

The 2021 Mexican Elections

At stake in the June 6 elections were all 500 seats in the federal Chamber of Deputies as well as governorships, seats in state legislatures, and local posts. The results provided some satisfaction as well as considerable disappointment for both of the nation's major coalitions.

The *Go for Mexico (Va por México - VPM)* coalition consisted of the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA), the Labor Party (PT), and the Green Ecology Party of Mexico (PVEM). As election day began, this coalition held so many seats in that federal Chamber of Deputies (334) that they could initiate constitutional changes without a single opposition vote. But by the time that the ballots were counted, that majority had declined to some 281 seats

The rival coalition *Together We Make History (Juntos Hacemos Historia – JHH)*, consisted of the three traditional parties: the conservative National Action Party (PAN), the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), and the corporatist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). These three parties, which dominated Mexican politics prior to the recent emergence of MORENA, agreed to slate only one candidate in each district to maximize their chances of victory. Although JHH did not succeed in depriving VPM of its majority, that coalition did succeed in depriving VPM of the ability to initiate constitutional change without opposition support.

During the campaign, Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador (AMLO) argued that since displacing the three traditional parties, he and his VPM coalition had refocused federal efforts and expenditures on the nation's poor majority while giving up the rewards of public office, to which he said that the JHH parties helped themselves. AMLO cited his decision to convert the presidential palace into a public museum and his decision to sell the presidential jet and instead fly in the coach section of scheduled airlines as examples of his coalition's commitment to selfless public service.

In contrast, JHH's principal argument was that AMLO and VPM sought to subvert the checks and balances provided in the Mexican Constitution and to then institute a presidential autocracy. Also, they pointed to the failure of the federal government to reduce the already high level of crime and the pandemic-induced 8.5% decline in the gross national product.

So, on the national level, one coalition said that the other lacked respect for democracy and was incompetent while that other coalition replied its rival lacked integrity and had proven no better at solving the nation's problems. My opinion is that once the proverbial doors were closed for the post-election analysis, neither coalition was happy with the results of the Chamber of Deputies elections.

Results at the state level similarly proved bittersweet for them. VPM triumphed in many governors' races, boosting its number of governorships from six to sixteen. This left the PAN with only seven governorships; the PRI with four; and the PRD with one. However, in MORENA's traditional stronghold (and AMLO's base) of Mexico City, the party suffered multiple

defeats. Here, the JHH candidates ran as candidates of their specific party and in seven of the sixteen boroughs, PAN candidates defeated the ruling MORENA governments, and the PAN defeated the PRI government in an eighth. This defeat was in part attributed to the ruling party's inept response to the Covid-19 emergency and to the death of more than a dozen citizens when an improperly constructed metro viaduct collapsed.

A minor party that chose not to join either coalition, the Citizen's Movement (*Movimiento Ciudadano* – MC) Party won two governorships. MC describes itself as a Social Democratic Party and is one of several minor parties.

VPM's greatest strength proved to be AMLO's popularity. His informal style, daily press conferences, and shedding of the trappings of office have endeared him to many people. JHH's greatest asset proved to be AMLO's failure to improve the economy and to successfully address rising crime.

Of note is the extent to which so many voters broke long-standing precedents in casting their ballots. Mexico City had long been regarded as a leftist stronghold but given the string of PAN victories at the borough level, that is no longer the case. Similarly, the PRI had held more Mexican governorships than any other party since 1929, but after this election, that is no longer the case. In politics, nothing can be taken for granted.

Lastly – and as always - the opinions expressed in this comments reflect my judgements and not those of the University of Texas – Rio Grande Valley or of the University of Texas system.
