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Presidential Elections of 1934 in Colombia and Mexico

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Abstract

This chapter reflects upon the 1934 electoral processes of Colombia and Mexico, after which presidents Alfonso López Pumarejo and Lázaro Cárdenas, respectively, were elected. They both designed social government programs, with the aim of improving the living conditions of the population. From the electoral history, a historiographical and documental review was carried out, which allowed for a better understanding of the political dynamics of the two candidates in distinct settings, but both with political projects oriented toward aiding the most vulnerable. This allowed a view of how their government programs were perceived during the electoral campaigns and what brought about the favorable results which made Alfonso López the president of Colombia and Lázaro Cárdenas the president of Mexico.

Keywords: presidential elections, party, social reforms, popular sectors

1. Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to compare the political and the electoral processes of 1934 which took place in Colombia and México, when Alfonso López Pumarejo was elected president of Colombia and Lázaro Cárdenas president of México. In Colombia, in 1934, the Liberal Party had managed to consolidate majorities in the electoral results after the national and local governmental elections conducted in 1933. Simultaneously, the Conservative Party had weakened and, given the public order situation, in which they condemned the fraud and lack of guarantees, they decided to abstain from participating in the presidential election. As a result, the only candidate was Alfonso López Pumarejo, who presented a proposal for reform focused on the popular sectors, which he called *La Revolución en Marcha* (Revolution in Progress). In the case of Mexico, the political leader Lázaro Cárdenas, the candidate for the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Party), the official party, had at his command state resources and a vast organizational infrastructure for his campaign, which allowed him to defeat the other three candidates. Cárdenas' project had an underlying social tone and was denominated the "Six-Year Plan"; for many, this was the materialization of the revolution. Thus, both candidates had every chance of winning the election, either because there were no other contenders or because their rivals did not have enough electoral strength to compete. On the other hand, both presented social reforms which captivated the voters. The main objective of this chapter is to analyze the support for, as well as the opposition to, these candidates, the nature and the scope of their political projects, in addition to the electoral process they followed in order to gain power.

The topic of the elections has been approached from different perspectives; however, attention has been focused more on electoral legislation [1–6], electoral practices [7–14], the elections per se, and the construction of citizenship [15–18], although the works dedicated to the presidential elections have been few [19], while a considerable number have focused on the regional elections [20]. Thus, the topic of the elections has gradually drawn the attention of historians, although there have not been any comparative studies that portray the different connections and works of the presidential candidates, their parties, and the electoral bases, as is the intention of this study.

Initially, a historiographical review on the topic was carried out, which allowed for the identification of their approaches, methodological processes regarding elections, and the construction of citizenship, in Colombia as well as in Mexico. Afterward, a review of the newspapers and documents of the time was conducted, which led to the characterization of the political and electoral processes in both countries. An analysis and interpretation of these, in addition to the events that were the presidential campaigns in Colombia and Mexico, were implemented under the parameters of the comparative method, for which spaces and temporalities with similar dimensions were designated. In that same vein, the following aspects were defined: the situation of the political parties in both countries; the campaign rituals with regard to electoral tours and government plans, which showed a rapprochement of the candidates and the electors; the use of the media during the campaign; and the expectation created by the proposal of a government with a social orientation among the popular sectors.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first is related to the 1934 electoral campaign in Colombia and the Revolution in Progress. The second refers to the 1934 election in Mexico, the Six-Year Plan promoted by the presidential candidate Lázaro Cárdenas, and how support was obtained in the political and popular spheres. The third presents a reflection upon the scope and limitations of both campaigns and the government plans from a comparative perspective.

2. Alfonso López Pumarejo and the Revolution in Progress

The topic of the elections is still of great relevance as regards understanding the political dynamic, taking into account the recent elections in Venezuela, Colombia, and Mexico. This is because elections define a state's political orientation, social policies, and its general form of governance. In the case of Colombia, in the political scene that we have just experienced, there was a return to the tensions between friends and foes, among the followers of the right and the left, in order to find alliances, trends, and dynamics that, at times, are far removed from the needs and interests of the population. The 1930s in Colombia were not exempt from the debates, partisan polarization, projects of social reform, and the defense of traditionalism; rather they were part of the public scene and stimulated the ballots.

In Colombia, the presidential candidacy of Alfonso López Pumarejo was considered to be the continuation of the liberal regime which began in 1930, with the election of President Enrique Olaya Herrera. From the taking of office of the new president in August of that year, the political panorama started to change: firstly, because the population of Colombia at the time wanted social changes in government policies; secondly, because the Conservative Party that had been in power for more than 45 years had been weakened; and thirdly, because liberalism started to consolidate its own political machinery, with the changing of public officials in institutions, which was eventually reflected in the electoral results of the different public corporations, where conservatism started to lose its political strength

as regards the number of votes received, whereas liberalism gained more voters. Furthermore, the intention of the liberal government to propose social reforms as a means to mitigate the impact of the international economic crisis of 1929, which revitalized Colombian politics, attracted the attention of voters. In their 3 years in office (1930–1933), the Liberal Party had managed to transform the political map in their favor, as can be seen in **Table 1**.

Alfonso López Pumarejo was born on January 31, 1886 in Honda, Tolima, and died in London on November 20, 1959. He was a liberal politician and statesman, who served as president of the Republic of Colombia during the periods 1934–1938 and 1942–1945 [21, 22]. He studied finance in Brighton College and then continued his studies in economics in Packard School (New York). He worked, together with his father, in Casa López, where he developed his skills as a statesman and in the management of economic policy. Tirado Mejía considered him to be the most important statesman of the twentieth century and a pioneer of social reform. Nonetheless, Tirado Mejía’s reflections could have an emotional charge when exalting the magnitude of the politician, given that he does not make a balance of the scope and the dimension of his reforms.

