

MEXICO JUDICIAL ELECTION SUNDAY, JUNE 1ST, 2025

ELECTORAL OBSERVERS REPORT



THE UNITED STATES-MEXICO CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
CÁMARA DE COMERCIO MÉXICO-ESTADOS UNIDOS



COORDINACIÓN DE ASUNTOS INTERNACIONALES

Oficio No. INE/CAI/255/2025

Ciudad de México, a 7 de abril de 2025

**ALBERT CHARLES ZAPANTA
PRESENTE**

En nombre del Instituto Nacional Electoral de México, deseamos agradecer su interés por ser parte del Proceso Electoral Extraordinario para la elección de diversos cargos del Poder Judicial de la Federación 2024-2025, que actualmente se desarrollan en este país.

Con relación a la documentación que tuvo a bien presentar para obtener su acreditación como persona visitante extranjera, toda vez que cumple con los requisitos legales establecidos, con fundamento en el párrafo 1, inciso A, de la Base 4ª del resolutivo Primero del Acuerdo del Consejo General del Instituto Nacional Electoral por el que se establecen las bases y criterios con que habrá de invitar, atender e informar a las personas visitantes extranjeras que acuden a conocer las modalidades del Proceso Electoral Extraordinario para la elección de diversos cargos del Poder Judicial de la Federación 2024-2025, me es grato comunicar a usted que su solicitud ha sido aprobada, por lo cual le damos una cordial bienvenida a esta elección.

En breve estaremos enviando información sobre el procedimiento a seguir para la obtención del gafete de acreditación correspondiente, documento esencial para que usted pueda desarrollar sus funciones de visitante extranjero.

Paralelamente, le invitamos a visitar el sitio especializado <https://ine.mx/internacional/visitantes-extranjeros/>, donde encontrará más información para llevar a cabo sus actividades, así como <https://ine.mx/eleccion-del-poder-judicial-de-la-federacion-2025/>, donde se presenta información general sobre este proceso electoral federal extraordinario.

En caso de requerir información adicional o algún apoyo específico, le pedimos dirigirse al correo electrónico visitantes-extranjeros@ine.mx

ATENTAMENTE


**MARISA ARLENE CABRAL PORCHAS
COORDINADORA DE ASUNTOS INTERNACIONALES**

El presente documento está firmado electrónicamente, produciendo los mismos efectos que los presentados con la firma autógrafa y, en consecuencia, con el mismo valor jurídico-administrativo que las disposiciones correspondientes les otorga a estos, de conformidad con lo previsto en los artículos 10 y 22 del Reglamento para Uso y Operación de la Firma Electrónica Avanzada en el Instituto Nacional Electoral



PRESENTATION

On Sunday, June 1st, 2025, Mexico celebrated for the first time in history an election to vote for justices and magistrates across all judicial agencies in the country. Result of a very controversial Constitutional Reform, the National Electoral Institute (INE) issued a call to Mexican society to participate in the election of the judicial branch authorities. The U.S.-Mexico Chamber of Commerce (USMCOC) received an invitation from the INE to serve as *Visitante Extranjero* (International Observer) during this important electoral process. In my capacity as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Chamber, I attended in representation of our organization. In this report, we present a summary of the observations gathered during a day of significance for Mexico and for the future of the North American Economic Partnership.


Albert C. Zapanta
President and CEO

USMCOC PARTICIPATION

The USMCOC received an invitation from INE President Lic. Guadalupe Taddei Zavala to participate in the elections as an Official International Observer (Visitante Extranjero). We submitted the application on behalf of the Chamber, which was approved, and received the credential on June 30, 2025, Mexico City.

INE registered more than 317,000 electoral observers, though the number of international visitors was not disclosed.



