

What Went Wrong

What the U.S. Media Didn't Tell You

WHEN IT COMES to recognizing and reporting on instances of election fraud in the world, the U.S. corporate media appears to take its cue from White House foreign policy. Consider the Bush administration and the national media's condemnation of the Ukraine elections in 2004: exit polls were amiss; clearly there was a problem. U.S. diplomats, led by Colin Powell, bewailed the vile practice of election fraud when it was the Russian-friendly incumbent Prime Minister Yanukovich who had been doing the vote rigging. U.S. diplomatic remonstrations were severe and led to another election, which resulted in the victory of the much

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more palatable Victor Yushchenko. Unlike its involvement in the Ukraine election, the White House barely twitched while Egypt's Hosni Mubarak conducted a murderous reign of terror against voters who would likely support the Muslim Brotherhood in that country's most recent parliamentary

elections. Major U.S. media outlets barely noticed it either, and we would see this pattern repeat regarding extensive irregularities in the 2006 Mexican presidential elections. Both the White House and the U.S. media would ignore and dismiss the evidence of election fraud and quickly pronounce the preferred candidate the "winner" of a "free and fair election."

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This year's July 2 presidential election in Mexico promised to be a hotly contested race essentially between the candidates of rival parties: the popular former mayor of Mexico City, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), versus former Energy Secretary Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party (PAN),

the controlling party of President Vicente Fox. Calderón's election platform would maintain the status quo favored by the business elite while López Obrador promised a number of progressive measures, including a renegotiation of the North American Free Trade Agreement, which has decimated Mexican farmers since it went into effect in 1994. As might be expected, the Bush administration fully supported Calderón's candidacy.

Long before the election, President Fox's government, and Fox himself, tried to prevent López Obrador from even entering the race. When a money laundering and bribery scheme meant to implicate López Obrador was exposed as a fabricated plot (an interrogation tape implicating PAN members in plotting to prevent his candidacy has recently surfaced), another plan, the so-called "desfuero scandal," was brought out. The new plan would strip López Obrador of his governmental immunity and indict him on what were widely regarded as trumped up charges of ignoring a court injunction concerning the construction of a hospital access road in Mexico City. After widespread protests, President Fox decided that the strategy wasn't working and conceded at least a temporary immunity for López Obrador.

While such efforts proved fruitless, it was clear that López Obrador was going to have a very difficult time come election day. With his opponent well ahead in the polls only months before the election, Calderón launched a vicious negative campaign against the PRD candidate, which had its intended effects, as did a presidential debate which polls showed Calderón had won. Contrary to Mexican election law, President Fox actually ran advertisements attacking López Obrador. For this, Fox was censured and ordered to refrain. More sly and illegal behavior came to light when one of Fox's former allies, Arnulfo Montes Cuen, accused Fox of diverting government money from antipoverty programs to Calderón's campaign coffers. Mere weeks before the election the two candidates appeared to be dead even in some polls, a condition ripe for election-day exploitation.

The Bush administration's award of a no-bid contract to the company ChoicePoint, ostensibly to provide "counter-

In Mexico?

by Kenneth Anderson



terrorism databases” on foreigners, aroused further suspicion of possible exploitation. This effort was notable in that its focus wasn’t on the Middle East but on Latin America—specifically on countries that employed left-leaning governments or that were threatening to do so, such as Mexico. Though it is unknown whether ChoicePoint’s database service provided anything to PAN, the company’s prior engagement would cause little comfort to those familiar with its employment in the electoral processes of the United States. (ChoicePoint was the company contracted by the state of Florida in 2000 to produce the now-notorious felon list that was used to scrub voters from Florida’s voter rolls. Their list was notable for two salient features: it contained very few actual felons, and those listed were mainly Democratic voters or those thought likely to be so.)

Further suspicion fell on the election outcome when it was learned that the computer systems of the Federal Election Institute (IFE) were partly designed by companies and partners of Calderón’s brother-in-law Diego Hildebrando Zavala. The IFE also learned that Calderón’s party, PAN, had somehow acquired voter registration data, something strictly forbidden under law. The IFE downplayed this as a minor problem, although according to *El Universal* the extent of the acquisition appeared to be unknown. With voter rolls possibly in the hands of party operatives and questionable family ties to the tabulation software, the stage

