



# Report

## **Survey of Mexicans Living in the U.S. on Absentee Voting in Mexican Elections**

By

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February 22, 2006

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## Executive Summary

Strict requirements, insufficient information about registration procedures and lack of public interest hobbled Mexico's first effort to conduct absentee voting among its more than ten million adult citizens living in the United States, according to a Pew Hispanic Center survey. About one-half of one percent of Mexicans in the U.S. sought absentee ballots for the presidential election in July during a registration period which ended last month.

The survey found that more than half (55%) of Mexicans in the U.S. were not aware that a presidential election is taking place this year and that few were familiar with the regulations and procedures adopted by the Mexican government last June when it authorized absentee voting for Mexicans abroad. About a third knew that the deadline for seeking an absentee ballot had just passed at the time of the survey. Only one of every ten eligible voters could correctly answer a set of factual questions about the procedures for getting a ballot.

The Mexican Federal Elections Institute, known by its initials in Spanish, IFE, recently announced that it received 56,749 ballot applications from abroad prior to the January 15 deadline, with 89% coming from the United States. As many as a fifth of those applications, however, may be rejected because they were submitted improperly. With the processing of the applications still being completed, it appears that fewer than 40,000 Mexicans in the U.S. may be able to cast absentee ballots in the July 2006 presidential election.

Out of a total adult population of some 10 million Mexicans living in the U.S., the survey showed that about three million would have been eligible to vote under the rules established by the Mexican congress—if they had applied for ballots. According to the IFE's count of ballot applications, about one-half one percent of all the adult Mexicans in the U.S. and fewer than two percent of the eligible voters registered for absentee ballots.

By contrast, during 2004 election in the Dominican Republic, which has a long tradition of expatriate involvement in home country politics, a population of some 670,000 adults living in the U.S. cast 26,437 ballots for a turnout of 4 percent.

Why didn't more Mexicans sign up? Eligible voters, given a choice of several reasons, blamed the requirements for absentee voting as well as a lack of information on the process for seeking a ballot. But while Mexico remains a primary interest to expatriates—they send money home, travel back and call relatives frequently—many said a lack of knowledge about the politics of their home country was also a factor that discouraged them from participating.

Although they maintain close ties to families left behind, Mexicans in the U.S. generally express a low opinion of Mexican political institutions. In terms of their partisan preferences, the survey of Mexicans in the U.S. showed somewhat different leanings than in public opinion polling in Mexico, with greater support for the centrist National Action Party (PAN) and less support for the leftist Democratic Revolutionary Party.

The three million eligible voters in the U.S. had the potential to exercise a decisive voice in an election often described as among the most important in Mexican history. This is the first presidential election since the Institutional Revolutionary Party

lost power in 2000 after a seven-decade reign, and three major candidates with substantially different positions on different issues are running in a campaign that is perhaps the most closely contested in the nation's history.

In Mexico, absentee voting has become an important test of whether the government and the political parties are willing and able to grant a political voice to a population that sent home some \$20 billion in remittances last year. For Mexicans in the U.S. it has become a measure of their intentions to exercise political influence in Mexico. And, in the United States, the prospect of so many people potentially voting in another country's election has been portrayed as an indication of how Mexicans might balance political involvement in their native land with their lives in the United States.

The survey findings are based on telephone interviews with a nationally representative sample of 987 Mexican-born adults living in the United States. Fieldwork was conducted by International Communications Research of Media, PA and lasted from January 16, 2006—the day after the deadline had passed for absentee ballot registration by Mexicans living abroad—until completed February 6. Virtually all (96%) of the interviews were conducted in Spanish. The survey results have a margin of error of 4.37%. (See Appendix on Methodology for further details).

About one of every eight adults born in Mexico now lives in the United States, and they are by far the largest foreign population living in this country. As such, the new Mexican absentee voting program marks the largest experiment ever undertaken of expatriates voting in one western democracy while living in another. At a time when migration flows are increasingly worldwide, it has also been a test of how a diaspora and a home country government manage a civic relationship with each other. The survey results indicate that each side failed to engage the other.

The major findings of the survey include:

- The eligibility requirements adopted by the Mexican government excluded nearly seven million people—about two-thirds of the potential electorate—from participation. The law enacted by the Mexican congress last June authorizing the first absentee ballot by Mexicans living abroad limited voting to persons who hold a valid voter registration credential issued in Mexico and made no provision for voter registration outside the country.
- The survey found that 31% of Mexicans in the U.S. have valid Mexican voting credentials with them, a potential electorate of three million persons. That group is younger, more recently arrived in the United States and more likely to send remittances to Mexico than is the population of Mexican adults in the U.S. as a whole.
- Asked in what year the next Mexican presidential election would take place, 45% of all Mexicans in the US and 53% of eligible voters answered correctly, 2006.
- Slightly fewer than a fifth (19%) of all Mexicans in the U.S. and a quarter of eligible voters (24%) knew both the correct month and year of the election, July 2006.
- More than three-quarters (78%) said they were aware that Mexicans living in the U.S. will be able to vote in the next Mexican presidential election.
- Somewhat more than a third of all Mexicans in the U.S. (36%) and of eligible voters (35%) said they were aware that the deadline for seeking an absentee ballot

had passed. Fewer than one fifth of either group could correctly identify the deadline for registration.

