Evaluating the Judicial Elections and Setting the Agenda for Future Reforms: Insights of the Public, Judicial Candidates and Legal Professionals

Abstract

This study examines perceptions of Mexico's 2025 judicial elections among three key groups: the public, attorneys, and judicial candidates. Drawing on original surveys conducted immediately after the contests, we find widespread skepticism: the public expressed declining confidence in electoral fairness and vote counting, attorneys highlighted deficits in transparency and voter information, and candidates voiced deep mistrust of the process. We analyze how institutional design choices regarding party involvement, candidate selection, campaign restrictions, and ballot structure compare with judicial elections in Bolivia and the United States. Finally, we assess public and elite support for possible reforms, revealing consensus around increasing transparency but sharp divisions over expanding political or campaign finance-related reforms. Mexico's experience underscores both the promise and perils of judicial elections: successfully democratizing access to the bench requires not only electoral mechanisms, but also civic knowledge, procedural integrity, and institutional safeguards capable of sustaining judicial legitimacy.

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On June 1, 2025, Mexico became the first country in the world to directly elect all judicial ministers, magistrates and judges at both the federal and subnational levels. Public buy-in and acceptance is required for any truly democratic process to obtain, yet such popular endorsement requires more than formal participation. In the case of Mexico's judicial reform, it rests on citizens' understanding of the rules, the perception that the procedures followed were fair and transparent, and belief that reforms will strengthen rather than undermine judicial independence, and to bolster the rule of law. Our study speaks to these dimensions by examining how different groups of the Mexican public understood, evaluated, and would seek to improve the unprecedented 2025 judicial elections. Public buy-in lies at the very heart of democratic governance: without citizens' informed consent and confidence, no set of rules or institutions can ensure legitimacy. Our study takes this as its starting point, underscoring that civic knowledge is a cornerstone of efficacious participation, and examining how Mexicans understood and evaluated the 2025 judicial elections.

We first introduce original public opinion survey data collected between March and July 2025 that describes the public evaluation of these historic reforms and their evaluation of inaugural electoral process. Next, we introduce data on the public's regarding the fairness of the electoral process and their perceptions of the vote tabulation process. Here, we find that although opinions varied amongst the public and legal elites, approximately 40% of both groups evaluated the fairness of the electoral process in a negative light. What is more, candidates were especially pessimistic in their evaluations of fairness of the electoral process, and all three groups expressed skepticism about the accuracy of the vote tabulation process.

Next, we turn to potential reforms. We discuss how the process used in Mexico differed from the procedures used in the United States (which has elected some judges for most of its history) and Bolivia (which began electing national judges in 2011). We discuss key insights each country's approach can offer the other, especially as it relates to the role of political parties, the candidate selection process, campaign regulations and the physical organization of the ballot. Then, we return to our survey data to assess Mexicans' support for judicial reforms. Here, we find a broad

consensus for procedural reforms that will enhance process and transparency, such as for prior examination and meritocratic evaluation of candidates in the pre-selection process. As to reforms relating to the involvement of political parties, outside groups or public financing, there was more diversity of opinions across the groups.

Understanding these unprecedented elections is important for at least two reasons. First, given that the adoption of elections in Mexico was driven by populist arguments and the admirable desire to democratize the judicial power, it is critical to understand the ways in which this election did—and did not—achieve its stated aims. Insofar that the public, legal professionals and judicial candidates expressed doubts and skepticisms about the elections and the electoral process, Mexico has an opportunity to innovate further and to improve. Second, considerando la expansión bien documentada del populismo a nivel mundial, la experiencia mexicana plantea la posibilidad de que las elecciones judiciales se vuelvan más comunes en otros países. As such, we must learn as much as possible from the Mexican experience, so as to guide future reformation processes.

Study Design and Data Collection

Our analysis combines survey data collected from three different sources. First, our public opinion survey is from the Mexico Judicial Reform Opinion Panel (Wave 3), conducted online between June 24 and July 08, 2025. The data and codebooks for Waves one through three are available at www.dialogojudicial.com. The surveys were fielded by NetQuest which maintains an online panel of nearly 260,000 respondents in Mexico, the NetQuest panel is certified with the requirements for the ISO20252:2019 standard. The first wave of the survey was designed to approximate a nationally representative sample of the Mexican population with quotas for gender, age, region and socioeconomic status. Nevertheless and consistent with most online surveys, younger and more affluent respondents are overrepresented relative to the Mexican population. The second wave of the survey was fielded in May, 2025; the results reported here are from Wave 3, which are those respondents who answered our third wave survey. The data is unweighted.

