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Electoral Institute Approves Official Party Status for Center-Left Movement Morena

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On July 18, the electoral institute (Instituto Nacional Electoral, INE) awarded party status to the movement created by former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (Morena). The INE approved registration for Morena, along with two upstart political organizations—the Partido Humanista (PH) and Partido Encuentro Social (PES). The three parties are eligible to field candidates in the 2015 congressional elections, and Morena has been laying the groundwork to participate in several gubernatorial, state, and local elections.

Each of the three parties recruited a sufficient number of members to gain affiliation, effective Aug. 1. However, Morena, the PH, and the PES must obtain 3% of the total vote in the next national election in 2015 to maintain party registration.

While the prospects for the PH and the PES are uncertain, Morena probably will not have much difficulty reaching the 3% threshold, given López Obrador’s broad popularity.

INE president Lorenzo Córdova noted that citizen support allowed each of the parties to gain registration. "While the registrations are made official by the national electoral institute after verification of signatures, it was the Mexican citizens who made this a reality by exercising their right to affiliation," said Córdova. "This right is spelled out in the Constitution."

The decision to seek party registration and participate formally in elections could go a long way toward legitimizing Morena, which started out simply as a citizen movement created to denounce and oppose the decisions of the established parties (SourceMex, Sept. 19, 2012). Morena initially targeted the long-governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), but the movement has also criticized the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) for entering into a political agreement with President Enrique Peña Nieto, the PRI, and the PAN.

Left could face major divisions

Morena's emergence as an electoral option instead of simply a voice of conscience could complicate matters for the PRD and even for other center-left parties like the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) and Partido del Trabajo (PT). The two latter parties had a foot in both camps, strongly supporting Morena while also forming part of the congressional establishment. The MC and PT could be overshadowed by Morena or run the risk of becoming irrelevant. Before obtaining its own registration, Morena attempted to gain registration via the MC, but party president Dante Delgado refused.

While the possibility is strong for divisions in the center-left parties, the likely scenario is that Morena, the PRD, the PT, and MC will somehow come together to form coalitions in some races in the 2018 presidential and congressional elections. Divisions are likely in the 2015 congressional and...
gubernatorial races, where the PRD and Morena could field candidates in the same race, and the PT and MC would have to choose which candidate to support. In some cases, a PT or MC candidate would be representing Morena.

Because of electoral rules, a new party is unable to form an alliance in its first year of existence, so any joint Morena-PRD candidacies are not an option in 2015.

"Circumstances dictate that Morena would be running without the benefit of a coalition, an advantage that we will only have this year," said an analysis of electoral prospects commissioned by the PRI, entitled "Informe Prospectivo 2014-2015."

However, a coalition could prove difficult beyond 2015, as the PRD and Morena are suspicious of each other, and each believes it has the best approach to represent the left. "The leaders of that party opted to cooperate with the corrupt government of Enrique Peña Nieto," López Obrador said earlier this year.

Even on issues where the PRD and Morena coincide—such as opposition to energy reforms—there is no unity. Morena president Martí Batres Guadarrama said the new party, which still considers itself very much a movement, declined to participate in the PRD's effort to collect signatures to force a citizen consultation because the PRD cannot be trusted. He cited the PRD's decision to enter into the cooperation agreement with the Peña Nieto government and the PRI and the PAN.

**Gaining seats in Congress**

Morena is expected to gain some representation in the Congress in the 2015 election, perhaps at the expense of the PRD. Some of the new legislators might win election directly as Morena representatives. Others could retain affiliation with the MC and PT and still consider themselves part of the Morena coalition, said Deputy Manuel Huerta, who is affiliated with the PT.

PRD leaders took a pragmatic approach to the possibility of having to share Congress with Morena. "The goal is to strengthen plurality," said Deputy Silvano Aureoles Conejo, floor leader for the PRD in the lower house. "I hope that Morena comes, as well as many other parties."

Morena officials have set a target of winning as many as 50 seats in the Chamber of Deputies in the July 5, 2015, elections.

There is some concern within the PRD hierarchy whether there will be a large exodus of members to Morena. In late July, PRD Sen. Adán Augusto López Hernández, who represents López Obrador’s state of Tabasco in the upper house, announced he was leaving the party to become a member of Morena.

López Hernández’s defection elicited a variety of reactions. PRD president Jesús Zambrano and legislative leaders Sen. Miguel Barbosa and Deputies Aureoles Conejo and Miguel Alonso Raya pointed out that the Tabasco senator is the only PRD federal legislator to defect to Morena and that any further exodus would be small. However, Sens. Alejandro Encinas and López Hernández said they anticipated a large defection in 2015.

Still, the PRI electoral study pointed out that the PRD is currently strong and could remain a force in Congress in 2015 and beyond. "The PRD is structurally strong, and its possibilities of success are high," said the study, which pointed out that the PRI could face some difficulties if the PRD and PAN come together on certain issues, such as taxes. A PAN-PRD coalition is likely to remind voters
that the Peña Nieto administration and the PRI were the architects of the tax reform that has been highly unpopular with the middle class and with working families. Among other things, the tax included an across-the-board value-added tax (impuesto al valor agregado, IVA), which especially hit communities along the US-Mexico border hard, and a levy on junk food and soda, which has not been universally accepted (SourceMex, Sept. 18, 2013). Because of pressure from the PAN and PRD, taxes on private-school tuition and mortgages were removed from the final package (SourceMex, Oct. 23, 2013, and Nov. 20, 2013).

**Morena to compete in several gubernatorial races**

Morena officials are quick to point out that the decision on which elections to target has not been finalized. Beyond the possibility of running for Congress in certain districts, Morena is likely to field candidates in six gubernatorial races, some municipal elections, and some state legislative contests in 2015.

A victory in gubernatorial elections could give Morena a high profile, and party officials acknowledge that candidates have been recruited for the races in Michoacán, Guerrero, Campeche, Colima, San Luis Potosí, and Sonora, all to be held on July 5, 2015. The highest profile candidate is MC Sen. Layda Sansores in Campeche.

Morena is also targeting some key municipal races, with Yeidckol Polevnsky selected to represent Morena in the mayoral election in Cuautitlán Ixcalli in México state. As a candidate for the PRD-PT, Polevnsky obtained about one-fourth of the vote in the México state gubernatorial election in 2005, which PRI candidate Peña Nieto won with 48% of the vote.

Morena could also take some seats from the PRD in the local races in Mexico City, including several borough presidencies in the capital as well as the legislature (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF). Luisa María Alcalde, coordinator of the voting strategy for Morena, believes that the new party has the possibility of taking six boroughs and 30 seats in the 66-member ALDF. Thousands of voters in Mexico City supported López Obrador, but ended up voting for the PRD, PT, and MC in local elections. Morena is targeting those voters. "There are many people that at one time viewed the PRD as an option but now have changed their minds because of decisions that the party has taken [to vote with the PRI and the PAN]," Alcalde said in an interview with the daily newspaper La Razón.

Morena is also targeting Tabasco state, where the PRD controls 19 of the 35 seats in the state legislature. There are rumors that some PRD state legislators could defect to Morena. A large number of defections could cause the PRD to lose its plurality, which has raised concerns among some legislators. "Those who are fomenting division are doing the dirty work for the PRI," said state legislator Alipio Ovando Magaña.