

[Comments by Ulises Beltran](#)

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Warren in Mexico

Warren's departure was the leading story in the evening news in Mexico, and it was widely commented in the media. Probably some of you don't know, that Warren's last exit poll was precisely the work he did for the Mexican Presidential election we will comment today. It is not my intention to add anything to the thousand words of praise you have heard about Warren. What can I add to a life of achievements that speaks for itself? I will only tell you the story of Warren in Mexico. The story of the outstanding contribution Warren did to the Mexican polling industry, and above all, to the construction of a reliable electoral system. I can tell you this story because it was I, who brought Warren to Mexico, becoming in the process, Warren's "Mexican friend", or probably I should say Warren's Mexican family. I first met Warren in the winter of 1990. I was at the time pollster to the President of Mexico, Carlos Salinas de Gortari who had just been elected under widespread accusations of fraud. My intention was to convince the American networks to do independent exit polls in Mexico. I had never heard of Warren Mitofsky, but wherever I went he was the reference.

First I saw him in an awful office he had in 57th street (ABC I think), and after a brief talk he asked me to meet him the day after in an Italian restaurant in the Village. I did my best to make my case. The pollster of the Mexican president was asking him to do independent exit polls in Mexico. Ideally, to bring the American networks to do it. He just couldn't understand it. Or perhaps he just didn't believe me. He was absolutely clear, he didn't see any possibility of the networks doing it, and there was no way he would ever

work for a government, let alone a political party. He was only interested if one or some of the Mexican media hired him.

I kept frequent contact with Warren, but I realized he was in the middle of important changes in his life. In those years he left CBS, and I think he began to think of Mitofsky International.

In the mid-term election of 1991 Televisa, the largest network, hired one of the most renowned and prestigious American polling firms to do an exit poll. The PRI, the official party, won every single district and more than 60% of the popular vote. An easy election to call, but the large and famous American firm could not give its estimate of the popular vote until three o'clock in the morning, and only because the client pressured them to do it.

It was time to bring Warren Mitofsky to Mexico.

Warren went in various occasions to see us, I mean my office, do some local races, but the race for governor in the state of Hidalgo in the spring on 1992 was a turning point.

I think he saw professional interviewers at work, and he realized he could expect good response rates. Let me tell you the story. We were watching the work of the interviewers in a very rural precinct and we came to the local store for some refreshment. A very angry woman came in complaining because, as she put it, she had been forced to vote twice, the actual vote and the exit poll. I asked her why she had agreed to participate in the interview, and she said, it was because it would be impolite (de muy mala educacion) not to answer those poor guys who had been there all day long. The moment I translated to Warren he jumped and decided to work in Mexico. He knew the value of high response rates.

Another important event during that trip was that he could see first hand the efforts we were making to build a reliable electoral system. He met several

times with various officials of the electoral Commission, and knew all the projects. From then on, he maintained occasional contacts with them and accompanied these changes all along the way.

Finally, in the Presidential election of 1994, the Chamber of Radio and TV hired Warren to do an exit poll for the election. He worked with two Mexican polling firms. The announcement was done as polls closed, and was precise to the decimal point.

Since 1989, we were doing exit polls in local races. Roy Campos, then at the Census Bureau, was the technical support in these efforts. Roy was in charge of some of the economic surveys of the Census Bureau, and was at the time one of the most experienced survey researchers in Mexico. In the various occasions that Warren visited us he interacted with Roy.

Roy left the Census Bureau, and in 1995 he opened Consulta, an independent polling firm. Two years later, Consulta became Consulta-Mitofsky, the Mexican partner of Mitofsky International. They put together a plan for Televisa, the largest network in Mexico, and since the mid-term election of July 1997, in every single local and National election Televisa has announced the results as polls close. TVAzteca, the other network, followed the lead.

Maybe some of you do not fully appreciate the importance of this for an electoral system under construction. The perfect election occurs when, after a good and fair competition everybody can predict the winner with some degree of certainty, then as early as possible the media confirms the expected winner and the defeated candidate concedes. Time to go to bed. Sometimes some people with insomnia wait for the official result, but except them, nobody cares. The election has been a citizen's event. This cannot happen without a robust polling industry working for independent media.

Consulta-Mitofsky's polls became an indispensable reference in every election, and the electoral system gained the trust of the people. In no single occasion did Mitofsky's estimates differ from the official results announced later in the night.

In 1988, five polls were published before the election, and no exit poll or quick count was done. In the 2006 Presidential election between January and June a little more than 100 polls were published and 8 exit polls and quick counts were released in election night in nine different media, done by a dozen different polling firms. Half of these firms have, in some way or another direct links with Warren Mitofsky, and all of them knew him at least occasionally.

Warren did not teach us how to do exit polls. I think you end up doing them reasonably well if you follow simple methodological rules and if you are careful. He did more than that. He trusted us, and set very high the ethical standards for the Mexican polling industry he contributed to develop. Above all, Warren was an integral participant in the construction of a reliable electoral system, and therefore, a better democracy.

It would be unfair to Warren to finish this note in such a solemn note. In the beautiful piece that Kathy Francovic read in Warren's funeral she described a Wapor seminar in Mexico where Warren participated. She mentioned how she could hear "Mitofsky" whispered like a kind of prayer. I have to make a small correction to that comment. We were trying to solve the most difficult problem Warren had put to us. Where should we take Warren for lunch?

Thanks.