

QUICK POLICY INSIGHT

Elections in Mexico: the PRI returns to government, but without a legislative majority

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The Institutional Revolutionary Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) and its candidate Enrique Peña Nieto emerged the clear victors of Mexico's elections on 1 July 2012. While Peña Nieto will take office as President on 1 December, the PRI and its allies did not achieve a majority in the two chambers of Congress, and the new government will have to negotiate with other parties to get support for its proposals. Overall, the elections consolidated Mexico's three-party system. The runner-up in the election, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of the left-wing Progressive Movement (*Movimiento Progresista*) alliance, has refused to recognise the result and has accused the PRI of massive vote-buying. A legal challenge against the result is unlikely to succeed, and it may be difficult to mobilise sustained protests against alleged electoral fraud.

The result

The PRI's presidential candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto, won a clear victory in the elections on 1 July, but less resounding than many opinion polls had predicted.

The general elections of 1 July drew 50 million Mexicans voters. In addition to the President, 500 members of the Chamber of Deputies were elected for a period of three years, and 128 Senators for a six-year term. Six of Mexico's 31 states also elected their Governor and the Federal District of Mexico (Mexico DF) its Head of Government for the next six years. Elections to the state legislatures and municipal elections took place in 15 states and Mexico DF. The participation rate was 63 %, roughly the same level as during the last presidential elections, in 2006.

As largely anticipated, the polls have returned the PRI, in power from 1929 to 2000, to government. With 38.2 % of the votes, Enrique Peña Nieto, candidate for the Commitment to Mexico (*Compromiso por México*) alliance, formed by the PRI and the Green Ecologist Party of Mexico (*Partido Verde Ecologista de México*, PVEM), obtained a clear victory, although less resounding than many opinion polls had predicted. In second place, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the candidate of the Progressive Movement, a coalition of his own Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) and two smaller

parties, the Labour Party (*Partido del Trabajo*, PT) and the Citizens Movement (*Movimiento Ciudadano*, MC), achieved relatively fewer votes than in the 2006 elections, when he also was second. Josefina Vázquez Mota, the candidate of the centre-right National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN), the governing party during the last 12 years, obtained 25.4 % of the vote, the lowest percentage for the PAN since 1988. The number of presidential candidates —four— was the lowest since 1976, when José Lopez Portillo of the PRI was the only candidate.

Peña Nieto was the most popular candidate in 21 states, including the State of Mexico, the Federation's largest, where he was Governor from 2005 to 2011. López Obrador was the most popular candidate in seven states and the Federal District, and Vázquez Mota in three.

Table 1:
Mexico: Presidential elections 1 July 2012

Candidate	% of votes	votes
Enrique Peña Nieto (Commitment to Mexico, <i>Compromiso por México</i>)	38.21 %	19 226 784
Andrés Manuel López Obrador (Progressive Movement, <i>Movimiento Progresista</i>)	31.59 %	15 896 999
Josefina Vázquez Mota (National Action Party, <i>Partido Acción Nacional</i> , PAN)	25.41 %	12 786 647
Gabriel Quadri de la Torre (New Alliance Party, <i>Partido Nueva Alianza</i> , PANAL)	2.29 %	1 150 662
Non-registered candidates	0.04 %	20 907
Blank votes	2.47 %	1 241 154
Total		50 323 153

The new Mexican government will not have a majority in Congress.

The results of the two parties supporting Peña Nieto's candidacy are not sufficient to provide the new President with the support of a majority in Congress. In the Chamber of Deputies, the PRI and the PVEM (in 199 of the 300 constituencies the two parties presented candidates jointly, in the rest separately) will jointly control 240 seats out of 500; 207 of them will represent the PRI and 33 the PVEM. This is less than their combined representation in the previous legislature; despite Peña Nieto's victory in the presidential polls, the PRI saw its representation in the Chamber diminish from the 241 seats the party achieved in the elections to Congress in 2009. In the Senate, the PRI and the PVEM will have 61 out of 128 seats (52 for PRI, 9 for PVEM), 20 more than in the period 2006-2012, but not an absolute majority. With 136 seats, the alliance between PRD, PT and MC will be the biggest opposition group in the Chamber of Deputies; the PRD will have 101 representatives, the PT 19 and the MC 16. In the Senate, PAN will have more representatives than the left-wing coalition.

(The exact distribution of seats in the two Chambers may still change once the Electoral Court has validated the results).

