

Mexican General Elections, 2018.

I. Mexico's political system

The United States of Mexico (Estados Unidos Mexicanos) is a federal presidential representative multiparty democratic republic based on a congressional system. Since the granting of full statehood to Mexico City in 2016, previously the Federal District, the Republic is divided into 32 federal states. Governmental powers are divided between executive, legislative and judicial branches. Historically, the President has held a considerable amount of power, though Congress has progressively gained influence since the fall of the PRI's (Partido de Revolución Institucional, or Institutional Revolutionary Party) one party presidential rule in 2000, and some have argued the "meta constitutional powers" of the President have eroded to the point of turning one of the strongest presidential systems in the world to one of the weakest (Cantú and Desposato).

The President is both head of state and head of government, and is empowered to select a cabinet, attorney general, diplomats, high ranking military officials and Supreme Court justices. They can further issue *reglamentos* (executive decrees) that act as law. Congress holds legislative powers, with a need for a two thirds majority for constitutional changes to be approved.

II. Electoral system

Presidential elections

The Mexican President is elected for a six year non renewable term (sexenio). The victorious candidate is the one who obtains a plurality of votes, without a need for an absolute majority.

Congressional elections

Congress is composed of the Senate and the Chamber of Deputies. Senators are elected for 6 year terms. Out of the total 128 seats, 64 are allotted by relative majority, 32 are granted to parties that came in second in each state, and the remaining 32 are elected based on a plurinominal list system through proportional representation. Deputies are elected for 3 years. Out of the 500 seats in the chamber, 300 are elected through relative majority whereas the remaining 200 are based on the same plurinominal list system of proportional representation present in the Senate.

Mexico's party system

Since the late 1990s and the beginning of Mexico's democratization process, the nation's party system has developed to be a plural one. The PRI's one party rule, established

in 1929, was only weakened in the 90s as declining support encouraged increasing competition from opposition parties. This paired with electoral reform allowed for more opposition victories and progressive breaking away from disillusioned PRI party members.

The PRI lost majority control of congress in 1997, and the presidency in 2000. In this immediate aftermath, three main parties dominated the scene. The PRI persisted in its influence, notably on a local level, as it continued to hold considerable influence in governorships and municipal governments. Alongside it emerged two ends of the spectrum parties, contrasting with the PRI's notorious centrism and ideological flexibility and clientelism (Cantú and Desposato).

The PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional, or National Action Party) was one of the major parties to have spearheaded the democratization process and granted structure to the post-2000 party system. Founded in 1939 as response to the leftist actions of the Lazaro Cardenas government, it historically supported the Roman Catholic Church and the business sector, favoring a non interventionist economic approach (Rice University Baker Institute for Public Policy). The party won its first presidency in 2000 with Vicente Fox, followed by Felipe Calderon in 2006.

The PRD (Partido de Revolución Democrática, or Democratic Revolution Party) was formed in 1987 through the merger of a number of small leftist parties and a defecting faction of the PRI, discontent with both the neoliberal turn Mexico's economy was taking, as well as internal candidate selection processes within the PRI (Cantú and Desposato). The PRD held a left wing monopoly for a considerable period, despite never reaching the presidency.

That monopoly has weakened considerably since 2014, as 2018 Presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), previously a member of the PRD, broke away to form his own party, Morena (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional, or National Regeneration Movement), with which he ran during the 2018 electoral cycle. Positioned as left wing, AMLO presented Morena as a break from the establishment and the PRI period.

The INE (Instituto Nacional Electoral)

The INE (Instituto Nacional Electoral or National Electoral Institute) is an autonomous public agency responsible for the organizing of federal, state and local elections in Mexico. Founded as the IFE (Federal Electoral Institute, Instituto Federal Electoral) in 1990 as a response to controversies surrounding the 1988 general election results, it was dissolved in 2014 following electoral reforms led by President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018). Refounded as the INE in 2014, the Institute administers voting, and is complemented by the Federal Electoral Tribunal, which interprets election law and certifies results, and the Specialized Prosecutor for Election Crime which investigates charges of malfeasance. All of these bodies are institutional characteristics which have been viewed as allowing a continued stability in Mexico's party system.