Second, collaborating again with NetQuest, we conducted an online survey of attorneys in

Mexico from June 22 to July 02, 2025. A total of 567 attorneys participated. The sample includes legal professionals from various backgrounds, such as private firms, corporate counsel, public sector legal offices, academia, and independent practice. Respondents shared details about their demographic background, professional experience, political attitudes, and their perspectives on the 2024 judicial reform, the June 2025 judicial elections, and the functioning of Mexico's courts. While not a probability sample, this attorney survey offers valuable insights into the views of legal experts, a group with specialized knowledge and direct stakes in the reforms. It complements the public panel and candidate survey by providing an inside perspective from the legal community.

Third, we report on an original online survey fielded in July 2025. From the official website of the National Electoral Institute portal which contained information on each of the candidates *(Conóceles, Practica y Ubica)*, we collected emailed the universe of judicial candidates an invitation to complete a short online survey.[1] Of 3414 candidates we attempted to contact, we received responses from 278 candidates, which is a convenience sample of approximately 8% of the candidate universe.

All three sources of data were fielded in the weeks following the inaugural judicial elections. In each of our surveys, we collected basic demographic information before turning to their perception of the election and the electoral process.

Perceptions of Fairness

We begin our inquiry with a consideration of the public's, attorneys and candidates perceptions of the fairness of the election. Specifically, these three groups were asked "En algunos países, la gente cree que las elecciones se desarrollan de forma justa. En otros países, la gente cree que las elecciones se desarrollan de forma injusta. Pensando en las elecciones judiciales, ¿dónde las situaría en una escala de 1 a 5 en la que UNO significa que las elecciones se desarrollarán de forma injusta y CINCO que se desarrollarán de forma justa?." The results of this question is presented in Figure

[1]The first wave of personalized emails were sent between June 18 & 20th 2025. Subjects were recontacted once more approximately 10 days later.

1. The x-axis reports the categories of the fairness perceptions variable, ranging from 1 (injusta) to 5 (justa), along the y-axis is the percentage of respondents from each class of survey respondents who responded with a particular category.

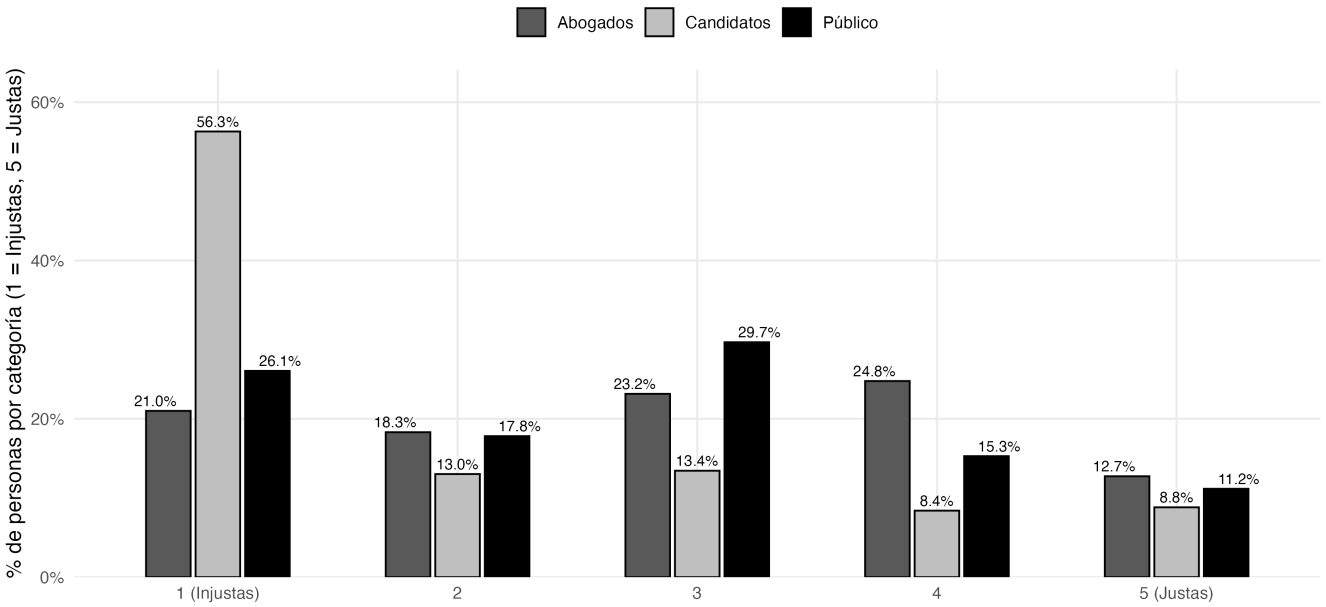

Figure 1: Percepción de justicia de las elecciones por cada categoría para Público General, Abogados y Candidatos.

