

Mexican elections overshadowed by political crisis

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Mexicans will vote Sunday June 7 in legislative elections for the lower house of the Mexican Congress—the Chamber of Deputies—along with governors in nine of Mexico’s 31 states, state legislators and municipal presidents. The vote is overshadowed by a profound crisis of rule for Mexico’s capitalist political establishment.

Eighty three million Mexicans are registered to vote. But the turnout will be far lower, likely well under 50 percent.

There is widespread and pervasive disgust in Mexico with a ruling class that is viewed as rotten and corrupt, from politicians and the state bureaucracy, to big business and financiers, along with the major media and the narcotics mafias.

Over the last year major scandals rocked Mexico, from the disappearance and likely brutal killing of 43 Ayotzinapa teaching college students in Guerrero state, to extrajudicial killings by the army in the state of Mexico, to corruption involving the financing by a business magnate close to the president of the first lady’s purchase of a mansion, and the involvement of his business group in awarding a contract to construct a high-speed bullet train.

Polls show that eight out of ten voters say they do not trust the three major political parties. A recent poll showed that 85 percent of the population do not trust President Enrique Peña Nieto of the ruling Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI), a plunge from a 51 percent favorable rating in August 2014. Such distrust has spread to supposedly left-leaning parties, such as the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the National Regeneration Movement (Morena) of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who was the PRD’s candidate in the last two presidential elections.

Opposition to Peña Nieto’s handling of the economy has risen to above 70 percent, in large part due to his so-called Pact for Mexico, which passed the Congress with the approval of the three major parties, the PRI, the previously ruling right-wing National Action Party (PAN) and the center-“left” PRD. The Pact has included historical reversals of workers’ rights. Its centerpiece has been the opening up of the Mexican economy to big foreign capital, most

importantly the state-owned oil industry, which is still viewed by most Mexicans as part of their national patrimony.

The government’s program has done nothing to turn around Mexico’s \$1.3 trillion economy. It continues to limp along, showing growth so far this year of only 2 percent, once again falling far below the predictions of major economic and financial analysts. This follows two years of growth under 2 percent. As a result, the Bank of Mexico has been forced to hold interest rates at a record low of 3 percent.

Earlier this year, the Mexican peso hit its lowest level against the dollar since the 1993 devaluation in the wake of the 1992 debt crisis. The peso’s fall reflects plunging oil prices and threats by the US Federal Reserve Bank to raise interest rates, which could cause investors to dump risky emerging market assets, especially debt denominated in dollars.

Mexico registers the second highest level of inequality amongst the 34 advanced economies that make up the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Masses of workers continue to struggle to make ends meet, paying rising prices for basic goods and services.

While opinion polls show that the three major parties are, in the aggregate, polling upwards of 70 percent compared to other registered political parties (PRI-32 percent, PAN-22 percent and PRD-14 percent), rejection of the current political setup is taking various forms.

The candidate of the Citizen’s Movement Party (MC) for mayor of Mexico’s third most populous city, Guadalajara, is running neck and neck with the PRI candidate, even though the MC is only polling 3 percent nationally. MC, originally known as Convergence for Democracy and later just as Convergence, was founded in 1997 by Andrés Manuel López Obrador, before he joined the PRD. MC now holds power in the poor southern state of Oaxaca, which has seen struggles by teachers and social movements over the years. In the past, MC entered into national electoral alliances and fronts with the PRD and the Labor Party (PT), an originally

Maoist organization that now claims a “democratic socialist” platform.

Jaime Rodriguez, an independent candidate, has a serious shot at winning the governorship of the northeast state of Nuevo León, which includes the major industrial city of Monterrey. Legislation passed last year allowed independent candidates for the first time in Mexico. Critics have charged that Rodriguez, who spent 33 years in the ruling PRI, broke with the party to take advantage of the new law and to ride the wave of anti-government and anti-party sentiments.

Rejection of the current setup also is taking the form of widespread calls to abstain from voting or to deface ballots.

The major party candidates shy away from public controversy, running their campaigns on empty rhetoric and platitudes, such as calls for “good governance” or “teamwork.”

Despite attempts to sanitize the election process, its ugly face is there for all to see.

The PRD and Morena are engaged in a furious battle for the powerful position of Mexico City mayor.

The National Electoral Institute recently fined Mexico’s Ecological Green Party (PVEM) around \$21 million for campaign advertisements allegedly paid for illegally. PVEM says it is innocent and that the rules were changed due to pressure from other groups, including the ruling PRI, which itself was accused of widespread fraud by vote buying in the 2012 election. The Greens’ spokesperson said the party intended to file a complaint against Mexico’s government before the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights.

Money from organized crime washes into candidates’ campaign war chests to buy their loyalty. All three of the major gubernatorial candidates in Michoacán, from the PRI, the PRD and López Obrador’s Morena, have accused each other of links to drug gangs.

Criminal groups favoring candidates who protect their interests have been using threats, kidnapping and violence against their rivals. There have been assassinations of mayoral candidates of the PRI, the PRD in Michoacán and Guerrero states, and of the Green Party in the poor southernmost state of Chiapas, where it holds state office.

Voters will elect 500 deputies to the Chamber of Deputies, 300 by party plurality vote and 200 by proportional representation. Under proportional representation parties such as Morena, the Green Party and PANAL, a party created by the corporatist National Union of Educational Workers (SNTE, the largest union in Latin America), polling nationally around 8, 7 and 4 percent respectively, can add seats up to 8 percent above their electoral showing.

The composition of the Chamber of Deputies will determine the size of the expenditure cuts in the 2016 national budget. The PRI, PAN and PRD will likely

maintain their current majority. This will lead to further budget cuts, mostly to spending on social programs, as opposed to infrastructure.

None of the political parties offers a way forward for the Mexican working class. The PRD has largely abandoned even its populist pretensions, joining the PRI and PAN in pushing the demands of the Mexican oligarchs and foreign capital.

The nationalist program of Morena’s López Obrador represents the interests of smaller sections of the Mexican bourgeoisie and the upper-middle-class, as does that of the Green Party and CM. All such parties claiming to pursue a social democratic program of reform—along the lines abandoned by socialist parties in Europe years ago—will succumb to the interests of the financial oligarchy at the end of the day, like Syriza in Greece.

Finally, whatever their rhetoric, the pseudo-Trotskyist Pabloite and Morenoite parties such as Socialist Convergence (CS), the Workers Revolutionary Party (PRT), the Socialist Workers Party (PTS) and Socialist Alliance (AS), to the extent they even continue to function, ultimately will join in electoral alliances with Morena and its ilk, preserving the present economic setup.

All the ills that beset Mexican society and its masses are the product of the crisis of international capitalism. None can be remedied outside of an international revolutionary socialist program. This requires the building of Marxist revolutionary parties, linking up the struggles of the working class throughout the Americas.



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