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Center-left Coalition, PAN Decry PRI's Electoral Practices, but Take Different Approaches Following Presidential Election

by Carlos Navarro

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In the aftermath of the 2012 presidential election, the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) is pushing for Congress to approve major electoral reforms to clean up future elections. The center-left coalition, led by the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), supports the initiative but argues that this year's election must be cleaned up first.

The two political forces are pushing for changes amid charges that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) won the election in a manner that was unfair and, according to the PRD and its partners in the Movimiento Progresista, illegal. The final results from the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) showed that Enrique Peña Nieto, representing the PRI and the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), won the election by almost seven percentage points over Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the center-left coalition, with Josefina Vázquez Mota of the PAN coming in third ([SourceMex, July 11, 2012](#)).

The IFE has received thousands of complaints against the PRI from the losing parties, particularly López Obrador's Movimiento Progresista, which also included the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC). The IFE, which does not have the power to act on the complaints, passed on the documentation to the electoral tribune (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, TEPJF), which is expected to review the complaints in the next several weeks and determine if they are valid.

Center-left coalition asks for election to be annulled

The complaints from the center-left coalition were sent to the TEPJF in 58 sealed boxes, two packages, several binders, 10 compact discs, and a sample voting card that was allegedly fraudulent. The tribunal has until Sept. 6 to validate the July 1 election.

The center-left coalition and the PAN contend that the use of gift cards favoring the PRI gave its candidate Enrique Peña Nieto an unfair advantage. The gift cards, distributed by the Soriana grocery chain and Grupo Financiero Monex, displayed the image of Peña Nieto with the inscription, "Por un México Exitoso Me Comprometo y Cumpló" (My Promise and My Pledge is to Seek a Successful Mexico). The cards were distributed primarily to low-income voters.

The cards prompted the Movimiento Progresista and other organizations such as the student movement #YoSoy132 to call for the election to be annulled. López Obrador said the cards might have swayed 5 million voters to vote for the PRI-PVEM candidate. He went as far as to suggest that this maneuver might have created an opening for organized crime to become involved in the election.

"Peña Nieto benefited from this illegal activity, which is commonly known as money laundering," the center-left candidate said in a press conference. "One cannot declare an election valid when it was financed with illicit resources."

López Obrador, who also organized major protests in the aftermath of the 2006 election ([SourceMex, Aug. 9, 2006](#)), said the proof would also be presented to other competent authorities besides the TEPJF. He mentioned Attorney General Marisela Morales, Finance Secretary José Antonio Meade, and President Felipe Calderón. "If this case is not investigated, and if impunity is allowed to prevail, we will act against the responsible authorities," he said.

And if all else fails, said López Obrador, the Movimiento Progresista would bring the matter to the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR).

In a partial setback for the center-left coalition, the TEPJF ruled on July 18 that the use of Peña Nieto's image on the Soriana and Monex cards was a legitimate campaign practice consistent with Mexican electoral law. But the tribunal must still determine if the money incurred in creating the cards violated campaign-spending limits.

PRI defends victory

The PRI responded to the Movimiento Progresista by challenging the center-left coalition to present concrete proof to back its allegations. "To erase any doubts and to uphold the legitimacy of [the electoral] institutions, we are going to launch a legal defense of our electoral victory," PRI president Pedro Joaquín Coldwell told reporters. "We are ready to defend not only our victory and the votes of 19 million citizens who supported us but also the votes of all 50 million Mexicans who participated in the election."

Peña Nieto reiterated that the votes cast by Mexican citizens on July 1 should not be devalued. "What makes a presidency legitimate is the vote of the citizens," said the PRI candidate.

Peña Nieto expressed confidence that the TEPJF would validate his victory. But he promised to respect the process and wait until after the court makes its announcement on Sept. 6 before proceeding with such tasks as naming a transition team to work with the Calderón government.

