



Bronco buster

MEXICO — CORRUPTION

Jaime Rodríguez is called “El Bronco” for a reason. The Nuevo León governor’s nickname, often used to describe untamed horses, suits the rough-around-the-edges image that he’s cultivated through a penchant for swearing and colloquialisms. For citizens of this dusty border state, the birthplace of the Mexican cowboy, the resilient horse also acts as a potent political symbol.

El Bronco (*pictured*) ran for office in 2015, easily defeating his rivals from Mexico’s two main traditional parties with 49 per cent of the vote. He promised to drain the swamp, Mexican-style, and end the institutional back-scratching that has long defined politics. “Corruption is the biggest cancer we have,” he says, reaching for a breakfast taco in his office in Monterrey’s governor’s palace. “Few people have dared to tackle it but that’s what I am doing.” His message resonates in a country where more than 40 state governors have been implicated in corruption scandals over the past decade – most of them have evaded jail time.

It’s hard not to draw comparisons between El Bronco and Donald Trump. Not that Rodríguez is a proponent of blanket immigration bans but the two

leaders share a knack for tapping into people’s frustrations while promoting themselves as straight shooters. “He’s the one who copied me,” he says of Trump, a mischievous smile creeping across his face.

Driving to his ranch in García to visit Tornado, his favourite stallion, Rodríguez explains that there were several attempts to assassinate him by the drug cartels when he was mayor of the town. The last one, in 2011, saw a gunfight that left one of his guards dead. Beyond the ranch gates is another sobering reminder of the wave of drugs-related violence in Nuevo León that peaked that year: a beaten-up red Ford Mustang that once belonged to Rodríguez’s 22-year-old son, who was kidnapped and murdered in 2009.

“I made a promise to my son when I found him dead,” says Rodríguez. “And that was to spend the rest of my life trying to change people’s attitudes. I realised that the only way to do this was by getting into government.” That fight against red tape and corruption may lead him to consider a run for the presidency in 2018. Opinion polls haven’t been forgiving – he’s promised more than he’s delivered so far – but just like his horses, Rodríguez is resilient. He doesn’t have much time for polls anyway. — EJS

Memory bank

BURKINA FASO — MEMORIAL

People in Burkina Faso are being asked to give CFA100 (€0.15) each towards the construction of a memorial to soldier, former president and national hero Thomas Sankara, who seized power in 1983 in a bid to curb corruption.

Sankara turned his back on Cold War rivalry and believed that his desert country could be self-sufficient. Most people think he was murdered during a coup d’état



led by Blaise Compaoré in 1987, who then served as president until 2014.

“We could easily secure donor funding but only a national collection is true to Sankara’s spirit,” says Boukary Kaboré, one of the late revolutionary leader’s closest aides. With 17 million Burkinabés, Kaboré is confident that the push can raise FA11.7bn (€2.5m) for the monument. After all, Sankara’s self-reliant spirit is in revival: in 2014 protesters took to the streets bearing brooms and demanding that Compaoré be swept from power. It worked. — ADS

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Politics Briefing

Referendum roll-call

Brexit has shown that opening governance up to the ballot box is not a decision to be taken lightly. Our correspondents offer their predictions on this year’s critical referendums.



1. Turkey’s new constitution 16 April

There have been Turkish babies called Evet (“yes”) ahead of the vote to deliver rule-by-decree power to President Erdogan. The referendum has dangerously divided the nation; heartland support in Anatolia means this will likely go in the government’s favour. — CL



2. Puerto Rican statehood 11 June

The US commonwealth territory heads to the polls for a fifth time to decide on becoming a US state or between independence or free association. The vote will be close but something needs to give to sort out the island’s rocky finances. — EJS



3. Catalan independence September

Seen as illegal by prime minister Mariano Rajoy, the referendum has put the regional and central governments on a collision course. If he suspends regional authority it would be a gift to separatists, who decry the authoritarian overstep of the central government. — LA



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The Foreign Desk,
Saturday 12.00 UK time

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