During the government of Olaya Herrera (1930–1934), some fundamental changes were fostered in relation to social policies, although many of them could not be applied. This situation allowed Alfonso López Pumarejo to revisit those proposals and to launch a social reform program that would be managed by the state. He proposed a governmental project called the Revolution in Progress, which included a series of social reforms focused on solving some of the problems of the popular sectors, among them the settlers, and the main focus was on agrarian reform, education, labor reforms, and tax reform.

When the liberal hegemony started in Colombia (1930), the Conservative Party seemed to be weakened and with few reformist perspectives. It limited itself to conserving things the way they were, to repeating the political principles of the government, and to strengthening the relationship between the Church and the state. One of the main controversies was the posture to be taken regarding the liberal government, as there was doubt as to whether to take peaceful action or to totally reject the work of the government. This led to the creation of diverse groups with different principles. For example, the civil movement did not have a clear position with regard to the government; another faction retook the course of *caciquismo* (also called bossism), turning the electoral activity into an individualistic bastion, while the conservative youth remained relegated from the decisions of the veterans, due to their pacifistic viewpoint as well as a lack of innovation. The youth were influenced by Italian Fascism and Spanish Falangism, and proposed a nationalist political project to reestablish social order and, as a tactic, it proposed the use of force or offensive and counter-revolutionary violence [23]. One of the movements among the youth was constituted by the Leopards, who had an anti-communist, anti-revolutionary approach which defended order, authority, and Catholicism. These ideas brought them closer to right-wing political tendencies, turning them into the first opposition to the liberal governments of Olaya Herrera and López

Congressmen February 1, 1931				Congressmen February 5, 1933			
Liberal	Conservative	Others	Total	Liberal	Conservative	Others	Total
458,702	406,441	363	735,312	551,029	333,892	4829	896,532

Source: *Anuario General de Estadística 1937*, No. 3183 (statistical yearbook).

Table 1.
Election of deputies in 1931 and 1933.

Pumarejo, which can be summarized in the words of Silvio Villegas: “the Marxist heresy could only be opposed by a bronze doctrine; the violence of the left could only be opposed by the counter-revolution of order. Hybrid species are called to disappear... [24].”

This movement proposed a political project focused on order, nationalism, tradition, and the relationship between the Church and state. In addition, it put forward a policy of excluding adversaries from the governmental scene, which made violence a component of politics. Likewise, it declared itself an enemy of democracy, of communism, and of republican ideas, while its proponents assumed a stance of deep appreciation for the classical, especially for monarchist ideas. It broke away from Caesarist ideology and considered establishing a new order emphasizing Bolivarian patriotism and expansionism. As a state project, it was considered fundamental to promote an authoritarian government, with corporate forms of representation, and with a nationalist project which highlighted the motherland as the basis of the struggle. In addition, it was thought that violence was the principal mechanism through which to consolidate authority.

In the context of the political dispute for power between liberalism and conservatism, a war broke out against Peru (1932–1933), a conflict characterized, as it is referred to by Álvaro Acevedo and John Jaime Correa, more by rhetoric than by military combat [25]. The development of the war had several purposes, among them the articulation of the population around a common objective: fostering nationalism, omitting the triumph and the strengthening of liberalism, and discrediting the government of Olaya Herrera due to the diplomatic management of border relations. Olaya, for his part, insisted that this was a problem of a diplomatic nature, unrelated to the phenomena of local and targeted violence. Notwithstanding, the diplomatic management of the situation as well as the campaign in defense of the national territory, on a national and international level, favored the image of Olaya Herrera and López Pumarejo which, in turn, projected the latter as a political leader, negotiator, and possible presidential candidate. More than an international conflict, this war represented a strategy used by both parties. In the case of the conservatives, they intended to promote the image of war in the nationalist perception with which it tried to unify and strengthen the party. The liberals tried to foster the idea of conciliation and integration with the neighboring countries, which set the scene for promoting the presidential candidacy of Alfonso López Pumarejo.

With relation to the electoral campaign for president, liberalism resorted to the political machinery and the networks of local and regional power that had been consolidated as from 1930. The elections for public corporations that took place in 1933 reconfigured the political map and made liberalism stronger. Those elections helped to prepare for the electoral campaign that would lead Alfonso López to the presidency of the Republic. In general, López Pumarejo led the committees that visited the capitals, cities, and some towns. The press wrote about the activities of his campaign and simultaneously published photographs of López even when he was not an official candidate. This was intended to build his public image. Conversely, with the elections for congressmen in February [26] 1933, for representatives in May [27] of that year, and for councilors in October [28–31], the political structure and machinery were conserved. This favored the number of votes for the liberals, while the Conservative Party lost the regional power it had had for over 50 years, as can be seen in the number of votes and the comments of the liberal press (*El Tiempo*, *El Espectador*, *Revista Cromos*).

Alfonso López Pumarejo had accompanied Olaya Herrera's administration from different positions and this support made him one of the most important liberal figures, because of his public recognition and his projection as a reformist leader. López's presidential campaign proceeded naturally and without many demands.

Although he was out of the country during some key moments, such as the peace negotiations with the Peruvian government in 1933, he led the delegations to the Economic Conference of London in 1932 and the Pan American Conference in Montevideo in 1933 [32]. Those visits earned him international recognition and projected him as a diplomat and a Colombian public figure, knowledgeable in international politics.

The political campaigns officially started with the national convention of the party formed by delegations from all the departments, where candidates were put forward and the general outlines related to the organization of the campaign were defined. Said outlines were to be put into practice in the towns and regions. Those activities were coordinated by the political directorates of each party, which operated in the capitals of the department and municipal seats. In the case of liberalism, the convention took place on November 6, 1933. In this gathering, Alfonso López Pumarejo was officially proclaimed as the candidate for the presidency of the elections of February 1934 [33].

