

Mexico: Enrique Peña Nieto wins presidential race

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According to a preliminary ballot count, Enrique Peña Nieto, 45, former governor of the State of Mexico, appears to have won the July 1 presidential contest. Peña Nieto's party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) has also won a majority of the federal legislature.

On Monday morning, the Federal Elections Commission (IFE) reported the following totals: Peña Nieto received more than 18 million votes, 38.02 percent; Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) received 31.73 percent; Josefina Vazquez Mota of the National Action Party (PAN) 25.44 percent; Gabriel Quadri of the New Alliance Party (PANAL) 2.3 percent; and 2.41 percent of the ballots were spoiled. Out of 70 million potential voters, the participation rate was 62 percent.

In addition to a new president, Mexican voters were electing 300 members of the Chamber of Deputies (Mexico's lower house) and 168 senators. New governors were to be elected in six states and a new mayor in Mexico City. The PRI appears to have won majorities in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate.

President Felipe Calderón, who won in 2006 as the candidate of the PAN, immediately acknowledged the victory of the PRI and promised an "orderly, transparent and efficient" transition during the period leading up to the inauguration of the new president on November 1. "I want to sincerely congratulate him," he said of Peña Nieto.

The PRD retained control of the second most powerful office in the country, mayor of Mexico City, the capital and most populous city, with Miguel Angel Mancera winning more than 60 percent of the vote, ensuring he will succeed the PRD's Marcelo Ebrard.

The election took place amidst accusations of electoral fraud and the ongoing drug war. The alleged fraud consists of lost ballots, vote buying, and ballot sites that did not open on time. National Action Party (PAN)

officials charged that some 15,000 voting locations—so-called "red sites"—were suspect, mainly for vote buying by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). PAN leader Gustavo Madero called on federal authorities to be very vigilant.

According to a survey by the Mexico City daily *La Jornada*, 70 percent of the public believed that the current election would be fraudulent. As the results became known, #YoSoy132 protesters began to rally at the IFE offices in several cities, to protest over instances of vote buying, and of voters prevented from voting.

Mexico has a long history of vote manipulation. López Obrador had raised the issue during the last few weeks, charging the PRI with using gifts to entice voters into electing its candidates. The candidate accused PRI officials of spending US\$5 million to purchase debit cards that were then distributed among the population.

Despite the allegations, however, Peña Nieto's victory is consistent with his first-place standing in polls since the start of the campaign, three months ago, although his margin has narrowed significantly, from 30 percent down to little more than 5 percent.

Mexico's electoral system awards the presidency to the candidate with a plurality of the votes, even if less than a 50 percent majority, so unlike France, for instance, there is no second round.

The victory of the PRI is the result of the enormous popular hostility to the PAN, which has held the presidency since 2000, and left the vast majority of Mexican working people worse off than before. Despite the backing of the outgoing president Felipe Calderon, Vazquez Mota won only a quarter of the votes cast July 1, representing barely 15 percent of the Mexican population.

So discredited is the Calderon administration that sections of the PAN, including former president Vicente Fox and Manuel Clouthier, son and heir to the late party's founder and longtime boss, both broke with their party,

backing the PRI and the PRD, respectively.

Describing the record of the PAN, one worker told the *New York Times*, “The rich are richer, the poor are poorer; the rest of us in between, we’re just surviving.” What “just surviving” means is suggested by census figures that show 57 percent of Mexican workers earn less than \$13.50 per day. Fifty-two million Mexicans live below the official poverty line, 12 million more than a decade ago.

The outcome is hardly a demonstration of enthusiasm for the PRI, widely reviled as corrupt and authoritarian, or for Peña Nieto personally, viewed by millions as the puppet of the big media monopolies and Mexico’s handful of billionaires. The longer the campaign went on, the further Peña Nieto fell in the polls, and in the end, more than 60 percent of those voting opposed him.

The PRD’s shift to the right over the past six years was a major contribution to the successful return to power of the PRI. The programmatic differences among the contending candidates were very narrow. Over the last six years the PRD and López Obrador had moved away from the left-populist rhetoric of the 2006 campaign, at times allying itself with the PAN in state elections.

For López Obrador, this strategy reaped support of business interests based in the city of Monterrey. An important layer of industrialists in this northern city shifted its support from the PAN to the PRD in this election. Some like Alfonso Romo, head of the Pulsar Group, had supported Calderón in 2006 and had condemned Lopez Obrador as a “danger to México.”

Cristina Sada Salinas, also from Monterrey, whose family owns textile and other industries, is running for the Senate as a PRD candidate. “We can’t take another six years of this decadence,” declared Sada. The support of the Monterrey elite—one of the most conservative in all of Mexico—for López Obrador is a testament to the sanitized PRD, calling for national unity under the slogan “love not bullets.”

The PRI victories in the legislature plus the election of Peña Nieto represent a big comeback for the PRI, the party that controlled Mexico’s executive branch for 71 years, from 1929 to 2000. The collapse of the PRI that year was the result of serious internal division.

The party was established in 1929 as an outgrowth of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917.) It effectively subordinated Mexican society, and its competing classes to the rule of the national bourgeoisie, while at the same time maintain a certain degree of independence from the United States, despite the overwhelming political, military

and economic dominance of US imperialism in the region.

In the late 1980s, under the hammer blows of globalization and increasing economic pressure from the United States—ultimately crystallized into the NAFTA treaty—the corporatist structures that had allowed the party to attenuate the class struggle, subordinating it to national capitalism and the army, began to break down, and the PRI shifted drastically to the right, adopting the prescriptions of neo-liberal economists out to dismantle state enterprises and social reforms.

The corporatist “four pillars” of the PRI (big business, trade unions, farmers, and the military) were given lip service only, as transnational corporations and financial institutions demanded and achieved the dismantling of state industries, such as railroads, utilities and steel. The erosion of its institutional base ultimately produced the 2000 debacle, in which the even more right-wing PAN came to power under Vicente Fox.

That the PRI now returns to power Sunday is a sign of the magnitude of the current socio-economic crisis that has Mexico in its grip. In policy terms, the party continues under the domination of the extreme-right free-market faction—infamously known in Latin America as the “Chicago Boys” or the “técnicos.”

Despite demagogic promises of higher wages, more jobs and less street violence—Madrid’s *El País* called it a Christmas wish list—a Peña Nieto administration represents no change for Mexico. Throughout the campaign the candidate had made it clear that his promises for jobs and higher living standards were tied to increases in productivity that, in turn, depended on labor market reforms, that would give private companies flexibility in hiring, and firing.

The Mexican economy is linked to the US and, to a lesser extent, to Spain and the euro zone. A downturn of the American economy and the continuing collapse of Europe are bound to have a serious impact on Mexican exports, employment and living standards.



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