

17.588f13 Week 11 Paper Topic Option #1

Mexico's Federal Electoral Institute has hired you as a consultant to recommend ways to prevent clientelism in the federal midterm elections of 2015. What would you suggest they do?

As background: Mexican federal elections are administered by an autonomous body known as the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE). Over the last fifteen years, elaborate precautions have been put in place to prevent fraud and manipulation. For instance, all voters carry cards with biometric identifiers that must be presented to polling station workers (who are selected at random from the population); both these ID cards and the electoral registry (which includes photographs of the voters) are marked whenever voters vote, and voters' thumbs are also stamped with indelible ink. Representatives of political parties and authorized poll watchers may observe elections at all polling stations and verify whether polling station workers are accurately recording who is voting; however, they may not attempt to influence voters on Election Day, attempt to discern how voters mark their ballots (behind opaque plastic screens), or offer inducements of any kind to vote for any particular party. Counting of the ballots by polling station workers is conducted only after the polling stations are closed and emptied, in the presence of party representatives, an IFE representative, and any other authorized observers.

Despite these and other precautions, clientelism and even vote-buying are thought to remain a problem in Mexican elections. Some suspected practices include:

- Significant discretionary spending by state governors and mayors that is not accounted for and could be used to influence voters;
- Representatives of parties paying for people to vote (even who they vote for cannot be observed);
- Representatives of parties or government officials insisting that recipients of government benefits sign pledges to vote for a party in the run-up to the election, or threatening to withdraw benefits from those who do not vote;
- Party representatives or government officials promising benefits to those who pledge their support in advance (even in the absence of a clear enforcement mechanism);
- Techniques to frustrate the secret ballot, such as voters' photographing their marked ballots with cellphones and the "carousel" (in which a broker marks a ballot but does not deposit it, passing it secretly to a voter, who deposits the marked ballot and then returns her unmarked ballot to the broker, and so forth);
- Voters' "loaning" their ID cards to similar-looking individuals;
- Collusion between polling station workers and party representatives;
- Etc.

Your paper, obviously, should not focus mechanically on these particular practices but rather draw on the readings to address what sorts of strategies the IFE should adopt.

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