Political parties in Colombia, in pre-election periods, were organized through directorates with a vertical structure, with the aim of articulating the electors and dynamizing the electoral activities. The base was formed by the masses, the popular sectors: farmers, craftsmen, workers, day laborers, tenants, and small traders. The medium sector was formed by public officials, who directly assumed a partisan, rather than a state role, as their duties were focused on supporting the actions of the candidate of their party, whereas the state institutions were malleable to the interests of the party [34, 35]. Then, there were the political officials who had managerial positions and who could later become advisers, regional directors, or leaders. At the top were the political leaders, regional as well as national, who gave orders, had the function of appointing candidates, along with supporting and approving government programs that catered to the nature of the party.

The organization of political directorates also had a vertical structure, with which it was intended to gain power in the territory. Directorates established an institutional link and consolidated a hierarchical order, from which decisions that involved the population and favored the interests of the party [36] were made and executed. In this way, the national directorate operated in the capital, Bogotá; the departmental directorate operated in the departmental capitals; the municipal directorate operated in the municipal seat, and their function was to appoint leaders or agents in the *veredas* [37] (territorial division in rural areas). This system can be related to the hierarchized conception of power presented by Norberto Bobbio, when referring to the consolidation of a particular type of representative democracy [38]. The organization of the directorates constituted the first phase of the electoral process, which guaranteed the presence and activity of the party in the area.

In his election campaign, López Pumarejo introduced an innovative model for the time, with a view to visiting the regions and having a broad view of the situation of the population. This intention motivated him to travel the country widely by plane, including in his electoral tours, to peripheral areas with a considerable number of inhabitants, such as the coast, which until the 1920s had been ignored due to its distance [39]. Despite his government program and his intention to get closer to the vulnerable sectors, the most relevant meetings were carried out in clubs, restaurants, and prestigious venues, as the image he wanted to portray was that of an English gentleman.

Another phase was carried out by the media with the dissemination of the programs of visits, endorsements, and controversies in which the protagonist, victim, and winner was always the candidate that the newspaper or journal supported. With respect to this, Álvaro Acevedo and John Jaime Correa [40] present an important balance of the meaning, sense, and scope of the press during the Liberal

Republic (1930–1946) in the construction and promotion of political representations. They also center their attention on the endorsement of sectors, such as the unions, farmers, committees, and other forms of political groups, given that for López Pumarejo it was very important that the farmers, artisans, and workers organized in order to reclaim and defend their rights.

The press and the radio contributed to promoting the activities of the candidates, reporting on political events, and publicizing political and propagandistic activities. They published the itinerary of the candidates' visits to different towns, reported on the visits and, along with the interviews; they included pictures of the candidate and his entourage in places where they wanted to empower the masses. In addition, the importance of the sector leader, the liberal leader, and the priest was taken into consideration, given that they had an impact on the decisions of the voters. Meanwhile, the shops and canteens became places to socialize, where the people could learn about politics and the actions of the party.

In the presidential elections of 1934, Alfonso López Pumarejo, as the only candidate, had a great majority of votes, as he did not have a strong opponent, given that the Conservative Party had declared its abstention from the election [41] due to the lack of guarantees; it was still weak and constantly denounced irregularities and their persecution by the liberal government. For his part, the communist candidate, Eutiquio Timoté, did not have enough electoral strength. Therefore, Pumarejo was certainly going to win. Firstly, he had no opposition, and secondly, the political machinery was ready to inflate the results, as it appears happened in several localities. In **Table 2**, we can see a comparison of the votes obtained in 1934, which show an increase in some departments, as can be seen below.

According to the results obtained on February 11, 1934, López obtained 938,608 votes against the scarce 1974 votes of the communist Eutiquio Timoté, with total conservative abstention. So, López Pumarejo won with 99.8%, against Timoté, who obtained 0.002%. On the other hand, said electoral results gave an account of a process of political homogenization, as the Liberal Party obtained the votes of both, liberals and conservatives. As shown in **Table 2**, in the 1933 elections for the Chamber, the liberals obtained 604,372 votes and there was an increase of 300,000 votes in only 9 months, whereas the number of votes for the conservatives fell enormously.

The number of votes obtained in 1934 was high in relation to the 1930 election, considering that there had not been any reforms either in the political or in the electoral systems; nor had there been a census carried out in which an increase in the population was shown. For this reason, the results were questioned although no detailed explanation was given.

Departamento	Congressmen 5 February, 1933				Chamber 14 May, 1933				Presidency 1934			
	Liberal	Conservative	Others	Total	Liberal	Conservative	Others	Total	López Pumarejo	Dr. E. Timoté	Other parties	Total
Antioquia	41150	67790	318	112253	55339	64582	132	120053	44022	212	480	44714
Atlántico	11442	5759	1011	18212	15827	2642	0	18469	26697	12	7	26416
Bolívar	29381	12523	0	41901	29153	5492		34645	91234	64	4	91302
Boyacá	69304	45459	0	114763	88345	67636		155981	121614	92	47	121753
Caldas	48811	47126	160	95097	42817	44387	51	87258	62136	173	4	62313
Cauca	30724	17397	37	48158	28205	17450		45655	42958	55	3	43016
Cundinamarca	83717	56705	2854	143276	82088	61230	1633	144951	131067	859	802	132728
Huila	4560	9038	34	13632	10019	7446	34	17499	10424	49		10473
Magdalena	20704	16827	0	37531	24303	12076	2	36381	45348	9	4	45361
Nariño	0	0	0	0	13067	23499		36566	26791		16	26807
Norte de Sar	47873	22787	8	70663	56718	15403		72121	69117			69117
Santander	86687	621	60	92368	88356	2504		90860	122209	60		122269
Tolima	34858	10768	347	45773	33796	16234	68	50098	58301	211	26	58538
Valle del Cau	41818	21092	0	62905	36339	20990		57329	67750	171	27	67948
total	553.824	338892	4819	897535	604372	361571	1923	967329	919668	1967	1420	922755

Table 2.
Elections carried out in 1933–1934/by department.