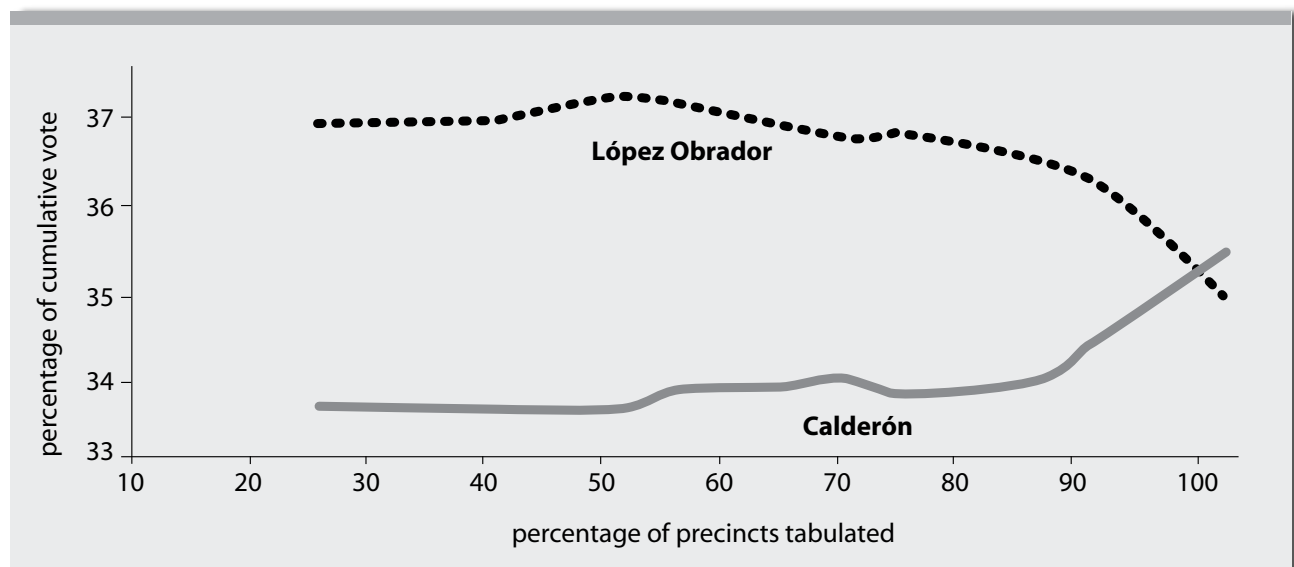
was set. A clean election was unlikely to appear on Mexico’s horizon.

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The night of Mexico’s presidential election witnessed objectively strange behavior, both in the initial, real-time count (the Preliminary Elections Results Program or so-called PREP) and in the actions of IFE officials. As detailed in an analysis by University of Texas at El Paso Physics Department Chair Jorge A. López, the IFE reported the PREP count after ten thousand ballot boxes had been tallied; no incremental count had been provided during this initial phase. At this point Calderón had a lead of more than 4 percent over López Obrador, which, as the evening’s PREP count proceeded, sharply and steadily decreased throughout the night.

By midnight many election observers believed that the result was inevitable: López Obrador would win the election. However, at three o’clock on the morning of July 3, the day after the election, the trend suddenly halted and the tally maintained a constant and unwavering margin of 1.1 percent for Calderón over López Obrador.

Not only was the PREP count inconsistent with itself—James K. Galbraith affirmed in his July 17 *Guardian* piece that vote totals didn’t match the reported percentage said to have been won by each candidate—but the PREP count was completely at odds with exit polls conducted throughout



ADAPTED FROM *NARCO NEWS BULLETIN*

the day, which reported that López Obrador was maintaining a lead of some 2 percent over Calderón. Exit poll results weren't widely known, nor were they disseminated. The publication *Proceso* had reported that "senior Interior Ministry officials" had contacted Mexican television networks and persuaded them to "keep their exit polls off the air."

Other blatantly odd behavior by IFE officials confounded the PREP count. Some 2.5 million ballots, which López Obrador had accused the IFE of withholding during election day, suddenly reappeared in time for the final count. This sudden emergence of 2.5 million ballots trimmed Calderón's initially reported winning margin of 400,000+ votes down to 257,000. The discovery of these "missing ballots" was presaged by previous reports and photographic evidence published in *El Universal* and later on the *Narco News Bulletin* showing that ballot boxes from at least three precincts won by López Obrador were discovered in a Neza-huacoyotl garbage dump.

When the "final count" (really just a count of the precinct tally sheets) was undertaken, which removed the 10,000 polling station lead Calderón acquired in the PREP count, things were once again looking good for López Obrador. On July 5, 2006, Reuters reported that, with 75 percent of polling stations counted, López Obrador had a lead of 2.2 percent, completely agreeing with the exit polls from election day. But by the next day Calderón's numbers mysteriously recovered and moved him into the lead with the slimmest of margins. It was during the tallying of the final 25 percent of precincts that the voting pattern, constant throughout the count, suddenly exhibited incredible behavior, with precincts then reporting wins for Calderón by margins of 5 to 1, 10 to 1, and, near the very end, ballot ratios of 100 to 1. Professor Victor Romero of Mexico's National University pronounced this turn of precinct events a "miracle" and

a statistical impossibility, though the miraculous numbers were hardly the result of divine intervention. In fact, *La Jornada* ran a still photo from a videotape clearly showing an IFE official stuffing a ballot box.