Beginning with the perspectives of Attorneys (dark grey bars), opinions were mixed and spread roughly equally across the scale. The average score for the attorneys was a 2.9 of of 5, indicating a central tendency that is slightly below neutral. This implies that on average the fairness assessments of this group of legal insiders was moderate but leaning in a positive direction. Still, a sizable proportion of attorneys characterized the elections as unfair, with 39.3% of attorneys describing the elections on the negative end of the scale.

The candidates, by contrast, stand out for their overwhelming negative assessment of fairness of the elections, with a strong and absolute majority of respondents (56.3%) describing the elections in starkly negative terms. The mean score for this group was 2.00 on a 5 point scale, which shows a clear consensus from those who were most closely involved in the election had a negative evaluation

as it related to fairness. We acknowledge an obvious source of sample bias in our data, insofar that unsuccessful candidates were over represented in our sample relative to victorious candidates.[2] Nevertheless, instructive that those participants most closely involved with the process were also the most skeptical. Only a small minority (20–21) saw them as "fair" or "very fair."

Sources of Skepticism

To investigate the sources of skepticism more closely, we asked a follow up question to both the attorneys and the candidates, requesting that they elaborate on their reasons for classifying the electoral process as fair or unfair.[3] We report in Table 1 a random sample of ten open-ended responses from Attorneys and Candidates who had classified the elections as unfair (Categories 1 or 2 in the previous electoral fairness question). We identify several similarities in their open-ended responses, as well as some key differences.

The critiques from the attorneys focused on lack of transparency, low voter information, and procedural disorganization. This is observed in the random sample of responses shown in Table 1, where our respondents observed that there were many candidates who were not well known to the public, and that voters lacked information about the myriad of candidates they were asked to consider. The attorneys also expressed skepticism about several facets of the electoral process, including the candidates selection process, as well as the vote tallying procedures. About 10% of the attorney's open-ended responeses mentioned the widespread use of acordeones, which swayed the outcome of elections to a particular set of candidates.

Candidates were much more likley to express their concern about the circulation of acordeones, most often with reference to how the distribution of these voter information guides negatively

[2]Of 278 respondents, most were not electorally victorious: 14% (37) reported having won their judicial seat, with 194 indicating their candidacies were unsuccessful. Another 10% were unwilling to answer, with another 19 skipping the question altogether.

[3]Specifically, we asked "¿Cuál es la principal razón por la cual usted siente que las elecciones se desarrollaron de manera justa o injusta?" The response rate for this question was very high for both groups: 552 of 557 (99%) of attorneys provided a reason, as did 230 of 238 candidates (97%).

Abogados (1–2 = Injusta)

- *Porque muchos candidatos eran desconocidos, otros delincuentes.*
- *Por que todo fue un montaje ademas de que existieron muchos medios que dieron la formula de votar.*
- *El gobierno eligió a todos los candidatos, no dió información sobre ninguno de ellos, otorgó acordeones dónde se "sugirió" por quienes votar, la elección no contó con suficiente participación para ser validada.*
- *Porque hubo falta de información clara sobre los candidatos y las reglas cambiaron durante el proceso.*
- *Por todas las irregularidades que se presentaron en el proceso, por la falta de informacion e interes de los ciudadanos.*
- *Que hasta se contaron los votos sin que nadie viera.*
- *La votantes llevaban acordeon y desconocían a los candidatos.*
- *Por qué la mayoría de gente que se presentó a votar tenía un acordeon con los candidatos designados por el partido en la presidencia y no por qué conocían la trayectoria de los candidatos.*
- *Nadie sabía nada de los tantas personas propuestos.*
- *POR QUE YA LA GENTE SE HA VUELTO INCREDULA POR TANTAS MENTIRAS Y FALSAS ESPERANZAS, YA NO SE TIENE CONFIANZA.*

Candidatos (1–2 = Injusta)