In the elections of 1933 and 1934, the liberal machinery installed by public officials played a fundamental role in the definition of the number of votes. For many people, these results were a threat to democracy and the legality of the political system. Nevertheless, it is to be noted that both liberals and conservatives resorted to fraudulent practices in an attempt to augment the number of votes in their favor and, frequently, each accused their adversary of being corrupt, violent, and immoral. Finally, liberalism achieved the majority of the votes because it had better political machinery, which allowed it to legitimize the results obtained, given that it had control over the whole system: from the elaboration of the census to the consolidation of the final results. In addition, having the security forces on their side guaranteed them a structure with which to legally coerce and persecute their adversary.

2.1 The Revolution in Progress

The political program presented by Alfonso López Pumarejo, known as the Revolution in Progress, was focused on consolidating a reformist government in accordance with other political projects of the time, as was the case of Mexico and Spain. However, his proposals were questioned by the liberal and conservative elites. His main objective was to make a reform of the constitution as he considered it to be a conservative and traditional framework. Among his ideas were the reviewing of the agreement concerning the relations between the Church and the state, launching agrarian reform in order to improve the situation of the farmers, fostering public education, and the organization of the working class. These proposals were condensed into the program that was called “The Revolution in Progress” which, in political terms, was the strengthening of the Liberal Republic. The concept of *revolution* was controversial for the time, because it called political and religious traditionalism into question as well as proposing a project of institutional and social modernization. This was questioned by the clergy and the traditional political elites because they linked it with the arrival of communism and the empowerment of the popular sectors. Thus, they considered it a threat to the political stability of the regime.

Miguel Ángel Urrego reviews the different processes of Colombian political history, highlighting the legislation regarding land, wasteland, and land ownership, which preceded the so-called “Revolution in Progress.” Mainly focusing on this reform, the author points out that López Pumarejo proposed a project of intervention in the economy in which he stated: “[...] the state will be able to intervene through laws for the exploitation of industries or public and private companies, with the aim of rationalizing the production, distribution and consumption of the wealth, or of protecting work [42].” According to Urrego, the intervention proposal was not new, it had been proposed by Rafael Uribe Uribe at the beginning of the 1910s and Jorge Eliécer Gaitán in the early 1930s. These two political leaders considered that the state should intervene to correct the huge social inequality and guide the productive sector. On the other hand, interventionism was adopted as a policy to lessen the impact of the economic crisis of 1929 and, in some states, to reactivate the economy.

The first proposal for agrarian reform was presented to the Congress in 1933, but it was rejected, which strengthened the position of the landowners. López’s government had the objective of implementing a reform project which intended to stop the growing conflict in rural areas. The proposal came to a halt in Congress, given that landowners were already organized in a union of landowners and agricultural businessmen, and they opposed any attempt to reform the property regime.

The main axis of the Revolution in Progress was the constitutional reform of 1936. However, it is important to consider other measures such as the trade agreement with the United States, the tax reform, and the land law. For the popular sectors, the Revolution in Progress brought great expectations, because it became

their hope as regards obtaining a piece of land, improving their living conditions, and bolstering their freedoms. From the point of view of the opposition, it caused the radicalization of the liberal and conservative elites, as well as the clergy. With regard to this, the controversies eventually intensified in Congress, the press, and in the public sphere. At the same time, the image of López Pumarejo was associated with communism, which along with Pumarejo, had to be fought on all fronts, even if it required violence.

3. Lázaro Cárdenas and the Six-Year Plan

Lázaro Cárdenas was born in 1895 in the state of Michoacán. He was raised in the bosom of a humble family. He was forced to work from an early age and, given their limited social conditions, he only managed to finish primary school. He took part in the revolution and quickly ascended in rank. At the age of 32, he was major general. At 33, he was appointed governor of Michoacán. In 1931, Cárdenas was the head of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* (National Revolutionary Party, PNR by its acronym in Spanish). Afterward, he was government secretary during the mandate of Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–1932) and, finally, Secretary of War during the term of Abelardo Rodríguez (1932–1934). He had gained the trust of Plutarco Elías Calles—a political leader who controlled power within the PNR. Thus, he remained close to power, given that the PNR was the only means of reaching the presidency of the Republic [43]. Through his military and political ascent, he gained valuable governmental experience, which projected him as a political leader capable of guiding the Mexican nation in a difficult period when conflict and social crises had to be overcome.

In September 1928, he took office as the governor of Michoacán, while he continued to develop various activities in accordance with the principles of the revolution, mainly focused on mass politics [44]. In 1929, General Lázaro Cárdenas was one of the most relevant figures in Mexican politics. He seemed to be one of the three leaders of the revolution, together with General Calles and General Joaquín Amaro. Cárdenas was a revolutionary leader who was determined to recover and make triumphant the ideological and political heritage of the revolution; that was his goal as a presidential pre-candidate.

While he was governor of the state of Michoacán, he had to face the *Cristera* war (1926–1928), political polarization, and an economic crisis. He had a conciliatory attitude, so he took on direct negotiations with his countrymen in arms and achieved an agreement that put an end to the war. He was committed to guaranteeing the Catholic Church and its followers the respect of the state for their beliefs and to collaborating with some material improvements for some goods and buildings that had been affected by the war [45].