- About a quarter of Mexicans in the US (25%) and about the same share of eligible voters (27%) said they knew “something” about the procedures for applying for an absentee ballot.
- Asked a series of factual questions about those procedures, 7% of all Mexicans in the U.S. and 12% of the eligible voters correctly stated the deadline for application had passed, that a valid electoral credential was needed, that the application could be dispatched by mail and that it had to be sent by registered mail.
- Responding to a variety of statements about reasons why Mexicans in the U.S. did not register for the vote abroad, two thirds (67%) of all Mexicans here agreed that lack of the necessary documents such as the voting credential was a reason, while almost as many (61%) said they thought they knew something but were not sufficiently informed about Mexican politics to vote.
- About half said that they did not receive enough information to know how to register for the absentee vote (55%) or that the procedures were too difficult and complicated (46%).
- In response to the statement “I am making my life in the United States and the elections in Mexico are not important to me,” 28% of Mexicans in the U.S. agreed that was a reason people did not apply for the absentee voting, but 68% disagreed.
- Few Mexicans in the U.S. (13%) said they had a good opinion of the way Mexican political institutions function while 32% said they had a bad opinion. The rest said they had a fair opinion.
- In response to questions about party preferences and the upcoming presidential race, Mexicans in the U.S. and especially eligible voters showed leanings in favor of the PAN. More than a third of eligible voters (36%) said they felt closest to the PAN compared to 14% each for both the PRD and the PRI.

## 1) Eligible Voters: Three Million Strong, Young and Recently Arrived

The most recent data available from the U.S. Census Bureau shows that nearly 9.7 million persons born in Mexico who were at least 18 years old lived in the United States as of March 2005. \* Given that population's pace of growth in recent years, the estimated number of Mexican adults now living in the United States is about 10 million.

The survey was taken from a nationally representative sample of that population. However, only a fraction of that population is eligible to vote under the law enacted by the Mexican government last year. The law requires expatriate voters to hold a valid electoral credential and to have it with them in order to apply for an absentee ballot. Slightly less than a third (31%) of Mexican adults said they have a valid electoral credential with them in the United States.

Applying the survey results to the population data yields an estimate of about 3 million eligible voters living in the United States.

Fewer than two percent of those eligible voters applied for absentee ballots. The IFE, the Mexican elections institute, accepted ballot applications until February 15, one month after the deadline for dispatching the applications to Mexico by registered mail. The IFE announced February 16 that it received 56,749 applications for absentee ballots from around the world with some 89% coming from the United States. That would be about 50,500 applications. The actual number of valid applications, however, is likely to be lower. The IFE reports that a substantial number, perhaps as many as a fifth of the applications receive, may be disqualified because they were not sent by registered mail as required by the law on expatriate voting. .

The estimate of about 3 million eligible voters living in the United States is in line with estimates drawn from other sources.

According to the IFE, the Mexican elections institute, regular household surveys of registered voters show that 4.2 million Mexicans who hold a valid electoral credential no longer live in Mexico. The institute estimates that some fraction of those individuals is assumed to have either left their credential behind or have lost them (News Conference in Washington on November 17, 2005, Luis Carlos Ugalde, president of the IFE, official transcript, *Sala de Prensa Virtual*, [www.ife.org.mx](http://www.ife.org.mx))

A previous survey conducted by the Center produced comparable results. The Survey of Mexican Migrants involved a sample of nearly 5,000 Mexicans who were interviewed between July 2004 and January 2005 in seven Mexican consulates around the U.S. All were in the process of applying for a *matrícula consular*, an identity card issued by Mexican diplomatic missions, when they were interviewed. That survey was designed to produce a portrait of recently arrived migrants who are the ones most likely to be applying for a *matrícula*, and the sample included a disproportionate number of recent arrivals. In that survey, 42% of respondents said they had a valid credential, but as noted in the report, adjusting the data to account for the over-representation of new arrivals would lower that percentage. Weighting the data according to time of arrival yields a result of 35%.

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\* Based on Pew Hispanic Center tabulations of the Current Population Survey

The key characteristic distinguishing eligible voters from the rest of the Mexican population in the U.S., both in the Survey of Mexican Migrants and in this survey, is the amount of time they have been here.

