win: this is the least desirable scenario from the Mexican perspective for the simple reason that it entails prodigious uncertainty, the latter aggravated by the explosive and impulsive temperament of the personage-in-question. The principal risk of a possible win by Trump lies in the actions in which he individually, in his character as chief executive, could engage, particularly with regard to NAFTA. If Trump wins and he does not act impulsively in this matter, we would enter into a period of uncertainty that would probably involve extensive negotiations and lobbying within the U.S. and, on a second plane, in bilateral matters, regarding which steps to take.

The second scenario, the Clinton triumph, although more benign, would not be free of risks and complications. Clinton has not headed a proactive campaign, which would deny her what the Americans denominate a "mandate". In contrast with Trump, her campaign has instead been obscure and defensive, thus (with the possible exception of foreign policy) it would not be

distinct from that of Obama and, in that regard, it would become a third presidential term, similar to what occurred with Bush Senior in 1988. Clinton has had long experience with Mexico and understands the complexity of the relationship; therefore we would not have to anticipate much ado except for her obvious wish to penalize the Peña government for the invitation to Trump.

The greatest risk of a Clinton government would reside not in Clinton herself but in the Congress. Were the Democrats to win control of the Senate and, on an extreme scenario, of the Congress, Clinton would fall into the hands of activist legislators determined to step up financial, labor and trade regulations, much of that with potentially grim consequences for NAFTA. Viewed from the most benevolent side, under this scenario it would be conceivable for a migratory reform initiative to prosper.

It seems to me that there are three lessons to be derived from this election. The first is without doubt that the Mexican government should acquire better understanding of our neighbors in order to avoid episodes of maladroitness such as the events that transpired with the Trump invitation to Mexico: there are well-established procedures for contacting candidates, thus eschewing the need to reinvent sliced bread.

The second is that the Mexican government cannot and should not intervene in the internal affairs of another nation, but it definitely should advance its interests. In the case of the U.S., this fine line is somewhat difficult to draw, if not artificial, due to the fact that the two societies and their economies are so profoundly intertwined. Although the Mexican government should articulate a strategy that would redress the poor reputation of Mexico exhibited in this electoral contest, it is clear that it is the Mexican society, and not the government, that should respond to the insults heaped upon us by Trump. It is sufficient to remember that the declarations of Fox as well the invitation issued to Trump inflated his electoral stakes. Better for artists, literati, entrepreneurs and chefs to stalwartly defend and advance a fairer picture of Mexico than our beleaguered -and ignorant-politicians.

The geopolitical reality obliges Mexico to get along and build with the Americans and we are the ones who, in the absence of visionary leadership on their part, will be required to take the initiative. Thus, whatever the electoral scenario of next November 8th, Mexico will have no

alternative to that of seeking out the best way to attenuate electoral broadsides and to correct its own dearth of strategic lucidity in the relationship.

Finally, much of what was addressed in the U.S. elections and its effects (for example, on the peso) have to do with what has not been accomplished within Mexico itself. Mexico continue to be a society dependent on low salaries to be competitive, we have returned to financial policies that render economic stability vulnerable and we have not grown up to the need to agree on a political process to settle disputes in general and over the economy in particular. Hence the unending disputes that consume the country and that proved so dangerous through this campaign. As long as we do not attend to these issues, Mexico will continue to produce risk factors that feed into those originating in the outside.

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