III. 2018 elections: an unprecedented test of Mexico's democratization process

In 2018, almost 88 million voters were set to elect 3416 different positions, making that year's election unprecedented in its scope. Out of the country's 32 states, 30 held local elections, and the nation's congress saw a total turnover of its 128 senators and 500 deputies. Furthermore, this year's voters were set apart by their youth, with around half of eligible voters being under 39, and 14 million of them being first time voters.

As analyzed by Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer (2018), three main sources of discontent dominated Mexican citizens' concerns during this electoral period.

Firstly, Mexico's transition to democracy in 2000, as well as its switch to a market based development model, had laid the groundwork for rising expectations of modernity, prosperity and the rise of accountable government. However, by 2018, expectations remained unmet. Severe poverty remained a crucial issue, and privatization and neoliberal policies had significantly increased wealth inequality.

Secondly, discontent was furthered by the stark rise of crime, a phenomenon beginning in the late 2000s as Felipe Calderón's (President from 2006-2012) launch of a drug war against the country's cartels made Mexico's homicide rate – previously dropping since the 1940s – sharply increase. Mexicans called to the ballot box were faced with the fact that 2017 had been the deadliest year on record for the country. This violence was not just perpetuated by cartels, as attempts at imposing the rule of law through the sending in of the military resulted in hundreds of cases of enforced disappearances, torture and extrajudicial killings, deeply shaking trust in the government as both an agent able to protect its citizens, and willing to do so.

Lastly, citizens were chiefly concerned by a widespread perception of rampant corruption among public officials. A series of scandals at high levels, along with the common experience of exploitation by low level bureaucrats and law enforcement officials rendered confidence in government abysmally low. Prior to the 2018 elections, over 91% of the population thought corruption was very frequent, and recent events such as the 2014 disappearance of 43 normalista students in the state of Guerrero in unclear circumstances loomed heavily over national consciousness in the lead up to the election.

Furthermore, the election was one marked by lethal violence. Political figures were extremely targeted, with 371 bureaucrats, 104 elected officials, 20 candidates, and 28 pre-candidates still competing for nominations assassinated (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer). Danger also loomed for the press as Mexico ranked as the world's second deadliest nation for journalists according to the World Press Freedom Index (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs).

Severe discontent with institutional processes, a lack of trust in government on the part of the population, and the unprecedented nature of these elections as the first in its scope since the democratization of the country made some consider them as a potential turning point for Mexico's political system.

This is in part due to the role discontent has played in pushing voters towards partisan dealignment. Independent voters have grown increasingly numerous while holding more radical anti-system attitudes. Parties with older roots found in the PRI era saw their supporters turn away from them and towards personalistic outsiders, and as they fumbled to

break with the status quo found themselves causing internal party split and forging awkward alliances (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer). Morena's rise raised questions on the survival of the traditional left wing strong block of the PRD, and the PAN's internal fighting over nomination processes left its structure weakened and influence questioned (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer). All of this has led to numerous debates regarding the extent to which this election can be considered as a turning point for Mexico's party system, be it as a breakdown of traditional party politics or as a realignment towards new partisan forces.

IV. The candidates

Four main candidates dominated the race for President, three heading large coalitions, the last running as the first independent presidential candidate in Mexico's electoral history.

Juntos Haremos Historia (Together we will make history)

Headed by AMLO, this coalition brought together his own party, Morena, the smaller PT (Partido del Trabajo, or Labor Party) and the PES (Partido de Encuentro Social, or Social Encounter Party).

AMLO, also known by his nickname "el Peje" was a former Mexico City mayor, having served from 2000 to 2006 and was running on his third bid for presidency. He lost by less than a percentage point to Felipe Calderón in 2006, and by 6.7% to Enrique Peña Nieto in 2012. Drawing on public dissatisfaction over chronic poverty and inequality, unmet progress expectations, corruption and escalating violent crime, he constructed an anti-system rhetoric positioning himself as an alternative to "more of the same" that would come if the PRI or PAN was elected (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer). Having broken away from his previous party, the PRD, in 2014, to found Morena, he was not weighed down by baggage of earlier administrations and seemed like a legitimate anti establishment option. His narrative came to describe a Mexico facing a deep regime crisis rooted in generalized corruption, denouncing technocrats and capitalists as a "mafia of power" within the PRIAN – an amalgamation of the PRI and PAN.