Mexicans who migrated in the past few years are more likely to have voting credentials with them than those who have been here longer. More than half (52%) of Mexicans who have been in the United States for five years or less have credentials compared to less than one in seven (15%) of those who have been here for 15 years or more. (See Figure 1)

The election credential in its current form was not available when many long-term migrants left Mexico, and in recent years the credential has become widely accepted as a general purpose identity document. As a result, the pool of eligible voters is substantially made up of people who recently left Mexico. Those who left the country in the past five years account for 29% of the eligible voters; those who left in the past ten years account for 53%. (See Figure 2)

Given that recent immigrants are most likely to hold a voting credential, it is not surprising that eligible voters are disproportionately young. Among eligible voters 54% are between the ages of 18 and 34 compared to 40% of Mexicans who do not have a credential.

Also, a greater share of eligible voters (65%) sends money home to Mexico in remittances than among those without a credential. (55%).

Figure 1: Share of Mexicans in the U.S. with an Electoral Credential by Time in the U.S.

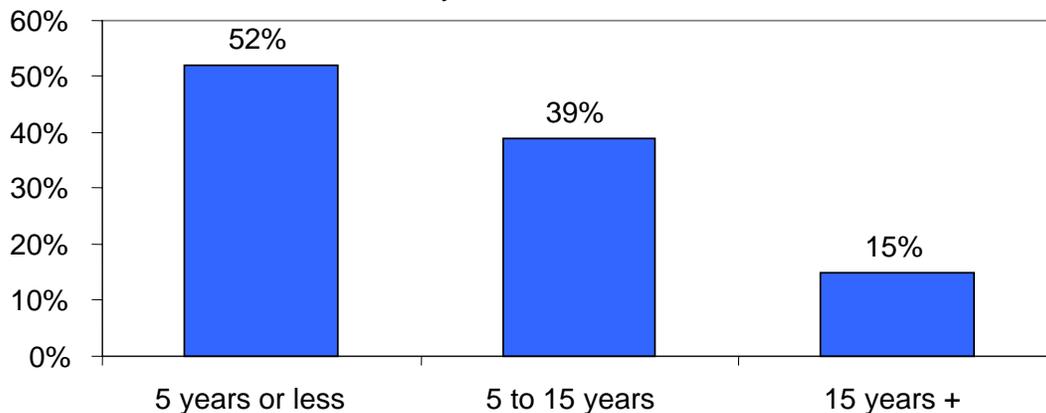
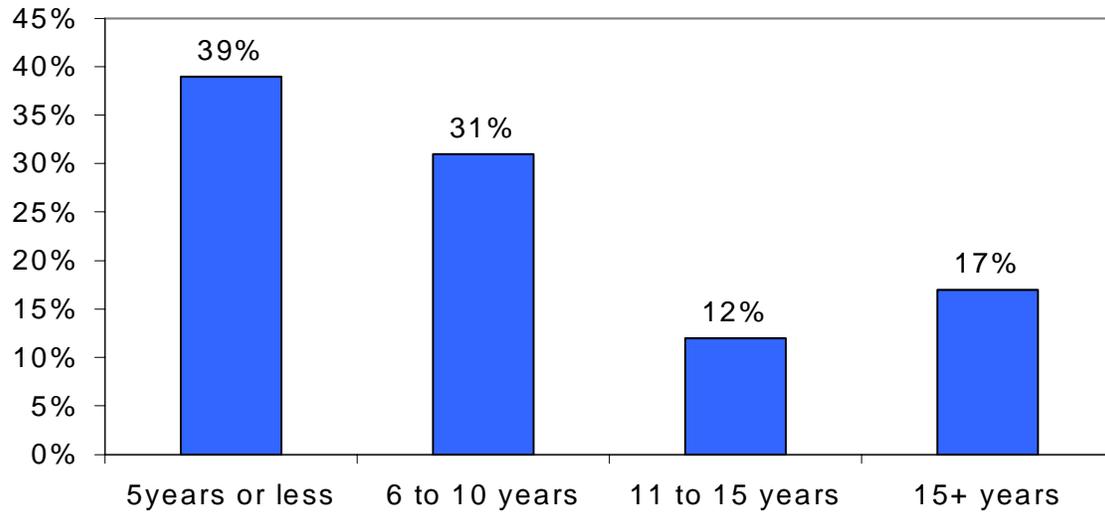


Figure 2: Mexicans with Electoral Credentials by Time in the U.S.



## 2) Scant Knowledge of the Election and Electoral Procedures

The survey tested knowledge of the procedures for absentee voting through a series of factual questions. The results showed that only a small fraction of Mexicans, whether they were eligible voters or not, knew enough about the procedures to file a valid application for an absentee ballot.

The lack of information extended to the timing of the election itself. Only 45% of Mexicans knew that a presidential election would take place; the share of eligible voters answering correctly was 53%. An even smaller number could correctly identify the month that the election would take place, 19% of all Mexicans and 24% of eligible voters.

Q3. Do you know in what year the next Presidential election will take place in Mexico?

