

1-6-2016

Initiative to Grant Autonomy to Mexico City Moves Forward

Carlos Navarro

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Initiative to Grant Autonomy to Mexico City Moves Forward." (2016). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/6222>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Initiative to Grant Autonomy to Mexico City Moves Forward

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2016-01-06

The Mexican Congress has reaffirmed changes to the Mexican Constitution that would allow Mexico City, previously known as the Distrito Federal, to become a fully autonomous state. The initiative, which the Senate originally approved in April of 2015 ([SourceMex, May 6, 2015](#)), gained overwhelming support during a vote in the Chamber of Deputies in December 2015. As required by the Constitution, the Senate then voted on the initiative approved by the Chamber of Deputies, setting in motion the process to create a state to be known as Ciudad de México. The measure needs the approval of at least half of Mexico's state legislatures because changes to the federal Constitution are involved.

The last political change of similar magnitude came in 1976, during the administration of former President Luis Echeverría Álvarez (1970-1976), when the territories of Baja California Sur and Quintana Roo became states.

The move, which comes more than 190 years after the Federal District was founded, puts the capital almost on par with the country's 31 other states. An elected official with the same powers as a governor – who would set fiscal, management, and security policies – would lead the executive branch. The legislative branch, which would comprise directly elected legislators and at-large members, would serve in a similar role as its predecessor body in introducing and passing legislation. The difference is that a Mexico City Congress would have fiscal powers that the Mexico City legislature (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF) does not enjoy. In the judicial branch, the current Tribunal Superior de Justicia would take on the role of the state supreme court, while the role of lower-level courts would parallel those of courts in other states.

“Once the political reform is approved, neither the president nor the Congress will have the power to select the city's attorney general or the director of public safety,” wrote Rodrigo Ramírez Quintana, a political analyst for Borde Político, in a guest column in the online political news site La Silla Rota. “The executive of the new entity will have the power to make these appointments.”

A fundamental difference is in the area of finances. While the executive and the legislature will have discretion on many budgetary issues, the entity will still have to rely on the federal executive branch and the Congress on important financial matters, such as the issuance of debt. “This will limit the planning capacity of the local government,” Ramírez Quintana wrote.

The federal government would retain the responsibility of financing education and health services in the new entity.

Another significant change is the new role of the boroughs (delegaciones), which would take on increased responsibilities as independently incorporated entities. This means that, in addition to being governed by a chief executive with the powers of a mayor, each entity would have the equivalent of a city council elected directly by the citizens. A mayor would assume the

administrative role and 10 to 15 city councilors would have the power to approve the budget and evaluate the actions of the administration.

“The current boroughs are entities where power is not transparent and is discretionary,” said Ramírez Quintana. “We will now have a system with greater equilibrium, where a mayor and councilors will share power.”

Others pointed to some of the disadvantages that will accompany the changes.

“There are some lingering concerns in terms of the financial cost of the move and the creation of a new administrative structure with greater bureaucracy,” columnist Antonio Tenorio Adame wrote in the online news site e-consulta.

There was also criticism of the formula developed by the Congress to select the 100 members of the special assembly charged with drafting a new constitution for Ciudad de México. Under the measure approved by both chambers of Congress, the voters of Mexico City would select 60 of the 100 members of the constitutional assembly. The federal Senate and Chamber of Deputies would each designate 14 of the members, and the Mexican president and the Mexico City mayor would each appoint six individuals to participate in the process.

Critics suggest that the voters should have full say on who should write their Constitution.

“If we are really talking about a victory for the residents of the capital, then why are the powers forcing representatives of the constituent assembly on us?” asked Ramírez Quintana.

Debate over who should write the new Constitution

Under the timetable spelled out by the original Senate legislation, the constitutional assembly would be elected on the first Sunday of June 2016 and would be installed three months later, on Sept. 15. The assembly would have until Jan. 31, 2017, to approve a new Constitution. Mexico City Mayor Miguel Ángel Mancera, or a successor, and the ALDF will have strong input into the text of the Constitution that will be drafted by the constitutional assembly.

Political analysts said there were some partisan tensions during the debate on the legislation, with the initiative receiving strong backing from the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), and the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM). The Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) offered mixed support, with some members, like Sen. Ernesto Ruffo Appel, a former governor of Baja California, arguing that the new entity would be maintaining advantages that other states do not enjoy, such as free education and health care. The opposition from the PAN was not unanimous, with key legislators like Sen. Gabriela Cuevas strongly supporting the reforms. “The support from the PAN was key to give the reforms legitimacy,” columnist Ivonne Melgar wrote in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*

The strongest objections came from the center-left Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), which has 35 representatives in the Chamber of Deputies and five in the Senate. Morena legislators argued that the party should have a major say in the composition of the constitutional assembly. “The deputies from the party founded by [ex-presidential candidate] Andrés Manuel López Obrador argue that the formula to designate the members of the body that will be drafting the new Constitution ignores the strength of Morena, which has become the majority party in the Mexican capital,” Melgar wrote.

Morena has a slight majority in the 66-member Mexico City legislature, with 20 legislators. The PRD is next with 17 members, followed by 10 for the PAN, eight for the PRI, and three each for Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) and the PVEM. Four small parties account for the five remaining seats.

-- End --