

Study shows Mexico's latest elections most violent in decades



Mexico City, July 20 (RHC)-- The Seventh Report on Political Violence, by the consulting firm Etellekt, recorded aggressions against aspiring and active public servants during the whole federal electoral process, starting on September 8, 2017 and ending on the day of the election on July 1, 2018.

The high number of murders, attacks, threats and other kinds of aggressions made this the most violent process since 1997, the year marking the “transition” into Mexican democracy, when the long-time ruling Revolutionary Institutional Party (PRI) started to loosen the grip.

Etellekt registered a total of 774 attacks against elected politicians, out of which 278 were threats, 152 were murders (20 percent), 125 were physical attacks, 64 were gun attacks, 59 attacks against politicians' family members, 38 were assaults, 31 kidnappings and 27 injured by gun fire. And regarding the aggressions against family members of politicians, the attacks resulted in 51 killed.

Also, the consulting firm recorded 429 attacks against non-elected public servants, appointed to their positions through means different than a voting process, resulting in 371 killed, making a total of 523 murders. Even though some local and international media reported the actual day of the elections ran smoothly, Etellekt registered 138 aggressions and seven murders against politicians in 26 states that day alone.

The report also classifies the aggressions by gender, state, political party and government position, maps them at municipal level and presents a timeline of the events.

Mexico's July 1st elections were the biggest in its recent history, in which eligible voters elected a new president, 128 senators and 500 deputies for both legislative houses. State representatives and local officials were also among the more than 3,400 seats contested in the election.

The difficult situation in Mexico's political sphere represents a challenge for democracy, as candidates and politicians often give up on their aspirations or backtrack on their government plans due to threats and fear, especially at a municipal level where organized crime and corrupt authorities have greater control and impunity.

After several candidates and politicians were murdered in the northern state of Chihuahua in a short span of time, about 80 candidates decided to withdraw from their respective campaigns, as reported by the executive secretary of the State Electoral Institute, Guillermo Sierra.

"State and local authorities are outgunned and outmaneuvered and the federal forces cannot be everywhere," said Duncan Wood, director of the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars in Washington. "There is an urgent need...to provide greater protection and insulation against organized crime."

But security experts suspect drug gangs drove much of the bloodshed. With a record of about 3,400 mostly local offices up for grabs in July, Mexico's warring cartels appear to be jostling for influence in city halls nationwide, according to Vicente Sanchez, a professor of public administration at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Tijuana.

He said crime bosses seek to install friendly lawmakers, eliminate those of rivals and scare off would-be reformers who might be bad for business. Local governments are a lucrative source of contracts and kickbacks, while their police forces can be pressed into service of the cartels.

Other kinds of aggressions also harmed the democratic process. On the eve of the elections, suspected fraud took center stage with several ballot boxes and documents reported stolen from delivery trucks destined for parts of Oaxaca and Chiapas, the State Electoral and Citizen Participation Institute (IEPC) said.

Reports suggest that seven ballot boxes were stolen from Huixtan, Chiapas and another 1,770 ballots and several ballot boxes were taken in Oaxaca. According to Mexico's National Electoral Institute (INE), at least 20,000 ballots were stolen across the nation.

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