

11-2-2011

# Chamber of Deputies Approves Partial Reforms to Electoral Laws, including Independent Candidacies

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

---

## Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Chamber of Deputies Approves Partial Reforms to Electoral Laws, including Independent Candidacies." (2011).  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5837>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact [amywinter@unm.edu](mailto:amywinter@unm.edu).

## Chamber of Deputies Approves Partial Reforms to Electoral Laws, including Independent Candidacies

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Politics, Elections and Government

Published: 2011-11-02

The Chamber of Deputies in late October approved reforms to Mexico's electoral laws that allow independent candidacies and citizen referenda, but the measure fell far short of the comprehensive systemic transformation that President Felipe Calderón and his governing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) had envisioned ([SourceMex, Jan. 6, 2010](#)). The measure now goes back to the Senate, which approved the original proposal in April 2011 ([SourceMex, May 4, 2011](#)).

### *Measure goes back to Senate*

The lower house, where the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has a plurality, made some modifications that diluted the legislation. The watered-down bill angered senators from the PAN and PRD, who pledged to restore some of the measures that were taken out when the Senate returns from a short recess in mid-November.

The measure that passed the Chamber of Deputies did retain an important element of the Calderón plan, which was to allow citizens to run for office without having to affiliate with a political party. The lower house measure also allows for citizen referenda, but the provisions are not as strong as those originally proposed by the president and approved by the Senate. The version approved by the lower house also removes a couple important provisions, such as the opportunity for federal and state legislators and mayors to run for re-election. Provisions allowing for the impeachment and removal of a president were also taken out, as was a proposal to reduce the size of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

The measure that passed the Chamber of Deputies did retain an important element of the Calderón plan, which was to allow citizens to run for office without having to affiliate with a political party. The lower house measure also allows for citizen referenda, but the provisions are not as strong as those originally proposed by the president and approved by the Senate. The version approved by the lower house also removes a couple important provisions, such as the opportunity for federal and state legislators and mayors to run for re-election. Provisions allowing for the impeachment and removal of a president were also taken out, as was a proposal to reduce the size of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate.

But some PRI legislators pointed out that the legislation approved in the lower house contains a very important initiative that discourages candidates from taking donations from drug cartels and other criminal organizations. Deputy Arturo Zamora Jiménez said the measure would punish candidates who are proven to have taken the dirty money with stiff fines and prison terms of up to nine years.

The Senate, which expects to vote on the plan sent back from the lower house sometime in mid-November, could restore some of the removed provisions, but this would require some assistance from PRI senators.

Sen. Manlio Fabio Beltrones, a PRI leader in the Senate, said he favors some of the measures deleted by PRI deputies, such as re-election and an impeachment process for the president. But he also noted that his party's delegation in the Senate would not take a vote that contradicts the will of the PRI deputies.

The PRI Senate leader said the mere approval of the citizen referenda offers an opportunity to address some of the measures that were omitted. "The PRI in the Chamber of Deputies agreed to approve popular consultation, and now we have some issues to bring before the voters regarding re-election and the revocation of a mandate, Beltrones told reporters during a tour of Chiapas.

PRI Deputy Beatriz Paredes Rangel, a former PRI president who is running for mayor of Mexico City, said critics should not downplay the importance of the legislation approved in the lower house because it takes important steps to give citizens greater participation in the electoral process. She said the Congress did not discard the decision on re-election but left that decision to a future vote by citizens.

### *PAN, PRD senators pledge to restore re-election, other provisions*

The arguments of Paredes and Beltrones did not convince the PAN, PRD, and other parties, which suggested that the PRI approach does not guarantee citizen participation. The PAN and PRD also view the re-election process as an opportunity to allow voters to decide whether a public official has done a good job. "The PRI and its allies, the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM) and the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL), have denied citizens any possibility of deciding whether officials who have performed poorly should remain in office," the PRD said in a statement.

The PRD suggested that a reform of the electoral process should also encourage coalition governments. "The PRI has proposed band-aids that simulate changes in the political process," said PRD Deputy José Luis Jaime Correa.