- *Hubo influencia del gobierno para votar por determinadas personas, quienes estábamos en funciones no tuvimos las mismas oportunidades . . .*
- *Por apoyos que recibieron algunos candidatos.*
- *Intervención del partido político en el poder; entrega de acordeones; coacción de voto de funcionarios de la administración pública del partido en el poder; entrega de dinero por votos.*
- *La elección fue una farsa.*
- *Hubo inducción al voto a través de acordeones, sólo los que aparecieron en los acordeones ganaron.*
- *Todo estuvo arreglado desde un inicio y el INE nos hostiga.*
- *Intervención pública [del partido gobernante]. . . en la promoción de los candidatos que ellos incluyeron en el acordeón que circuló en el estado.*
- *Las . . . asignaciones de candidaturas y los procesos de votación y conteo fueron estratégicamente planeadas y ejecutadas para favorecer ciertos intereses, . . . la elección un circo con aparente democracia para elegir a quienes ya estaban decididos.*
- *Falta de certeza en todo el proceso electoral.*
- *Los partidos políticos tuvieron injerencia en la elección.*

Table 1: Muestra aleatoria (n=10 y n=10) de respuestas abiertas de quienes calificaron la elección con bajo nivel de justicia (1 o 2 = Injusta). Some responses have been abridged for clarity of exposition.

impacted their chances for electoral success. Approximately 45% of the candidates who rated the elections as unfair made mention of the acordeones as having an outsized impact on the outcome of the elections. More generally, the candidates shared a pessimistic viewpoint of the competitiveness of the elections, sharing their perspective that the party in power used its access to state resources to its own benefit, so as to ensure a favorable outcome for the governing party. Whereas the opinions of the attorneys touched on various aspects of the electoral process, we see homogeneity in the candidates' perspectives in this respect.

Perceptions of the Vote Tabulation Process

We next consider perceptions of whether the votes in the June 2025 judicial elections were counted correctly. The unprecedented nature of the electoral process required an atypical and untested approach to ballot counting (Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025). With this vote counting procedure in mind, we asked our respondents about the extent to which they had confidence the votes were counted correctly.[4] The results are presented in Figure 2. The x-axis reports the four categories of the confidence variable, ranging from "ninguna confianza" to "mucha confianza," while the y-axis shows the percentage of respondents in each group selecting a given category.

As to the Attorneys (dark grey bars), opinions were divided and spanned the scale. Just 20.8% reported "mucha confianza" and 32.7% "algo de confianza," while 22.2% indicated "poca confianza" and 24.3% "ninguna confianza." In total, an absolute majority of respondent attorneys expressed doubts about whether votes were accurately counted, though a sizable share retained at least some confidence in the process.

As with the perceptions of the fairness of the elections, the Candidates (light grey bars) stood out as the least trustful group. Only 17.1% expressed "mucha confianza" and 16.3% "algo de confianza',' while more than two-thirds were skeptical: 22.5% selected "poca confianza" and 44.2% "ninguna confianza." This distribution underscores that those most directly engaged in the election

[4] "¿Qué tanta confianza tiene en que los votos de las elecciones judiciales fueron contados correctamente?"

were also the least likely to see the counting procedure as transparent and worthy of trust.

Among the Public (black bars), responses also leaned in a negative direction. Just 12.4% expressed "mucha confianza" and 27.5% "algo de confianza," while 29.0% reported "poca confianza" and 31.1% "ninguna confianza." Thus, only about four in ten reported at least some confidence in the process, with a majority of the public expressing skepticism about this component of the electoral administration.

Taken together, Figure 2 shows that significant doubts about the accuracy of vote count were widespread across groups. Attorneys were evenly split, candidates were overwhelmingly distrustful, and the public expressed the highest overall skepticism, with fewer than half reporting confidence that votes were counted correctly (Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025). All told, it would seem that this new approach to tallying ballots and despite the earnest effort of INE officials to ensure transparent procedure and public involvement, was generally met with skepticism by the public, the candidates and legal elites.

