

A REPORT OF THE CSIS
AMERICAS PROGRAM

Mexico's 2012 Elections

FROM UNCERTAINTY TO A PACT FOR PROGRESS



February 2013

Author
Stephen Johnson



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MEXICO'S 2012 ELECTIONS FROM UNCERTAINTY TO A PACT FOR PROGRESS

Introduction

At the beginning of 2011, security defined the U.S.-Mexico relationship, and it was the issue that most observers thought would shape Mexico's 2012 presidential, state, and local elections. Only two of Mexico's three main parties, the National Action Party (PAN) and Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), had well-known positions on security and on themes such as economic liberalization, rule of law, and reform of the energy sector. It was thought that another PAN government might try to achieve additional, though limited, progress on those issues, while the PRD would try to roll back achievements of the past 12 years of PAN government. What the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) might do if it returned to Mexico's presidential palace, Los Pinos, presented a quandary.

Meanwhile, Mexico's murder rate continued to dominate the news and several sour notes sounded in bilateral affairs: President Felipe Calderón's unhappiness with the Wikileaks disclosures of U.S. ambassador Carlos Pascual's cables, the murder of a U.S. Customs agent, and particularly Operation Fast and Furious—the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms sting that misdirected some 1,700 weapons to Mexican drug traffickers. Clearly, the PAN would have a tough time selling policies that might promote more of the same. Predictably, polling data indicated that Mexicans were beginning to tire of the crackdown on drug cartels and the accompanying mayhem.

Surprisingly, the candidate who became the early frontrunner—Enrique Peña Nieto—spoke in generalities about his positions until he was elected. Yet his promises of change tapped into other public concerns. These included the slow economic growth, inefficiency and corruption in the energy sector, and the poor quality of Mexico's public schools. While the electorate did not want the prolonged bloodshed associated with the PAN's approach to battling criminal organizations, it also rejected the leftist populism advocated by the PRD and other leftist parties. During the run-up to the July 1 vote, cartel violence began to subside, and the economy improved slowly, which allowed space for discussions of sectoral reforms.

After the election, changes began to occur. A labor bill that Calderón introduced in the new Congress passed both chambers largely intact with the new president-elect's support, setting the stage for multipartisan cooperation. Similarly, in December, Congress enacted a constitutional change in education, and a supermajority of states seem destined to approve it. This measure will take teacher-hiring decisions from the Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de Educación (SNTE, teachers' union) and place it in the hands of the education secretariat. It remains to be seen whether that sense of compromise among Mexico's three dominant parties will prevail for other key initiatives, including telecommunications, taxes, energy reform, and public safety. Yet, where there was uncertainty about the course Mexico would take leading up to the 2012 elections, the new administration has committed itself to the principles of effective government, with public opinion playing a supporting role.

Climate for Change

Demands with Mexico's political establishment for more market-oriented, democratic, transparent government began with Mexico's disastrous economic performance and allegedly fraudulent elections in the late 1980s. Reform was expressed in President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's and the PRI's promotion of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in the 1990s and in the Ernesto Zedillo administration's willingness to hold free and fair elections in 2000, resulting in the first-ever opposition party government. After that, Mexico's reform agenda slowed as President Vicente Fox appointed PRI members for key posts and fought a congress dominated by opposition parties. Succeeding him in 2006, Felipe Calderón began a push for closer U.S.-Mexican counter-narcotics cooperation that became the hallmark of his administration, and his financial policies helped Mexico successfully weather the 2008 global economic downturn and begin attracting foreign investment, such as manufacturing firms that had gone to Asia.

Calderón's crackdown on Mexican drug cartels became the leading narrative of Mexico's national affairs and a major worry of its citizens, though attitudes were mixed.¹ By 2012, after some 50,000 drug-related deaths, 75 percent of respondents to a Pew Research poll said that cartel-related deaths posed the nation's number one problem.² The same survey found that less than half of all people surveyed felt the government's campaign against drug cartels was effective, although they overwhelmingly backed the use of the military to fight traffickers. According to a Gallup study, trust in Calderón's government remained low, at about 40 percent, from 2007 to 2011. Moreover, confidence in military and police capabilities to halt drug violence slowly eroded.³ Such data seemed to show that Mexicans favored addressing the problem, but were not that confident in the government's ability to solve the problem.