	Total	Eligible to Vote	Not Eligible to Vote
Correct/2006	45	53	42
Incorrect (net)	2	2	3
Don't know	53	45	55
Refused	--	--	--

(Total respondents who say the election will be in 2006; n=411)

Q3a. Do you know in what month the next presidential election will take place in Mexico?

	Total	Eligible to Vote	Not Eligible to Vote
Correct/July	41	45	39
Incorrect (net)	22	29	19
Don't know	37	26	42
Refused	--	--	--

### Q3/Q3a Combination Table

Base = Total Respondents

	Correct Year and Month=2006 +July	Incorrect Year or Month or Don't Know to either
Total	19	81
Eligible to Vote	24	76
Not Eligible to Vote	17	83

More than three-quarters (78%) said they were aware that Mexicans living in the U.S. will be able to vote in the next Mexican presidential election. But, far smaller shares were aware of the procedures for taking part in the absentee balloting.

Interviewing for the survey began the day after the application period for absentee ballots had ended on January 15. Somewhat more than a third of all Mexicans in the U.S. (36%) and of eligible voters (35%) said they were aware that the deadline passed. One fifth or less of either group could correctly identify the deadline for registration.

Q5 Do you know whether the Mexican authorities have set a deadline to register for the vote abroad?

5a. Do you know if the deadline to register has passed or is it coming up?

5b. When was the deadline?

#### Q5/Q5a/5b Combination Table

Base = Total Respondents

	Total	Eligible to Vote	Not Eligible to Vote
Deadline already passed	36	35	36
Deadline was Jan 15	15	20	13
Deadline coming up	9	9	10
No deadline	28	29	27
Don't know/refused	13	14	12

About a quarter of Mexicans in the US (25%) and about the same share of eligible voters (27%) said they knew “something” about the procedures for applying for an absentee ballot.

The survey asked a series of factual questions about those procedures, and a relatively small share of Mexicans could correctly answer on four points essential to submitting a valid application: that the deadline for application had passed, that a valid electoral credential was needed, that the application could be dispatched by mail and that it had to be sent by registered mail. Only 7% of all Mexicans in the U.S. and 12% of the eligible voters answered all the questions correctly.

Survey respondents were asked whether they had registered for an absentee ballot and 6% said that they had while 94% said they had not. Surveys in the United States and other countries routinely produce inflated share of positive responses when people are asked whether they have registered to vote or have actually voted. In this case the 6% positive response far exceeds the share of Mexicans living in the U.S. who actually submitted applications to the Mexican elections institute.

Of the survey respondents who said that they had registered for an absentee ballot, only 23% could correctly answer the battery of questions on the applications procedures. That means than less than 2% of all Mexicans surveyed said they had registered and knew how to register which is in line with the actual number of applications received by the elections institute.

### 3) Why didn't they register?

Mexicans living in the United States offered a variety of reasons for why expatriates did not register for the absentee ballot. The survey shows that the requirements for registering, along with a lack of information on the process, were significant obstacles. Many people also found the process too difficult. Mexico remains of primary interest to many and many view the upcoming elections as important to them. But the survey also found that a lack of knowledge about the politics of their home country also discouraged many from registering.

The survey posed five different reasons why people might not have registered, and respondents were asked to say whether they agreed or disagreed with each. Almost seven out of ten, the highest response, agreed that not having the necessary documents was a reason for not registering. Not having enough information on how to go about registering was also high on the list, cited by 55 percent. And 46 percent cited the difficulty in applying for registration as a reason.

The responses to two other possible reasons for why people did not register offer a window into how expatriates might have brought their personal experiences to play.

About six out of 10 said that not being sufficiently informed about Mexican politics was a reason why people did not register. Next to the lack of documents, this possible reason received the second highest response (61 percent).

The one reason that was rejected, by a significant majority, was the possibility that people did not register because the focus of expatriates is on life in the United States and not back home Mexico. The strongest reaction was to this possible reason. Almost seven out of 10 disagreed, and of those who disagreed, 47 percent said they disagreed strongly.

**(Total respondents who did not register, don't know or refused to say; n=925)**

Q10a. I am going to read you some of the reasons that people have given for not registering to vote abroad. For each statement, please tell me whether you agree or disagree with the statement.

a. Sometimes I think I am not sufficiently informed about Mexican politics to vote.

	AGREE			DISAGREE			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly		
Total Not Registered	61	33	28	33	14	18	6	*
Eligible Voters not Registered	54	32	22	36	18	18	9	*

b. I never received enough information to know how to register

	AGREE			DISAGREE			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly		
Total Not Registered	55	32	23	40	14	26	4	1
Eligible Voters not Registered	52	28	24	42	15	27	6	*

c. I am making my life in the United States and the elections in Mexico are not important to me anymore

	AGREE			DISAGREE			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly		
Total Not Registered	28	16	12	68	20	47	4	*
Eligible Voters not Registered	29	17	12	67	18	49	4	*

d. Applying for registration was too difficult and complicated.

