

CRS Report for Congress

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Mexico's Presidential, Legislative, and Local Elections of July 2, 2000

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Summary

Mexico held historic elections on July 2, 2000, that demonstrated Mexico's evolution toward fully democratic government since an opposition president was elected for the first time in 71 years. Coming after a series of electoral reforms in the 1990s, the elections were supervised by independent and widely respected Mexican electoral authorities, and were closely watched by party poll watchers, and domestic and international observers. Although polls suggested a close presidential race, final results showed Vicente Fox of the conservative Alliance for Change (PAN and PVEM) winning strongly, with 42.52% of the vote, over Francisco Labastida of the long-ruling, centrist PRI, with 36.10% of the vote. President-elect Fox will take office on December 1, 2000. In the congressional elections, no party will have a majority in either chamber, although Fox's coalition will have the largest bloc in the Chamber of Deputies, and the PRI will have the largest bloc in the Senate. As a result, significant negotiation and coalition-building will be necessary. In the other major races, the PAN won the two governorship races in Guanajuato and Morelos, while the leftist parties once again won the important race for Mayor of the Mexico City Federal District. This short report contains final results after resolution of disputes and will not be updated. For additional information see CRS Issue Brief IB10047, *Mexico-U.S. Relations: Issues for the 106th Congress*.

Introduction

With President Ernesto Zedillo in the last year of his six year term (December 1994-December 2000), and with no re-election permitted, the country held an important election on July 2, 2000. In these elections the country elected a new president, a new legislature, a new mayor and legislative assembly in the Mexico City Federal District, and new governors in the states of Guanajuato and Morelos. Under a series of electoral reforms enacted in the 1990s, the election was supervised by the independent and widely respected Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), and was closely watched by party poll watchers, as well as domestic and international observers. The election was considered to be a test of Mexico's evolution toward fully democratic government since this was the first

presidential election to be supervised by fully independent and autonomous electoral authorities.

Background on Recent Elections and the Zedillo Administration

1994 Presidential Election. Ernesto Zedillo of the long-ruling and now-centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party (**PRI**) was elected President with 50% of the valid vote in the August 1994 election, and had comfortable majorities in both legislative chambers. Diego Fernandez de Cevallos of the conservative National Action Party (**PAN**) came in second with 27% of the vote, and Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas of the center-left Party of the Democratic Revolution (**PRD**) came in third with 17% of the vote.

1997 Congressional and Local Elections. In the watershed midterm legislative elections of July 6, 1997, the PRI lost its majority in the Chamber of Deputies, its two-thirds majority in the Senate, and it lost the first time election for mayor of the all-important Mexico City Federal District. Following that election and some shifting of members to independent status, in the 128-member **Senate**, the PRI has 73 senators (57%), the PAN has 30 (23.4%) and the PRD has 16 (12.5%), while the Labor Party (PT) has 1 member (less than 1%) and there are 8 independents (6.25%). In the 500-seat **Chamber of Deputies**, the PRI has 237 seats (47.4%), the PRD has 125 (25%), the PAN has 120 (24%), the Green Ecological Party of Mexico (PVEM) has 6 seats (1.2%), the PT has 7 (1.4%), and there are 5 independents (1%). Since 1997, the opposition parties have remained united enough in the Chamber of Deputies to control more major committees (committee chairmanships are distributed roughly proportionate to the national vote, not to the majority party). The opposition parties succeeded in increasing social and local government funding in budget debates, and in demanding more transparency in government practices, including an audit of the bank protection agency responsible for rescuing the banks in the 1994-1995 financial crisis, and the creation of a commission to monitor any use of state resources in the current election campaign. In the important **Mayorship of the Mexico City Federal District**, the PRD won overwhelmingly, electing two-time presidential candidate Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas for the three-year term as Mayor.

