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Democratic Integrity: Mexico 2024

ELECTIONS AND FAKE NEWS



Summary

**"Fake news: false stories that appear to be news, spread on the internet or using other media, usually created to influence political views or as a joke."
Cambridge Dictionary**

In the modern world, misinformation has become a significant aspect of electoral competition. Although false information has always been part of political life, thanks to digital networks it now spreads faster and reaches more people through a phenomenon labeled as "fake news."

Fake news should not be taken lightly in an era of increasing political polarization. Misinformation can be used as a tool of deliberate manipulation to undermine the credibility of the democratic process. At its most extreme, it can promote extremist positions that undermine pluralism and tolerance and, thus lead to the rise of autocratic regimes.

In particular, unsubstantiated allegations of fraud or vote rigging by different political actors represents one of the most significant challenges to the integrity of elections. This issue surfaced in the United States in 2020 and Brazil in 2021, leading to several legal actions against former presidents Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro. Such accusations of fraud, made without substantial evidence in support, are a political tactic that seeks to circumvent the democratically expressed will of the people.

This issue explores ten examples of everyday fake news about the ongoing electoral process that we fear may begin to circulate in Mexico in the coming weeks.

In the "Last Glance" section, we present information about the pilot test of electronic ballot boxes at "Special polling stations" in Mexico City and Nuevo León.

Elections and Fake News

Repeating fake news does not make it true

The Mexican electoral system is designed to provide confidence in the legality and legitimacy of elections. For this reason, it has several security mechanisms and safeguards to protect the integrity of the vote.

For more than thirty years, the work of the National Electoral Institute (INE) has guaranteed the integrity of the elections at every polling station.

Nevertheless, fake news warning of alleged electoral fraud risks has become a common trope in Mexico's modern elections. Although these claims are rarely based in fact, they often spread quickly on social networks and reappear each electoral cycle.

Let's get to know some of them.



The Election Post

FAKE NEWS

SPREADS FASTER THAN TRUE NEWS ON TWITTER

“False news stories are 70 percent more likely to be retweeted than true stories are. It also takes true stories about six times as long to reach 1,500 people as it does for false stories to reach the same number of people.”
Soroush Vosoughi.

“Tweets containing false information were more novel than those containing true information. And they elicited different emotional reactions. That novelty and emotional charge seem to be what's generating more retweets”
Soroush Vosoughi.

Source: “The Spread of True and False News Online” by Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. Science. at: <https://www.science.org/content/article/fake-news-spreads-faster-true-news-twitter-thanks-people-not-bots>

1. The INE marker can be erased: Someone can change or cancel your vote

False: Hundreds of millions of ballots have been marked with the INE marker and there is not a single instance of a vote being erased.

INE provides each polling station with several crayon-like markers for voters to use. The marker is made with special pigments that ensure it cannot be erased without leaving marks that show the vote has been altered. However, if a person wishes to bring their own marker to vote, they may do so.

Although ballots may be marked with a pencil, even then it is nearly impossible for a vote to be erased or invalidated. Polling stations are the most closely supervised places on election day: six citizens—chosen by lot—are in charge of the station, and each political party has two representatives to verify that no malfeasance occurs.

After each person has cast their vote, the ballot is placed in a transparent box visible to everyone at the polling station. More than 15 people can see the ballot box. At the end of the day, the votes are removed from the transparent box and counted in front of everyone, and the results are recorded in the proper tabulation sheets.

2. Some people will carry pre-marked ballots with them to drop them in the ballot box

False: Only ballots distributed at polling places are valid.

It is impossible to obtain ballots before election day due to the security procedures in place before, during, and after election day. Ballots are made of special paper and contain visible and invisible markings that make them tamper-proof. In addition, they are guarded by the Army or Navy in INE warehouses until the ballot packages are delivered to the polling station officials.