Other notable trends did not grab headlines, specifically ones that favored institutional reforms. In March 2008, 63 percent of respondents to a *Reforma* newspaper poll agreed that the state oil monopoly Pemex should be allowed to forge alliances with private and foreign firms that have the technology needed to extract oil from deep-water reserves, while 29 percent disagreed.⁴ A decade earlier, such a suggestion would have seemed farfetched. By 2009, three-fourths of the population between 18 and 28 thought the Mexican government should be more involved in research and development, supporting medicine and public health, reducing pollution, improving education, and increasing budgets for science and technology, obviously with an eye toward improving competitiveness.⁵

1. Public opinion research is a relatively young industry in Mexico, with results varying on similar questions. See Verónica B. Hoyo, "The Controversial Role of Opinion Polls in Mexico," Americas Program Blog, Center for Strategic and International Studies, March 5, 2012, <http://csis.org/blog/controversial-role-opinion-polls-mexico>.

2. Pew Research Center, "Mexicans Back Military Campaign against Cartels," Pew Research Global Attitudes Project, June 20, 2012, <http://www.pewglobal.org/2012/06/20/mexicans-back-military-campaign-against-cartels>.

3. Peter Cynkar, "Opinion Briefing: Mexico's Drug War," Gallup World, April 4, 2012, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/153743/opinion-briefing-future-mexico-drug-war.aspx>.

4. "Mexicans Open to Pemex Forging Alliances," Angus Reid Public Opinion, April 7, 2008, http://www.angus-reid.com/polls/31414/mexicans_open_to_pemex_forging_alliances.

5. Encuesta sobre la percepción pública de la ciencia y la tecnología, INEGI (National Institute of Statistics and Geography), 2009, cited in Edmundo A. Gitierrez-D., "Eye on Mexico: Public support for

In 2005, a nongovernmental organization (NGO), Mexicanos Primero, sprang up to improve Mexico's education system through teacher evaluations, more thorough education for teachers, and an up-to-date survey of schools, teachers, and students. Although public opinion polling is scant on this issue, negative press accounts of Mexico's powerful teachers' union proliferated. Toward the end of his term, President Calderón unsuccessfully attempted to impose a process of evaluating teachers. And in the spring of 2012, the education system came under fire from independent Mexican filmmakers who released a documentary called *De Panzano* that exposed the state of Mexico's public schools, emphasizing that little more than half of all high school graduates are prepared for the modern workplace.

Other proposed reforms gained less traction. As a sign of what Mexicans, or at least Mexican politicians, were not ready to accept, President Calderón presented an electoral-reform package in 2009 that would have reduced the number of members in both the senate and chamber of deputies, as well as permit reelection for lawmakers. "The idea is to give more power to the citizens, to enhance their ability to determine the course of public life and thus strengthen our democracy," he said.⁶ The senate passed a version of the proposals in 2011, the chamber of deputies turned thumbs down.

Candidate Selection

Each major party followed a different course in selecting its presidential candidate. The PRD looked to its tried-and-true leadership, the PRI turned to youth and dynamism as a break with the past, and the PAN sought someone who could ensure continuity while presenting the image of change. In most cases, an accommodation between candidates and party leaders determined the final nominee, except for the PAN, which held a primary.



Former Mexico City mayor and 2006 presidential nominee Andrés Manuel López Obrador (also known as AMLO) and current Mexico City mayor (head of government of the Federal District) Marcelo Ebrard announced their intentions to compete for the PRD candidacy in 2011. Ebrard felt López Obrador would alienate too many voters after contesting the 2006 presidential election—declaring himself the country's "legitimate president," and failing to recognize Calderón's narrow victory. Eventually, both agreed to an internal poll of PRD supporters and members of supporting coalitions. The poll consisted of a questionnaire, and López Obrador won on three of the five questions presented. Results were announced November 15, 2011. In the end Ebrard conceded, "The left divided will just fall into the precipice. I accept the results of this poll. I am loyal."⁷

science is high, but transition to a research-based economy remains the challenge," *Academic Executive Brief: Research and Public Opinion* 1, issue 2 (2011), <http://academicexecutives.elsevier.com/articles/eye-mexico-public-support-science-high-transition-research-based-economy-remains-challenge>.