In Mexico, the Program of the Revolution was based around four pillars, the agrarian and educational reforms, the organization of the working and popular sectors, and the regulation of fiscal policy; the first two being given more emphasis, they became even stronger with the boost given to them by Lázaro Cárdenas.

Cárdenas' period in power was preceded by the government and the influence of Plutarco Elías Calles, who was president between 1924 and 1928, with a favorable fiscal and economic situation which gave the Mexican financial elite a certain confidence (1924–1926). Meanwhile, economic growth was reflected in the banking industry and public works. However, a key point was that presented in the constitutional reform (1917) which was the application of constitutional controls imposed on the Church and the oil industry. This was a clear sign that Calles was defying the Catholics and the Americans. The *Cristeros* War (1926–1929), the conflict with the United States, and the deterioration of the economic situation were consequences

of this. Against this background, Calles' project started to weaken due to internal confrontations. At the same time, he started to identify with the ideology of the European right, particularly with Hitler's policies, which distanced him from the ideals of the revolution. Another turning point was the assassination of Álvaro Obregón (17 July 1928), who had been president between 1920 and 1924, and president elect at the moment of his death. This caused an acute economic crisis in Mexico, before the world economic crisis of 1929. The criticism and confrontation led Calles to retire from power and name as his successors figures such as Emilio Portes Gil (1928–1930), Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–1932), and Abelardo Rodríguez (1932–1934), who governed for the following 6 years, that is to say from 1928 to 1934 when Lázaro Cárdenas took office. Those 6 years of government were called the *maximato*, because they were governed by the *Jefe Máximo* (Supreme Leader), who was behind the political proposals and the governments of those three presidents, that is to say that he exerted power from behind the throne [46]. Alan Knight considered that the previously named period, the *maximato*, was a transition, from then on there was a shift from a personalistic to an institutional government. During the *maximato*, Calles called for an assembly of the new *Partido Revolucionario Oficial* (Official Revolutionary Party, PNR), with the aim of opposing the liberal and anti-reelection governmental aspirations of José Vasconcelos in the presidential election of 1934 [47]. During that period, apart from the political institutionalization of the *maximato*, there was escalating social conflict and growing ideological polarization. For this reason, Cárdenas' rise as a national political leader made him the hope for the negotiation of the conflict and the materialization of the revolution.

Lázaro Cárdenas became a presidential pre-candidate in June 1933 [48] and started an intense campaign of visits to the most remote areas with the aim of learning about the real problems of the population. For that, he resigned from his position as Secretary of War (May 15, 1933). He announced that on June 5, he would make a statement related to the acceptance of his candidacy and, at the same time, he would launch a manifesto with the content of the preliminary design of his governmental program. By that time, Cárdenas had received the support of farmers, workers, and indigenous people. The other pre-candidate was General Pérez Treviño, who had developed political activities in Coahuila and had received the support of the majority groups of the Socialist Party from the southwest of the state of Yucatán, and some from Guanajuato. After realizing that most of the revolutionary people and the organizations of the PNR supported Cárdenas, General Pérez Treviño declined his postulation [49].

During his electoral campaign, Lázaro Cárdenas proposed to the masses that they get organized in order to defend their rights. On many occasions, he reminded them of the importance of organization as the one and only basis upon which their cultural and material situation would improve. He often intervened directly in conflicts among workers, with the aim of advancing peace, which led him to identifying the needs of the people. He reiterated that unity was the best weapon the workers had and that it was more important than laws and the authorities, because no official was to be found where the deeds were done, whereas the workers were ready to continue fighting. With the organization of workers, a substantial change could be achieved with regard to economic relations, with the aim that the workers would no longer be dependent on others. To that end, unification and cooperativism were urged. Cárdenas considered that this was a fundamental means of gaining the adhesion of the proletariat, paving the way for the integral control of the instruments of production. Thus, it could be seen as a mobilization process of the workers [50].

On several occasions, Cárdenas expressed his wish to see the working and the subsistence farmer class together as a common front, which would fight actively to fulfill their social aspirations and specific interests. During his electoral campaign,

Cárdenas also dealt with other important topics, among which was the indigenous issue which was a visible stigma of national misery and disintegration. He considered that it was important to integrate this ethnic group into the nation [51].

In his many rallies and tours, such as in Veracruz, again and again he promoted the union of the workers. In many towns, he called for the formation of a united front, not to destroy the organizations, but rather to strengthen the demand and to make it evident that the needs of the workers were the same. This unification would allow them to consolidate a general program in which the fair demands of all workers were included.

In his visits to diverse regions, Cárdenas learned firsthand, the situation of farmers and their needs. In Puebla, he declared that he would dedicate himself fully and radically to the cause of the farmers and the laborers, for which he obtained their full support [52]. Cardenas' electoral tour contributed to the formation of a public figure sustained not only by representative organizations, but also by deep popular roots.

At the beginning of the campaign, there were persecutions against the followers of Lázaro Cárdenas, as had occurred in Tulancingo, where the local authorities denied permission to carry out a pro-Cárdenas demonstration, which was organized by worker and farmer unions. Likewise, there was another complaint regarding persecution on the June 20, 1933, when six Cárdenas supporters who were handing out leaflets with propaganda of the pre-candidate in the village of San Pedro Nextlalpan were killed. A group that formed part of the social defenses, led by Cristiano Cruz [53], was held accountable for the crime.

The Mexican reformist movements eventually won prestige within the PNR, and its members were convinced of the need to generate substantial changes in accordance with the constitution and social needs. However, the reforming forces made their political victory public with the approval of the Six-Year Plan and the election of General Cárdenas as their candidate for the presidency of the republic in the framework of the second ordinary national convention of the National Revolutionary Party, which was celebrated in Querétaro on December 6, 1933.