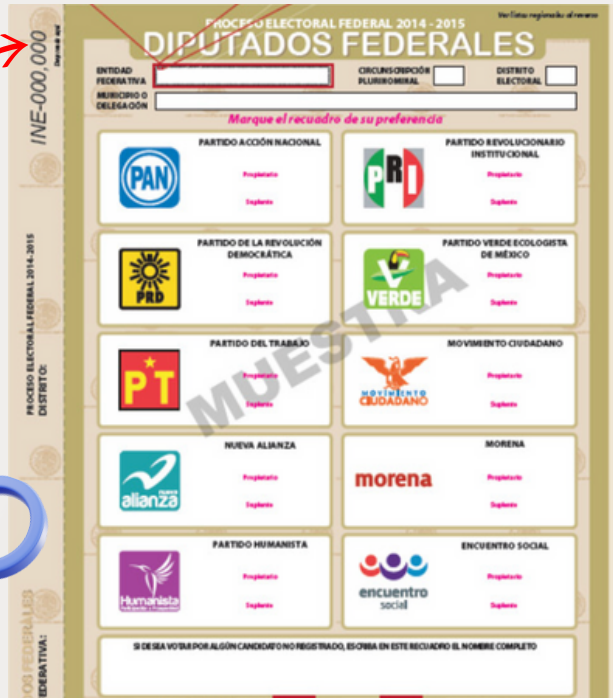
Both polling station officials and party representatives check the ballots they receive one by one before voting begins.

The political parties may even sign the back of the ballots to ensure that the marked ballots at the end of the election are the same as those given to each voter at the polling station.

Ballot Security Measures

Microprinted legends

All ballots contain the election and polling place data, so they cannot be used in another place or election.



Visible and invisible optical fibers



In addition, it has other security measures such as inverted prints, latent images (which require a special lens to observe), and invisible prints (which are observed with an ultraviolet lamp).

INE logo watermark



3. The INE never installs all the polling stations

False: More than 99.9% of polling stations are set up, save for cases of force majeure.

On election day, the INE is prepared to install 100% of the polling stations planned: it has drawn lots and trained the citizens to be polling station officials. Only in extremely rare cases, due to weather conditions or social problems, have specific polling stations not been installed.

On election day, the INE monitors real-time reports on the installation and operations of each polling station throughout the country, tracking any incidents or problems that may occur so that they can be resolved immediately. Political parties have access to this crucial information.

Polling stations installed over the years 2000 to 2021

Polling Stations	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015	2018	2021
Approved	113,423	121,367	130,488	139,181	143,132	148,833	156,807	162,570
Not installed	18	1	11	67	2	231	10	32
% Not installed	0.02	0.001	0.01	0.05	0.001	0.16	0.01	0.02
% Installed	99.98	99.999	99.99	99.95	99.999	99.84	99.99	99.98

Source: Compiled by the authors based on information from the National Electoral Institute. INE.

4. Polling stations always close early to discourage voters

False: Polls are open until 6:00 pm.

By law, polls are open from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. However, they can remain open longer if people are waiting in line at 6:00 p.m.

The number of ballots printed is equal to the number of people registered to vote at any given polling place so that ballot box cannot be overfilled and every voter can exercise their right to vote.

The only exceptions are the "special polling stations," which are set up so that people far from home can vote. By law, one thousand ballots are available in these stations.

If a thousand people have voted before 6 p.m., these special polling stations may close earlier, as they are unable to receive more votes. Such polling stations represent only 0.7% of the total number of polling stations.

5. There are not enough ballots at the polling places

False: Each polling station has ballots for all registered voters and political party representatives.

Polling stations are set up according to the number of voters residing in each electoral section. By law, a maximum of 750 people can vote in each polling place. If there are 751 people in that section, a contiguous polling station will be set up. Thus, each person registered to vote will have access to a ballot for each elected office.

As explained, the only exception are the "special polling places".

6. One person can vote more than once

False: Multiple security measures ensure it is impossible to cast multiple ballots.

MEASURES TO ENSURE THE INTEGRITY OF THE VOTE



THE PERSON WHO IS AT THE POLLING STATION IS THE ONE ELIGIBLE TO CAST THEIR VOTE

Upon arrival, voters presented their INE-issued credential, which includes a photo ID. Their data and photo will be cross-checked against the records in an official booklet of the electoral roll. All polling station officials and party representatives must verify on their list if the person presenting their credentials is authorized to vote.