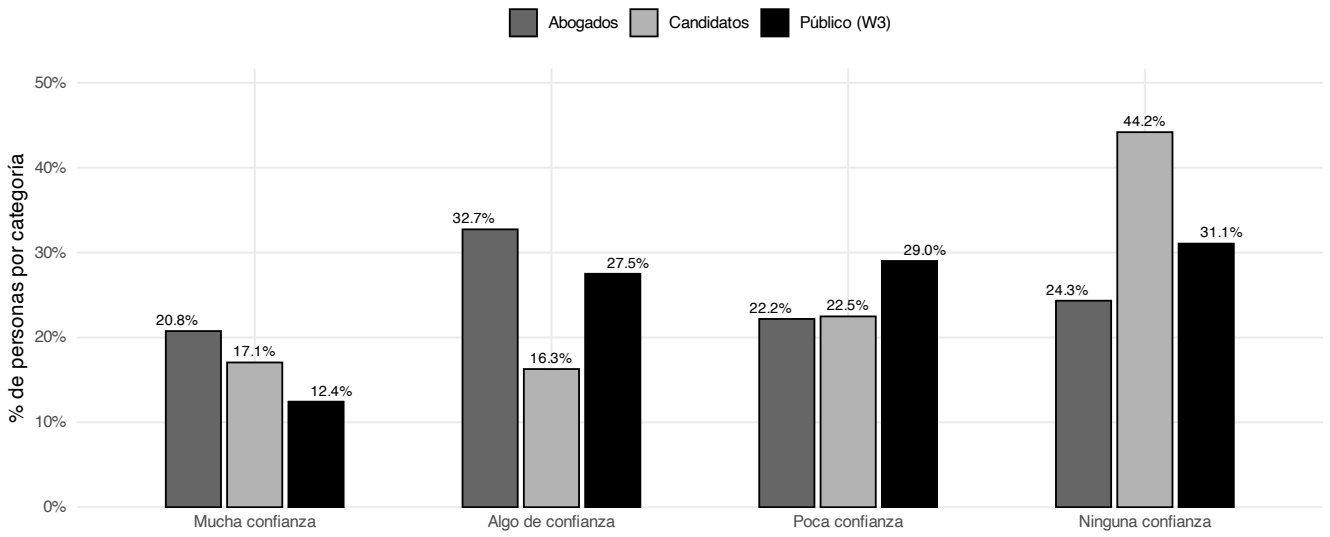

Figure 2: Confianza en que los votos fueron contados correctamente. Comparación: Público, Abogados y Candidatos.

Designing Judicial Elections

When designing the rules for the inaugural judicial elections, Mexico made a series of institutional design choices that differed significantly from the process used in the United States. Four key distinctions stand out: (a) the formal role political parties are permitted to play in the electoral process, (b) how judicial candidates are selected, (c) the extent to which candidates can campaign publicly, and (d) the design and content of the ballot voters saw on election day.

Party Involvement

The history of judicial elections in the U.S. reflects ongoing efforts to find the "just right" level of party involvement (Shugerman, 2010; Driscoll and Nelson, 2013; Bonneau and Hall, 2009). Initially, judges were appointed by governors or legislatures, but states began adopting partisan elections in the late 1800s to promote judicial independence (Shugerman, 2012). During the Progressive Era, concerns about patronage led many states to drop party labels from ballots (Hanssen, 2004). Later, many adopted the Missouri Plan, where commissions vet candidates and the governor selects from a shortlist (Caufield, 2009).

Partisan elections offer clear opportunities for party involvement, but parties also play a role in nonpartisan and retention elections. Party committees support judicial candidates, and media often highlight their partisan ties (e.g., Sample et al., 2010; Hojnacki and Baum, 1992). Although ballot information on party endorsements varies, it's widely recognized that parties influence judicial elections. Even in nonpartisan races, voters' partisanship often aligns with their choices, particularly in high-salience, costly contests (Rock and Baum, 2010).

Mexico, like Bolivia before it, tried to tamp out partisan influence. Judicial elections in Bolivia are also formally nonpartisan with no information about a candidate's partisan affiliation or ideological affinities provided to voters. Instead, the national electoral authority puts together a nonpartisan voter guide with information about the candidates' educational and professional backgrounds as well as a photograph of the candidate; those photographs appear on the ballot

next to the candidate's name on election day (Driscoll and Nelson, 2012). Still, as Driscoll and Nelson (2015) show, Bolivian candidates with government ties were advantaged in those elections, just as Mexican candidates with ties to the MORENA party were more likely to be elected in June.

The candidate selection process

In the United States, getting on the general election ballot is a simple two-step process: candidates gather enough signatures to enter the primary, and top vote-getters in the primary move on to the general election.[5] This process has two notable features. First, it sets a low barrier to entry: anyone meeting basic qualifications (usually a law degree and legal experience) can run. Second, in partisan elections, it allows all political factions—not just those in power—to support candidates who can reach voters and potentially win a judicial seat.