Zedillo Administration. Throughout his term (1994-2000), President Zedillo continued the free market policies of his predecessor (Raul Salinas de Gortari), implemented austerity measures to emerge from the 1994-1995 financial crisis, and encouraged cooperation with the United States as a partner in the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). He also reformed the police, strengthened democracy, and curtailed the threat of violence in the far southeastern state of Chiapas, although serious human rights concerns continue. By early 2000, Mexico had experienced four years of economic recovery, with GDP growth averaging about 5% per year (5.1% in 1996, 7% in 1997, 4.8% in 1998, and 3.7% in 1999). However, the government admitted that it would take some time to restore the living standards prevailing before the peso devaluation crisis, and many observers point to continuing widespread poverty and inequality in the country. Officials predicted growth in 2000 of 4.5%, with inflation under 10%.

Major Parties and Coalitions in the July 2000 Elections

Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Known by another name, this party was originally founded in 1929 and is the party that has governed Mexico with nearly complete dominance from the days of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1940) to the present, espousing Mexican nationalism, and drawing support from the three sectors of the party -- the workers, the peasantry, and the employees of the state. Favoring a generally leftist foreign policy (support for Cuba under Castro and Nicaragua under the Sandinistas) and heavy involvement of the state in the economy, the PRI was generally considered to be a left-of-center political party in the past. With the free market reforms, acceptance of NAFTA, and more cooperative relations with the United States under Salinas and Zedillo, the PRI is now considered a centrist party. Until 1989 all governors were from the PRI, but since that time the opposition has made steady gains and by early 2000 controlled 11 of 32 statehouses, including the Federal District, although the PRI did recapture Chihuahua in the north in 1998. While the PRI has had majority control of both chambers throughout its history, following the 1997 elections, the PRI had 237 seats in the 500-seat Chamber of Deputies, and the opposition parties had the majority if they remained united. The PRI did have a majority in the Senate, with 73 Senators in the 128-seat Senate. Francisco Labastida, former Minister of Government, was selected as the presidential candidate for the July 2000 election in an highly touted open primary in November 1999.

National Action Party (PAN) and the Alliance for Change. The PAN was founded in 1939, mostly as a conservative reaction to the PRI. It has always been considered to be the conservative party in Mexico, favoring free enterprise and more pro-clerical policies. It stresses clean and transparent government. Many of its economic policies were adopted by the current PRI, and the PAN often breaks with the opposition because of agreement with the PRI on economic principles. While the PAN has not been successful in presidential contests, it has elected governors and mayors in many of the northern and central states, and by early 2000 PAN governors were in office in six states (Aguascalientes, Baja California Norte, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Nuevo Leon, and Queretaro). At that time, it had 120 members in the 500-seat Chamber of Deputies, and 30 Senators in the 128-seat Senate. After efforts by the PAN and the PRD to agree on a common candidate for the opposition came to an impasse in September 1999, Vicente Fox, Governor of Guanajuato, was selected as the PAN's presidential contender. The PAN subsequently negotiated an alliance with the pro-environment Green Ecological Party of Mexico (PVEM) which is known as the Alliance for Change.

Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and the Alliance for Mexico. The PRD was formally founded in 1990 from elements that split off from the PRI and other leftist parties who supported the presidential candidacy of Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas in the 1988 election. It espouses a more leftist position, arguing that NAFTA and the free enterprise policies have benefitted the wealthy and middle classes, but have neglected the lower classes. The party tends to favor a larger role for the state and a more independent foreign policy. The major victory for the party was Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas winning the mayorship of the Mexico City Federal District in the July 1997 election, although the party has won governorships in four less populous states (Baja California Sur, Zacatecas, Tlaxcala, and Nayarit) in coalition with other parties. In early 2000, the PRD had 125 seats in the 500-seat Chamber of Deputies (making it the second largest delegation) and 16 seats in the 128-seat Senate (making it the third largest delegation). When negotiations to designate a single opposition candidate failed in September 1999, Cuauhtemoc

Cárdenas was selected as the PRD's presidential candidate. The PRD subsequently negotiated an alliance with four minor and mostly leftist political parties – the Labor Party (PT), the Social Alliance Party (PAS), the Convergence for Democracy (CD), and the Nationalist Society Party (PSN). The alliance is known as the Alliance for Mexico.

