

# OUR VOICE

Two events in the United States are marking a moment of political transition. On the one hand there are the marches of Latino workers, mainly Mexicans, in different U.S. cities, in which four million demonstrators peacefully and creatively demanded a comprehensive migratory reform including the regularization of the legal situation of several million immigrants, until now uncertain and vulnerable. The marches were pro-active, sending a message to U.S. society that migrants strongly desire integration into that country and to become a part of the broad, diverse ethnic-cultural mosaic that the United States has been since its origins as a modern nation. Given the unbounded optimism that these demonstrations may have sparked on both sides of the border among some political circles who support a comprehensive migratory reform, we should mention that they prompted a variety of reactions among the public, the media and a broad spectrum of political and partisan groups. Some conservatives did not approve, above all some congresspersons and constituencies who insist on arguing that migrants who have resided in the United States illegally should not be given legal status. On the other hand, progressive political and social sectors maintain that these mobilizations have revealed a heretofore unknown facet of the Latino movement and that, given their undoubted, manifest strength, they will have a considerable impact on the country's political-electoral map in November's balloting.

What is clear is that in the framework of these events, the debate about immigration reform in the U.S. Congress will probably be held up considerably at a time when it was thought it would be more than successful and that an agreement could have been reached to legalize millions of undocumented immigrants, 70 percent of whom are Mexican. We have to expect that the final agreements will be profoundly influenced by the coming elections, which have already begun to have an impact.

The other important event is the resignation of CIA Director Porter Goss and the president's nomination of General Charles Hayden, National Intelligence Director John Negroponte's second-in-command, still to be ratified by the Senate. This strengthens the hard line in the U.S. intelligence community, headed over the last year by Negroponte, who is also the head of all the security agencies and a very important influence on President Bush in this area. The CIA and Porter Goss were under his tutelage, and they seem not to have understood the fundamental priorities in security defense since 9/11. So, hoping to get absolute control of the coordination of national intelligence, the strong man of U.S. security seems to have gotten rid of Goss, who, despite being his friend and colleague for years, stopped being of use to him in the CIA in a very short time. All that remains is the Senate debate, which should be very intense given that among some sectors of civil rights proponents and congresspersons General Hayden is considered directly responsible for espionage against political and social leaders, which presumably could have violated constitutionally guaranteed individual rights. Therefore, this polemical nomination is not expected to get through the Senate easily. For all these reasons, and given President Bush's low approval rating in the polls (29 percent), the worst in his entire presidency, we can suppose that coming political times in the United States will be unpredictable and very intense.

Hayden's nomination seems a fitting accompaniment to President Bush's recent, though expected, decision to send 6,000 National Guardsmen to reinforce the U.S. southern border. This securitization measure had been hinted at on various occasions in the past. This time, the President seems to have made a very important strategic move, and we would be fooling ourselves if we concluded that it only reflects the defensive obsession of U.S. national security policy in recent years. It is interesting that this takes place at a time when the Senate is debating the future immigration reform, which has to be ready by the end of May at the latest. It is even more interesting if we note that Bush associated the measure with a defense of the possibility of regularizing the situation of several million undocumented immigrants. If this is the case, the president seems to have offered his party's and the nation's most conservative sectors a concession (more border security and *ad hoc* measures against illegal immigration and terrorism) in exchange for approving a comprehensive immigration reform, which, given the pressures of the aforementioned Latino mobilizations, looks to him and to the rest of the U.S. political class like the most sensible political solution. In that sense, it would be advisable for Mexican candidates and government, now running

the closest electoral race in their history, to read this change with appropriate prudence, without resorting to knee-jerk patriotic responses before seeing the real results of the chess game that this measure is a part of. It remains to be seen whether Mexico's presidential candidates will be able to deal with this and many other facets of the international situation with the self-possession and modern vision that Mexico requires for its twenty-first century international policy.

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As previously mentioned, everything seems to indicate that Mexico's coming presidential elections will be the closest race in history. Nothing about the outcome is certain and everything seems to change day to day. At least, that is what the polls show. Their surprising, shifting results seem to testify to a malleable, undecided, extremely changing electorate. By the close of this issue, it is impossible to predict whether the votes are going to be divided evenly among three candidates or if two front-runners will be competing for victory. It is also difficult to say much about scenarios of governability for the country's next president, although everything points to a government even more divided than the current one, without a clear majority in either chamber of Congress, an unprecedented situation for Mexico's young democracy. In our "Politics" section, then, we include several contributions about electoral proposals and scenarios. Alejandro Becerra describes and analyzes the three main parties' proposals about foreign policy and relations with the United States, undoubtedly important in light of recent Latino protests in that country. John Burstein points to the most recent political changes in both countries, emphasizing the importance for the United States of the ideological shift in the Supreme Court due to the new appointments and the transfer of political weight from the presidency to the Congress in Mexico. Carlos Casillas deals with the latter issue by analyzing the potential consequences of a new scenario of ungovernability in Mexico with a presidency facing broad opposition in Congress, as well as the possible reshuffling of political forces and party realignments. Lastly, Jorge Alcocer offers the results of a methodology for creating electoral scenarios based on previous voting trends used to analyze the current race.

