

The PRI Contenders' Debate

On September 9, Mexico watched the first television debate ever among candidates for the PRI presidential nomination, Francisco Labastida Ochoa, Roberto Madrazo Pintado, Humberto Roque Villanueva and Manuel Bartlett Díaz. The debate aimed to show each contender's priorities and proposals before the November 7 primary, as viewers scrutinized how each defended his own proposals face to face with the others.

However, unprecedented as it was together with the much touted elimination of the *dedazo* (the tradition of the president "pointing his finger" to designate his successor), the debate did not live up to expectations. Though all the candidates talked about their concerns, most of which were common to all four, what should have been a debate about platforms and ways of doing politics became vague statements with few concrete proposals about how to solve what they themselves pointed to as the country's most serious problems. In addition, at one point Francisco Labastida Ochoa and Roberto Madrazo Pintado began hurling personal attacks at one another. This was the follow-up of Madrazo's campaign of "denunciations" of the PRI's antidemocratic practices, thanks to which, in his opinion, the party leadership has thrown its support to Labastida, whom Madrazo has referred to as "the official candidate." Meanwhile, Labastida accused Madrazo of being a "liar" and wishy-washy on the issue of selling Pemex, the state-owned oil company, and pointed to his links to former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari.

THE COMMON CONCERNS

Center stage was taken by public insecurity and the fight against crime. Labastida proposed "strength and vigor" to fight it. Madrazo called for higher sentences for convicted criminals and introducing "a reform to protect victims," without specifying what that would mean. Roque said, "public participation and the creation of a new body to fight crime" would be basic. And Bartlett pointed to poverty and marginalization as the roots of crime and proposed fighting them and creating "neighborhood and community defense committees."

Education took second place. The candidates talked of the need for free education and the new training programs especially for women (Bartlett), more and better schools (Madrazo) and quality education (Labastida), although none expressed an opinion about the strike in the National Autonomous University of Mexico, or how they would resolve the conflict if it were up to them.

Third place, although closely related to the first two, was occupied by economic growth: more and better jobs (all the candidates), encouraging savings and support for the countryside (Roque), higher wages (all), jobs for retirees and a plan to support micro-, small and medium-sized companies (Madrazo). Other important concerns were the development of legislation to protect the physically and mentally challenged and the fight against drug use among children and teenagers (Madrazo); housing for the poor (Bartlett); and improving health services and the need to end centralism (Labastida).

HOW THE VIEWERS RATED THEM

Three companies that do nationwide surveys, the *Reforma* daily newspaper, CEO and Indemerc-Louis Harris, all put Roberto Madrazo in first place (27.3 percent, 30 percent and 43 percent, respectively), Francisco Labastida second (25.5 percent, 20 percent and 24 percent), with Humberto Roque and Manuel Bartlett in third. La Crónica-IDS, a company specializing in opinion polls, did surveys in Mexico City, Guadalajara and Monterrey and came up with similar results, although they found percentage differences to be wider (Madrazo, 33 percent; Labastida, 15 percent; and Roque and Bartlett, 6 percent). However, Alduncin, another company whose polls cover the same cities, put Labastida in first place with 35.5 percent, Madrazo in second place with 29.7 percent and Bartlett and Roque trailing in third.