By choosing Lázaro Cárdenas as its official candidate for the 1934 elections, the PNR was inclining toward the left. In addition, it trusted that Cárdenas could follow the government of Calles with loyalty because he had proven to be radical, without being orthodox, during his time as governor of Michoacán (1928–1932), but he was still a prominent politician who had been trained in the ranks of the revolutionary army, where he had been a loyal subordinate of Calles. At the same time, Cárdenas' bureaucratic experience was taken into consideration, given that he had held important political positions as president of the party and Secretary of War, and so he was considered a key player in the political-military hierarchy of the PNR [54].

From his appointment as candidate for the presidency of the republic, Lázaro Cárdenas undertook the initiative of politically mobilizing the masses around the country, in order to strengthen revolutionary activity. In opposition to other leaders of the revolution, he considered that the revolution had not ended and that the old regime had to be completely eradicated [55].

After his selection as presidential candidate, Cárdenas started his campaign by visiting faraway places, traveling some 300 km, visiting cities, factories, and villages. Thus, he created a particular style as a candidate. He went to the provinces on several occasions, visited remote communities and places that were very difficult to access, sometimes on horseback, on foot, or in the presidential boat. The electoral campaign and the tours he embarked on afterward gave the president direct knowledge of the conditions existing in the country and they seem to have contributed to creating an identity. Also, with his reformist rhetoric, especially regarding the agrarian issue, he managed to captivate the popular sectors [56], which became a powerful electoral bastion.

Cardenas' political program in the federal district was developed on the basis of the following three fundamental points: the strengthening of the economy, the design of mechanisms for its effective application, and the unity of the action of workers, farmers, and indigenous people. As part of the activities of his campaign, he proposed the creation of "pro Cárdenas" committees in each state [57]. These committees were supposed to be in charge of managing the propaganda and of harmonizing electoral projects in the numerous branches. In political and parliamentary circles, those who followed Cárdenas were classified under three groups: first, states without opposition which unanimously declared themselves to be supporters of Cárdenas from the very beginning, such as Sonora, Nuevo León, and San Luis de Potosí; second, states with groups that opposed the local governments, in which both opposition and government declared their support for Cárdenas, such as Tamaulipas, Jalisco, and Guerrero; and third, states in which the government officials had been followers of Pérez Treviño and opposed Cárdenas, but now they all supported Cárdenas, as was the case of Hidalgo, Guanajuato, and Coahuila.

Close to the end of the electoral campaign, Lázaro Cárdenas toured the region of San Luis de Potosí (June 8, 1934) and he encouraged different people to travel to the area to meet with and interview him. General Zedillo accompanied him during his tour. They both addressed the crowds which were comprised of groups of workers from different local factories and close to 5000 countrymen, communal land representatives, school children, etc. In these types of visits, the influence of the candidate could be seen, as well as the participation of some of the most outstanding leaders, regional leaders, countrymen, students, children, and young people. There were also congressmen who generally spoke on behalf of the rights of women, farmers, indigenous people, and their sense of participation and access to civil and political rights. Those speeches were broadcast by the radio station of the *Partido Nacional* [58] (National Party), in order to gain a broader audience and follow the activities of the candidate.

With relation to those who opposed the election of General Cárdenas from the *Partido Nacional Antirreeleccionista* (National Anti-Reelection Party, PNA by its acronym in Spanish), they stated their dissatisfaction with the upcoming elections in a manifesto. They told their members that they could vote freely for any candidate, while highlighting that their social work and activities would continue until they obtained the postulates in their program of principles of the revolution [59].

The presidential elections of July 1, 1934, were won by Cárdenas on behalf of the *Partido Nacional Revolucionario* with a total of 2,225,000 votes against his opponents Antonio Villarreal, the representative of the *Confederación Revolucionaria de Partidos Independientes* (Revolutionary Confederation of Political Parties), who obtained 24,395 votes; Adalberto Tejada Olivares from the *Partidos Socialistas de Izquierda* (Left Wing Socialist Parties), with 16,037 votes; and Hernán Laborde from the *Partido Comunista Mexicano* (Mexican Communist Party), who won 539 votes. Thus, Lázaro Cárdenas obtained 98.2%; Antonio Villarreal 0.11%; Adalberto Tejada 0.077%; and Hernán Laborde 0.0023% of the votes.

The new president won an overwhelming victory and took office in December 1934 without significant controversies. In terms of the distribution of power, the *carlistas* kept their key positions, which had more weight than those of Cárdenas' followers. In this way, Calles had hopes of controlling power while the media also considered that Cárdenas would be just another of Calles' pawns. But the dynamic was different: Cárdenas became familiar with power while some key leaders within his government still tried to generate a crisis with the Church and to destabilize the new government. However, Cardenas soon discovered Calles duplicity, which caused a crisis that resulted in Calles' exile.

3.1 The Six-Year Plan

The emergence of the Mexican Six-Year Plan had its origins in the projects derived from the Mexican Revolution. However, the impact of the 1929 economic crisis and the high poverty rate in some Mexican rural areas brought about great controversy within the emerging National Revolutionary Party. For his part, in 1930, Calles referred to the crisis of the Mexican Revolution and declared that the agrarian reform had been a failure because, according to him, communal property led to laziness. As a consequence, it was necessary to foster the capitalist agriculture of private property. Another main point Calles mentioned was laborer unrest, highlighting that it was necessary to take severe measures to limit strikes. On the other hand, he reiterated the decisive topic of the anti-clerical element, which had brought about the *cristero* conflict and the controversies in the 1920s. Regarding this, he reaffirmed that it was the anti-clerical policy that had caused the political turmoil. In addition, he emphasized the role of teaching as a means for revolutionary transformation. He pointed out that the objectives of change for social impact in Sonora (the political model established in the state of Sonora) were not the means of production, but rather minds [60].