Mexico's judicial selection process contrasts sharply with that of the U.S. Under the reformed Article 96 of the Constitution, a committee composed of the executive, legislative, and judicial branches—each nominating one-third of candidates—was tasked with vetting judicial applicants (Congreso de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos, 2024). The reforms also lowered professional requirements: a law degree, minimum GPA, and 1–5 years of experience, depending on court level, replaced stricter prior standards.[6] Applicants submitted documentation including a statement of purpose, CV, and personal references (El Financiero, 2024). From 34,000 applicants, 7,700 were shortlisted (Forbes México, 2024). After the judiciary's role in selection was suspended, the Senate—dominated by Morena—took over most nominations, effectively allowing the ruling party to control two-thirds of appointments (Washington Office on Latin America, 2025; Espinosa Silis, 2025). Though officially nonpartisan, many candidates had ties to Morena and some were linked to organized crime, prompting widespread criticism (Camacho et al., 2025; Ortega, 2025; Villegas and Mega, 2025; Jiménez, 2025).

[5]Some exceptions exist—e.g., candidates may win outright in the primary or be nominated at party conventions—but this is the general pattern.

[6]Previously, Supreme Court nominees needed 10 years of experience; lower court judges needed 2–5.

Campaigning

All types of judicial elections in the U.S. involve campaigning, though retention elections tend to be quieter. Campaign activity—especially in state supreme court races—has surged in recent decades (Sample et al., 2010). During the 2021–2022 cycle alone, over $100 million was spent by candidates, interest groups, and parties (Keith, 2024). Following the Supreme Court's decision in Republican Party of Minnesota v. White (2002), judicial candidates may freely express their policy views. In the high-profile 2023 Wisconsin Supreme Court race, which saw over $51 million in spending, winner Janet Protasiewicz openly endorsed abortion rights, stating, "People should have a right to choose... I certainly expect that we will be looking at that issue in the near future" (**?**). Such candid statements—rare among federal nominees—are increasingly common in state judicial races (e.g., Hall, 2015).

By contrast, the ability of candidates in the inaugural Mexican elections to campaign openly was circumscribed.[7] There was no public funding available to candidates, who were also prohibited from accepting donations from private entities, much less parties. This meant candidates for the large part self-funded their campaigns: although they were prohibited from purchasing advertisements in traditional media outlets or paying for publicity, much of their campaigning took place online and via social media. In the place of traditional campaigns, in National Electoral Institute (or INE for its spanish acroynm) launched a centralized online portal *(Conóceles, Practica y Ubica)* which provided candidate biographies, contact information, social media links, candidate numbers, sample ballots, and a ballot simulation tool (Instituto Nacional Electoral, 2025). Voters reported that the sheer number of candidates made it difficult to navigate and accurately identify candidates they most preferred.

In practice, there were large disparities in promoptional resources available to candidates, and

[7]In limiting the ability of judicial candidates to campaign, Mexico took a page from the Bolivian electoral rules; there, candidates are also formally prohibited from campaigning and, instead, the standardized candidate information from the national electoral authority provides the information the public is able to gather about judicial candidates (e.g., Driscoll and Nelson, 2013)

uneven enforcement resulted in some government-backed candidates reportedly accessing external resources for self-promotion (Dresser, 2025). There were well documented cases of interest groups and political parties distributing voter guides (*"acordiones"*) that endorsed specific lists of candidates, sometimes accompanied by explicit endorsements by key elites and opinion leaders (Instituto Nacional Electoral Comisión de Quejas y Denuncias, 2025; Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025). Preliminary research on the election results [(Citation redacted)] suggests that these "cheat sheets" played an out-sized influence on voter choice on election day, and largely benefited governmental-affiliated candidates.

The Ballot

Voters in most U.S. judicial elections cast a single vote to elect a judge for a single seat on the bench.[8] When a voter in the U.S. encounters a ballot on election day, they generally see the names of the candidates for each position and fill in a small oval to indicate their preference, in some but not all cases the partisanship of the candidates are indicated. There may be many judicial races on the ballot, but generally voters must choose between a small number of candidates for each race, and it straightforward to indicate which candidate they support.

The sheer scale and complexity of the Mexican election, by contrast, presented significant informational challenges for voters. With over 7,700 candidates competing for more than 2,600 judicial posts, voters faced ballots that were crowded with names, some listing more than 150 candidates on a single page (Wagner and Beltran, 2025).[9]

Voters were tasked with casting a vote for 9 candidates for the Supreme Court of Justice, 5 candidates to serve on the newly established Judicial Disciplinary Tribunal, 17 magistrate candidates to serve on either the Superior or Regional electoral courts, as well as judges who would

[8]There are a few exceptions; in a few places, some candidates are conducted in multimember districts in which voters select multiple candidates at once (e.g., Bonneau and Hall, 2009; **?**).