The process to register as an international visitor was efficient and clearly outlined. On May 30–31, 2025, INE held an information forum for foreign observers that covered:

- Constitutional reforms to the judicial branch
- Election preparations
- Voter outreach strategies
- Campaigns and gender equality
- Election day operations
- Vote counting procedures
- Resolution of disputes and certification of results

While attending the forum, I had the opportunity to greet Councilwoman Norma Irene De la Cruz, who had also participated in our Washington, D.C. conference on April 30, 2025. She expressed appreciation for the Chamber's presence in Mexico.

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM CONTEXT



This election resulted from a highly controversial constitutional reform passed in 2024. The reform, proposed and enacted by President Andrés Manuel López Obrador on September 15, 2024, was framed as a democratizing effort to reduce corruption and increase the efficiency of Mexico's judiciary. However, experts have argued that the reform represents a significant overhaul of the judicial system, posing serious risks of politicization and a loss of judicial independence. Many view the move as retaliation for the Supreme Court's opposition to several of the former president's legislative initiatives.

The reform passed with the support of a newly installed Federal Congress, where the ruling party, Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), held a supermajority. Most Mexican states ratified the reform on a fast-track basis.

ELECTION ORGANIZATION AND PROCESS



The National Electoral Institute (INE)—long respected for its independence and competence—was tasked with designing and implementing this entirely new judicial election process in less than 10 months. INE itself expressed concern about the short timeframe and requested additional time and resources, which were denied by Congress.

The election process was unique: the Executive, Legislative, and Judicial branches each submitted nominations for the Supreme Court, and installed Evaluation Committees. Due to the large number of applicants, candidate selection for circuit courts and magistrates was ultimately decided by lottery.

To become a candidate, applicants were required to:

- Hold a law degree with a minimum GPA of 8 out of 10
- Have at least five years of legal professional experience
- Submit five letters of recommendation
- Provide a three-page essay outlining their motivation for candidacy
- For Supreme Court justices, they could not have been a Secretary of State, Attorney General, Senator, Federal Deputy, or Governor within the year prior to their appointment.

Campaigns were required to be self-funded, with no political party endorsements, and were limited to 60 days.

MEXICO'S JUDICIAL ELECTIONS

On Sunday, June 1, 2025, Mexico conducted its first electoral process to fill more than 2,600 judicial positions, including:

- 9 Supreme Court Justices (12 years term. For the first group of justices, the term will expire in 2033 or 2039 depending on the number of votes. No re-election).
- 5 Judges of the Judicial Disciplinary Tribunal (6 years. No re-election).
- 2 High Judges of the Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judiciary (8 years. No re-election).
- 15 High Judges of the Regional Chambers of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judiciary (8 years. No re-election).
- 464 Circuit Court Magistrates (9 years with possibility of reelection).
- 386 District Court Judges (9 years with possibility of reelection).

This was an unprecedented election not only for Mexico but The Americas. While other countries, such as Bolivia, have implemented systems for judicial elections, none have placed all high-level judicial positions on the ballot in a single national vote.

In this election, there were 881 judge positions at federal level, and 1,800 magistrates and judges in 19 states; this corresponds to only half of the positions. In 2027 on a date to be determined, there will be another election to vote for the second half of magistrates and justices remaining.

ELECTION DAY



One detail of the process that raised concern was the handling of ballots: after polls closed, ballots were transported to District Councils (Consejos Distritales) for counting by INE staff. This required storing the ballot boxes overnight—introducing a potential risk to their integrity. Traditionally, ballots have been counted at polling stations by trained citizen volunteers (Funcionarios de Casilla) immediately after voting concludes. This shift away from citizen-led counting is a significant procedural change and one that may erode public trust in the outcome.

On Sunday, June 1, I visited various *Casillas* (polling stations) in the boroughs of Venustiano Carranza, and Cuauhtémoc. The most striking observation was the lack of voter turnout. In conversations with local partners and friends, many shared that they had chosen not to vote in protest against the judicial reform, or to cancel their vote by attending the polling site and crossing out their ballots.

INE reported that voter participation was between 12.57% and 13.32%, or approximately 13 million voters out of over 100 million registered citizens. This is in stark contrast to the historical participation rates in presidential elections, which have typically exceeded 60% of registered voters.