CREDENTIALS CAN NOT BE USED TWICE

Once the person has cast their vote, their credential will be returned with an imprint indicating the year of the election (this June, cards will be stamped with a "24"). The marked credentials may not be used again.



VOTER'S THUMBS ARE MARKED

The right thumb of all voters will be marked with indelible ink that indicates they have cast a ballot. The ink used has a chemical reaction with the skin, ensuring the mark is resistant to solvents, creams, and other substances and lasts for 10 to 12 hours.

For more detailed information on fake news regarding the ongoing electoral process, please refer to Certeza, the INE's project dedicated to fighting misinformation: <https://centralectoral.ine.mx/certeza/>

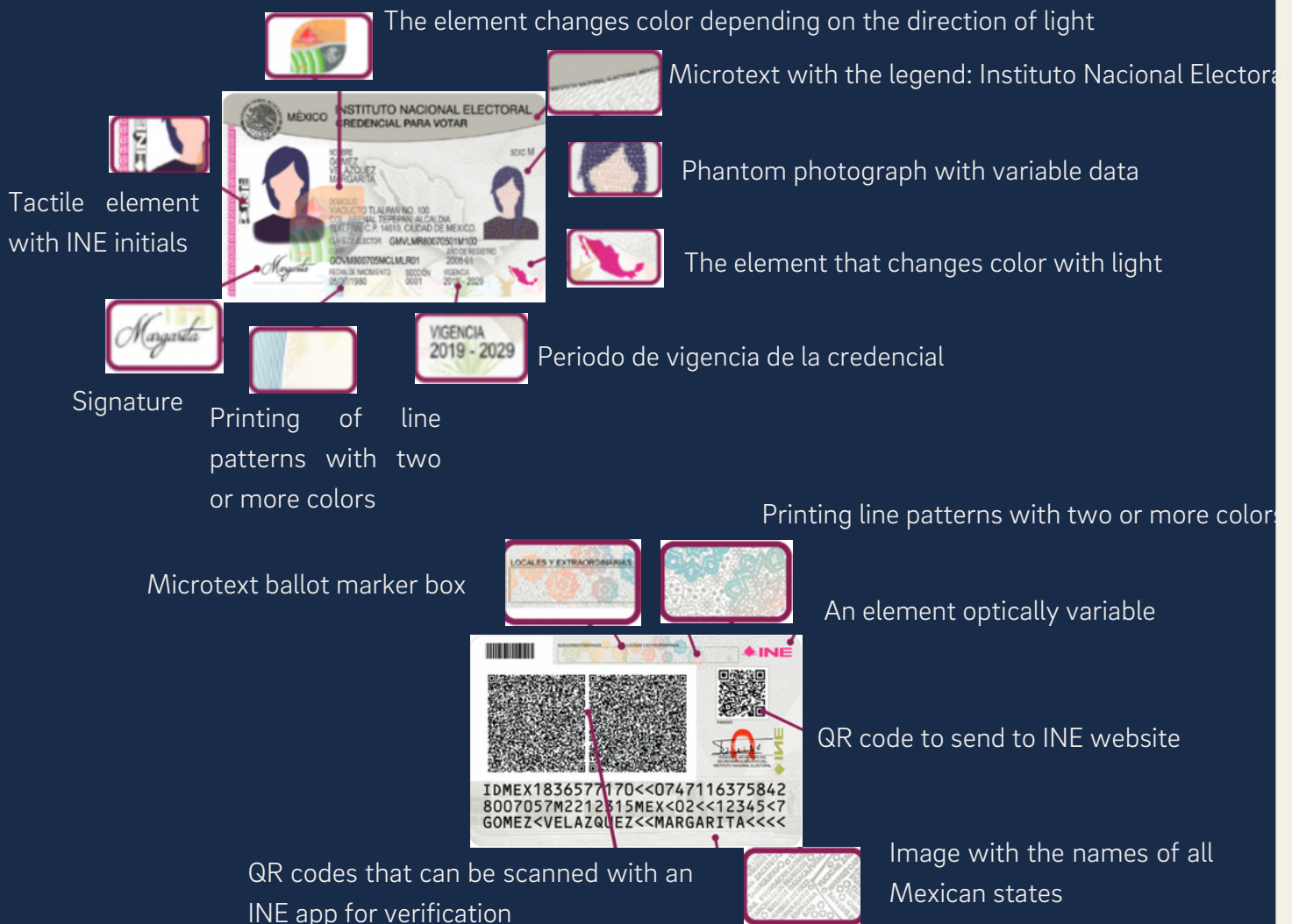
7. You can vote with any form of identification or with a photocopy of your voting card