According to Alan Knight, the main factors of the Mexican economic crisis were the drop in the prices of exports, deflation, and the contraction of the economy as from 1926. Between 1929 and 1932, foreign trade decreased by two-thirds while the capacity to import was reduced by a half and at the same time unemployment rose. To a large extent, the cause was the repatriation of 300,000 Mexicans who had migrated to the United States. Likewise, there was a drop in the exports of gold, silver, crude oil, raw materials, and other products [61], which contributed to the worsening of the economic crisis.

From the congress held on December 6, 1933, emerged the Six-Year Plan, which became the government program that the president elect should follow, according to the election of 1934. This plan implicitly criticized the *sonerense* model (developed by Plutarco Elías Calles), asserted the role of the interventionist state and the need for Mexicans to exploit the national resources of the country. It promised minimum wages to the workers and the right to present collective agreements. It also restated the importance of the agrarian question, which required radical solutions, including the division of very large properties.

The Six-Year Plan was the result of a commission formed of 25 members and with a representative from each delegation, formed on December 3, 1933 [62]. This commission, of which pre-candidate General Pérez Treviño was a member, had the following objectives: the discussion of the Six-Year Plan; the study of the reforms to the statutes of the National Revolutionary Party; and the designation of a presidential candidate [63]. This commission requested information from the Secretary of State, autonomous departments, and other governmental branches, as well as reports on the modifications and orientations that the administrative function of the government required, so as to make them more expeditious and adjust them in accordance with the postulates of the revolution. Starting from there, the commission elaborated the Six-Year Plan, which contemplated a set of actions in fields such as communications, public works, labor, agriculture, and promotion. Some aspects related to the labor sector were taken into consideration: the implementation of compulsory social insurance applicable to all workers was thought to be necessary; the promotion of accessible and hygienic rooms for the workers; the regulation of the legal framework of family patrimony; the establishment of recruitment agencies and an employment exchange; the construction of statistical bases regarding employment; the creation, in the supreme court, of a special chamber for labor [64]. With regard to the agrarian situation: a review of the agrarian legislation; the

endowment of land in compliance with article 27 of the constitution; an increase in economic resources for the solution of the problems of the countryside; a commitment of the United States in the endowment of land according to the fractioning of the sites that belong to the nation were included [65]. However, one of the key points was perhaps the importance of reviewing land ownership, mainly related to profiteers, for the commission suggested that lands had to be subject to the provision of communal land, different from that of private property.

In the report of the advisory commission regarding said plan, it was expressed that the Mexican state had to take and maintain a policy of intervention that would regulate the economic activities of national life. It also said that the state was an effective agent for the management and order of the vital activities of the country. This became one of the principles of the 1917 constitution, which allowed the nation to begin an agrarian reform and reclaim its natural resources [66]. The intervention of the state referred to in the Six-Year Plan was supposed to be carried out in four fundamental fields: the agrarian, industrial, union, and educational.

The central question is: “why so much insistence on focusing the Six-Year Plan on the distribution of land and the working sector?” With relation to the agricultural sector, Tzvi Medin highlights that toward 1930, in Mexico, there were more than 16 and a half million inhabitants. The economically active population was about 5 million people, and 70% of that, 3 and a half million people, worked in agriculture. According to that same census, of a total surface of about 130 and a half million hectares, 110 belonged to 15,488 properties larger than 1000 hectares, while 796,600 pieces of land only reached almost 5 and a half million hectares. The situation becomes clearer after verifying that 70 billion hectares were divided into less than 2000 larger pieces of land of 10,000 hectares each [67]. If we analyze this information, we can conclude that there was a high level of property concentration and that this did not favor economic production, which was a concern for the reformist governments of the time.

Calles’ statements were taken differently, given that many people rejected the anti-clerical policy, while they considered that some reforms were necessary in order to improve the social and economic conditions of the Mexican population. Simultaneously, like in Colombia, the adoption of state interventionism was proposed, as in the federal labor law of 1931, which offered concessions regarding timetables, vacations, and collective agreements, in exchange for which the state would regulate industrial relations more rigorously. As an economic policy, it was considered that salaries could reinforce internal demand and benefit industry. However, this project failed to bring about the postulates of the revolution, and from different points of view the revolution itself had failed. For this reason, the Six-Year Plan became the hope for the popular sectors, while the elites maintained the desire to control power through Cardenas’ government.

In 1934, an autonomous agrarian department and a new agrarian code were created, through which it was allowed, for the first time, that the laborers of the large farms could ask for land concessions. At the same time, this code offered guarantees to the landowners, which caused ambivalences and divisions within the PNR.

4. Campaigns and government programs in Colombia and Mexico in 1934: a comparative perspective

Although the world economic crisis had different levels of intensity in both countries, this event, along with the economic situation of each state, provoked broad reflections in the political scene. In both states, López Pumarejo as well as Lázaro Cárdenas took the foreground because they proposed social programs and

projects, in order to improve the quality of life of the most vulnerable sectors. In both cases, they focused on agrarian reform, educational reform, improving the relationship between the Church and the state, as well as the conditions of workers, indigenous people, and farmers. All this was linked to a fiscal policy which was intended to guarantee the application of the social policy.