Unusual polling station locations also stood out. For example, one casilla was set up directly on Ejército Nacional Avenue—highly irregular, as polling places are typically located inside schools or municipal buildings, sometimes in public parks, but usually in structured spaces like kiosks.

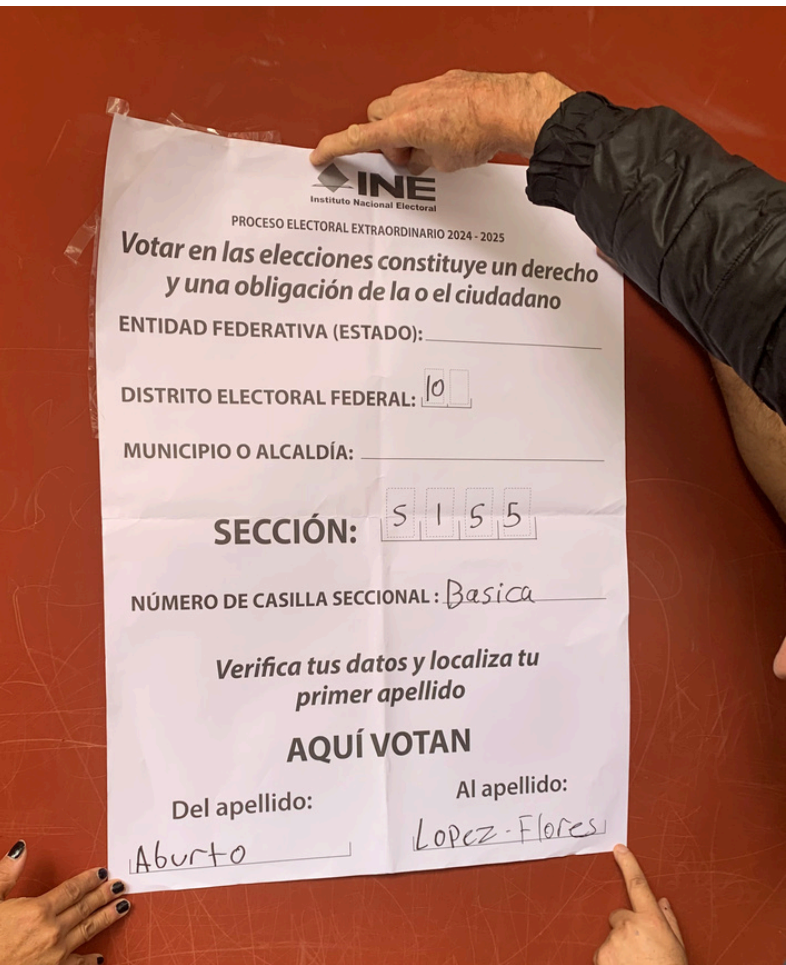
Casillas were scheduled to open at 8:00 am, however, delays were common. One of the casillas visited, opened after 10:00 am. Election officers stated they were still waiting for materials. Voters expressed concern that delays could compromise ballot integrity.

Voters received six color-coded ballots, one for each judicial category:

- Purple: Supreme Court of Justice
- Turquoise: Judicial Disciplinary Tribunal
- Blue: Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal
- Peach: Regional Chambers of the Electoral Tribunal
- Pink: Circuit Court Magistrates
- Yellow: District Court Judges

Candidates were listed alphabetically and grouped by gender, with voters required to write in the number corresponding to their preferred candidate. Voters received between 6 and 10 ballots, with a large list of candidates: 64 for the Supreme Court alone, 38 for the Disciplinary Tribunal, 16 for the Superior Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal, 95 for the Regional Electoral Tribunal, and dozens more for circuit and district court positions. The voting process took between 5 and 20 minutes, with several voters expressing confusion on how to fill in the ballots.