Candidates and Results in the July 2000 Presidential Election

Among the major candidates in the presidential election campaign, the **candidate for the PRI was Francisco Labastida**, a former Governor of Sinaloa and Minister of Government, who represented continuity of the regime, with more attention to social issues. He was selected as the PRI candidate in an open primary in November 1999. The **candidate for the Alliance for Change (PAN and PVEM) was Vicente Fox**, a former Coca Cola executive and the Governor of Guanajuato, who favored a pro-business approach and spoke directly about the need for change to end corruption and to achieve full democracy. The **candidate for the Alliance for Mexico (PRD and four minor parties) was Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas**, son of a famous president, former Governor of Michoacan, two-time presidential candidate (1988 and 1994) after leaving the PRI, and recently Mayor of Mexico City, who favored more nationalistic and social welfare policies.

Three minor candidates were also running in the presidential race: ex-PRISTA Manuel Camacho Solís running for the Democratic Center Party (PCD); longtime leftist Gilberto Rincon Gallardo running for the Social Democracy Party (DS); and ex-PRD member Porfirio Muñoz Ledo, running for the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) until he withdrew in the final weeks and cast his lot with Fox and the Alliance for Change.

During the campaign, opposition parties claimed that the PRI was using coercion and vote buying to gain votes by requiring government bureaucrats to support the PRI and by offering various inducements to party faithful, particularly in rural areas, and Vicente Fox stated at one point that a victory by the PRI by a close margin might not be legitimate, given the possibility of corruption. PRI spokesmen disputed the charges and criticized those casting doubt on the election, while also leveling charges in the final weeks of the campaign that Fox had received considerable funding from abroad. Following the TV debates among the candidates in April and May, most dailies reported that Fox won the debates, although some faulted Fox for his stubbornness in the negotiations over the arrangements for the second debate. According to most of the latest polls, released in the second half of June 2000, Labastida and Fox were in a technical tie, with the margin of error being greater than the difference between the two candidates, although most polls gave Fox the advantage in the urban areas and Labastida the advantage in the rural areas.

By the evening of the election of July 2, 2000, Mexican electoral authorities were able to announce, based on a series of quick counts and preliminary election results, that opposition candidate Vicente Fox of the Alliance for Change (PAN and PVEM) had won the presidential election by a significant margin. That same evening, PRI candidate Labastida and PRD candidate Cardenas conceded the election, and President Zedillo offered his assistance in the coming transition. Final results show Fox winning with 42.52% of the vote, while Labastida came in second with 36.10% of the vote, and Cardenas came in third with 16.64% of the vote, with the remaining votes being blank, null, or for minor presidential candidates. Fox won in 20 of the 32 states, Labastida won in 11, and Cardenas won in only one state.

Results of the July 2000 Congressional Elections

Chamber of Deputies. The Chamber is composed of 500 members with three-year terms (300 elected by plurality in single-member districts, and 200 elected by proportional representation in five 40-member “plurinominal” districts). Final results show the Alliance for Change (PAN/PVEM) with 38.23% of the vote and 224 deputies (207 for the PAN, and 17 for PVEM), making it the largest bloc in the Chamber. The PRI came in second place with 36.91% of the vote and 211 deputies, and the PRD/Alliance for Mexico came in third with 18.69% of the vote and 66 deputies (50 for the PRD, 7 for PT, and 9 for other leftist parties).

Senate. The Senate is composed of 128 members with six year terms (64, or 2 from each state, elected by plurality; 32 elected from the first minority in each state; and 32 elected by national proportional representation). Final results show the Alliance for Change (PAN/PVEM) with 38.11% of the vote and 51 senators (46 for PAN, 5 for PVEM), the largest percentage of the votes, but not the largest delegation. The PRI, with 36.74% of the vote, will have 60 senators, the largest delegation, while the PRD/Alliance for Mexico, with 18.85% of the vote, will have only 17 senators. The PRI has the largest delegation because of the intricacies of the senate election process (the PRI won in 16 states, did well in the national proportional representation, and was the first minority in 15 states, while the PAN won in 14 states and was the first minority in 10 states).

