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Mexican Voters Elect More Women to Chamber of Deputies during June Vote

by Carlos Navarro

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The midterm elections on June 7 brought an increased number of women to positions in the federal Chamber of Deputies, state legislatures, and mayor's offices, resulting in some improvement in gender equity in government. However, despite the gains, some women legislators believe that the ranks of women policymakers is still low, and they are pushing electoral authorities to ensure a greater share of posts for women legislators. This, they say, could be accomplished by further tweaking the formula by which the political parties select candidates for at-large posts. These seats are distributed based on the percentage of the vote that each party receives.

While future elections would ensure a more fair gender-based representation via the at-large route, the parties fielded a larger number of women in direct elections to the Chamber of Deputies in June, primarily because the electoral reforms approved by Congress in 2013 required that each party submit an equal number of male and female candidates for public office ([SourceMex, Dec. 11, 2013](#)).

Because of the reforms, women increased their numbers in the Chamber of Deputies via direct elections. A total of 117 women were elected directly to the Chamber of Deputies in the June 7 election, accounting for 39% of the 300 congressional districts in Mexico. In contrast, only 52 women were elected to the lower house via direct elections in 2009, and 91 in 2012.

In addition to the women elected directly to the lower house in 2015, another 90 will be seated in Congress via the at-large process by which 200 at-large seats are allocated to parties based on the percentage of the vote received at the national level. This means that women would account for about 41% of the seats in the lower house during the 2015-2018 legislature.

"Those who have criticized the gender-based quotas have to be reminded that the nomination of women does not guarantee an automatic victory at the ballot box," Javier Aparicio wrote in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*. "Everything depends on the effort and the quality of the candidates, and the voters have the final say."

Aparicio pointed out that elections continue to favor male candidates, who won 61% of the seats even though they only had 50% of the slots in the election.

Statistics from the Observatorio de Participación Política de las Mujeres en México (OPPM) indicate that members of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and its ally Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM) won 73 of the 117 seats won by women in Congress, while women representing the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) took another 22 seats. There are other interesting trends, including the gender balance of the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), a party that participated in its first election. Eight of the 14 seats obtained by Morena will be held by women.

Increasing parity through at-large slots

While women increased their numbers in the federal Congress through direct elections, an initiative is in the works to also ensure greater equity in the party allocations in the lists of at-large slots for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate in future elections. The initiative—proposed by Deputies Amalia García Medina (PRD), Martha Lucía Mícher Camarena (PRD), María Beatriz Zavala Peniche (PAN), and Eufrosina Cruz Mendoza (PAN)—would require the INE to ensure that all political parties include gender parity as they develop their lists of candidates to receive at-large slots for the two houses of Congress.

The deputies said their initiative also proposes to extend gender parity to judicial and administrative agencies.

A lingering question is how much influence the newly elected women will have in the legislature. As was the case in 2012, a determining factor is whether the women will be appointed to lead important committees dealing with budget, foreign relations, energy, and domestic policy and not just committees dealing with family issues and human rights ([SourceMex, Aug. 8, 2012](#)).

Furthermore, some analysts point out that women need to set the agenda on matters related to gender equity. Excelsior columnist Yuriria Sierra says the pay for women in Mexico is about 31% below what men earn in jobs involving manual labor, down about 17% in the retail sector, and lags by about 15% in professional positions. "Unpaid domestic work accounts for 21.7% of our national GDP," noted Sierra.

Sierra also pointed out several disadvantages that women in Mexico must face, including a 35% illiteracy rate among indigenous women.

Advances in state legislatures and municipalities

The push for gender equity also bore fruit in the elections for state legislatures and for mayoral posts around the country. A total of 146 women were elected via direct vote to state legislative slots in 16 states. The OPPM says the biggest gains occurred in Guanajuato and Querétaro, where women won a majority of seats. In Guanajuato, women won 12 of the 22 directly elected seats, while eight women candidates were victorious in 14 elections in Querétaro.

Results were also positive in the 14 other states that held state legislative elections, with seven women elected in Baja California Sur, 10 in Campeche, six in Colima, 11 in Guerrero, eight in Jalisco, 18 in México state, 11 in Michoacán, nine in Nuevo León, five in San Luis Potosí, 10 in Sonora, and seven in Yucatán. Nuevo León was also the state where independent candidate Jaime Rodríguez was elected governor, while independent Alfonso Martínez Alcáza won election as mayor in the Michoacán capital of Morelia ([SourceMex, June 24, 2015](#)).

In Mexico City, 15 women candidates were elected to the Asamblea Legislativa (ALDF), joining 12 others who will gain seats through the distribution of at-large posts. This means that the ALDF would have 27 women legislators, or about 40% of the total slots in the legislative assembly.

"The two states where victories were minimal for women were Tabasco and Morelos," Anayeli García Martínez wrote in Cimacnoticias, a news wire in Mexico that focuses on women's issues. Only six women were elected to the 21 open seats in Tabasco, while three women candidates were victorious in Morelos.

Women candidates also won elections as mayors in 104 of the 871 municipalities that held elections on June 7, but the electoral reforms are not as favorable to promoting women candidates at the municipal level as they are at the legislative level. The totals for this year represented a slight increase from the 2012 election, when 86 women were elected mayors. No women were elected in the major cities, and a male mayor-elect (Felipe de Jesús Cantú Rodríguez) will replace an outgoing woman mayor (Margarita Arellanes Cervantes) in Monterrey, Mexico's third-largest city.

The OPPM said the states of Baja California Sur and Querétaro elected the largest number of women mayors. Results were disappointing elsewhere, with the number of women mayors declining in Campeche, Guanajuato, and Jalisco from the last election. Guanajuato was especially disappointing, with only the city of Salvatierra electing a woman out of 46 municipalities.

In Jalisco, the center-left Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) scored some important victories, including several mayoral elections ([SourceMex, June 24, 2015](#)). Two of the six mayoral posts won by women in the state went to MC members: María Elizabeth Alcaraz Virgen in Pihuamo and María Elena Limón García in San Pedro Tlaquepaque.

In Mexico City, women were elected president of four of the capital's 16 boroughs (delegaciones): Claudia Sheinbaum (Morena), Xóchitl Gálvez (PAN), María Antonieta Hidalgo Torres (PRD-PT), and Dione Anguiano Flores (PRD-PT-Panal).

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