The state elections showed mixed results. The PRI candidates for Governor, in most cases supported by the PVEM and other smaller parties, won in three states. The most important victory was in Jalisco —whose capital, Guadalajara, is Mexico's second largest city— which has been governed until now by the PAN. Left-wing coalitions, including the PRD and its allies and local forces, won the elections in Morelos and Tabasco, the home-state of Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Finally, the PAN retained the governorship in Guanajuato in Central Mexico, one of the party's strongholds (and one of the three states where Josefina Vázquez Mota won most votes in the presidential elections).

The most important local election was in Mexico DF, where the PRD candidate for Head of Government, Miguel Ángel Macera, obtained a record score of almost 64 % of the vote. In second place, the PRI obtained slightly less than 20 %. The PRD-led local government proved so popular in the capital that Macera obtained 10 percentage points more than López Obrador (head of the capital's government 2000-2005).

The challenge to the result

The runner-up in the presidential election, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has refused to recognise the results and has accused the PRI of having bought millions of votes.

The elections went smoothly, with only relatively minor incidents. According to the Federal Electoral Institute (*Instituto Federal Electoral*, IFE), the number of incidents was the lowest ever reported. The Chief of the Electoral Observation Mission of the Organization of American States (OAS), former Colombian President César Gaviria Trujillo, acknowledged in a statement issued on 2 July the broad participation in the elections, as well as the calmness, respect and order that prevailed. He noted that Mexico enjoys a robust and trustworthy electoral system.

The conclusions of the Mexican NGO Civic Alliance (*Alianza Cívica*), which deployed around 500 observers, were different, however. The organisation's observers suggested that around 20 % of polling stations had problems with the secrecy of the vote and that a similar portion of voters complained that they had been subject to some form of pressure. The organisation has not, however, made any assessment of the extent to which has influenced the outcome of the polls. The students protest movement #Yosoy132 —clearly opposed to the PRI and Peña Nieto—, had registered about 2 000 observers, and stated that it had evidence of more than 1 000 irregularities.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador has characterised the elections as inequitable, fraudulent and marred by irregularities. As early as 2 July, he stated that he did not recognise the provisional results. His demand of a recount of the results from around 80 % of the more than 143 000 polling stations was partially met by IFE, which recounted the tally sheets from more than half of the polling stations (54.5 %), —those that contained some kind of irregularity or inconsistency or where the difference between the two frontrunners was less than 1 %. However, this unusually comprehensive recount only changed the provisional results slightly, and

in fact, slightly lowered López Obrador's share of votes while similarly increasing Peña Nieto's. The challenge to the result of the elections was somehow unexpected, as the four presidential candidates had signed a "civility pact" (*pacto de civilidad*) before the vote, in which they committed themselves to respect the results of the elections, in recognition of the IFE's independence.

López Obrador and his alliance's refusal to recognise the result is principally based on accusations that the PRI spent more on the elections than what is legal and that the party 'bought' around five millions votes by, for example, distributing super market vouchers to PRI voters.

The decision to legally challenge the result of the elections, demanding that they be declared void and null, mirrors López Obrador's reaction in 2006, when he also refused to recognise the result, declaring himself the legitimate President, and protests lasting several months supported his claim. This reaction did not go down well with all sectors of the PRD or the public at large, and many consider that it damaged López Obrador's image to a point where that also handicapped him in the 2012 elections. In the most recent poll —unlike 2006, where López Obrador was beaten by PAN's Felipe Calderón by a margin of only 0.6 %—the clear distance between him and Peña Nieto will make it difficult to again mobilise sustained protests. Nonetheless, on 8 July some 70 000 people in Mexico DF reportedly protested against the elections and Peña Nieto's victory.

The clear victory for Peña Nieto will make it difficult to mobilise sustained protests on the basis of the claim that he won because of irregularities and unequal conditions.

