

Reports of fraud continue in State of Mexico gubernatorial election

Alex González**14 June 2017**

The political battle between the ruling Party of Institutional Revolution (PRI) and the “left” Movement for National Regeneration (Morena) continues to intensify after the State of Mexico gubernatorial election. While official records show the PRI beat Morena by less than three percentage points, widespread reports of voting fraud cast doubt on the PRI’s narrow victory.

As Mexico’s most populous state, the State of Mexico gubernatorial election was a major political affair. The state has been ruled by the PRI for 88 years and is the home state of current president Enrique Peña Nieto. Due to Peña Nieto’s deep unpopularity, the election was seen as a referendum on the PRI’s rule, as well as an assessment of forces for Andres Manuel López Obrador, Morena’s leader. López Obrador, who was a presidential candidate in 2006 and 2012, is currently leading numerous polls for next year’s presidential election.

The night of the June 4 election, the PRI’s candidate, Alfredo del Mazo, was declared the winner with 33.7 percent of the vote, while Morena’s Delfina Gómez received 30.8 percent of the vote. Notably, the number of votes nullified the night of the election is greater than the difference in votes between the two candidates. A recount of less than four thousand votes a few days after the election did not significantly alter the results between the two candidates.

Even with its narrow victory, the election marked a historic defeat for the PRI. The party obtained only half of the votes it did in the prior gubernatorial election, even though it mobilized its local, state, and federal apparatus. Several national media outlets have openly speculated that the PRI committed fraud as an act of desperation to secure the governorship for Del Mazo, Peña Nieto’s distant cousin and the son and grandson

of two former governors.

The election took place under conditions of widespread intimidation against Morena voters, as well as accounts of vote buying, illegal campaign spending, and inconsistencies in tallying up the vote. Prior to the election, the Prosecutor’s Office for Electoral Offenses (Fepade) received formal complaints of 55 “massive events” in the State of Mexico in which social programs were doled out in exchange of a copy of the attendee’s voter registration card. In one of these complaints, Morena representatives allege debit cards containing 3,000 pesos (US \$160) were given out at every PRI campaign event between September and March. Some of these events were addressed by current members of the Peña Nieto administration, including the secretary of education and the secretary of urban development.

Representatives from Morena and the center “left” Party for Democratic Revolution (PRD) have also presented formal complaints to the National Electoral Institute (INE) indicating Del Mazo topped the legal campaign spending limit by over 40 percent. Surpassing campaign spending limits is cause to declare an election null if the leading candidate won by less than 5 percentage points, which is the case with Del Mazo’s narrow three percentage point victory.

Various media accounts have also shown irregularities in the digital counting system used to project results for the entire state the night of the election. The tool, known as the Program for Preliminary Electoral Results (PREP), inconsistently allocated votes to the PRI and took votes away from Morena that did not correspond to official ballot results. In addition, several districts show a larger vote count than the number of voters who reside in that district.

Allegations of intimidation also implicate police,

likely operating with cartels. A video shared by Morena shows several state police delivering false subpoenas to Morena members by the Office of the Prosecutor of Electoral Crimes, reportedly to keep them away from the ballot box. A local INE official in the State of Mexico said he was called at three in the morning the day before the election in an act of “electoral terrorism.” Civil society organization #NiUnFraudeMas reported a woman was repeatedly called by the military with death threats against her family if she did not vote for the PRI.

Since the election, López Obrador has continued to make calls for a full recount of the vote, as well as for annulling results in key municipalities. While the state-wide voter participation rate was 52 percent, in five districts this number ranged between 64 and 66 percent for the PRI and 54 percent for Morena. Annulling these five districts would flip the results of the election in favor of Gómez.

Reiterating accusations of direct interference by the Peña Nieto administration, López Obrador stated: “[In these districts] the PRI bought most of their votes, they used the federal, state, and municipal public budget; here is where the team directed by Peña Nieto from [the presidential mansion] Los Pinos operated.” The Party for National Action (PAN) and the Workers Party (PT) are also calling for annulling the state election.

The electoral court system has not signaled it intends to mount any substantial investigation, let alone annul the state election. On June 8, the Upper Chamber of the Electoral Tribunal of the Judiciary (TEPJF) rejected claims that delivering social programs in massive events in the State of Mexico constituted vote buying, supporting an earlier ruling by the State of Mexico Electoral Tribunal (TEEM). Before the election, the INE refused to step in to provide additional oversight the day of the vote, even as it was clear the results between the PRI and Morena were within the margin of error.

López Obrador and Morena continue to denounce any independent mass mobilization. In a state that houses 16 million people and Mexico’s second largest economy, Morena has called for no mass protests or demonstrations, despite mass anger among the population and the fact that this election had the highest voter participation rate in the state’s history.

Instead, Morena is appealing to the court system to

“clean the election.” “The people decided in favor of Morena and so we will carry out a peaceful protest. We will not have any blockages or marches, what we are going to carry out is a thank you tour,” stated Gómez.

López Obrador is no stranger to the electoral court system. In 2006, he ran as a candidate for president with the PRD and lost by just 0.58 percent against the PAN’s Felipe Calderón. Even though the PRD alleged irregularities in over 30 percent of the country’s polling stations, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) granted the election to Calderón.

After losing to Peña Nieto in 2012, López Obrador launched a formal complaint to the TEJF presenting evidence of vote buying, illegal campaign donations, ballots already marked in favor of the PRI, and the surpassing of campaign spending limits by over 1000 percent. The IFE conducted a partial recount only to confirm the original result.

Yet, López Obrador is now appealing to the same discredited institutions that he alleges have now twice cost him the presidency. This is not a personal failing, but reflects the class character of López Obrador and Morena. His is a policy of a “moral and cultural revolution” that is deeply hostile to a genuine mobilization of the working class to fight for a social revolution.

The outcome of the State of Mexico gubernatorial election should serve as a warning to the working class ahead of next year’s presidential election: neither Morena nor the court system will fight to defend their interests.

In an indication of the type of state repression that can be expected by the institutions Morena is appealing to, a peaceful demonstration by 500 people organized independently of Morena outside of the State of Mexico electoral offices was met with 100 state police officers.



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