AMLO called for peace, love and reconciliation among the country, claiming he aimed to "govern for all". Main focuses of his campaign were a proposed questioning of Peña Nieto's energy and education reforms, as well as a recall of large developmental projects such as a massive renewal of Mexico City's airport based on claims of corruption in contract allocation. In dealing with violent crime, he proposed the development of a national guard that would grant marines and soldiers a permanent role in Mexico's streets, along with proposed partial amnesty for offenders, aiming to focus on combating social exclusion processes leading to crime. On the economic front, he promised to prioritize the nation's most vulnerable while balancing the budget, by reducing public officials' salaries and cutting back on Presidential privileges such as the official *Los Pinos* residence and selling the presidential plane.



Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 2018, Source: Animal Político

Por México al Frente (For Mexico in Front)

Headed by Ricardo Anaya, this coalition was made up of Anaya's own party, the PAN, the PRD and the MC (Movimiento Ciudadano, or Citizen's Movement).

As previously mentioned, the PAN is one of the major players in Mexico's multi-party system. Anaya got an early start in party politics at 21, running for state legislature in his home state of Querétaro. Only 38 during the 2018 election, he resigned as leader of the PAN to present his candidacy. A talented political strategist, he presented himself as a true break from the establishment as opposed to other candidates, yet suffered from bruising accusations of damaging his party to rise to the top, and having lost allies in the process. Notably, former first lady Margarita Zavala broke away from the party to present her – later abandoned – independent candidacy. Her departure was rumored to be the result of infighting and exposed growing rifts in one of the nation's largest parties.

Anaya's platform was viewed by many as technocratic in its focus, aiming to increase security by retraining police and introducing better technology to track criminals, for example. He further proposed the concept of a universal basic income to combat extreme poverty, though he came under sharp criticism for failing to delve into the details of the funding of such a plan. On an institutional level, he proposed making the attorney general's office independent from the government as a means to reduce corruption, but veered away from dismantling reforms instituted by President Peña Nieto, a point which AMLO heavily based his campaign on.



Ricardo Anaya, 2018, Source: El Economista

Todos por México (Everyone for Mexico)

Headed by PRI candidate José Antonio Meade, this coalition brought together the historic 20th century ruling party of the PRI, the Panal (Nueva Alianza, or New Alliance) and the PVEM (Partido Verde Ecologista de México, or Green Ecologist Mexican Party).

Given historically low approval numbers faced by PRI President Enrique Peña Nieto, as well as the scandals trailing behind him as he left office, the PRI sought a candidate untouched by scandal. José Antonio Meade was a technocrat having served in both PAN and PRI cabinets, who lacked a strong personal presence and led a campaign that has repeatedly been characterized as uncharismatic. Because Meade needed to distance himself from the institution of the PRI, he held back from forging strong links with state governors and local officials, failing to exploit one of the PRI's key advantages of a rooted nationwide presence and remaining clientelistic linkages on local levels. His program was a rather traditional one, as he aimed to continue the PRI's developmental projects first undertaken under Peña Nieto.

José Antonio Meade, 2018, Source: Forbes México



Independent candidate Jaime Rodríguez Calderón, “El bronco”

Then governor of the northern state of Nuevo León, one of the country's economic and industrial powerhouse, Jaime Rodríguez Calderón, nicknamed “El Bronco”, ran as the first independent candidate for President in 2018. The first independent candidate to have won a governorship, he had also served as mayor of García, Nuevo León, as part of the PRI.

His campaign was marked, as his previous political career, by his hard stances on drugs and crime, resulting in several sensationalist moments during his run, such as his

declaring thieves should get their “hands cut off”, reaffirming he was being literal when asked to clarify by debate moderators. Conservative and starkly right wing, he proposed to bring back the death penalty, held conservative views on abortion and LGBTQ+ rights, and proposed the militarization of high schools as part of educational reform efforts. Within a context of strong anti-establishment feelings on the part of the general population, Rodríguez Calderón played on his extremism as a means to sensationalize, further denouncing the establishment as holding back his run. Indeed, his initial bid had not reached the required number of signatures to appear on the ballot, a fact he appealed and denounced as unfair.



