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Managing Electoral Waste From 2024 Elections

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Amid the electoral ban and with the upcoming elections on July 2, 2024, civil organizations and academics draw attention to the environmental impact of electoral waste within urban areas. Specialists emphasize that the amount of plastic waste generated as a result of electoral campaigns exacerbates the environmental crisis.

Dr. Juan Manuel Núñez, Researcher, Transdisciplinary University Center for Sustainability (CENTRUS), IBERO, notes that despite being promoted as environmentally friendly, banners used to promote electoral candidates, typically made of PVC, can take hundreds of years to degrade. To illustrate the problem, Núñez and his team estimated the amount of electoral waste that these elections will leave in Mexico City, the most affected by this issue. They calculated the number of poles in the city and the surface area and weight of electoral material hung in public spaces. Based on this data, an estimated total of 1,245,000 poles and 9,960,000 advertising banners translates to nearly 10,000t of waste. "This amount of waste is equivalent to 2.3 times the area of the Chapultepec Forest and the weight of 750 trolleybuses," Núñez highlighted.

Greenpeace pointed out that according to the Foundation for the Rescue and Recovery of Urban Landscape (FRRPU), the 2024 electoral campaign propaganda will double electoral waste, potentially reaching 25,000t in Mexico City alone. Additionally, other figures suggest up to 40,000t, stressed the organization.

In early April, Greenpeace sent a letter to the candidates for the Presidency of Mexico urging them to act against the plastic pollution generated by their campaigns. Candidates were encouraged to publicly disclose the report required from political parties and coalitions by the INE Election Regulations regarding the materials used in electoral propaganda production, among other measures. Moreover, the organization demanded that parties develop a recycling plan for electoral propaganda and invited candidates to explore new ways of campaigning using digital tools and social networks.

In addition to the evident environmental pollution caused by political propaganda, experts highlight that during the electoral campaign, advertisements were placed in spaces that jeopardized the physical and property integrity of citizens, according to the Electoral Institute of Mexico City (IECM). According to the institute, electoral propaganda that restricts or obstructs the free circulation of pedestrians or the visibility of drivers of any type of vehicle was prohibited.

IECM emphasized that these guidelines aim to guarantee safety, harmonious perception of urban image, and enjoyment of urban landscape for the inhabitants of Mexico City. Furthermore, it warned that electoral propaganda can represent aggressive and invasive visual overstimulation that affects the right of Mexico City residents to a sustainable natural and urban environment.

In this context, Greenpeace conducted a collection of electoral waste in different municipalities in Mexico City, including Coyoacan, Tlalpan, Benito Juárez, Iztapalapa, and Miguel Hidalgo. Among the waste collected, the parties that generated the most single-use plastic waste were MORENA and PAN. In contrast, only one banner was found from MC.

Ornella Garelli, Activist, Greenpeace, denounced that during their collection of this electoral waste, they removed a significant amount of propaganda from political parties and coalition leaders in locations where, by law, they were not authorized. "We focused mainly on removing banners from places where they are not allowed

by law, such as poles, overpasses, or bridges. We see it so commonly that we thought it was allowed, but parties are actually breaking electoral law by placing them there," Garelli said in an interview with Animal Político.

Núñez stressed that while some parties have proposed alternatives, such as transitioning to digital electoral advertising or using biodegradable and recyclable materials in physical propaganda, none of these proposals comprehensively address the problem. "In a city where the environmental crisis is reflected in water and air pollution, neglect of the adverse effects of urban heat islands, and illegal deforestation, the scale of the electoral propaganda problem reflects the lack of interest in the city's environmental issues by those aspiring to govern us," he stated.