The candidates developed their campaigns by visiting remote areas in order to learn firsthand the reality of the farmers, workers, women, children, indigenous people, and industrial workers (this can be applied more extensively to the Mexican case). In Colombia, although the candidate visited some towns, he gained his perception of people's needs through the visits and demonstrations he carried out mainly in urban centers. Unlike Lázaro Cárdenas, López Pumarejo did not go directly to the villages, nor did he get close to the daily realities of the people. Thus, the social perception of the candidates was different. The two candidates did coincide in the nature of their visits and in proclaiming the social purpose that their government programs should have, but nevertheless, Cárdenas was able to get closer to the people and was more sensitive to their situation, perhaps as a result of his origins and his perception of their needs.

While in Mexico the political and the popular sectors had expectations and hopes for the Six-Year Plan to be the materialization of the Mexican revolution, in Colombia the concept imprinted by López Pumarejo with the Revolution in Progress was controversial and was particularly questioned by the liberal, conservative political elites, as well as the Church. For the popular sectors, it became the hope for obtaining recognition from the state. In this sense, in Colombia the plan was associated with communism and socialism, a circumstance which was not so different in Mexico.

In their campaigns, both Lázaro Cárdenas and López Pumarejo had the entire infrastructure and the machinery of the state institutions at their disposal. In that way, they had the necessary resources and projects that were granted to them by the majorities. In both cases, in Mexico and in Colombia, the elections for public corporations, which preceded the presidential elections, contributed to promoting and strengthening the activities of the parties, their political and electoral bases, as well as to organizing the committees in charge of the election activities, which secured them an important electoral structure.

According to the electoral results obtained in both countries, it is observed that the representation of the Communist Party in both countries was 0.002%, which meant that in political terms it did not represent a "threat." However, an idea of the revolution was constructed as an expression of communism as well as generating a fear of the revolution, the masses, and social policies. In that way, the political elites managed to avoid any type of social reform because it was contrary to their interests, particularly in the case of Colombia.

Among the basic aspects of Cárdenas' campaign, what stands out is his contact with the masses and his desire to improve the quality of life of the popular sectors through national policies, which were derived from the project of the Mexican Revolution. Despite the fact that his ideological approach used the postulates of the Six-Year Plan, Cárdenas gave them a particular spin that led them to having a direct impact and ultimately to the materialization of the projects. Also, in his electoral tour, Cárdenas was in close contact with workers, farmers, women, indigenous people, and business people. As a future president, Cárdenas gained the recognition and acceptance of these sectors, which, as president, allowed him to build a political space of his own, with a different posture from the *callista* tutelage.

In the case of Colombia, López Pumarejo also imprinted a social purpose on his government plan but with the view of a statesman, as although he tried to come closer to the masses and their needs, he did not manage to gain a real sensitivity to

the actual necessities of the population. Moreover, while he distanced himself from some party leaders, such as Olaya Herrera and Eduardo Santos, who belonged to the conservative wing of liberalism, he kept an undefined position with which he intended to carry out a new revolution from the state apparatus.

5. Conclusions

The topic of the elections is vital to understanding the intentions, reformist projects, and political dynamics of the two states. For the year 1934, it is an opportunity to study the coalitions; the controversies among parties; and how the economic and political crises, at a national and international level, were channeled with projects of social reform, which transformed the political scene in Colombia and in Mexico.

The late 1930s saw social and political changes which made farmers, workers, women, and indigenous people the protagonists, who in the text have been referred to as the popular sectors. They were at the same time potential voters and also susceptible to socialist and communist ideas. In this sense, the presidential candidates of Colombia and Mexico sensed this dynamic and the vulnerability of these social actors and for that reason they focused their government programs on improving their living conditions. They carried out tours to learn about these peoples' needs, particularly Lázaro Cárdenas. These tours motivated the Six-Year Plan and the Revolution in Progress. Perhaps, the candidates intended to carry out a revolution from within the state, as Alfonso López suggested, in order to prevent the possible organization of these social actors outside the state or that they were captivated by socialist and communist ideas.

These government plans, the Revolution in Progress, and the Six-Year Plan, in addition to their social purpose, are policies that coincided in many aspects, including: agrarian reform; fiscal policy; educational reform; the separation of the Church and state; labor reforms; and the promotion of the organization of workers, farmers, and indigenous people. As can be appreciated, they were not transcendental changes, but strategies to govern which implied the promotion of other forms of social organization, a dynamic different from that of subjects and, instead, one of citizens, and the establishment of a different political relationship between the state and society.

The electoral campaign was the means chosen by Lázaro Cárdenas, as well as Alfonso López Pumarejo, to get close to the electoral bases. In both cases, there was a concept of intensifying the democratic spirit and participation, the vote being a fundamental act to establish that negotiation process; that is to say, to place one's trust in a candidate, to later receive the benefits with the materialization of their government programs. The two candidates had administrative and economic capital derived from the institutions of the state, which granted them supremacy in the control of political and electoral power. It is true that neither of them had a strong opponent; they would achieve a victory even with very few votes. Nevertheless, what is striking is the particular way of doing politics by visiting remote areas and having a social orientation in their programs, while they conserved the traditional organizational structure of political campaigns when it came to the structure of the parties, the directorates and the networks, which allowed them to secure their power.

The dynamics that have been the focus of this text show how, in these two states, Colombia and Mexico, the elections were a pretext to revitalize politics, mitigate crises, and reduce the polarization between the political elites, as well as to negotiate with the popular sectors, a situation that continues even today.

Acknowledgements

The author would like to express her heartfelt thanks to Dr. Iva Lipovic, author service manager and editor of the book, for her invitation to write about this topic, which has been of great relevance in her academic life; to Ms. Silvina Velazquez for her translation of the text into English and for her collaboration in the editing and correction process; to the Research Department of the Universidad Pedagógica y Tecnológica de Colombia for its financial support; also to Luis Eduardo Wiesner, a colleague and friend for so many years who is sadly no longer with us but who will forever be remembered by those who knew him; and finally to her family and friends for their lasting support and companionship.

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