

Mexico state and municipal elections deal blow to ruling party

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Mexicans voted on June 5 for governors, legislators and city mayors in 12 of Mexico's 31 states, comprising 30 percent of its population of 128 million.

The ruling Party of the Institutional Revolution (PRI) suffered significant if not historic losses. Prior to the elections, the PRI had nine of the 12 governorships up for grabs. It lost six of those, including those in four states that had never seen a governor from another party since the PRI's founding in 1929. It won in two states that it previously did not control.

The election demonstrated Mexico's extreme political instability. Gubernatorial candidates who won failed to garner 50 percent of the vote, most winning with percentages in the 40s or even in the low 30s. Most that won did so by entering into contorted electoral alliances with multiple parties.

It is little surprise that the PRI fared so poorly. Polls on the eve of the election showed the approval rating of PRI President Enrique Peña Nieto to be a dismal 30 percent. His popularity plunged after the disappearance and likely brutal killing of 43 Ayotzinapa teaching college students in Guerrero state in 2014, and continued after he and his wife were shown to be personally mired up to their necks in corruption.

The entire ruling structure has been discredited by endemic corruption, state and drug cartel violence, an economy limping along at 2.5 percent annual growth, high unemployment, low wages, high prices and a falling peso. This has been combined with attacks on the working class under Peña Nieto's so-called Pact for Mexico, approved in 2012 by all three of Mexico's main political parties—the PRI, the right-wing National Action Party (PAN), which held power from 2000 to 2012, and the center-“left” Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD).

Polls typically show that seven to eight of 10 voters

say they do not trust these parties. There is a general sentiment that all the parties operate to protect the interests of the wealthy at the expense of the overwhelming majority of the people.

Limping back from its defeat in the 2012 presidential election, the PAN managed to win governorships in seven of the 13 contested states, but in four of them through formal electoral alliances with the PRD. The PAN's base is in the wealthier states in the north that border the US. It also won in states with the worst drug violence and corruption, even though its corruption while in power extended beyond awards of large government contracts to the protection of drug cartels.

In Tamaulipas State, bordering eastern Texas, the PAN candidate won handily over the PRI candidate. The state is home to the Gulf Cartel and the vicious cartel of the Zetas. It is often described as having an official and a criminal government, although the two are effectively indistinguishable. The PAN winner, Francisco Garcia Cabeza de Vaca, had been accused of enjoying the protection of gang bosses. His PRI opponent, Baltazar Hinojosa Ochoa, has been accused of taking money from the Gulf Cartel and is under investigation by the US Treasury Department for money laundering.

In Chihuahua State, home of the violence-infested city of Juarez, the PAN candidate Javier Corral won with substantial support from the PRD. Corral modeled his campaign on that of the successful independent campaign for governor in 2015 of Jaime Rodriguez Calderón, in the northeastern state of Nuevo León, eschewing the support of Mexico's television duopoly.

The PAN won in the large north-central state of Durango, besting a coalition of the PRI, the green PVEM and two other minor parties.

The PAN also won in the small central industrial state

of Aguascalientes, home to many auto plants, besting a coalition of the PRI, the PVEM and New Alliance (PANAL). The PANAL is based on the unions, and particularly the corrupt 1.4 million-member National Educational Workers Union (SNTE), which supported Pena Nieto's education reform after its prior head, Ester Gordillo, was jailed after she supported the PAN.

The other four governorships won by the PAN involved formal alliances with the PRD.

Most significant was its win in Veracruz State on the Gulf of Mexico, Mexico's third largest state in terms of population. Under Pena Nieto's program to open the Mexican oil industry up to foreign investment, the city of Veracruz was expected by many to become the new Houston. Instead it has been plagued by drug cartel battles. Its PRI governor, Javier Duarte, was deeply implicated in cartel activity and the murder of journalists. He is accused of plundering hundreds of millions of dollar in public funds.

The PAN coalition candidate, Miguel Ángel Yunes, won in Veracruz, even though his son's name appeared in the Panama Papers detailing money laundering operations. The rival PRI candidate, his cousin Héctor Yunes Landa, accused him of being a pedophile.

The PAN candidate also won in the Yucatan state of Quintana Roo. Coming in second was a coalition of the PRI, PVEM, PANAL and the Socialist Party (PT). Finally, the PAN-PRD coalition prevailed in the states of Puebla, which adjoins Mexico State.

Apart from its historic losses, the PRI picked up governorships in Oaxaca and Sinaloa states. Oaxaca is a poor southern state that has seen a decade of social unrest, including by militant teachers, and government repression. The governor had been from the PRD. The PRI candidate eked out a win with about 31 percent of the vote, followed by the PRD candidate at just under 30 percent and the PAN candidate a distant third.

Sinaloa is an agricultural state that runs along Mexico's mainland on the Gulf of California, which had a PAN governor. A coalition of the PRI, PVEM and PANAL prevailed over a candidate from the Citizens Movement, a party that depicts itself as democratic socialist, and whose initial leader was López Obrador.

The PRI also maintained governorships in the small states of Tlaxcala and Hidalgo near the state of Mexico through a coalition with PVEM and PANAL, as well as

in the central industrial state of Zacatecas.

Putting aside its coalition in races with successful PAN candidates, the PRD won no governorships, and it lost Oaxaca. PRD's national percentage in the 2015 elections had already shrunk to around 10 percent. The results caused the current chair of the PRD, Augustine Basave, to insist loudly that "the PRD was not dead."

Perhaps most crushing to the PRD in Sunday's election was its defeat in Mexico City by Morena. Mexico City had long been the center of the PRD's electoral power. In elections to a Constituent Assembly in Mexico City that will draft a new constitution for the mini-state, Morena bested the PRD. Morena already had garnered 22 deputies against 19 for the PRD in the 2015 Mexico City elections.

López Obrador crowed that Morena had become the "first electoral political force" in Mexico City. While Morena did not win any gubernatorial elections, it had strong showings in three it ran in. Significantly, Morena's candidate Soledad Luévano Cantú won the mayoral election in the important industrial city of Zacatecas. López Obrador also emphasized that Morena's national vote on Sunday increased by 800,000 over its 2015 total to 2.5 million.

Morena's advances were so significant that the chair of the PAN said he viewed López Obrador as PAN's main rival in the 2018 presidential election, not whoever will be the candidate of the PRI. Two weeks before the election, Jorge Castaneda, the former "leftist" and minister of foreign affairs under the presidency of PAN's Vicente Fox, wrote a prominent column asserting that López Obrador would likely become president in 2018 because the other political parties will be so discredited in the eyes of the Mexican population.

The WSWS has long explained that López Obrador is a bourgeois politician heading up a bourgeois party. When needed he will indeed serve the Mexican ruling class as a means of upholding the political establishment, much as Bernie Sanders is doing in the US.



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