

Zapatistas Put Forward Indigenous Woman for President

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The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), which led an armed uprising in Mexico's southern-most state of Chiapas in 1994, and which has since then spent its time organizing autonomous communities in that state, is now putting forward an indigenous woman candidate for president in the 2018 elections. The Zapatistas hold the Mexican government and the country's political parties in utter disdain, both for their corruption and for their disregard for the people they supposedly represent. The Zapatistas also reject elections and voting on principle. So, while they are putting forward health worker María de Jesús Partricio for president, they are not actually trying to elect her.



Chosen as candidate by the EZLN and by 1,500 delegates to the National Indigenous Congress (CNI), María de Jesús Partricio of the Nahua people is not a prominent national figure, but rather a traditional healer who works at La Casa de Salud Calli Tecolhuacateca Tochán, a community health center in Tuxpan, Jalisco.

Born on December 23, 1963 in the Nahua community of Tuxpan, Jalisco, she is the mother of three children. She was working at a health clinic in Chiapas in January 1994 when the EZLN led its armed uprising in Chiapas and she subsequently became involved in the movement. In 2001, the Zapatistas chose her to speak to the joint houses of the Mexican Congress, her first political speech. Today she speaks out against discrimination against indigenous people and women, and denounces the killing and imprisonment of so many people in the country.

Even now, however, the EZLN's candidate says she is not running to win, but to promote the concerns of the country's underdogs. Marichuy, as she is known, says that she is taking the step of running for president of Mexico in order to defend the lives of the indigenous people and of all Mexicans from a system that it is destroying them. She has told the press, "We are not a political party. We are not going to vote and be election watchers. This is about rebuilding our country." She is clear: "The objective is not to win. We want to organize ourselves, to organize our communities."

Carlos González, a spokesman for the National Indigenous Congress (CNI) says that they have no interest whatsoever in the election, except "to crash the election party and ruin it." For the last twenty years, Subcomandante Marcos and other EZLN leaders have expressed their contempt for the corrupt Mexican political system and for all of the political parties, including those on the left. Unlike the small parties of the Marxist left in Mexico, the EZLN and the CNI express no interest in political campaigns as a way to build a revolutionary political party.

Others Are Running to Win

While the Zapatistas may not care about winning, millions of Mexicans do think that who runs the country is important and they plan to vote. And there are candidates who are running to win.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the left-of-center Movement for National Renovation, or MORENA Party, currently leads in the polls. He ran twice before as candidate of the Party of the Democratic

Revolution (PRD) in 2006 and again in 2012. He was probably the actual winner in the 2006 election, but much like Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, founder of the PRD who probably won the 1998 election, was kept from the presidency through electoral fraud. A populist politician with moderately leftist program, he has maintained a hold on about a third of all Mexican voters for a decade.

The candidate of the National Action Party (PAN) will likely be Margarita Zavala, wife of former PAN president Felipe Calderón (2006-2012) who launched the war on the drug cartels that has taken tens of thousands of lives and led to widespread human rights violations by the military and the police. Were she to win, she would be the country's first woman president.

The sitting president, Enrique Peña Nieto of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), is ineligible to run, because Mexico's constitution does not permit presidential reelection. The PRI's likely candidates are Secretary of Foreign Relations Luis Videgaray or Secretary of the Interior Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong.

Recent polls report that López Obrador has the support of 33 percent of the electorate, Zavala of 27 percent, and Osorio Chong only 13 percent. If he is to win, however, López Obrador will have to overcome not only the other major parties and hostile media, but election fraud. The establishment will do everything it can to keep him from taking office. This campaign seems to be principally a reaffirmation of the EZLN's rejection of Mexico's authoritarian political system, its corrupt parties, and of their devious leaders. This campaign may also be another attempt following several past failures to project the EZLN as a political force beyond parts of Chiapas and even to give it a national presence.

A Propaganda Campaign

The EZLN's public statements suggest that it is not so much interested in politics as in propaganda, and not concerned with seizing power, but rather with building its autonomous communities, called *caracoles* (snails). So far this strategy has led to the creation of about 30 autonomous communities involving several thousand indigenous people in Chiapas, with a few tenuous communities in other locations. There is no census of how many people actually live in these communities.

Whatever their success at the local level, which remains unclear, the autonomous communities have not proven very effective in changing the national balance of power or in projecting the EZLN as a force on the national level. The EZLN remains largely isolated both geographically and politically, much as it has been since February 1994 when the armed conflict in Chiapas was halted.