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## Conservative Opposition Introduces a Proposal for a Runoff in Presidential Elections

by Carlos Navarro

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The debate on runoff elections has resurfaced in the Congress in the context of proposals for further electoral reforms in Mexico. Mexico approved major electoral reforms in 2011 and 2013, opening the door to citizen referenda, independent candidacies and reelection ([SourceMex, May 4, 2011](#), and [Dec. 11, 2013](#)).

While the reforms have opened some doors for more equity and increased citizen participation, critics say the process could be opened further. In November of this year, legislators from the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) introduced an initiative to reform Article 88 of the Mexican Constitution to allow a runoff election in the presidential vote if the front-runner in the first round does not receive 50% or more of the vote.

Under the initiative proposed by the PAN, the first round of elections would take place in July – the month when presidential elections have been held over the past several cycles. The runoff would take place on the second Sunday of August, provided all the challenges to the results of the first round are resolved by that time.

PAN Sen. Fernando Salazar, one of the sponsors of the initiative, said the measure would bring Mexico in line with more than a dozen countries in Latin America that have runoff elections. Those countries are Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Nicaragua, Peru, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay. Even Cuba, with its one-party system, has a provision for a second round of elections if the winning candidate does not obtain a certain percentage of the vote.

Other PAN leaders said the aim of the proposal would be to create a more even playing field for all candidates. “The main objective is to create equity,” said PAN president Ricardo Anaya. “A second goal would be to ensure that we comply with the will of the citizens.”

### *Would a runoff have changed outcome of last three elections?*

Analysts said the last three presidential elections, particularly the 2006 and 2012 races, are evidence that a change is needed, since none of the candidates took 50% of the vote. In 2000, Vicente Fox of the PAN obtained about 43% of the vote, compared with 36% for Francisco Labastida of the PRI and 16.5% for Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas of the PRD ([SourceMex, July 5, 2000](#)).

In 2006, Felipe Calderón won the presidency with 35.9% of the vote, a mere half-a-percentage point above the total received by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who was representing a center-left coalition led by the PRD ([SourceMex, July 12, 2006](#)). Roberto Madrazo of the PRI received slightly more than 22% of the vote. Some analysts have suggested that López Obrador would have benefitted from a runoff, especially if even a slight majority of the PRI voters had supported the center-left candidate instead of Calderón.

In 2012, Peña Nieto obtained 38% of the vote, compared with 32% for López Obrador and 25% for Josefina Vázquez Mota of the PAN ([SourceMex, July 11, 2012](#)). It is unlikely that a runoff would have benefited López Obrador in the balloting because the PAN vote would have been split between him and Peña Nieto, given the antipathy that members of the center-right party had for both PRI and PRD candidates.

Some analysts suggested that the next presidential election in 2018 might again face controversy if a runoff is not instituted, since the vote is expected to be tight. Several politicians are already being mentioned in connection with the 2018 presidential election, including López Obrador, Mexico City Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera, former first lady and ex-federal Deputy Margarita Zavala, Nuevo León Gov. Jaime Rodríguez Calderón (an independent), Finance Secretary Luis Videgaray, Interior Secretary Miguel Ángel Osorio Chong, and Puebla Gov. Rafael Moreno Valle.

“Anyone who is elected president in 2018 will likely do so without a clear mandate and without the support a majority of the voters,” columnist Leopoldo Gómez wrote in the daily newspaper Milenio

Given the divided loyalties among the Mexican electorate, it is likely that an election with only one round could produce a president with only slightly more than 30% of the vote in 2018. “The only viable alternative to sustain a victory is for the winner to be ratified by a majority of voters in a runoff election, columnist Yuriria Sierra wrote in the daily newspaper Excélsior. “We need this not only to avoid the customary cries of ‘fraud’ where none existed, but also to create an institutional vehicle to bring society together.”

The PRI has opposed a runoff election, arguing that it would bring an additional cost to the electoral process and create divisions among the parties, which could become a problem for the eventual winner of the runoff. “I don’t believe that the electoral composition of our country is adequate” for a runoff, Alejandro Gutiérrez, one of the secretaries in the governing body (Comité Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN) of the PRI. “I believe more in coalition governments where all the political forces can be part of government. This would guarantee a stable environment to govern.”

The PRI has offered its own suggestions for political-electoral reform, with its main proposal centering on the Congress. The governing party would like to reduce the size of the Chamber of Deputies and Senate by eliminating the number of at-large seats in each chamber ([SourceMex, Aug. 27, 2014](#)). Some analysts suggest that this plan is anti-democratic. “This proposal affects pluralism and especially hurts the medium-sized and small parties,” said political blogger Liébanos Sáenz.

Other analysts point out that the PRI would benefit from a single-round election, even with only a small percentage of the vote. “There is a scenario where a fragmented vote, let’s say of 30%, which the PRI had attained in recent elections, assures victory for the party,” Gómez wrote in his column in Milenio.

According to Gómez, the center-left Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), a party that López Obrador founded when he broke with the PRD ([SourceMex, Sept. 19, 2012](#)) could face a similar scenario as the PRI in 2018, obtaining a minute plurality in a single-round election. That advantage could be lost in a runoff, and that is likely why the Morena candidate has come out against the PAN proposal, Gómez said.

López Obrador described the PAN runoff proposal as window-dressing to hide the advantages that the conservative party obtained in the 2006 election, and which the PRI repeated in 2012. He went as far as to suggest that the runoff proposal represents an act of collusion.

The PRD is also unenthusiastic about a runoff, although party president Agustín Basave Benítez agreed that a second round would bring beneficial changes to Mexico's electoral process. "I recognize the advantages of a runoff, but they are not sufficient to merit a change to Constitution," said Basave Benítez. He suggested a change to a parliamentary system, which would strengthen the coalition-building process, was the type of deep political reform that Mexico needs.

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