	AGREE			DISAGREE			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly		
Total Not Registered	46	26	20	39	17	23	14	*
Eligible Voters not Registered	56	34	22	37	15	22	7	*

e. I did not have the necessary documents, such as a voting credential

	AGREE			DISAGREE			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Strongly	Somewhat	NET	Somewhat	Strongly		
Total Not Registered	67	44	23	29	11	19	3	*
Eligible Voters not Registered	51	28	23	44	14	31	4	*

The law adopted by the Mexican congress in June 2005, authorizing expatriate voting, established procedures for seeking an absentee ballot that some leaders of Mexican organizations in the U.S. considered burdensome. These complaints included: Applicants were required to submit a photocopy of a lease or a utility bill in their own name as proof of their home address in the U.S. although many recent immigrants share housing and do not have such documentation. Mailing the application required going to a U.S. post office and paying \$8 for the registered mail, in addition to postage. Doing so, and filling out a form that required a name and home address, might be especially troublesome for the many Mexicans who are living in the United States illegally.

The law established an application period from Oct.1, 2005 to Jan. 15, 2006. In mid-November, a consultative council of expatriate Mexicans organized by the Mexican Foreign Ministry complained that the elections institute had not made a sufficient effort to inform potential voters about the application procedures. A week later the elections institute announced that it would develop a public information campaign which was eventually launched in mid-December, a month before the application period closed. (See Appendix II: Background on Voting By Mexicans Abroad)

#### 4) Connections to Mexico

The survey shows that Mexicans maintain close relations to their home country. A significant majority follows the news from Mexico, primarily through Spanish-language media. About a third of those polled said they had traveled to their home country in the past year, almost six out of ten said they had sent money to relatives and about eight out of 10 said they placed a call to family in Mexico at least once a month. There were some differences between those who were eligible to vote in the elections and those who had not registered, but generally most Mexicans in the U.S. revealed a significant connection to their native countries and their interest was focused on their families.

In terms of travel, for instance, 33 percent said they had made the trip home in the past year, and there was no difference between those who said they were eligible to vote and those who were not. Of all those who said they had traveled to Mexico, 18 percent had made the trip twice in the last year and 17 percent three times or more.

Q12 Did you travel to Mexico over the past year?

Q12a How many times?

#### Q12/12a Combination Table

Base = Total respondents

	TRAVELED TO MEXICO					Did not travel to Mexico	Don't know	Refused
	NET	Once over the past year	Twice	Three times	More than three times in the past year			
Total	33	19	6	2	6	67	*	*
Eligible to Vote	33	18	5	1	9	67	*	*
Not Eligible to Vote	33	20	7	3	4	67	*	*

Remittances, or the money sent to Mexico by those abroad, are one way to measure ties to home. According to the Bank of Mexico, more than \$20 billion in family remittances were received in Mexico in 2005. The survey showed that 58 percent of Mexicans in the U.S. said they had sent money over the past year. Of these, a third said they sent money at least once a month and about six out of ten said they had sent money several times in the past year. Mexicans who said they were eligible to vote were slightly more likely to say they sent money in the past year (65 percent) than those who were not registered to vote (55 percent).

Q13 Have you sent money to anyone in Mexico over the past year?

Q14 How often?

### Q13/14 Combination Table

Base = Total respondents

	SENT MONEY TO MEXICO				Did not send money to Mexico	Don't know	Refused
	NET	At least once a month	Several times in the past year	Once in the past year			
Total	58	19	34	4	42	*	*
Eligible to Vote	65	27	34	5	35	*	*
Not Eligible to Vote	55	16	34	3	45	1	1

The survey found that 79 percent of Mexicans in the U.S. said they talked to their families by telephone once a month or more. Almost one in five said they talked to relatives more than once a week. In terms of frequency of calls, there was little difference between those who were eligible to vote and those who were not. And there was no difference when they were asked if they called Mexico one or two times a month. About one in three of those eligible to vote and those who were not said they called one or two times a month.

Q15 How frequently do you talk with your family in Mexico by phone?

15. How frequently do you talk with your family in Mexico by phone?

	Total	Eligible to Vote	Not Eligible to Vote
One a month or more (net)	79	91	74
More than once a week	19	27	16
Once a week	27	31	25
One or two times a month	33	33	33
Less than once a month	4	1	5
Almost never	9	4	12
No Family in Mexico	7	4	9
Don't know	*	1	*
Refused	*	*	1

Interest in news from Mexico is high among Mexicans in the U.S., regardless of whether they were eligible to vote or not. A significant majority said they get their news from television (87 percent) and most often from Spanish-language television. Asked how closely they follow news from Mexico, about seven out of ten said they followed it very closely or somewhat closely. However, as noted earlier, when were asked what year

the next presidential election would be held, 55 percent said they did not know or answered incorrectly.