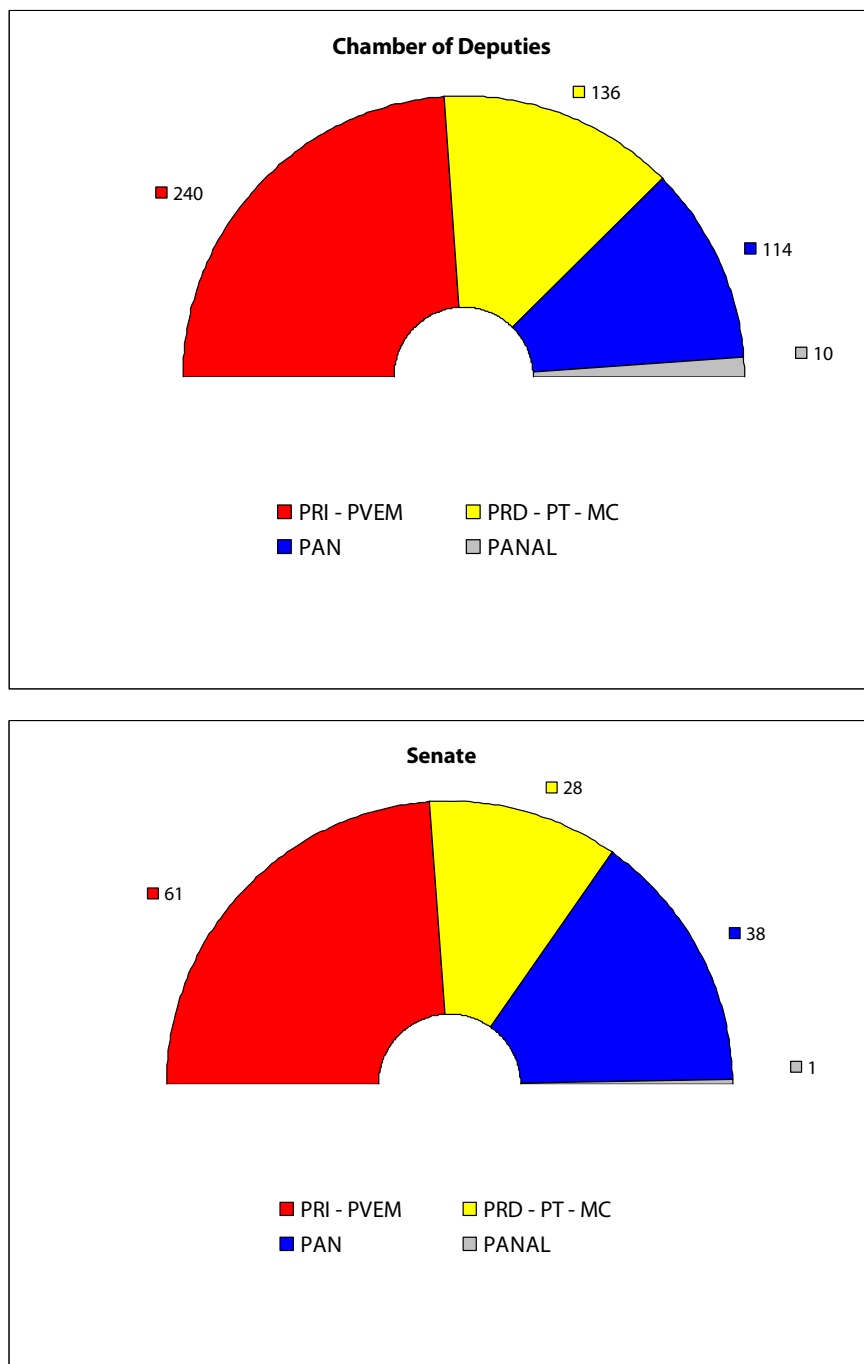
Mexico's tri-party system

The 1 July elections confirmed that Mexico has a relatively stable political panorama, with three dominating parties, each commanding important positions at various levels and popular support:

- The **PRI** has regained its position as Mexico's biggest party, thereby demonstrating that its historic defeat in 2000, when it lost power for the first time in 71 years, did not signal the end of the party. The polls have confirmed the recovery of the PRI's electoral strength: after the 2000 defeat, it came in only third in the 2006 elections, then nearly obtained an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies in the successful 2009 parliamentary elections. Yet, Peña Nieto and the PRI won the most recent vote by a smaller margin than was generally expected, and the party's result are far from the virtual hegemony the PRI enjoyed before 2000. The 38 % for Peña Nieto is much better than the 22 % received by Roberto Madrazo in 2006, but still only marginally better than the 36 % the PRI reached in the 2000 elections. The score remains the lowest obtained by any Mexican president, with the exception of Felipe Calderón in 2006. And as mentioned above, Peña Nieto's government will not enjoy a majority in Congress.

The elections confirmed that Mexico has a competitive tri-party system.