The PRD suggested that a reform of the electoral process should also encourage coalition governments. "The PRI has proposed band-aids that simulate changes in the political process," said PRD Deputy José Luis Jaime Correa.

Other PRD officials such as strategy coordinator Vladimir Aguilar García suggested that the PRI's refusal to codify the re-election concept in the new law was the equivalent of "institutionalizing impunity."

Similar comments came from the PAN delegation in the lower house. "We regret that some PRI legislators maintain archaic positions, which, far from promoting democratic transformation in Mexico, stick to the political tradition that the party supported in the past," said the center-right legislators.

PAN Sen. Alejandro Zapata Perogordo said members of his party and those from the PRD and its allies in the upper house are hoping to restore the legislation to its original form when the measure comes up for a vote in the Senate in mid-November. But he promised that all points of view would be discussed during the process. "We have to consider the needs of our country and not those of political parties," Zapata said in an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper *Diario La Razón*.

Some analysts pointed out that the current system already allows politicians to run again for their current position, but this can occur only after they skip at least one term. "There are legislators

who have been deputies and senators several times," said Miguel Carbonell, a legal expert at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM).

Still, many deputies and senators who return to their posts do not usually stand for re-election. They are normally appointed to fill the at-large seats available to the major parties based on the percentage of the vote received during an election.

### *Political analyst says most recent electoral reforms have benefited Mexico*

Nationally syndicated columnist Sergio Sarmiento said Mexico has undergone seven political and electoral reforms since 1977, mostly with positive results. "The first six reforms, including the latest one in 1996, had positive consequences for the country," said Sarmiento. "Each reform gradually encouraged greater participation of common citizens and groups in the elections, produced a greater diversity in the political system, caused the PRI to lose its status of political monopoly, and led to the first official recognition of a our country's closest election [in 2006]."

Sarmiento regretted that the most recent political reforms in 2007 were actually a setback for the political process in Mexico. Those reforms, intended to regulate political advertisements, primarily on television, had the opposite effect by limiting political expression during the campaigns and also by turning the public against the political parties (SourceMex, Sept. 19, 2007).

Sarmiento regretted that the most recent political reforms in 2007 were actually a setback for the political process in Mexico. Those reforms, intended to regulate political advertisements, primarily on television, had the opposite effect by limiting political expression during the campaigns and also by turning the public against the political parties (SourceMex, Sept. 19, 2007).

"Because of that step backward, and because the seven electoral reforms together have not resulted in a greater quality of life for Mexican voters, we are seeing an increase in the level of indifference regarding politics," said Sarmiento. "This is not the fault of the people. The politicians have convinced us that these reforms would not lead to anything. And the worst thing was that they were right."

One politician who is promising changes if he gets elected president in 2012 is former México state governor Enrique Peña Nieto, who has endorsed reforms in the electoral system and in energy policy, including in the state-run oil company PEMEX. Among other things, Peña Nieto criticized the electoral reforms of 2007 as "inadequate" because they limited freedom of expression during political campaigns. He also has endorsed eliminating 100 of the 200 at-large slots in the Chamber of Deputies. But some critics say that Peña Nieto forgets that his own party was responsible for some of these deficiencies.

"Peña Nieto spoke about reducing the number of legislators in Congress, but when President Calderón presented an initiative to accomplish this in 2009, it was PRI legislators who opposed the measure," said Luis Pazos, a columnist for El Diario de Yucatán, based in the city of Mérida. "If Peña Nieto really wants to make the changes he is proposing, and which are necessary to modernize Mexico, his enemies will be the PRI legislators themselves."

Some critics suggest the proposal to eliminate 100 at-large deputies will not necessarily make things more democratic or equitable in the Congress. "If we eliminate 100 at-large deputies, this would favor the party that wins the largest number of directly elected seats," said Carbonell, pointing out that this could be the PRI in 2012.

"The secondary effect is that the change would stifle political plurality and would in particular affect the smaller parties," added Carbonell. "I would include the PRD in this group, since there is a chance that it will finish in third place in the election."

-- End --