A relatively small share (10%) said they belonged to a civic organization, sports team or social club of people from Mexico, and there was no significant difference in this regard between those who are eligible voters and those who are not.

Nearly half (46%) of Mexicans in the U.S. have a *matrícula consular*, a photographic identity card issued by Mexican consulates that verifies the holder's residential address in the United States.

20. Would you say that you usually follow the news from Mexico very closely, somewhat closely, not too closely, or not at all closely?

	CLOSELY			NOT CLOSELY			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Somewhat	NET	Not too	Not at all		
Total	74	30	44	25	17	8	*	1
Eligible to Vote	81	32	49	19	14	5	*	1
Not Eligible to Vote	71	29	42	27	18	9	1	1

21. Do you belong to a civic organization, sports team, or social club of people from Mexico?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
Total	10	89	1	1
Eligible to Vote	13	85	1	1
Not Eligible to Vote	8	90	*	1

22. Do you have a matrícula consular?

	Yes	No	Don't know	Refused
Total	46	52	1	1
Eligible to Vote	55	42	2	1
Not Eligible to Vote	42	57	*	1

## 5) Views on Mexican Politics and the Election

Mexican political institutions are held in low esteem by a majority of those surveyed. Only 13 percent of Mexicans in the U.S. said their opinion of Mexican political institutions was good or very good. About three quarters judged these institutions either fair or bad. This negative view was generally shared equally by those who were eligible to vote and those who were not.

16. In general terms, what is your opinion of the way Mexican political institutions function. Would you say they are very good, good, fair, bad, very bad.

	GOOD			FAIR	BAD			Don't know	Refused
	NET	Very	Good		NET	Bad	Very		
Total	13	4	9	42	32	17	16	11	1
Eligible to Vote	11	2	9	48	32	18	14	7	2
Not Eligible to Vote	14	5	9	40	32	16	16	13	1

Views on the upcoming presidential race in general reflect the same divisions and differences seen in Mexico. In the survey, the responses on political inclinations were within the margin of error, so no firm conclusions can be drawn. However, a plurality (40%) said they did not favor any of the three major parties, the PRI, PAN or PRD, and also said they would not know who they would vote for if the election were held today (33%).

Asked which party they feel closest to, Mexicans in the U.S. chose PAN (27 percent) over PRI (17 percent) and PRD (11 percent). Of the presidential contenders, the PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón, received 26 percent, while Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the PRD received 21 percent, which puts them in a statistical dead heat. Robert Madrazo of PRI was in third place with 13 percent.

Recent polls released in Mexico show somewhat varying results. A survey released by *El Universal* on February 19 showed López Obrador with 30% in a statistical tie with Calderón at 27% while Madrazo followed with 22%. A survey released by *Reforma* on February 20 showed López Obrador with 38% of provable voters' preference, followed by Calderón with 31 % and Madrazo with 29%. (A compilation of the latest news reports and polls on the Mexican elections is maintained by the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars [http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic\\_id=5949&fuseaction=topics.item&news\\_id=143858](http://www.wilsoncenter.org/index.cfm?topic_id=5949&fuseaction=topics.item&news_id=143858))

17. In Mexican politics, which of the major political parties do you feel closest to (the PRI), (the PAN ), (the PRD) or do you not consider yourself close to any of the three?

	<b>PRI</b>	<b>PAN</b>	<b>PRD</b>	<b>None of the three</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Refused</b>
Total	17	27	11	40	4	1
Eligible to Vote	14	36	14	34	1	1
Not Eligible to Vote	19	23	9	42	5	1

28. And now, some last questions, if the election for president of Mexico was held today, who would you vote for?

	<b>Roberto Madrazo, candidate for PRI party</b>	<b>Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, candidate for PRD party</b>	<b>Felipe Calderon, candidate for PAN party</b>	<b>Don't know</b>	<b>Refused</b>
Total	13	21	26	33	7
Eligible to Vote	10	22	36	24	8
Not Eligible to Vote	14	20	21	37	7

## Appendix 1: Background on Voting by Mexicans Abroad

Proposals to allow voting by Mexicans living outside the country to vote began circulating in Mexican political and academic circles at least a decade ago as the country undertook a reform of its electoral system and the migrant population in the United States boomed. The subject gained urgency under President Vicente Fox, who was elected in 2000. In a departure from his immediate predecessors, Fox regularly extolled the virtues of Mexicans who left the country for jobs abroad, calling them “heroes” for their hard work and for the large sums of money they sent home in remittances. Mexico received \$20 billion in remittances, the great majority from the United States, in 2005, according to the Bank of Mexico.

The Fox administration also aggressively courted Mexican community organizations, hometown associations and business groups in the U.S., giving them opportunities to visit Mexico and make their views known. For example, the Foreign Ministry created a special “Consultative Council” of 105 elected representatives of Mexicans living in the United States and Mexico abroad which holds regular meetings with government officials, including the president. These efforts established a venue for lobbying in favor of absentee voting by Mexicans in the U.S.