[9]Ballot design was managed by state electoral authorities, leading to substantial variation in format and presentation across different jurisdictions (Pantin et al., 2025).

serve as circuit and district court judges.[10] Each of six ballots was color coded to correspond to a different court, each list of candidates was segregated by gender to ensure that voters would select judicial candidates who were both male and female. Although candidates were prohibited from advertising their party affiliation, the ballots also indicated the nominating body that cleared their candidacy (executive, legislative, judicial or some combination thereof), as well as their legal specializations (where applicable). Voters marked their choices by writing candidate numbers into color-coded boxes corresponding to specialization areas and gender (Laboratorio Electoral, 2025).

Although the elections were promoted as a means to democratize the judiciary and enhance trust in the legal system, public reactions indicate a disengaged electorate with limited confidence in the process (Driscoll and Nelson, 2012). Restrictions on campaigning, the ballot's complexity, and the lack of clear cues may well have fostered public confusion, skepticism, or apathy. As Mexico plans a second round of judicial elections in 2027, these findings highlight the need for significant improvements in voter information, candidate accessibility, and transparency to boost electoral credibility.

Support for Possible Reforms

Given the stark contrasts between Mexico's new judicial elections and those held in the United States, the lower-than-expected turnout in the 2025 Mexican contests, and the wave of legal challenges contesting the procedures' validity (Instituto Nacional Electoral Comisión de Quejas y Denuncias, 2025; Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA, 2025), what kinds of electoral designs might prove more acceptable to voters? With another nationwide round of judicial elections scheduled for 2027, we asked respondents about their support for a range of potential reforms to the process.

Figure 3 reports the share of respondents in each group that expressed approval ("aprueba firmemente" or "aprueba") for a variety of proposed reforms to the judicial electoral process. The x-

[10]The 2025 elections would select 464 circuit court judges and 386 district court judges throughout the country.

axis lists each reform option, while the y-axis shows the percentage of respondents supporting that proposal. We have ranked the reforms along the x-axis that corresponds to the highest supported proposals by the attorneys in our sample.

Among Attorneys (dark grey bars), levels of support were consistently high for reforms aimed at improving professionalization and transparency. More than four in five attorneys favored requiring candidates to pass a prior examination (84.5%) and mandating a ballot-by-ballot recount at the polling place (79.9%). Support was more mixed for other proposals: 53.6% endorsed allowing endorsements from professional associations, 47.8% favored eliminating the pre-selection process, and 44.1% supported removing restrictions on campaigning. By contrast, fewer than one-third supported party endorsements (30.0%) or public financing of campaigns (32.0%). These results suggest that attorneys prioritized reforms strengthening technical and procedural safeguards, while remaining cautious about measures expanding political influence or campaign resources.

The Candidates (light grey bars) also expressed strong reformist preferences. Majorities endorsed prior examinations (87.2%) and recounts at the polling station (85.5%), while 57.9% supported endorsements from professional associations. Nearly half supported eliminating pre-selection (45.5%) and campaigning without restrictions (46.4%). A slight majority (54.9%) also backed public financing of campaigns, making them the only group where this proposal gained majority approval. Support for party endorsements was low (15.5%). Taken together, candidates favored reforms that reduced government control, expanded resources, and increased transparency in the process. The Public (black bars), by contrast, displayed more limited enthusiasm across nearly all proposals. While solid majorities endorsed prior examinations (70.7%) and ballot-by-ballot recounts (65.6%), support dropped below 40% for most other proposals. Only 37.4% supported professional endorsements, 33.4% eliminating pre-selection, 28.0% campaigning without restrictions, 19.4% party endorsements, and 14.0% public financing. This pattern indicates that while citizens strongly valued transparency-enhancing reforms, they were less supportive of changes perceived as empowering parties, candidates, or professional groups.

Taken together, Figure 3 shows a striking consensus across groups in favor of procedural reforms designed to ensure fairness and transparency, especially prior examinations for candidates and ballot-by-ballot recounts. Yet the three groups diverged sharply on proposals expanding political involvement or financing: candidates were most supportive, attorneys somewhat more cautious, and the public largely opposed.

