

2018

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The year 2018 came early thanks to Peña and Trump, resulting in a lethal combination for the expectations, fears, spirits and, above all, the future, because it appears to pave the way, in inexorable fashion, for the presidency of López Obrador. This apparent causality is seen reflected in the surveys, those that the selfsame AMLO has procured converting, with enormous skill, into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Will it be that easy?

Paraphrasing Mark Twain, “For every problem there is a solution which is simple, clean and wrong” and this is not the exception. The argument in favor of AMLO is sustained on five elements: first, ‘we already tried the PRI, we already tried the PAN, the PRI returned and things still don't work.’ Second, only he, a dyed-in-the-wool nationalist, can defend us from Trump; third, there are no credible candidates in the other parties; fourth, that’s what the surveys say; and finally, it’s his turn. The candidate has conducted himself in "presidential" fashion, thus adding to this picture-perfect scenario.

The surveys say many things but, at fifteen months from the elections, these things are scarcely relevant, especially when those who are still undecided are, to a great extent, the largest block of the electorate. With a sole candidate in the panorama, present surveys strengthen all of the biases and serve to manipulate public discussion.

The argument against the PRI lies in that this government has been a failure, its unpopularity makes it impossible for a successor to rise from his ranks, corruption is stifling the country and all of its potential candidates, and in that, despite its promise to be an effective government, once the reforms were passed, it hasn't got its act together. Were this not enough, in its obsession to remain in power, the government has politicized all of its actions, to the extent of committing suicide in last July’s elections and postponing bringing gasoline prices up to date. Consequently, says the political mantra, there is no way that a PRIist could win.

The argument against the PAN lies in its that its internal disputes annul it, that there is no charismatic candidate capable of enthusing the citizenry and, above all, that it has proven to be, historically, a great opposition party, but one incapable of governing successfully. In sum, it would seem that next year’s elections are unnecessary in that it is a done deal. I ask myself whether that is in truth so obvious. Beyond the evident avatars of any contest,

–the successes and the errors, luck and bad luck, the circumstances at the time (economy, inflation, etc.) and the moods of the voters- it appears to me that it is the PRI that will determine the result of the election and not AMLO.

In the first place, elections with more than two candidates with no runoff always end up being contests of two, a nearly iron law of politics. In this respect, the key question is whether the election will in the end be between PRI and Morena or between Morena and PAN. *Ceteris paribus*, it seems evident that AMLO will be the “elephant in the living room,” the candidate to beat.

In second place, the essential characteristic of the present point in time is the fragmentation of the electorate. In principle, today all of the parties could win because, in contrast with the past, the electorate no longer entertains permanent loyalties. In addition to that, the appearance of the Independents, –one or many- as non-party candidates for the presidency, adds to the dispersion of the vote as well as to its fragmentation. I am certain that none of the potential independent candidates can win, but all compete for the same segment of the electorate, typically the urban middle classes, precisely the population that AMLO requires to win over beyond his hard base in the center of the country plus some other localities in the states of Guerrero and Michoacán. That is, almost every vote that will go to an Independent is one vote less for AMLO.

To the latter we must add the PRD or, at least, Miguel Ángel Mancera who, as much as he is trying to build a multicolor coalition, the measure of his success will reside in rendering the PRD viable more than in winning the presidency. That is, he divides the vote of the Left. The upshot of all this is that the next President of Mexico will probably be elected by less than 30% of the vote.

In third place, with such a low threshold for victory, the crucial question is how the PRIists will vote because, despite the party's unpopularity, it continues to command the country's largest hard vote. Some place this hard vote at around 26% of the electorate, a number not very distant from that necessary to win the election. However, as we were able to observe in 2006, PRIists do not vote in an automatically and guaranteed manner: Roberto Madrazo scarcely procured little more than one half of the hard vote of his party at that moment.

Thus, my reading of the current political reality tells me that the PRI could win the election if it were to field a candidate capable of taking 100% of its rank-and-file members on election day. It seems to me that there are only two or three PRIists who

could get that job done. Therefore, if my analysis is correct, the election is in the hands of the PRI and not AMLO. Everything will depend on the candidate postulated and his/her capacity for getting all of the PRIists out to vote on Election Day.

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