In February 2005, the Mexican Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Congress, overwhelmingly approved a law permitting absentee voting by Mexican living outside the country for the first time. Several objections were raised by the IFE, an independent body that organizes and oversees elections, regulates campaign spending and counts votes.

In particular, the IFE objected to provisions of the law that would have allowed Mexicans to register as voters abroad. It complained that that it would be logistically impossible to conduct the registration process with the same care and scrutiny normally applied to prevent fraud. In Mexico, voters must present proof of residence and identity to a local office of the elections institute and wait 20 days while the information is verified before collecting their electoral credential.

A compromise solution developed in the Senate that would allow Mexicans to cast absentee ballots only if they had already registered to vote in Mexico and had a valid electoral credential in their possession. The Senate and the Chamber of Deputies approved the legislation with these provisions in June and Fox signed it into law on August 31. At the time, Fox compared it to the granting of suffrage to women in 1953 and declared that Mexico was for the first time honoring the core democratic principle of “one citizen, one vote.”

The law established an application period for absentee ballots from October 1, 2005 to January 15, 2006. It required applicants to provide photocopies of their voting credential as well as a document, such as a lease or utility bill that established their residential address abroad. The law also required that the applications be dispatched to Mexico only by registered mail.

Some leaders of Mexican organizations in the U.S. objected that the requirements were burdensome even for voters with the electoral credential. Many recent immigrants share housing and do not have documentation showing their home addresses. Mailing the application required going to a U.S. post office and paying \$8 for the registered mail, in

addition to postage. (*Reforma*, January 8, 2006, “Objecta Red ‘Obstáculo’ de IFE a Voto Exterior”) Doing so, and filling out a form that required a name and home address, might be especially troublesome for the many Mexicans who are living in the United States illegally.

On November 7, 2005, Cándido Morales, director of the Institute of Mexicans Abroad, a branch of the Foreign Ministry, urged the elections institute to undertake a massive public information campaign among Mexicans in the U.S. The small number of applicants for absentee ballots—at the time only 733 had been received—reflected lack of familiarity with the application procedures, he argued. “I believe that the interest is there; what’s happening is that the information is not reaching them,” Morales said. (*La Opinión*, November 8, 2005, “Acusan al IFE de Falta de Promoción del Voto Postal”.)

A few days later the same complaint was lodged directly with officials of the IFE at a meeting of the Consultative Council of Mexican leaders from the U.S. and Canada. In what press accounts described as a tense and confrontational session, the representatives of the expatriate population accused the elections institute of “lacking an adequate strategy” to ensure participation in absentee voting. Some of the representatives threatened that if the elections institute did not step up its public information efforts, they would wash their hands of the entire matter. (*La Opinión*, November 15, 2005, “Arremeten Contra el IFE.” *La Jornada*, November 11, 2005, Grupos de Migrantes Reclaman al IFE por las Trabas Burocráticas para Votar” )

At a news conference in Washington on November 17, 2005, Luis Carlos Ugalde, president of the IFE, offered two possible explanations for why eligible Mexicans—those with an electoral credential—were not applying for the absentee ballot in greater numbers:

“We have observed that on occasion some Mexicans do not want to register themselves yet because they do not know where they will be next year,” he said, arguing that large numbers of Mexicans move around within the United States.

“We have detected in community meetings that the central priority for Mexicans who reside, above all in an undocumented manner, in the United States is to regularize their immigration status and to have access to education and health services,” he said. In comparison to this priority it is difficult to know how much importance is given to voting in Mexican politics, but “at the end of this process it may be possible to show that probably interest in exercising the vote in Mexican elections is lower than what was originally expected.” (*Sala de Prensa Virtual*, [www.ife.org.mx](http://www.ife.org.mx))

At the time Ugalde rejected complaints that the IFE had been insufficiently energetic about its efforts to drum up interest in absentee voting from abroad and said that it had asked the Mexican congress to approve additional funding for a public information campaign. Up to that point the IFE had primarily relied on Mexican consulates and community organizations to distribute application forms for the absentee ballot as a means of reaching Mexicans in the U.S.

On December 15, a month before the application period ended, the IFE announced that it was launching a public information campaign in the 15 U.S. cities with the largest concentrations of Mexican citizens. The announcement said the effort would include a broadcast and print advertising campaign. In addition, the IFE set up booths at airports and border crossing stations to provide information to Mexicans who were coming home for the holidays. (*Sala de Prensa Virtual*, [www.ife.org.mx](http://www.ife.org.mx))

## **Appendix 2: Background on Absentee Voting in Latin America**

Mexico's attempt to enfranchise expatriates is not unique in Latin America. Extending the vote to citizens abroad has been around for years in some countries. Colombia, Peru, Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, are among the Latin American countries that currently allow citizens abroad to vote. Ecuador, like Mexico, will allow citizens to vote for the first time in its presidential elections in 2006. As was the case in Mexico, the effort to enfranchise citizens who have emigrated has both proponents and detractors. Chile has been debating the issue since at least 2000, when the current legislative effort was first introduced. A recent poll there found that about 73 percent of Chileans support granting the vote to citizens abroad.

