

Mexican ruling party narrowly wins major state election

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The candidate of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), Alfredo del Mazo, narrowly won a hotly contested gubernatorial race on Sunday in Mexico's most populous state, the State of Mexico. He defeated Delfina Gómez, a "left" challenger from the Movement for National Regeneration (Morena). The PRI has controlled the State of Mexico governorship for 88 years, since the party's founding in 1929.

The gubernatorial election was widely seen as a referendum on the government of current president Enrique Peña Nieto, as well as a dress rehearsal for next year's presidential election, which will likely be won by either the PRI or Morena. In a further indication of the collapse of Mexico's formerly dominant party, the vote for the ruling PRI was cut in half from the previous gubernatorial election in 2011 while Morena's total tripled from legislative elections in 2015.

Morena's total is all the more significant considering serious intimidation of its supporters and widespread claims of voter fraud. Morena is expected to challenge the results before the Electoral Tribunal of the Federal Judiciary (TEJF), the body entrusted with resolving electoral disputes in the country.

According to election projections, Del Mazo won with 33.7 percent of the vote, while Gómez, a former elementary school teacher, received 30.8 percent of the vote. Over three percent of ballots were declared null, an amount greater than the voting gap between the two candidates, and reports have surfaced on social media of tampered vote tallies in several balloting stations.

Gómez frequently campaigned alongside the leader of Morena, Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). López Obrador, the former mayor of Mexico City, was the PRD's presidential candidate during the 2006 presidential elections. That year, Felipe Calderón

(PAN) was proclaimed president amid widespread proof of voter fraud while López Obrador finished a close second. After losing the 2012 elections to Peña Nieto, López Obrador broke with the PRD and founded Morena.

In the State of Mexico elections, López Obrador received credible death threats, including one from a drug cartel who left a burned car and a funeral wreath with López Obrador's name on it next to a message threatening him with death. On election day, two Morena representatives were kidnapped. There were widespread reports of vote buying and intimidation of Morena supporters by cartels, as well as by the police. In the days leading up to the vote, pig heads were dropped by polling stations, threatening calls were made to potential voters, and drivers were arrested for illegally busing unregistered voters to the polls.

Based on the party's records, López Obrador claims Gómez was the winner and quickly called for a recount of the vote: "The PRI's lead is less than the number of null votes... This merits a poll by poll review to open the electoral packets to see why there are so many null votes."

On May 30, Morena presented a criminal complaint against the federal government for allegedly mobilizing a coordinated political effort to tip the election in favor of Del Mazo. López Obrador claims this effort originated from the Peña Nieto administration itself and included members of his cabinet. Del Mazo is a distant cousin of Peña Nieto and the son and grandson of former governors of the state.

Financial markets responded to Del Mazo's election by rallying the value of the peso by 1.9 percent, fully raising its value to levels prior to Trump's election in November. In case of a Morena victory, Benito Berber, a senior economist for Latin America at Nomura

Securities, had predicted the value of the peso would drop by 6 percent due to López Obrador's improved chances of winning the presidency next year.

Peña Nieto's government is presiding over Mexico's highest levels of inflation in eight years and some of its worst levels of violence since the "war on drugs" began in 2000.

A recent report by the International Institute for Strategic Studies revealed that Mexico has the second highest homicide rate in the world, second only to Syria, a country ravaged by more than five years of war. Under the guise of energy "reforms," Peña Nieto opened oil fields for foreign exploitation and hiked up gasoline prices by 20 percent, setting off countrywide protests earlier this year. Peña Nieto also introduced education policies aimed at scapegoating teachers for the social ills facing millions of Mexican youth. Next week marks the one-year anniversary of the Oaxaca massacre, when state police ruthlessly attacked teachers protesting the government's education policies, killing at least 6 and injuring 108 others.

Mexico's political crisis has only been fueled by the anti-immigrant and nationalistic policies of the Trump administration. Itself a junior partner of American imperialism, the Mexican ruling class can offer no principled defense to millions of its citizens across the border who are being ruthlessly rounded up and detained by US police and immigration authorities. A renegotiation of NAFTA, expected to occur before the end of this year, also leaves Mexico vulnerable to losing 80 percent of its exports market and potentially launching the country into a recession.

It is under this context that a Morena victory is feared by ruling circles, not because Morena represents a genuine threat to the capitalist system, but because it may ignite a social powder keg that could quickly escape its control. An analysis of Morena's program reveals that AMLO's proposals do not have anything of offer the working class except tepid social reforms that will do little to alleviate social conditions in the country.

After the results of the State of Mexico elections, Morena has made it clear that it does not seek to independently mobilize the working class, even as the party claims that the political system launched a "dirty war" against it. "I am in favor of institutions. There will not be a takeover in the streets, there will be

actions that affect citizens, we do not have that intention," stated Gómez on Tuesday.



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