Another polemical issue which is not always completely understood is the influence of the media on elections. In his contribution to "Society", Raúl Trejo Delarbre, one of Mexico's most renowned media experts, questions the media's supposed omnipotence and attempts to situate it in its proper place and outline the real role it plays in our democracy. In the same section, we include an article by researcher Gabriela Angeles about the most important discussions at the 4<sup>th</sup> World Water Forum held in Mexico City last March. She focuses particularly on the alternative positions, critical of the proposal to privatize water as a solution to its scarcity in vast regions of the planet.

As we have already mentioned, the parties' positions on foreign affairs and relations with the United States have had an unprecedented importance in Mexico's electoral process, in part due to the recent protests by the Latino community there. In "United States Affairs", specialist Mónica Vereá presents an overview of the implications of the different immigration bills currently being discussed in the U.S. Congress.

Events have been very dynamic in recent months in all of North America. So, Canadian expert Elisa Dávalos contributes an article about the repercussions of Stephen Harper's electoral victory, particularly with regard to federalism and his proposals for Canada's provinces and their attributions.

Another very timely topic is the economic and trade integration of the Americas. In our "Economy" section, we include an article by analyst Berenice Ramírez López about the alternatives to the U.S.-proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas for regional integration developed recently by a series of countries that oppose and criticize U.S. hegemony, including Venezuela, Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. In the same section, we present an illustrative article about the causes, dimension and impact of the informal economy in Mexico by Carlos Márquez-Padilla and Daniel Tapia, who focus their analysis on the lack of incentives and the obstacles built into the legal and tax systems that discourage people from complying with formal business requirements.

As a contribution to the festivities celebrating the bicentennial of Benito Juárez, known as the Apostle of the Americas, in this issue we include a contribution by historian Patricia Galeana. She shows us both Juárez, the able politician, and Juárez, the great statesman, emphasizing his undeniable influence on later generations of Mexican politicians, including those of today, regardless of their ideological bent.

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In this issue, the “Art and Culture” section pays homage to Juan Soriano, one of Mexico’s most versatile, innovative twentieth-century artists, who died at the beginning of this year. Soriano’s work includes painting, sculpture, monumental sculpture, graphics, sketches and ceramics. All of it carries the personal stamp of an artist who, as art critic Jaime Moreno Villarreal writes, took responsibility for his own creations and was never seduced by fads. In this same section, we include an article about mezcal, one of the beverages distilled from maguey sap. Based on the hypothesis that this technique was not brought to Mexico by the conquistadors, but that almost all the Mesoamerican cultures distilled this beverage in pre-Hispanic times, Carmen Serra Puche and a team of researchers began the Road of Mezcal project which has led them to discover that throughout the country communities continue to make mezcal with pre-Hispanic techniques and tools.

“The Splendor of Mexico” section visits the mountains of Veracruz. We start with two brief articles by Cecilia Rábago about the region’s main cities, Orizaba and Córdoba. During the colonial period, both were stopping-off points for travelers and trade between Mexico City and the port of Veracruz, and developed thanks to their climate and the natural bounty of their surroundings. This route between Mexico City and Veracruz has been one of the most important throughout Mexican history, which is why when railroad tracks began to be laid, one of the first lines to be built was the one that connected the two cities. Luis De la Llave writes about the difficulties the engineers and builders had in laying the tracks through the mountains. Bridges and tunnels crossing ravines and mountains, empty stations that have been turned into homes, and abandoned electricity plants testify to the importance of the railways in the early twentieth century. Lastly, Mauricio Degollado draws a brief picture of Orizaba Peak, Mexico’s highest mountain, which from time immemorial has watched over the cities of Córdoba and Orizaba. Its melting snows providing an endless supply of water, it is vital for life and nature in the entire region, as well as a favorite spot for mountain climbers from the world over.

Our “Museums” section includes an article about the Córdoba Museum which boasts an important collection of donated archaeological pieces representing different Mesoamerican and local cultures. “Ecology” completes our visit to the mountains of Veracruz with an article about Las Cañadas, an ambitious, privately-owned ecological project that aims to protect and preserve the remnants of the region’s cloud forest and to change our very limited idea about what sustainable development is.

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In this issue, “Literature” is dedicated to a genre and literary trend that sketches a profound portrait of the social and family environment of drug trafficking. This genre has emerged above all in northern Mexico, and one of its outstanding proponents is Sinaloa-born writer Élmér Mendoza, a fragment of whose novel, *El amante de Janis Joplin* (Janis Joplin’s Lover), we reproduce here for the first time for English-speaking readers. Literary critic Miguel Cabañas writes about the relationship between literature and drug trafficking in general and its manifestations in Mexico and Mendoza’s work in particular.

We lost two illustrious, beloved intellectuals since our last issue came out. Our “In Memoriam” section pays them a well deserved tribute. They are the extraordinary playwright and director, Ludwik Margules, who was a director at the university theater, and the renowned, innovative demographer Raúl Benítez Zeneno, former director of the UNAM’s Institute for Social Research. Two admired figures of Mexican culture, writer Juan Villoro and social scientist and demographer Carlos Welti, write about their human side and their undeniable contributions to their respective areas of interest.

*José Luis Valdés-Ugalde*