False: Only the photo ID issued by the INE is valid at the polling station.

The voting card is an official document that cannot be forged and has 25 visible and invisible security measures. In INE history, no official credential has ever been found to be inauthentic.

Polling station officials and political party representatives ensure that only those with original and valid credentials enter the station. Citizens may vote without a credential only if they have a resolution from the Electoral Tribunal. In this case, citizens will have a document that allows them to vote instead of the credential.

Voter Credential Security Measures



8. Polling stations officials miscount votes

False: Citizen officials have carried out their responsibilities with tremendous efficiency and integrity.

Under the supervision of the party representatives, the election officials empty the ballot box, count the votes one by one for each contested office, and record them in the tabulation sheets. All those present sign the record, as do the parties, and keep a copy to verify that each vote is counted as it should be in the official tally (the sum of the votes from all the polling stations).

If there is doubt, a recount may be conducted in the official tally (as provided by law). In every election, the recount results agree with what was counted at the polling place, except for minor variations. An official INE study* showed that after recounting 45.9 million votes in the 2018 presidential election, the most significant variation was 15 votes per 10,000 between the count at the polling place and the recount. That is, the result of the first count was accurate in 99.9985% of the cases. In addition, the same study documented that while there may be inconsistencies, they result from human error, are randomly distributed, and do not affect or benefit any particular candidate.

9. Unused or extra ballots are sometimes fraudulently added to ballot boxes to manipulate election results

False: All unused ballots at the polling place are discarded at the end of the election.

At the end of the day, when the polling place is closed to voters, all remaining unused ballots are marked with two lines so they cannot be used. These canceled ballots are placed in a sealed bag, which becomes part of the electoral package that is returned to INE headquarters along with the marked ballots and the tally sheets.

10. When the election materials are returned, the results may be manipulated.

False: It is impossible to alter the votes.

When a polling place is closed, officials display a sign with the election results outside so that every citizen can know the outcome. In addition, each party representative takes a copy of the tabulation sheets with the signatures of the polling place officials and the representatives themselves. If anyone observes any discrepancies between the data recorded at the polling station and the data presented afterward when official results came, this document containing the election results can be used to file a complaint with the Electoral Tribunal.

Another security measure is the Preliminary Electoral Results Program (PREP) operation: PREP publishes the results of each polling station throughout the night of the election and up to 24 hours later. The system also publishes the images of each tally sheet. As a result, anyone with an internet connection can verify that the official results reflect the tallies from each polling place.

***For more information, please refer to the Study of the Effect of Recounts in District Counts of the Federal Electoral Process 2017-2018. National Electoral Institute. INE at:**
<https://repositoriodocumental.ine.mx/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/114281/CGex202007-30-ip-9.pdf>