Figure 1:
Composition of the Mexican Congress from 1 September 2012



PRI: Partido Revolucionario Institucional
 PVEM: Partido Verde Ecologista de México
 PRD: Partido de la Revolución Democrática
 PT: Partido del Trabajo
 MC: Movimiento Ciudadano
 PAN: Partido Acción Nacional
 PANAL: Partido Nueva Alianza

- Despite the defeat of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the score of nearly 32 % obtained by the **PRD** and its allies was considerably higher than what was expected during the most of the electoral campaign. Suffering from internal divisions, the party and its allies on the left obtained a poor result in the 2009 Congressional

elections. Yet they have now regained a position as the second political force in Mexico, both in terms of votes and representation in Congress. The elections also confirmed the PRD's dominating position in Mexico DF, the country's capital and largest city.

- The **PAN's** electoral result probably reflects a certain voter fatigue after the party has been in government for 12 years, nurtured by what many see as a generalised frustration with the limited political, economic and social changes that have been achieved since 2000. Insecurity and high levels of violence have also led to a growing dissatisfaction with the Calderón government's approach against organised crime and drug trafficking. Many observers have noted that Josefina Vázquez Mota did not receive the full support of her party or the current and the previous PAN President; in fact, former President Vicente Fox (2000-2006) gave his support to Peña Nieto. Despite this, the PAN was supported by around 25 % of the voters. It remains the oldest party in Mexico after the PRI and has a solid organisation and presence throughout most of the country.

Outlook

The transition period up to 1 December when the new President takes office involves a certain risk of frictions between the current and the incoming administrations and governing parties, but both seem committed to cooperation.

The new Government will face two main challenges: public security and economic reforms. Its success will largely depend on whether it will be able to get the support of other parties for its proposals.

The elections open a prolonged period of transition to a new government. The newly elected Congress will begin its work on 1 September, but Enrique Peña Nieto will only assume the Presidency on 1 December 2012. There will therefore be a —unusual long— interim period of three months during which the new Congress will co-exist with the Executive elected in 2006. Combined with the nearly five month-long period between the elections and the new President taking office, this could create some uncertainties over who is legitimately in power and potentially create frictions between the current and the incoming administrations and governing parties. However, President Calderón has stated that his administration will fully cooperate with the incoming one, and Peña Nieto has stressed the need for an effective transition. A key question will be whether the incoming President will seek Congress' approval on some of his reform proposals before he takes office.

One fundamental challenge for the new President will be to wipe out what remains of the association of the PRI, which had hegemonic power during almost seven decades, with authoritarianism, corruption and a rule based on patronage, corporatism and electoral fraud. Peña Nieto, who has a youthful appearance and an important presence in the media, appears to embody the renewal of the party. However, he will be expected to demonstrate that the PRI's return to government does not mean a return to the past, but that the party can govern as a political party among others, in Mexico's competitive multi-party system and a pluralistic society.

Another challenge will be meeting the expectations that the new government improve public security and bring down the levels of criminal violence, which cost as many as 50 000 lives during Felipe Calderón's

government. Peña Nieto has neither defended radically different alternatives to current security policies nor presented specific proposals. After the elections, he has promised to continue the uncompromising combat against organised crime, but also to give more priority to measures to reduce violence, including by expanding the police force to protect citizens. The new government may put more emphasis on addressing the social and economic reasons for the violence, and is likely to step up demands that the US take measures to reduce drug consumption and curb arms trafficking.

The new President and his government will to a great extent be judged on their ability to make the Mexican economy more productive, create more jobs and improve social conditions. Peña Nieto is clearly identified with the liberalising economic reform policies which the PRI has represented since the late 1980s. Reforms of the tax system, for example, and the energy sector, particularly the oil industry, will therefore figure high on the political agenda. The new President is also expected to follow-up on the initiatives taken during Mexico's presidency of the G20 this year.

Like all governments since 1997, Peña Nieto's administration does not have a majority in Congress and cannot count on automatic support for its policies. In the past, this situation has led to a certain blockage of government action, with the Executive's initiatives being diluted, only partially passed after lengthy negotiations, or stalled due to lack of agreement. (There have also been examples of important reforms agreed by a large majority, however). The success of the new Mexican government will depend much on its ability to create consensus in Congress and reach agreements with other political forces. Whether or not it will accomplish such cooperation will also depend on the two other major parties: will the PAN seek to recover the party's strength through a firm opposition policy and will Andrés Manuel López Obrador's legal challenge of the electoral results signal the PRD's position towards the new administration?