

Mexican Elections Overview

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On June 5 gubernatorial, state legislative, and municipal elections were held in 14 Mexican states. 12 new governors and 388 state deputies across various regional legislatures, as well as candidates in a further 965 municipal elections were elected.¹ Also taking place was the election of 60 members for a constitutional assembly that will draft a constitution for the newly formed state of *Ciudad de México* (CDMX), the country's capital city, which was recently granted statehood.

The elections exposed increasing tensions between the governing *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (Institutional Revolutionary Party or PRI) and the two major opposition parties. In addition to accusations of electoral fraud against the PRI, violence broke out in the southern state of Veracruz. Such realities reveal mutual suspicions of corruption among the candidates and concerns about the validity of the electoral processes. As a result, *Fiscalía Especializada para la Atención de los Delitos Electorales* (FEPADE), Mexico's electoral crimes unit, along with National Electoral Institute President Lorenzo Córdova Vianello, aimed to make the Mexican electoral process more effectively monitored and more transparent.² These efforts seemingly proved successful as one of the two opposition parties, *Partido Acción Nacional* (National Action Party or PAN), made huge electoral gains, which served to dampen the accusations of fraud that were voiced by the PAN's leadership in the run up to the vote. Further, the PAN's success in this election shows that the more competitive nature of Mexican politics that emerged during the 2000 presidential election, when the eight decades of the PRI dominance was broken by the election of PAN candidate Vicente Fox, has spread to the regional level.³

The election's outcome was widely considered a success for the PAN. It won seven gubernatorial elections out of the 12 that it contested, in the states of Puebla, Tamaulipas, Chihuahua, Quintana Roo, Durango, Veracruz, and Aguascalientes. It was the first time that it had won more than three governorships in a single election, a feat heralded as an historic achievement by PAN President Ricardo Anaya.⁴ The results also represent a monumental setback for the PRI, only comparable in significance to the aforementioned 2000 election victory of President Vicente Fox.⁵ Nevertheless, the PRI continues to have strong support in the states of Hidalgo, Zacatecas, and Chihuahua. Additionally, neck-to-neck competition for power in some regions, such as in Chihuahua and Aguascalientes, reveals deep polarization within the electorate. Despite democratic means for representing such support, tensions could lead to future violence and unrest.⁶

Recognizing a shared mutual foe in the PRI, the PAN and the second major opposition party, *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (Party of the Democratic Revolution or PRD), forged an electoral alliance in the states of Puebla, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz. Given that these were amongst the seven states in which the PAN had their gubernatorial victories, it appears that the alliance has primarily benefitted the PAN.

Veracruz

The deep tensions and explosive nature of the rivalry between the two parties was particularly marked in Veracruz, the most populous of all the states holding elections and therefore considered a vital test of support by all three parties. Indeed this is one of the states in which the PAN and the PRD formed an electoral alliance to try to unseat the PRI.⁷ On May 31, just days before the elections took place, authorities in the small town of Mixtla reported that two people were injured during a violent clash between sympathizers of the PRI and the PAN. LatinNews revealed that the violence had broken out when a group of around 60 PAN supporters tried to stop the local PRI deputy candidate, Tomás López Landero, from conducting a campaign rally in the town. They are said to have created roadblocks to stop López and his supporters from entering, and after failing, attacked them with rocks and sticks. Two people were injured before the local police broke up the demonstration.⁸

However, violence in the province also came from PRI supporters. The PAN and the PRD alliance complained of attacks against their party members in seven municipalities. Gasoline bombs were thrown at party officials and vehicles were burned in the state's capital city Xalapa. José Mancha Alarcón, the state leader of the PAN, stated that attackers broke into the home of the mayor of Acajete and set it on fire. There were also reports that a decapitated human head was left close to the entrance of a polling station in an effort to intimidate pro-opposition supporters. Such matters reveal that despite greater electoral transparency, there is much to be done to tackle political violence.⁹

FEPADE

Two weeks before the elections, the country's electoral crime unit FEPADE conducted major operations in five of the 12 states holding gubernatorial elections. These operations were in response to complaints regarding irregularities in the electoral process. Electoral crime concerns had been expressed preceding the elections, with many pressuring federal authorities to tackle such issues. In particular, four out of the five states identified as "priorities" by FEPADE are key electoral battlegrounds: Veracruz, Oaxaca, Tamaulipas, and Puebla.¹⁰

In an interview with *El Universal*, Mexico's major newspaper, President Enrique Peña Nieto stated that since the start of this year's electoral season, FEPADE has investigated 1,295 cases related to complaints about alleged electoral crimes committed by different parties—making evident the gravity of electoral violations. According to Peña Nieto, alleged violations range from the tampering of future social programs by local authorities, to vote buying, to electoral tourism (in which people registered in one district vote in another). Vowing that FEPADE was prepared to investigate all complaints, Peña Nieto stated that the unit was especially concerned about the situation in Veracruz, which had 250 recurrent electoral fraud complaints.¹¹

National Electoral Institute

On June 2, the president of Mexico's *Instituto Nacional Electoral* (National Electoral Institute or INE), Lorenzo Córdova Vianello, called registered voters to actively participate in the elections, insisting that the INE and other federal authorities were providing "all the guarantees."¹² The INE hopes to make electoral processes more transparent and better monitored. In addition, Córdova stated that the INE was ready to set up 68,028 polling stations with 8,637 electoral observers overseeing the process. However, despite advances in transparency, political violence has not disappeared. The Interior Minister, Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, stated that this season's elections have been the "most ruthless" he has seen. In

particular, the gubernatorial campaigns have been “very aggressive,” with some candidates “going too far” in their accusations of corruption and links to drug trafficking, such as in the case of Veracruz and Tamaulipas.¹³ This reveals that there is much to be done to combat electoral violence and overall corruption in Mexico. The INE will also need to improve its tactics within these two years in order to minimize the violence leading to the 2018 elections.

Conclusion

Taken together, these events reveal both weaknesses and successes in Mexico’s electoral processes. Although it seems that electoral fraud has to some extent been contained by FEPADE, which was formed in 1994, there was considerable failure to adequately contain political violence in the lead up to these elections. Violent riots, specifically in southern states, shed light on Mexico’s politically polarized population. This polarization is likely to continue through the 2018 presidential elections as both the PRI and the PAN struggle for dominance. The need to double down on counter-efforts against violence and fraud will become even greater as this scheduled nationwide electoral contest approaches over the next two years.

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¹ <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/infographic-mexican-elections-state-2016>

² http://latinnews.intelligenceresearch.com/_act/link.php?mId=A88907388874606851489616513024&tId=26930382

³ http://latinnews.intelligenceresearch.com/_act/link.php?mId=A88907388874606851489616513024&tId=26930382

⁴ http://latinnews.intelligenceresearch.com/_act/link.php?mId=A88907388874606851489616513024&tId=26930382

⁵ http://www.latinnews.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=69068&uid=17952&acc=1&Itemid=6&cat_id=802411%20

⁶ Ibid

⁷ http://www.latinnews.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=69021&uid=17952&acc=1&Itemid=6&cat_id=802330%20

⁸ Ibid

⁹ <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/05/mexico-elections-violence-veracruz>

¹⁰ http://www.latinnews.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=68951&uid=17952&acc=1&Itemid=6&cat_id=802222%20

¹¹ Ibid

¹² http://www.latinnews.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&id=69052&uid=17952&acc=1&Itemid=6&cat_id=802389%20

¹³ Ibid