Jaime Rodríguez Calderón, “El Bronco”, 2018, Source: El Universal

V. Results

Presidential election

Juntos Haremos Historia candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador won with a sweeping 53% of the popular vote. The landslide victory granted him a 20 percentage point rise on his results in his two prior runs, granted him the largest mandate for any Mexican President since 1982, and made him the first unified government and majority president since the advent of competitive democracy in 2000. AMLO carried all but one of Mexico’s 32 states, and assembled a socially diverse majority largely made up of the left’s traditional base and the crucially important independents (Greene and Sánchez-Talanquer). His majority was further strengthened by his draining of opponents’ power bases: he won 97% of precincts held by the PRD in previous elections, 52% of those of the PAN, and 79% of the PRI.

Al Frente por México candidate Ricardo Anaya was the runner up, garnering 22.3% of the vote, followed by PRI candidate José Antonio Meade with 16.4% of the votes. Independent candidate Jaime Rodríguez Calderón “El Bronco” scraped 5.23% of the vote.



Elecciones presidenciales en México 2018

Candidato con más votos en cada estado



Elecciones presidenciales en México 2012

Candidato con más votos en cada estado



Fuente: INE- Instituto Nacional Electoral



Congressional election

AMLO's coalition obtained an absolute majority in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, gaining 313 seats of the total 500 of the latter, and 70 out of 128 of the former. The PAN and PRD coalition (*Al Frente por México*) obtained very little legislative power in comparison, obtaining 37 senate seats and 127 lower house seats. The PRI's *Todos Por México* trailed further behind, obtaining only 58 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 19 in the Senate.

Despite the absolute majority of AMLO's coalition not reaching the 2/3rds required for a qualified majority to conduct constitutional changes, the coalition's alliance with the the

Green Party (Partido Verde Ecologista de México) and the Labor party (PT) granted this number.

TABLE—MEXICO’S 2018 GENERAL ELECTION RESULTS

Coalition/Parties	Pres. Vote Share	Chamber of Deputies		Senate	
		Total Seats	Seat Share	Total Seats	Seat Share
<i>Juntos Haremos Historia</i>	53%	313	63%	70	55%
National Regeneration Movement (MORENA)		255	51%	59	46%
Labor Party (PT)		28	6%	6	5%
Social Encounter Party (PES)		30	6%	5	4%
<i>Por México al Frente</i>	22%	127	25%	37	29%
National Action Party (PAN)		79	16%	24	19%
Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD)		20	4%	6	5%
Citizens' Movement (MC)		28	6%	7	5%
<i>Todos por México</i>	16%	58	12%	19	15%
Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI)		47	9%	14	11%
Mexican Green Ecologist Party (PVEM)		11	2%	5	4%
New Alliance Party (PANAL)		–	–	–	–
<i>Independent</i>		2	0%	1	1%

Sources: Instituto Nacional Electoral, <https://www.ine.mx>; http://sitl.diputados.gob.mx/LXIV_leg/info_diputados.php; http://www.senado.gob.mx/64/senadores/por_grupo_parlamentario.

Local elections

Though Morena remained victorious in local elections, its success was less sweeping than in federal level positions. Out of 9 governorships up for renewal, 4 went to Morena, including that of Mexico City, 3 to the PAN, and one to Movimiento Ciudadano. This was a huge blow to the PRI’s, whose traditional institutional apparatus is in large part reliant on state based connections through powerful governors.



Governor election results, Source: *Expansión Política*

1596 out of the country’s 2474 municipal governments were up for election. The PRI was first in the race, winning 437 municipalities, followed by 337 for the PAN and 320 for Morena, with smaller runner ups being the PRD and the Green Party. Despite Morena’s sizable achievement, the PRI and PAN’s continued influence demonstrated the maintenance of traditional partisan ties and alignments on much smaller scales of Mexican political life.

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