



RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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Mexico: Voter's Registration Card (*Credencial para votar*); whether a cardholder must make notification of a change of address; whether it can be used as an identification document; whether the card is punched in some manner once a person has voted; whether the card indicates when a secondary or replacement card has been issued; whether the police, government authorities or individuals can use the Voter Registration Card to access information in the official computer system in order to locate an individual within Mexico; voter card falsification and government responses to this problem (May 2006)

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Voter's Registration Card

The Website of the Federal Electoral Institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) stated that Mexican citizens can register in the voter's roll when:

[they] turn 18 years old, or whenever they choose to if they have not done so before, they must go to the IFE's module or office that corresponds to their home address in order to request their registration in the voter's roll. They only need to fill out and sign a registration application and have their photograph taken for the photo-voting card (Mexico n.d.a)

According to an official with the Electoral Institute of the State of Mexico (Instituto Electoral del Estado de México, IEEM), under Article 146 of the Federal Code of Institutions and Electoral Procedures (Código Federal de Instituciones y Procedimientos Electorales), citizens who have changed their address without notifying authorities, must appear before the Executive Directorate of the Federal Registry of Voters (Dirección Ejecutiva del Registro Federal de Electores) to update the General Catalogue of Voters (Catálogo General de Electores) and the Electoral Register (Padrón Electoral) (Mexico 12 May 2006; see also Mexico n.d.a). However, the law does not provide for any penalties should the individual fail to notify the authorities (Mexico 12 May 2006).

According to the IEEM official, the Voter Registration Card can be used as an identification document (ibid.). A press release published on the Website of Digimarc Corporation, a "leading supplier of secure media solutions used in... security, identification and digital media content applications" (Digimarc 7 June 2005), noted that the Voter Registration Card is "commonly used for identification at banks, stores and government agencies" (ibid.; see also *La Revista Peninsular* 30 Mar. 2006).

Although the Voter Registration Card is not punched after voting (Mexico 12 May 2006), once the voter has cast the ballot in the ballot box, his or her card is marked to indicate he or she has voted and his or her right thumb is marked with indelible ink (ibid. n.d.a). The box on the back of the Voter Registration Card is also marked to indicate that the individual has voted (Mexico 12 May 2006). The IEEM official informed the Research Directorate that the number, on the front of the card, which follows the year of registration indicates the number of times that a card has been updated (ibid.; see also ibid. 26 Oct. 2005). The number "0" appears on the first card the holder receives (ibid. 26 Oct. 2005). A new card can be issued if a replacement is needed or if any change needs to be made to the first card (i.e. change of address, correction of data, etc) (ibid. 12 May 2006). The number "1" appears on the first updated card (ibid. 26 Oct. 2005).

The Voter Registration Card bears the voter's name, age and sex, the year of his or her registration in the registry of electors, a personal identification number and the voting office that corresponds with the voter's address (Mexico 24 Apr. 2006, Chap. 5, Art. 164). The Card also has the following security features:

[translation]

- a. an invisible watermark on the back of the card;
- b. two watermarks on the photographic paper, one visible and the other invisible;
- c. a hologram of the logo of the Federal Electoral Institute partially covering the lower left part of the photograph;
- d. a digital laser-printed photograph of the card bearer's face;
- e. ... components that self-destruct if the card is altered in any way;

- f. the signature of the card holder;
- g. a bar code covered by a black band that appears under infrared light;
- h. a series of numbers specific to each card;
- i. a digital fingerprint of the index finger of the card holder;
- j. under black light, several national shields and the card holder's name appear;
- k. under black light, the letters "IFE" appear on the card bearer's photograph;
- l. micro-text printing;
- m. four numbers on the "section" that correspond to the four first numbers on the back of the card, which, with the nine other numbers, correspond to the OCR [optical character recognition];
- n. a card thickness of 0.76 millimeters, which adheres to the international standard (Mexico n.d.b.).

For further information on the previous design (*diseño anterior*) and the current design (*diseño actual*), refer to the attached copies of the Mexican Voter Registration Card (n.d.c-d).

Regarding whether the police, government authorities or individuals can use the Voter Registration Card to access information in the official computer system in order to locate an individual within Mexico, the IEEM official noted that, according to Article 135 of the Federal Code of Institutions and Electoral Procedures, documents, data and information provided by Mexican citizens to the Federal Registry of Voters is strictly confidential and cannot be divulged to anyone except authorized users within the organization (Mexico 12 May 2006). No reports of police, government authorities or individuals using the Voter Registration Card to access the information in the official computer system in order to locate an individual within Mexico could be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

Voter Registration Card falsification

According to Article 243 of Mexico's Federal Criminal Code, the falsification of public documents is punishable by

[translation]

imprisonment of four to eight years and fines of two hundred to three hundred sixty days of minimum wage for public documents; and imprisonment of six months to five years and a fine of one hundred eighty to three hundred sixty days of minimum wage for private documents. Where the falsification is committed by a public servant, the penalty in question shall be increased by up to one-half (Mexico 12 May 2006).

In a 17 April 2006 article published by *Diario de México*, the executive director of the Federal Registry of Electors (Registro Federal de Electores, RFE), indicated that the Office of the Special Prosecutor for Electoral Crimes (Fiscalía Especializada para la Atención de Delitos Electorales, FEPADE), was investigating the existence of commercial transactions including false Voter Registration Cards (*Diario de México* 17 Apr. 2006; see also *La Crónica de Hoy* 24 Nov. 2005). The trade in cards has been detected in United States (*ibid.*) and Guatemala (*El Universal* 25 Nov. 2005).

According to the executive director of the RFE, the illegal business in false voting cards is important because the Voter Registration Card is highly valued as an identity document (*Diario de México* 17 Apr. 2006). In a news article published by *El Universal*, the advisor to the President of IFE indicated that the falsification of these cards could have an impact for the immigration authorities (25 Nov. 2005). However, the executive director of RFE noted that election results could not be modified by the use of false Voter Registration Cards (*Diario de México* 17 Apr. 2006; see also *El Universal* 25 Nov. 2005). This information was corroborated by the election coordinator for Mexican residents living abroad who noted that no one holding a false Voter Registration Card will be able to vote in the 2006 elections, because he or she would not be registered on the voters list (*El Universal* 25 Nov. 2005; see also Mexico 17 May 2006).

The Website of the IFE indicated that

once [the voters] are before the directive board, they must present their photo-voting card, which is checked against the voters list that both the directive board and the political party representatives have.

Once the registration of the voter is confirmed in the voters list, he/she receives a ballot or ballots (a ballot of a different color is used for each federal post in contest but their characteristics are identical throughout the country) (n.d.a).

The official voter's list contains the same photograph that appears on the Voter Register Card as well as the name and address of every voter (IFE n.d.e).

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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El Universal [Mexico City]. 25 November 2005. Arturo Zárate and Justino Miranda. "Señalan que no se podrá votar con credencial falsa." <http://www.eluniversal.com.mx/nacion/vi_132435.html> [Accessed 16 May 2006]

Additional Sources Consulted

Internet sites, including: EFE NEWS, Embassy of Mexico in Canada, Factiva, *La Jornada*, Latinamerica Press, Massachusetts Immigrant and Refugee Advocacy (MIRA), North American Congress on Latin America (NACLA), *San Francisco Chronicle*.

Attachments

Mexico. N.d.c. Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE). "Elementos y características de la credencial para votar con fotografía: Puntos para verificar su autenticidad (Parte frontal)." <<http://www.ife.org.mx/documentos/DERFE/RFE2/cred/frontal.swf>> [Accessed 16 May 2006], 1 p.

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