These results suggest that the new President will have to work with the various parties to fashion coalitions to enact legislation. This may be difficult because both the PRI and the PRD oppose many PAN policies, although PAN-PRD coalitions have functioned in several states to oust PRI governments. With the Chamber, the new President will need to hold the support of the 15 PVEM deputies and obtain support from 27 additional deputies to gain a majority; and with the Senate, he will need to hold the support of the 5 PVEM senators and obtain support from 14 additional senators.

Results of the July 2000 Mexico City Federal District Elections

While the Federal District is a city, not a state, and the executive officer is called the Chief of Government, not a Governor, in many ways this populous jurisdiction is the equivalent of a major state and is considered a major prize. In the campaign for Mayor (or Chief of Government), the **candidate of the Alliance for Mexico (PRD, PT, etc.) was Manuel Lopez Obrador**, a former politician from the state of Tabasco, campaign manager and President of the PRD, who represented the incumbent PRD Administrations of Mayor Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas and substitute Mayor Rosario Robles. The **candidate of the PRI was Jesus Silva Herzog**, a former Finance Minister and Ambassador to the United States, who criticized the PRD Administration for failing to deal with crime and community problems. The **candidate for the Alliance for Change (PAN, PVEM) was Santiago Creel**, a former lawyer and academic and a counselor in the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), who called for honesty and change to deal with the city’s many problems.

The campaign was enlivened by charges by the PRD Attorney General for the District that the current federal Minister of Tourism from the PRI, Oscar Espinoza, embezzled \$42 million in government funds when he was the appointed Mayor of the District (1994-1997). The PRI countered that the PRD Attorney General had failed to reduce crime and

may have pressured a key witness to give false incriminating evidence in the high-profile case of the June 1999 drug-related killing of TV personality "Paco" Stanley.

According to the late June polls, the PRD candidate was leading strongly, with the PRI and PAN candidates lagging behind together, but on the evening of the election it became a neck and neck contest between the PRD frontrunner and the PAN challenger as the Alliance for Change did surprisingly well in the Federal District. Final results gave Mauuel Lopez Obrador of the leftist Alliance for Mexico the victory with 33.44% of the vote, with Santiago Creel of the conservative Alliance for Change with 32.98% of the vote in second place, and Jesus Silva Herzog of the PRI coming in third with 22.4% of the vote. Mayor-elect Lopez Obrador will face substantial opposition in the Federal District Legislative Assembly, but not the Alliance for Change majority originally announced. After a dispute over proportional representation was resolved by the Federal Electoral Tribunal, the Alliance for Change (PAN/PVEM) will have 25 seats in the 66-seat chamber, while the PRD and other leftist parties will have 25 seats as well (down from the 38 seats controlled before the election) and the PRI will have 16 seats. In the first time election of neighborhood administrators, the leftist parties won 10 of the 16 neighborhoods, the Alliance for Change won 6, and the PRI was left without a victory in this area.

Expectations for Fox Presidency

After a fairly long period of preparation following the election, President-elect Fox will assume the mantle of the presidency on December 1, 2000. In speeches and statements during the campaign and the post-election period, including visits to Latin America, the United States, and Europe, he has suggested some of the initiatives he plans to propose, although his support in Congress is uncertain. As a former businessman, he has suggested that the Fox administration will implement policies more favorable to businessmen and private enterprise in order to create more jobs in Mexico and to increase the rate of growth in the country. This will include opening the electricity sector to private investment but also will include credits and support for small businessmen, programs to aid the poorer sectors of society, and greatly expanded educational opportunities to give new workers the necessary skills for the modern economy. He has promised to encourage democracy and to attack corruption and drug trafficking activities, including reform of the law enforcement system. With regard to the unsolved conflict in Chiapas, he has indicated that he will seek to implement the agreement on indigenous rights, reduce the presence of the army, and seek a negotiated settlement of the issues.

Regarding relations with the United States, during his August 2000 trip to the United States, he called for working toward a more open border in the long term and for support for Mexico from the other NAFTA partners, similar to the support given in the European Union, to reduce wage and economic differences between the countries. He called for the United States to drop the unilateral certification of drug producing and transit countries and to utilize multilateral mechanisms. He promised to strengthen cooperative efforts in many areas with the United States in the coming years.

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