The atmosphere on election day lacked the patriotic spirit typical of Mexico's presidential elections, which the Chamber has observed since 1994. Instead, a large protest formed at the Ángel de la Independencia and marched to the Supreme Court Office and Monumento a la Revolución, expressing opposition to the judicial election.



JUDICIAL SYSTEM TRANSFORMATION

Mexico's judicial elections represent a major transformation of the country's legal system, with uncertain long-term consequences. While more transparent and efficient courts are a worthy goal, the reforms as enacted—especially under the rapid timelines and political dominance of the executive—do not preserve the constitutional democracy that provides balance between Mexico's legislative, executive, and judicial branches.

There are also potential ramifications for Mexico's obligations under the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA). The agreement requires the existence of independent courts to handle disputes related to labor, investment, and includes a dedicated chapter on anti-corruption. This chapter wasn't formally included in its precedent, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), but had labor and environmental side agreements in place.

The politicization of the judiciary may jeopardize Mexico's compliance and expose the country to legal challenges by U.S. and Canada.

The USMCOC firmly supports free trade and advocates for a transparent legal framework that ensures certainty, trust, and the rule of law to protect the private sector. How these reforms and elections will ultimately shape the administration of justice in Mexico remains uncertain. In the absence of a proven and reliable judicial system, the private sector has largely adopted a "wait and see" approach.

During recent binational conferences hosted by the Chamber in Washington, D.C. on December 5, 2024 and April 30, 2025, and in discussions with our members and stakeholders, the Chamber has identified key issues that the binational business community will be paying close attention.

KEY ISSUES

From the perspective of the Chamber, several key issues warrant close attention:

➤ **Elections Legitimacy**

Extremely low voter turnout suggest a lack of support for the reform.

➤ **Democratic Backsliding**

The reforms pose a risk to the strength of Mexico's democratic institutions and the independence of the judiciary.

➤ **Security Risks**

The possibility of organized crime gaining influence in the judiciary could increase legal and personal insecurity in the country.

➤ **Rule of Law**

Judicial institutions could be weakened if justices become politicized, making decisions influenced by political pressure, campaign financing interests, or public opinion rather than strictly adhering to the law.

➤ **USMCA Compliance Risks**

The judicial overhaul may place Mexico in violation of several provisions of the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA), particularly those related to legal impartiality, due process, and anti-corruption commitments.

➤ **Investor and Labor Implications**

The changes could prompt foreign investors and labor unions to initiate formal disputes under USMCA mechanisms, potentially undermining investor confidence and economic cooperation.

USMCOC FINAL INSIGHTS

Reflecting on Mexico's recent judicial elections, and drawing on prior experiences as international electoral observers, we note a significant departure from the processes typically seen in presidential elections. Unlike other democratic countries, where judicial appointments are not determined by popular vote, Mexico's newly proposed method of electing judges by popular vote raises concerns.

From candidate requirements, nomination procedures, and campaign dynamics to ballot design, vote counting and security of the ballots, low voter turnout, and widespread allegations of voter manipulation, the integrity and effectiveness of this new judicial framework remain in question.



NORTH AMERICA'S ECONOMIC PARTNERSHIP

Given these developments, it is critical to monitor the implementation of Mexico's judicial reforms—especially as we approach the 2026 USMCA Review, which may serve as a pivotal moment in trilateral negotiations.

In response, the Chamber is currently:

- Monitoring the implementation and rulings of Mexico's new judicial system closely.
- Engage proactively in the lead-up to the 2026 USMCA Review.
- Coordinate with other chambers and institutions that support free trade, rule of law, and transparency.
- Facilitate stakeholder engagement by organizing forums with businesses, labor groups, and civil society to assess evolving risks.
- Refocusing the North American Working Group, a Chamber's platform to address challenges and opportunities of the trade partnership and present recommendations to the three countries chief trade negotiators.

As always, the Chamber reaffirms its commitment to working collaboratively with government entities and relevant stakeholders to promote a prosperous, stable, and integrated North American Economic Partnership.

