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P.R.I. Candidate Enrique Peña Nieto Wins Presidential Election by Small but Comfortable Margin

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Mexico's national election on July 1 offered a mixed bag: a combination of the old corrupt political practices and the emergence of new trends that ushered in some generational changes. Electoral authorities said voters turned out in record numbers

The presidential election turned out as most public-opinion polls had anticipated, with Enrique Peña Nieto winning by a little more than six percentage points and reclaiming the presidency for the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

In its official report, which included a recount of about half of the precincts, the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) declared Peña Nieto—who represented the PRI and the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM) in the Coalición Compromiso por México—the victor, with about 38% of the total vote. This compared with about 32% for Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the center-left coalition known as the Movimiento Progresista and 25% for Josefina Vázquez Mota of the governing Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). Gabriel Quadri of the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL) received about 2% of the vote.

Voter participation strong

The 2012 election was remarkable because of strong participation. IFE president Leonardo Valdés reported a record turnout in the election, with 49 million Mexicans casting ballots. But even though the voter numbers increased from previous elections, the voter rolls have also risen in past years.

Voter participation this year was just below 63%, which compares favorably to the nearly 64% reported in 2000, the year that the PRI was ousted from the presidency ([SourceMex, July 5, 2000](#)). In contrast, voter participation in the 2006 presidential election was only about 59%.

Youth participation was apparently strong this year, with university students playing a small role in energizing the vote through their #yosoy132 campaign. The university students did not endorse a candidate, but their campaign was aimed at preventing a return of the authoritarian PRI, which might have eroded some support for Peña Nieto.

But the anti-PRI campaign might not have made a huge difference. A an exit survey of voters by the polling organization BGC, Ulises Beltrán y Asociados, indicated that about 41% of voters between the ages of 18 and 25 voted for López Obrador, compared with 34% for Peña Nieto. In contrast, voters 26 and under who did not have more than a secondary education voted overwhelmingly for the PRI-PVEM candidate.

Center-left coalition gains in Congress, but PRI still has plurality

The consensus is that Peña Nieto will have to work closely with Congress, as the election failed to give the PRI the overwhelming victories in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate that the party had sought. The PRI and the PVEM will have a plurality in the Chamber of Deputies, with the two parties amassing a total of 240 directly elected and at-large seats. But the total falls short of the

252 seats that the two parties had in the 2009-2012 Congress. The PRI-PVEM will have a stronger influence in the Senate, where the two parties will have 61 of the 128 seats.

The center-left coalition—comprising the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), Partido del Trabajo (PT), and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC)—was the biggest winner in the Chamber of Deputies, with the three parties taking a total of 136 seats, compared with only 88 in the last Congress. The increase comes at the expense of the PAN, which went from 142 seats to 114. In the Senate, the center-left parties will have 28 seats, down from 33 in 2009. The PAN went from 50 to 38 seats in the upper house.

Center-left candidate López Obrador accuses PRI of massive vote buying

But there is a dark cloud hanging over Peña Nieto's victory. López Obrador and his coalition have called for the election to be nullified, claiming that the PRI engaged in a massive vote-buying campaign. The coalition says the PRI surpassed campaign-spending limits and part of the money was used to distribute gift cards from the Soriana grocery chain and pre-paid cards from Banco Monex to mostly low-income citizens in exchange for their vote.

López Obrador claims the PRI governors of Veracruz, México, Nuevo León, Coahuila, Durango, Sinaloa, and Guerrero spent billions of pesos to bribe voters in the six states. The center-left candidate says this represented 5 million voters. In the IFE's official results, Peña Nieto received 19.2 million votes, compared with about 15.8 million for López Obrador and 12.8 million for Vázquez Mota.

The PRI criticized the center-left coalition for insinuating that 5 million Mexicans would give up their constitutional right to vote in exchange for food supplies. Party officials also challenged the PRD and its allies to provide conclusive proof that vote buying occurred on a massive scale. "There is no substance to these charges, which are based on a montage of videos and anecdotes," said Peña Nieto. "There is no reliable proof."

Other observers agreed that there was not sufficient evidence for the center-left coalition to move forward with its complaint. "Of course, there is no proof that these expenditures were used to buy the popular vote," said the online news site Punto Crítico. "If this were the case, we would be facing a massive scandal that would negate the results of the past electoral process."

PRI officials also criticized López Obrador for pushing forward with the complaint despite losing the election by several percentage points. "[López Obrador] has demonstrated that he is a poor loser," said Sen. Francisco Labastida, pointing out the center-left candidate's failure to accept the electoral results in 2006. ([SourceMex, Aug. 9, 2006](#)).

The PRD also attacked the IFE for not heeding its complaints. Unlike after the 2006 election, the IFE accepted a request to conduct a vote-by-vote recount in some precincts, but the center-left parties said that would not solve the problem. "The IFE failed. It became a bureaucracy and did not do its work. It became an accomplice by omission and inaction," said PRD national president Jesús Zambrano. "The institute had given the appearance of being a stronger institution, but in the end it appeared toothless in front of Mexican society."

Officials said the IFE would seriously consider all complaints and challenges but said it lacked the jurisdiction to act against vote-buying complaints. "The IFE does not have the power to investigate or sanction electoral violations," Valdés told reporters.

Valdés said the appropriate venue to deal with those complaints is the special prosecutor's office for electoral matters (Fiscalía Especializada para la Atención de Delitos Electorales FEPADE). Some of the more controversial matters might have to be resolved the electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación (TEPJF).