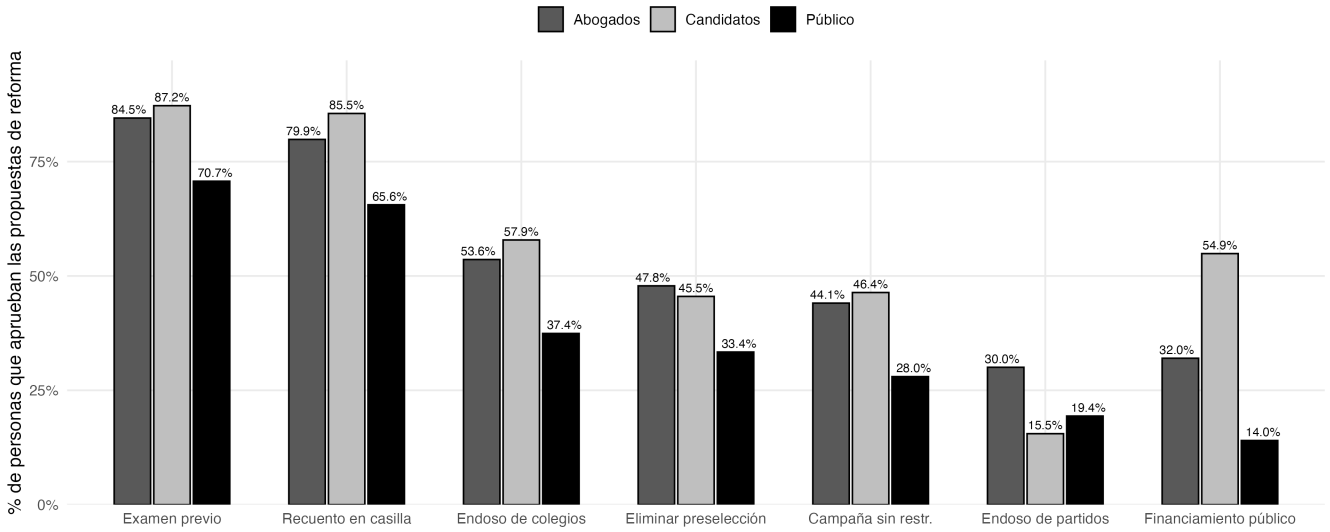

Figure 3: Apoyo a propuestas de reforma por grupo.

Discussion

The evidence presented here underscores both the promise and the pitfalls of Mexico's unprecedented judicial elections. On the one hand, the reform marked an ambitious experiment in democratizing judicial selection and extending electoral choice into a domain historically insulated from direct citizen control. On the other hand, our surveys of citizens, attorneys, and candidates highlight significant challenges of design and implementation that raise questions about the elections' capacity to achieve their intended goals. Public skepticism about fairness, candidates' deep mistrust of the process, and attorneys' concerns over transparency reveal that legitimacy cannot be secured by formal rules alone. Instead, effective democratic governance requires meaningful opportunities for informed participation, consistent procedures, and institutions capable of fostering

trust.

Comparisons with Bolivia and the United States suggest that institutional design choices carry profound consequences. Whereas U.S. judicial elections have long grappled with how to balance transparency with the risks of politicization, Mexico's inaugural elections instead constrained campaign activity and sought to limit partisan influence. The result, however, was not a neutral playing field but rather a context in which the ruling party enjoyed clear advantages through control of candidate selection and distribution of acordeones. Similarly, while Bolivia's early experience demonstrates that voter information guides can help reduce informational asymmetries, the Mexican case shows that such instruments can be co-opted to channel support toward government-backed candidates. These lessons reinforce the view that procedures intended to insulate judicial elections from politics may paradoxically create new avenues for partisan manipulation.

The survey results on possible reforms reveal a path forward. Across groups, there is strong support for transparency-enhancing measures—such as candidate examinations and ballot-by-ballot recounts—that could strengthen both the professionalization of the judiciary and public confidence in electoral outcomes. At the same time, there is little enthusiasm among the public for reforms that expand the role of parties, professional associations, or campaign financing. This divergence points to an important tension: candidates and attorneys perceive expanded resources and endorsements as means of leveling the playing field, while citizens remain wary of reforms that might deepen politicization. Any future reform package will need to navigate this divide, balancing demands for procedural integrity with the realities of electoral competition.

Ultimately, Mexico's 2025 judicial elections demonstrate that institutional innovation in judicial selection must be paired with careful attention to civic knowledge, transparency, and inclusivity. The challenge moving forward is not only technical but normative: to design an electoral process that citizens view as credible, candidates perceive as fair, and legal professionals regard as conducive to judicial independence. With another round of elections scheduled for 2027, Mexico faces a narrow window to recalibrate its experiment. The stakes are high, both for the resilience of

Mexico's judiciary and for global debates over whether electoral mechanisms can safeguard—rather than undermine—judicial legitimacy.

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