7-5-2000

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Vicente Fox Of Center-right Partido Accion Nacional (p.a.n.) Wins Presidential Election

by LADB Staff
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 2000-07-05

Mexican voters, citing a strong desire for change, elected opposition candidate Vicente Fox Quesada of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) as Mexico’s next president. The July 2 election marked the end of the 71-year tenure for the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which has held the Mexican presidency since 1929. Fox, who will take office Dec. 1, also represented the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) in a coalition called Alianza por el Cambio. Unofficial statistics from the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) indicate that the PAN-PVEM candidate received almost 43% of the vote, compared with about 36% for Francisco Labastida of the PRI, and 16.5% for Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). Cardenas was also representing four small leftist parties, the Partido del Trabajo (PT), the Partido Alianza Social (PAS), Convergencia Democratica (CD), and the Partido de la Sociedad Nacionalista (PSN). The leftist coalition was called Alianza por Mexico. The remainder of the vote was divided among Gilberto Rincon Gallardo of the Partido de la Democracia Social (PDS), Manuel Camacho Solis of the Partido del Centro Democratico (PCD), and Porfirio Munoz Ledo of the Partido Autentico de la Revolucion Mexicana (PARM). Munoz Ledo received some votes even though he withdrew from the race before the election to support Fox's campaign.

Fox wins undecided voters

Fox's margin of victory was greater than expected because he was able to sway undecided voters. In many public-opinion polls taken a week before the election, Fox and Labastida were in a statistical dead heat. But those polls had not taken into account the undecided vote, which at that time represented 20% of registered voters. Fox also benefitted from a relatively strong voter turnout in almost all regions of the country. An estimated 65% of Mexico's 59 million registered voters participated in the election. This translates to about 38.35 million voters. The percentage of participation was lower than in the 1994 election, when 77% of registered voters cast a ballot. But only 45.7 million Mexicans were registered to vote in 1994, meaning 35.18 million votes were cast in that election. In addition, reforms enacted by the IFE during the past six years included creating a more accurate voter list to eliminate duplications. This means the 1994 voter-registration numbers may have been somewhat inflated. The IFE also implemented several measures to facilitate voting and increase confidence in the vote tabulation on election day (see SourceMex, June 28, 2000). As a result, this year's elections were generally the most open and orderly in recent years, with only a handful of complaints reported to the IFE. "Abstentionism was soundly defeated," said an editorial by the daily newspaper El Universal. "This reflected the people's confidence in our institutions to promote a peaceful democratic transition."

Many voters who responded to exit polls said they cast their ballots for Fox because of his promise to end the institutional corruption that had become so common with successive PRI administrations. "We must reflect on the mandate that Vicente Fox received for the 2000-2006 presidential term," an
editorial in the daily newspaper La Jornada said. "This is a clear mandate to end the vices, excesses, and distortions of a corrupt system and not to resurrect this system under a different party label." Fox has yet to offer any specific plan to overhaul the authoritarian system developed by the PRI, which has controlled politics at all levels in Mexico. "But while Fox campaigned on a platform of change, he has offered no blueprint on how he plans to dismantle and reform a deeply entrenched system in which the government and the party have become almost indistinguishable," said The Washington Post.

**PAN also sweeps congressional races**

In addition to sweeping the presidential election, the PAN made significant gains in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate. Unofficial estimates from the IFE's Programa de Resultados Electorales Preliminares (PREP) indicate the PAN-PVEM is expected to control 224 of the 500 seats in the lower house, which the coalition won either through direct elections or in the distribution of seats based on the proportion of the vote. The PAN held only had 133 representatives in the Chamber of Deputies after the 1997 mid-term election, while the PVEM had eight seats. The PRI's poor performance in the election relegated the party to being the second force in the Chamber of Deputies with 209 seats. The PRI held 232 seats after the 1997 election. The PRD and its four coalition partners will control 67 seats in the lower house. The PRD held 115 seats after the 1997 election, with another seven posts held by the PT. The three other minor parties that participated in the election failed to receive the required 2% of the vote to qualify for any of the seats distributed through proportional representation. One of the three parties, the PDS, barely missed the cutoff, obtaining 1.9% of the vote. Some analysts had expected the PDS to qualify for at least one seat, based on the strong performance of its presidential candidate Rincon Gallardo in the first presidential debate in April (see SourceMex, May 3, 2000). In the Senate, the PAN won a small majority of the seats up for direct election or for distribution under proportional representation. But only two-thirds of the 128 Senate seats were open this year because elections in the upper house are staggered. This will leave the PRI with 58 Senate seats, compared with 53 for the PAN-PVEM and 17 for the PRD and its four partners. Even though the PRI now holds a simple majority in the Senate, the party will have fewer seats when the next session convenes in September. In contrast, the PAN will increase its numbers in the Senate by 22 seats, although a handful of these will be shared with the PVEM. The same is true for the PRD, which will have to allocate seats to the PT, CD, and one of the two other partners.

(Sources: Associated Press, 07/02/00, 07/03/00; Reuters, 07/03/00; The Dallas Morning News, La Jornada, El Economista, Reforma, Novedades, The Washington Post, The New York Times, Los Angeles Times, 07/03/00, 07/04/00; El Financiero, Proceso, 07/04/00; El Universal, 07/03/00, 07/05/00; Excelsior, 07/03-05/00)