The TEPJF, which has until Sept. 6, to ratify the election, said the court is prepared to receive a large number of complaints. "We are ready to deal with whatever matters are brought before us," said magistrate Flavio Galván.

Still, barring overwhelming evidence of fraud, the court is expected to ratify the election based on the vote count. "We will ratify the election if the vote was consistent with legal and constitutional principles," said Galván

The PAN has also complained about the unfairness of the election, denouncing the vote-buying practices of the PRI and calling on authorities to review whether the party surpassed spending limits. The PAN also asked the IFE to review whether the use of public-opinion polls before the election provided an unfair advantage to the PRI.

The PAN, however, stopped short of demanding that the election be voided, and party officials emphasized that their complaint was being filed separately from the center-left coalition. PAN officials said it would be extremely difficult to determine how many votes actually resulted from a vote-buying campaign. But they expressed support for authorities to severely sanction the PRI in order to discourage this practice in future elections.

And support for López Obrador's post-electoral challenges was not unanimous within his own ranks. Graco Ramírez, the PRD governor-elect of Morelos, said the center-left candidate was making a mistake in creating a post-election conflict, especially when there was much less reason to do so than during the tight 2006 election. He was among a handful of PRD members who opposed López Obrador's massive protests that snarled Mexico City following the 2006 election. In an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper *Excélsior*, Ramírez said it was important for all governors-elect to begin forming a relationship with the PRI to ensure governability.

Governing PAN considered the big loser

The complaints about voter fraud seemed to overshadow other clear trends that emerged in the election. First, the election clearly represented a vote against the status quo, especially the PAN and Calderón for failing to address drug-related violence and to end poverty despite strong economic growth.

The anti-PAN sentiment was evident in Vázquez Mota's relatively poor showing in the presidential election. The exit poll by BGC, Ulises Beltrán y Asociados on election day showed a large share of the middle class—which contributed significantly to Calderón's victory in 2006—opted to support López Obrador over Vázquez Mota in 2012. The results showed that the middle class split its vote between the PRI and the center-left coalition, with the PAN coming in a distant third. Where López Obrador fell short was with voters who had less than a secondary education. Pena Nieto obtained 43% of those votes, compared with just below 32% for López Obrador.

But the PAN was hammered even more in some state elections. The 25% support that Vázquez Mota received at the national level was respectable when compared with the party's performance in

gubernatorial elections in Jalisco and Morelos. The conservative party, which had governed the two states, came in third in Jalisco behind the PRI and the MC. And its support was minimal in Morelos.

Some observers said the results in both states were a referendum on the performances of outgoing Govs. Emilio González Márquez in Jalisco and Marco Adame in Morelos, both identified with the ultraconservative faction of the party known as El Yunque.

The Jalisco election also brought a generational change. The winner, Jorge Aristóteles Sandoval Díaz of the PRI, is only 38.

But the vote against the status quo was also evident in local elections in the northern states of Nuevo León and Tamaulipas, where the PAN took the majority of directly elected seats in the elections for federal Chamber of Deputies and Senate and easily retained the mayor's seat in Monterrey despite the Casino Royale scandal that plagued the incumbent mayor Fernando Larrazábal Bretón ([SourceMex, Oct. 12, 2011](#)). Observers said the PAN victories were a sort of referendum on the PRI governments in the two states.

Center-left coalition wins governor's races in Tabasco, Morelos

Despite López Obrador's defeat in the presidential race, the center-left coalition fared very well in the election. The PRD won governorships in Morelos and Tabasco, two states where it never governed before. In Tabasco, center-left candidate Arturo Núñez narrowly defeated Jesús Alí de la Torre, ending an 80-year tenure for the PRI in the state. The victory was also significant because Tabasco is López Obrador's home state.

And the center-left parties not only won convincingly in Mexico City but also marginalized the opposition further with overwhelming victories in the elections for borough chief and the legislature (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF). In the vote for mayor, Miguel Mancera, an ally of outgoing mayor Marcelo Ebrard, received nearly two-thirds of the votes cast in the capital.

Some analysts pointed out, however, that the overwhelming victory for center-left parties in Mexico City was more a win for the PRD faction that had sided with Ebrard, who in the eyes of many had a broader appeal than López Obrador. Mancera received twice as many votes as López Obrador in Mexico City. This means that many independents and PAN and PRI members in the capital voted for Mancera instead of their own party's candidate, but they did not vote for López Obrador.

"López Obrador conducted a very good campaign and, with the help of mistakes by adversaries—primarily the PAN—was able to earn more than double the support projected in the polls last December," columnist Jorge Fernández Menéndez wrote in *Excélsior*. "But once again he demonstrated that he has an electoral ceiling that he was not able to overcome, which candidates like Mancera and Marcelo Ebrard are capable of doing."

Another significant milestone occurred in the Chiapas election, where the PVEM won its first-ever gubernatorial seat, albeit with the strong support and muscle from its coalition partner the PRI.

Manuel Velasco Coello, at 32, is the youngest person to be elected governor of a Mexican state. But he has a strong political pedigree, since his grandfather was former Chiapas governor Manuel Velasco Suárez.

Velasco Coello also benefited from an endorsement from outgoing Gov. Juan Sabines Guerrero, who backed the PRI-PVEM candidate instead of María Elena Orantes López of the center-left coalition.

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