After such evidence of blatant voter fraud emerged, demands for a full recount followed. While pronouncements by the IFE, Calderón, Fox, the Bush administration, and many in the mainstream U.S. press had blessed the election as the "cleanest in the history of Mexico" (given Mexico's history, this might actually be true), the IFE finally agreed to a partial recount after several enormous public demonstrations—referred to as the "voto por voto" campaign. The IFE continued to resist a full recount, claiming that only evidence of ballot box tampering could justify such action. When videotape taken by Mexican-born Hollywood director Luis Mandoki, working on a documentary about López Obrador, showed that numerous ballot packets and boxes in several precinct stations were open, some appearing to have been broken wide open, this was still not sufficient for the IFE to declare what was obvious to almost everyone. There were serious grounds to believe that many ballot boxes had been tampered with and, by extension, that the entire election was tainted. Though a full recount appeared unlikely given the establishment's resistance to it, a partial recount was forthcoming, a recount that would demonstrate serious problems with the PREP and final count tallies.

Mexico's Supreme Electoral Tribunal (known as TRIFE) ordered a recount of 11,839 of Mexico's 130,000 precincts (about 9 percent). None of the recounted precincts would be ones where the near-impossible ballot ratios of 100 to 1 had been observed. Nor would they be precincts where ballot boxes had been found in the garbage. Despite ignoring what appeared to be the most blatant signs of election fraud, the recount *still* clearly demonstrated ballot problems and

evidence of both ballot box stuffing (known as *taqueo*) and ballot looting (*saqueo*). The *Narco News Bulletin* reported that in 7 percent of Mexico's precincts, over 126,000 votes had been altered either through *taqueo*, enhancing Calderón's total, or through *saqueo*, reducing López Obrador's. In previous instances of election fraud on this scale, the TRIFE actually annulled the precincts in question. But TRIFE failed to observe its own precedent. Were these precincts annulled, the decision would have given López Obrador the win by 425,000 votes.

But this wasn't the decision. On September 5 TRIFE ruled that Calderón's "win" would stand, despite having annulled almost 238,000 votes. TRIFE hasn't revealed the rationale behind the annulment, which didn't significantly alter the overall result, nor has a transparent accounting of the recount been produced.

The overall judgment revealed significant problems with the ballots but TRIFE refused to acknowledge any larger fraud effort, something that, at this point, seems patently clear. In fact, an independent study of the vote recount issued September 2 by the Center for Economic and Policy Research determined that there was a significant reduction in the vote count for Calderón and an actual gain for López Obrador. CEPR notes that this is "inexplicably one-sided," something that shouldn't happen from "mistakes." What is

clear from all this is that, in every single instance of partial recounting after the initial PREP tabulation, Calderón's winning margin was reduced, sometimes significantly so, as in the case of the suddenly "rediscovered" 2.5 million ballots by the IFE.

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As consumers of corporate news media in the United States, Americans are generally unaware regarding most of what has been chronicled here. Many are probably wondering what all that fuss was about in Mexico, if they wonder about it at all. In part this is a result of our general disinterest in international affairs that aren't based in warfare, but it is much more a function of the national media and the manner by which it chose to portray the Mexican elections. To those reading U.S. newspapers, López Obrador is a "leftist" and a rabble rouser; a grouser clearly unhappy with the result of a "free and fair election." To viewers of television news, the issue of the Mexican elections would have been scarcely a blip amongst reports of terror threats, wars, and references to Nazis and "Islamofascists."

In reality, López Obrador is much more of a centrist in Mexican politics and, in fact, almost didn't receive his party's nomination because he wasn't far enough to the left. However, López Obrador's popularity in Mexico couldn't be denied, and it was recognized that he would have the best chance to win against Calderón. But Vincente Fox's government and the PAN party mounted an anti-democratic program of illegal campaigning, money laundering, and election rigging that simply wouldn't allow the election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. That the Bush administration backed Felipe Calderón and subsequently declared the Mexican election clean says much more about its policy of so-called "freedom and democracy" than it does about the election itself.

The Mexican election was a profound test of the democratic will of that country. That will was seen in the throngs who protested and demanded a fair election. Sadly, the incumbency of Mexico's ruling elite, beholden as they are to our own country's ruling class, chose power over the people's choice. This is something Americans should be deeply concerned about, not only because Mexico is a close neighbor but because we need to start recognizing that our hypocrisy regarding the ideal of democratic government is something the rest of the world is well aware of, even if we choose not to be. ☒

Kenneth Anderson is a scientist living in Baltimore whose political, social, and media commentary appears in various online forums, including *Op-Ed News* and his daily blog at www.anythingtheysay.com.

On the Origin of Gods

by R.B. Stewart, jr.

Since the beginning of consciousness, Man's fear of the unknown has given rise to the invention of mythical, omnipotent deities to shield him from all real or imagined pestilence and suffering. Man refers to these omnipresent and all encompassing guardians as gods. They are all-powerful protectors, who recognize fidelity, and reward the faithful with everlasting life. This book chronicles Man's obsession with gods even before cave dwelling days, and how gods have been an essential element in the evolution of mankind.

"This is good reading."

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