Data on the expatriate vote from Latin America, including the number of potential voters, those who register and the turnout—are not readily available. In Ecuador, the president of the national electoral tribunal recently told *El Comercio* newspaper that this year's vote would probably attract only about 10 percent of the 3 million Ecuadorians living abroad. Of these, he estimated that only 10 percent, or 30,000 Ecuadorians would actually vote. At a recent conference on the expatriate vote in Latin America, held in Chile, a Peruvian government official said that country has about 250,000 voters registered in different countries.

The Dominican Republic's electoral board lists the expatriate vote on its website. Of the 11 sites around the world, six are in the United States and one is in Puerto Rico. In the U.S. cities and in Puerto Rico, 42,000 Dominicans registered to vote in 2004. Of these, about 30,000, or 71 percent, voted. There are about 670,000 Dominicans 18 or older, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

Spain, which has more than 1 million expatriates around the world, had a very high rate of voting in 2005. According to *The Spain Herald*, more than 330,000 Spaniards living overseas voted in that election.

## Appendix 3: Methodology Report

### THE PEW HISPANIC CENTER THE MEXICAN VOTERS SURVEY METHODOLOGY REPORT

#### METHODOLOGY REPORT

In order to fully represent the opinions of Mexico-born Americans living in the United States, ICR conducted interviews with a statistically representative sample of Mexicans so that they could be examined nationally, as well as in target regions of high Mexican concentration.

This survey was conducted by telephone from January 16, 2006 to February 6, 2006 among a nationally representative sample of 987 respondents. The margin of error for total respondents is +/- 4.37%. A total of 62 are registered to vote and 922 are not registered to vote. The margin of error for total registered to vote it is +/- 18.20% and for those not registered to vote it is +/- 4.51%

For this survey, ICR maintained a staff of Spanish-speaking interviewers whom, when contacting a household, were able to offer respondents the option of completing the survey in Spanish or in English. Of the total Mexican interviews, 96% were conducted predominantly in Spanish.

#### *Eligible Respondent*

The survey was administered to any male or female age 18 and older that is of Mexican origin or descent.

#### *Field Period*

The field period for this study was January 16 through February 6, 2006. The interviewing was conducted by ICR/International Communications Research in Media, PA. All interviews were conducted using the Computer Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI) system. The CATI system ensured that questions followed logical skip patterns and that the listed attributes automatically rotated, eliminating “question position” bias.

### ***Sampling Methodology***

A stratified sample via the Optimal Sample Allocation sampling technique was used for this research. Since the incidence of Mexico-born Adults is highly correlated to geography, it was decided early in the process to only interview in areas of reasonable incidence of this population. Covering 100% of this population, that is, giving every Mexico-born American a chance to be selected in the survey, was not at all cost effective. However, given the concentration of this population in certain areas, it was decided that a cover of at least 80% of the population would suffice. As such, states with the highest incidence of this population were selected to be part of the study. These included California, Texas, Arizona, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, Florida, New Jersey, New York, Illinois, and Nebraska. This comprised of 86% of all Mexico-born Adults living in the United States.

For this project, telephone exchanges in these states were first divided into high and low incidence strata. Then each strata was run against listed databases to identify households with a Hispanic surname. Then the strata were divided into RDD-no surname and RDD-surname substrata, for a total of four strata overall. The low incidence non-surname strata was not dialed due to extreme low incidence. As is usual with the disproportionate stratified design, high incidence strata were dialed more heavily than lower incidence strata via an optimal allocation method.

### ***Weighting and Estimation***

The data was weighted by first using a preweight to correct for the disproportionality across strata. This brought the complete back into proper proportions by region state, and telephone exchange. Then, post-stratification weights were used to weight by age, gender, and education.

***Response Rate***

The overall response rate for this study was calculated to be 56.6% using AAPOR's RR3 formula.

Following is a full disposition of the sample selected for this survey:

TOTAL NUMBERS DIALED	TOTAL 15406
<hr/>	
INTERVIEW (Category 1)	
Full interview	987
Short interview with non-Mexicans	1341
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ELIGIBLE, NON-INTERVIEW (Category 2)	
Refusals	1017
<hr/>	
UNKNOWN ELIGIBILITY, NON-INTERVIEW (Category 3)	
No answer	1682
Busy	78
Answering Machine	224
No screener completed	891
<hr/>	
NOT-ELIGIBLE (Category 4)	
Data/modem/fax line	375
Non-working, disconnected, business or government	5955
No eligible respondents to answer	63
Overquota	2793