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## Mexico: the multifaceted significances of the 2024 election

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**Jenny Pearce**, who explores the Mexican elections in a new film, sets out why this is potentially Mexico's most violent election to date, and the key issues the new President will need to address once in office.

Mexico was governed by a single party (the PRI) for 71 years: from 1929 to 2000. During these decades the PRI oversaw a range of national projects underpinned by what could be characterised as transactional politics between the federal centre and localities. It was able to manage these transactions between local and regional political and economic powers from the centre, until it lost power in 2000 to the PAN.

Although the PRI returned to power in 2012, remaining there until 2018, Mexico's transactional politics had already become a much more localised, decentralised affair, with drug trafficking money and leverage becoming a critical factor. This has brought with it a great deal of violence. And this violence has grown exponentially since PAN President Felipe Calderón declared a "war on drugs" in 2006. Annual death tolls have been over 30,000 in recent years, with many expressions of violence not counted in homicide statistics such as disappearances and forced displacement.

It is the violence during electoral processes that raises alarming questions today about politics in Mexico and the significance of the 2024 election. According to *El País*, Mexico is heading towards its most violent election ever, with 30 candidates murdered, 77 threatened and 11 kidnapped at the time of publication (24 April 2024).

The 2024 election is thus raising the issue of whether the presidential candidates have policies to address the violent criminalities that have extended through the country and penetrated political life in a number of key states. Amongst the violence, the killing of women because they are women (femicides) is a major issue. A report in 2022 by INFOBAE cited official statistics that show that 10 women were murdered every day in Mexico that year, but only a third of cases were ever investigated as femicides. Impunity is a huge issue for the country.

## Mexico is likely to elect its first female President

For that reason alone, the fact that the two frontrunner candidates are women, with one, Claudia Scheinbaum, the most likely winner, is giving added significance to this election. The other female candidate, Xóchitl Gálvez, represents a much-weakened opposition coalition which includes the PRI, PAN and PRD.

This is another significance to the election. Scheinbaum is the candidate of the Sigamos Haciendo Historia coalition and a member of its dominant movement, MORENA, the party founded by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), now finishing his six-year term. He is doing so on a high popularity rating, having prioritised social programmes, particularly pension support for the elderly, infrastructure and an investor-friendly environment which has attracted companies who want to take advantage of nearshoring – the production of goods for the US market in Mexico.



Will [the new President] offer something new to what have been politically progressive but socially conservative policies, in which security has been essentially handed to the army? ”

## Who is Claudia Scheinbaum, the next likely President of Mexico?

A key question of this election is whether Scheinbaum will continue AMLO's policy approaches or will she offer something new to what have been politically progressive but socially conservative policies, in which security has been essentially handed to the army? This diminished the role of local municipal and state police without notable impacts on crime and violence reduction, and with fears that the army has increased its power in the country.

As Mayor of Mexico City (2018 to 2023), Scheinbaum oversaw a decline in homicides. The question is, as President, will she offer new approaches to security, giving more attention to the many violences in the country, and address issues of impunity that have so enabled such violence to thrive?

Unlike her mentor, AMLO, Scheinbaum – a scientist by training, with an academic specialism in energy engineering – has shown much more interest in sustainable development and green issues. And many will hope she will offer new approaches to a progressive view of Mexico's development.

If elected, however, Scheinbaum would be under pressure to be a continuity president, and she has, to date, shown great loyalty to the current leader.

Whatever her approach, one key question is whether she will be able to communicate with Mexico's population as AMLO has done so cleverly, with daily televised press conferences enabling him to refute all criticisms. Some argue that



AMLO has weakened, or tried to weaken, some of the institutional checks and balances in Mexico. As such, this election has significance also for the direction of Mexican democracy.

Who will ultimately govern will only be answered in time, but what is clear is that whoever is elected in June 2024 will have many difficult issues to address. ■

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