

Mexico Battles Fraud, Ballot Thefts On Eve Of Elections

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Voters will be monitored and any suspicious behavior will be recorded and reported to electoral authorities immediately, one electoral assistant said.

On the eve of Mexico's July 1 elections, fraud continues to take center-stage with two more batches of ballot boxes stolen from delivery trucks destined for parts of Oaxaca and the Chiapas, the State Electoral and Citizen Participation Institute (IEPC) reported Saturday.

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So far, reports suggest that seven ballot boxes have been stolen from Huixtan, Chiapas, with another 1,770 ballots intercepted in Oaxaca on their way to La Reforma and El Salitre.

According to Mexico's National Electoral Institute (INE), over 20,000 ballots have so far been stolen across the nation.

Meanwhile, 157,000 civilians will act as electoral assistants to ensure the

elections proceed without incident. INE officials have said the ballot-counting machines are robust and have been tested in previous elections.

All voters will be monitored and any suspicious behavior will be recorded and reported to electoral authorities immediately, one volunteer, Beatriz Fenner, told EFE.

According to frontrunner Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, better known as AMLO, his defeats in 2006 and 2012 were due to fraud.

However, corruption watchdogs have voiced concern over the campaign funding of AMLO and his three competitors, Jose Antonio Meade and Ricardo Anaya. By law, presidential campaigns are primarily publicly funded, with some regulated private investment.

Candidates from the three main political parties say they have relied almost exclusively on public money from their parties to bankroll their campaigns, a total of US\$32.1 million.

But campaign spending limits are often exceeded and poorly monitored, the INE said. Luis Carlos Ugalde, a former INE president, acknowledged that Mexico's strict limits on private donations are easily evaded by contributors seeking influence.

The presidential campaigns of Meade, with the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and Anaya, of the National Action Party (PAN), both said public funding was sufficient, so they did not need private money.

AMLO, running for the MORENA party, declined to comment. So far, no complaints have arisen to contradict their claims.

Electoral results released by the Preliminary Electoral Results Program (PREP) will be available by 11p.m. local time on July 1.
