

## The Future

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"Anyone who thinks that things cannot get worse does not know the history of Argentina," says the keen observer David Konzevik. In 1913, Argentina occupied the tenth place in the world in product per capita; today it is the 57th. The reason: decades of bad economic policies ostensibly aimed at solving problems of corruption, welfare and poverty. Instead of moving forward, the country has retreated and the Argentines have gone from crisis to crisis for more than a century. When I hear that "things could not be worse," I remember the history of Argentina: things could get much worse, very fast. Just ask the Venezuelans, the country with the largest oil reserves in the world, today living in misery, despair and the worst social and political crisis in its history.

The contest in which we are immersed has three clearly differentiable dynamics: first, the dispute between the future and the past; second, the evolution of President Peña's administration and the perception of overwhelming corruption that emanates from it; and, third, the candidates as individuals: their virtues and defects. Each of these elements contributes to the perceptions that the citizenship has of the candidates themselves and of how to vote.

The dispute between the future and the past lies at the heart of this struggle: it is about two projects and perspectives of the country that propose, on the one hand, Anaya and Meade and, on the other, AMLO. The first, each with his skills and characteristics, agree on the need to build the country of the future through its integral transformation. Their vision can be summarized in one line: both want Mexico to be a rich country and fully integrated into the circles of successful and developed countries.

AMLO, on the other hand, proposes a return to the origins: the country worked better before, when modernity was not intended, when the government imposed its vision on society and the president was all-powerful. His approach is based on the principle that things were going well and that the reforms that began in the 1980s put a dent in the development that the country was already achieving. His model is the Mexico of then; the problem is that the sense of certainty that the past gives does not solve the issues of poverty, inequality or lack of growth that he has successfully raised.

Regardless of the feasibility of any of the proposals, explicit or implicit, of the candidates, these are two radically different ways of seeing and understanding the world. Thus, this election is not about concrete policies but about the direction the country should follow in the future: forward or backward.

The administration of President Peña is a central factor in this year's election, essentially because of its shortcomings, but above all because of its distance from the daily reality of the population. The president's advertising campaigns -in short, stop complaining- and his visits around the country reveal an absolute inability to understand the anger of the citizenship with corruption, and his disinterest in the daily life of the Mexicans. The result is that a nodal component of this election will be the anger with Peña against the fear of returning to the past that AMLO entails. The anger is real and Meade's future depends on his being perceived as independent from the president. Anaya's future depends on his being perceived as "presidential." Meade and Anaya have tried to differentiate themselves from each other, while they present themselves as leaders of the future. Until today, neither has succeeded in establishing that difference and thus becoming a true option before the electorate.

The nature of the candidates themselves is key in the election. In alphabetical order, Anaya has been a successful legislator and heads a coalition of political forces and parties that in the past would have long been considered inconceivable, but his tenacity and rudeness took him to where he is. López Obrador has spent decades in politics, was a successful head of the DF government and has managed to stay in the political arena because he has shown integrity and honesty as a person, while raising the relevant questions that Mexico has yet to resolve, such as poverty, inequality and economic growth. Meade has been a government official for decades, knows better than anyone the twists and turns of the bureaucracy and has a clear and structured vision of the challenges facing the country.

In the American studies on the presidency, a branch of political science, the key element with which presidents are evaluated is their "character," a term that is different in Spanish and translates essentially as integrity: what the person is made of. It is character that determines the way a leader would respond and deal with problems that are not foreseeable or predictable, the point at which integrity is the only thing that counts. It is in these conditions that figures like Lincoln emerge and why they become paragons of leadership and integrity.

Mexicans have before us an election that combines radically different visions of the world, personalities with contrasting stories and skills and a fundamental decision to make that will determine the future. Will Mexicans address the country's problems or will they repeat the history of Argentina?

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