The PAN, while decrying the unfair nature of the election, appears resigned to accepting that the Peña Nieto victory will be ratified. "The transition is already in process," said PAN secretary-general Cecilia Romero. "Felipe Calderón Hinojosa is the president until Nov. 30, and, on Dec. 1, Enrique Peña Nieto will be the one in charge of this office."

PAN officials agreed that there was insufficient proof to back López Obrador's allegations that the PRI's questionable practices were directly responsible for swaying millions of Mexicans to vote for Peña Nieto. "I do not know how [López Obrador] can say that 5 million votes were bought in this manner. Perhaps he has some sort of magic ball," said Romero. "The reality is that it is impossible to prove."

"In Mexico, proving electoral fraud is like proving the existence of God. One believes or does not believe. But it is difficult to prove its existence," columnist Federico Arreola wrote in SDP Noticias.

"The evidence that López Obrador presented is convincing to his supporters, but for many other people it does not offer conclusive proof."

To the displeasure of the center-left coalition's supporters, Calderón also appeared to offer a sense of legitimacy to Peña Nieto's victory by agreeing to hold a one-on-one meeting with the PRI-PVEM candidate at the Los Pinos presidential palace on July 17. The meeting was the latest turn in Calderón's stance regarding the elections.

Calderón has given conflicting signals in the weeks since the election. "Felipe Calderón believes and does not believe that there was fraud," said Arreola. "He said there was no fraud when on election night he congratulated Enrique Peña Nieto. He changed his mind when he later denounced that vote buying must be punished. And yesterday, when he received the PRI candidate at Los Pinos, he stopped believing that the election was fraudulent."

PAN proposes new set of electoral reforms

Even though the PAN strongly denounced the PRI's electoral practices, the conservative governing party declined to join with the Movimiento Progresista in demanding that the election be overturned. Instead, the PAN has insisted that Peña Nieto and the PRI delegation in the Congress support its efforts to enact new electoral reforms that could discourage unfair electoral practices in future elections.

In its call for electoral reform, the PAN urged an end to practices that promote inequality in elections, including changes to broadcasting laws and campaign financing. The plan also proposes eliminating campaign tactics that encourage vote buying. "We need to promote changes that reaffirm democratic representation as a priority," said the proposal.

Some observers said the PAN should put more meat in its proposal and seek more fundamental changes in the structure of elections, including the possibility of a runoff and re-election of legislators. A runoff could have been appropriate for both the 2006 and the 2012 presidential elections, since the winner did not receive more than 50% of the votes. "The PRI is scared of a runoff because it believes that the anti-PRI vote could be consolidated in a second round of voting," columnist Leo Zuckermann wrote in the Mexico City daily newspaper *Excélsior*.

But Zuckermann argues that the PAN has the upper hand if it chooses to promote this type of political reform, especially since no party or coalition won a majority in the Congress in the past election. "If Peña Nieto wants to advance his ambitious agenda of economic and other reforms, he must be willing to negotiate these types of reforms. Otherwise, he won't be able to fulfill his promises, and in 2018 his party would leave Los Pinos with its tail between its legs."

Other analysts doubt that a new set of electoral and political reforms will make much difference.

Syndicated columnist Sergio Sarmiento said Mexico has already enacted a number of reforms in the past quarter century that are designed to prevent voter fraud, including prohibiting private financing of campaigns, restricting political advertisements on radio and television ([SourceMex, Sept. 19, 2007](#)), tightening voter rolls, using voter credentials with photographs, and improving the plan to count votes. The latest reform allows independent candidacies and public referenda ([SourceMex, Nov. 2, 2011](#)).

"Please pardon my skepticism, but the truth is that we have had seven electoral reforms since 1977, some better than others. Together, they have given us one of the electoral systems with the most safeguards and restrictions in the world," wrote Sarmiento. "The problem is that we have a democracy without democrats. What good are laws if those who participate in politics do not have a democratic spirit?"

-- End --