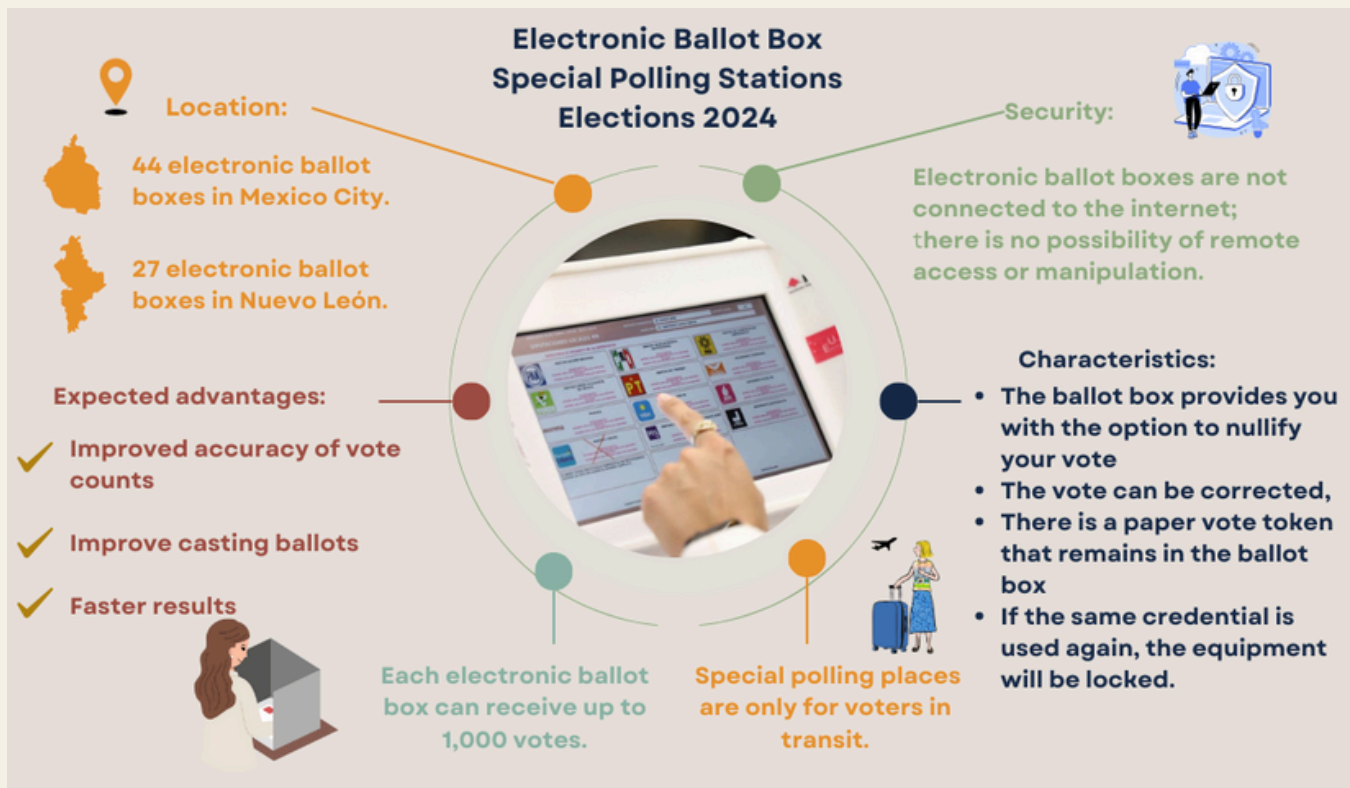
Last Glance

Use of electronic ballot boxes in special polling places

In Mexico, unlike other countries, voting is done in person using paper ballots placed in ballot boxes with polling station officials manually counting and recording the results. Electronic ballot boxes have not been used regularly in federal electoral processes. However, some states (Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Hidalgo, Jalisco, Mexico City, the State of Mexico, and Tamaulipas) have used them for local elections since 2005.

At the federal level, the INE used a prototype electronic ballot between 2003 to 2012 for various citizen participation exercises (the citizen consultation for integrating municipal development plans, referendums, university election elections, etc.). However, since 2015, the INE has conducted various pilot tests with electronic ballot boxes in federal and local elections.

Although electronic voting is not explicitly permitted in legislation, both the Electoral Tribunal and the Supreme Court of Justice of the Nation have validated electronic ballot boxes, stating that this method does not violate the Constitution or the right to vote and be elected. In December 2023, the INE approved a mandatory pilot test for electronic ballot boxes in the 2024 elections. These electronic ballot boxes, developed by the INE, will be installed at the 71 "special polling places" on June 2.



For more detailed information on the electronic ballot box, please refer to INE/CG637/2023 Agreement at: <https://repositoriodocumental.ine.mx/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/158195/CGex202312-01-ap-4.pdf>

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