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Center-left Candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador Breaks with PRD to Concentrate on Expanding Citizen Movement

by Carlos Navarro

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On Sept. 10, less than two weeks after the electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, TEPJF) ratified the victory of Enrique Peña Nieto in the July 1 presidential election ([SourceMex, Sept. 5, 2012](#)), opposition candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced that he was separating himself from the three center-left parties to concentrate on building a citizen movement that he launched in 2011 called the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena). López Obrador made the announcement before thousands of supporters in Mexico City's expansive central square, El Zócalo.

"In this new phase of my life, I am going to dedicate my imagination and work to the cause of transforming Mexico," López Obrador said.

The break is primarily with the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), since members of the two other parties—the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC)—are expected to work closely with López Obrador in building Morena.

The center-left politician said he would decide later whether to formally constitute Morena as a political party. If this happens, however, it might create further fissures in the Mexican left, which could be competing for votes in the 2018 presidential and congressional elections and even in the 2015 congressional races. For now, Morena is planning its first national congress in November of this year.

The organization, created in 2010, claims almost 5 million direct supporters, 2,200 municipal committees, and about 179,000 local leaders around the country. "These figures must be viewed with caution," said Álvaro Delgado of the Agencia de noticias Proceso (apro), pointing out that Morena networks made only a small difference in the elections in México state in July 2011 ([SourceMex, July 6, 2011](#)) and the federal elections a year later ([SourceMex, July 11, 2012](#)).

Amicable departure

López Obrador embraced the three center-left parties during the presidential campaign, even putting any efforts to build Morena on the back burner. And, even with the announcement in the Zócalo, he attempted to strike a conciliatory tone with the PRD. He described his departure from the party as amicable and not a "rupture."

"His departure from the PRD did not have the vengeful tone that many had anticipated," columnist Juan Villoro wrote in the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma. "He thanked his colleagues in the best tone possible. His message was characterized by a sense of responsibility, which is something that has not always guided him."

But López Obrador's decision to separate from the PRD was inevitable. While he worked well with the PT and the MC, his relationship with the largest party in the coalition was sometimes conflictive.

The difference was not so much on political philosophy but on practical matters, such as the PRD's decision to work with other parties—including creating coalitions with the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) in gubernatorial elections in Puebla, Oaxaca, and Sinaloa states ([SourceMex, July 7, 2010](#)).

PRD leaders reacted to López Obrador's decision with mixed feelings. Former PRD party president Jesús Ortega said the move was regrettable but also suggested that López Obrador's departure could "end the political schizophrenia" that has dogged the left, a reference to tensions between the moderate and more radical factions.

"What we want now is for the left, and especially the PRD, to have a cohesive vision of the reality of the country, of how to confront it, and, above all, to have a common vision of how to confront the political and social crisis our country is living," Ortega said in a news conference a day ahead of Sunday's rally.

Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, who lost the center-left presidential nomination to López Obrador ([SourceMex, Nov. 16, 2011](#)), said López Obrador had for all intents and purposes already been separated from the PRD for some time when he decided to form Morena.

The absence of the PRD was noticeable at López Obrador's rally in the Zócalo. Among the prominent names missing were Ebrard, Mexico City Mayor-elect Miguel Ángel Mancera, Morelos Governor-elect Graco Ramírez, and newly elected Sens. Alejandra Barrales, Mario Delgado Carrillo, and Dolores Padierna.

But there were plenty of collaborators at the Zócalo rally. Among those present were Alejandro Encinas, who served as Mexico City mayor and represented the center-left parties in the 2011 México state election; Arturo Núñez, governor-elect of Tabasco state; and Manuel Bartlett, a longtime PRI politician who will serve in the Senate as a member of the PT.

Mancera and López Obrador had divergent views on the latter's efforts to challenge the results of the presidential election. The Mexico City mayor-elect made it clear from the very beginning that he supported the institutions that conducted the election and therefore would accept the results. Mancera also openly expressed his willingness to work with the administration of President-elect Enrique Peña Nieto.

PRD free to chart own course

Villoro said the move provides a new sense of political freedom for PRD elected officials. "The PRD governors and legislators will now be able to negotiate with the federal government without wondering whether they are betraying the cause of López Obrador, who has refused to recognize the president-elect," he noted.

There is some debate on whether López Obrador's aim is to form a new political party. "This divorce...does not necessarily mean the birth of a new political party, although the path taken by the López Obrador movement certainly appears to have this goal," columnist Alberto Aguirre wrote in the Mexico City business daily newspaper *El Economista*. Even if the Morena chapters in each of the country's 300 electoral districts and 32 states decide that forming a party is the way to go, it is

uncertain whether Morena would take the next formal step of registering as a party with the federal electoral institute (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) by the next deadline of Jan. 31, 2013.

There is also the possibility that Morena might not need to register as a party but could use the existing registration of the MC, which supported López Obrador strongly during the election. "The party would be founded as a new entity with a new declaration of principles and a new structure, thus developing an entity that could compete in elections and define the country's new direction," columnist Norma González wrote in *La Jornada Aguascalientes*.

Others believe that Morena wants to work both as a political party and as a movement. "López Obrador already applied this party-movement model with the PRD in Tabasco while president of the state chapter and twice as gubernatorial candidate," said *apro's* Álvaro Delgado.

"In Tabasco, he mobilized his supporters, not only during the electoral season but also during times when there were no elections. For example, supporters pushed for the state-run oil company PEMEX to remedy problems with leaks that were contaminating agricultural fields," added Delgado.

A divided left faces difficult electoral challenges

Political observers note that the changes create difficult challenges for the left, both for Morena supporters and for the new PRD. "There is no use denying the significance of López Obrador's decision," Pablo Gómez, a former PRD president and federal senator, wrote in his column in *Milenio.com*. It is true that this separation was expected from the time that Morena was formed, but the actual surgical cut had not occurred. Until a few days ago, anyone affiliated with Morena could also be counted as a member of the PRD."

For many, the central question is whether Morena and the PRD can coexist. Some believe the next six years will serve as a major test for the PRD, which must prove that it can remain a viable option for Mexican voters. "The PRD must show that it is more than just an opportunistic machine that prefers to win elections with former PRI dinosaurs like Manuel Bartlett and Arturo Núñez instead of its own home-grown candidates," said Villoro. "By taking his own path, López Obrador freed up the PRD to make its own decisions, including the requirement that it find an influential leader."

At the same time, Villoro noted that the evolution of the PRD and the López Obrador faction does not preclude the possibility of coalitions or the development of a united left in future elections.

As was the case following the disputed 2006 presidential election ([SourceMex, Sept. 20, 2006](#)), López Obrador called on his supporters to reject the results of this year's vote and to engage in civil disobedience. Some supporters like former PT federal Deputy Gerardo Fernández Noroña, who stood among the participants rather than join with officials at the podium, said now was the time to engage in a peaceful revolution to transform the federal government.

But López Obrador was careful not to burn bridges like he did in 2006, telling supporters to take actions that "do not harm third parties." By snarling traffic for days in 2006, he angered many residents of the Mexican capital, and this might have cost him some votes in Mexico City in the 2012 election. As was the case with a similar rally in 2006, López Obrador attracted a large crowd to the Zócalo, although the numbers appeared down slightly this year. "It was difficult to come up with an accurate count of Sunday's crowd, but it was by all accounts far smaller than in the past," said the *Los Angeles Times*.

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