6. Robert Campbell, "Mexico's Calderon seeks broad electoral reform," Reuters, December 15, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2009/12/15/us-mexico-reelection-idUSTRE5BE39A20091215>.

7. Daniel Hernandez, "Lopez Obrador gets presidential nod from Mexico's left," *Los Angeles Times*, November 15, 2011, http://latimesblogs.latimes.com/world_now/2011/11/mexico-left-presidential-candidate-lopez-obrador-ebard.html.



Likewise for the PRI, two competitors announced for the race, one being former Sonora governor and senator Manlio Fabio Beltrones, who began seeking the nomination in 2010. The other was 45-year-old Peña Nieto, who announced shortly after leaving office as governor of Mexico State in September 2011. On November 20, 2011, the less-popular Beltrones withdrew from consideration “as a contribution to the PRI victory, not as a sacrifice.”⁸ Peña Nieto thus became the uncontested PRI standard-bearer. That month, he presented his book *México, la gran esperanza*, in which he outlined the need to expand Mexico’s economy and reform the state oil company Pemex. The book launch lost some of its punch, however, when Peña Nieto struggled to name three literary works that had influenced his life at a December book presentation conference. Favorable opinion ratings for the PRI and Peña Nieto took a slight dip but remained well ahead of possible PAN and PRD candidates.



The only organization to hold a primary was the National Action Party, although resulting internal divisions hardly helped the ultimate nominee. On February 5, the PAN conducted internal balloting open to some 1.8 million members to determine its nominee. According to media reports, only about 500,000 participated.⁹ The competitors were party stalwarts: Mexico City senator Santiago Creel, Finance Secretary Ernesto Cordero, and Mexico City deputy Josefina Vázquez Mota. While Calderón backed Cordero, Vázquez Mota handily won the contest with 55 percent of the ballots cast—compared to Cordero’s 39 percent, and Creel’s modest 6 percent. Vázquez Mota thus became Mexico’s first female major-party presidential candidate, generating substantial press interest and claiming to be a break with PAN’s past without having to noticeably criticize its policies.



The last party to name a candidate was the National Alliance Party (PANAL), a splinter group that had formed in 2005 to support Mexico’s powerful teachers’ union. At the beginning, it had aligned itself with the PRI. But the two parties split in January, and in the absence of an alliance with either the PAN or PRD, the PANAL presented its own competitor. On February 16, its leadership settled on former government official and environmentalist Gabriel Quadri de la Torre. Quadri had been director of environmental planning for Mexico City and most recently had managed an environmental consulting firm. An unknown in national politics, he still produced interesting, thoughtful proposals.

8. Fox News Latino, “Mexican senator drops bid for PRI nomination,” November 22, 2011, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/politics/2011/11/22/mexican-senator-drops-bid-for-pri-nomination>.

9. Tracy Wilkinson, “Mexico’s PAN picks Josefina Vazquez Mota to run for president,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 6, 2012, <http://articles.latimes.com/2012/feb/06/world/la-fg-mexico-pan-election-20120206>.

Campaign Platforms

Once nominated, López Obrador sought to moderate his image and move toward the center without abandoning his trademark advocacy for the poor and an activist government. He apologized for the disruptions he caused following the 2006 election and promised to respect the result of the 2012 contest. Following a populist course he felt best represented the electorate's desire for change, he campaigned on reopening NAFTA to obtain additional protections for Mexican farmers, creating jobs for unemployed youth, and building a "republic of love" through the broad sharing of wellbeing. His economic proposals included cutting government waste and corruption, as well as boosting social programs designed to bring some 15 million Mexicans out of extreme poverty. He also promised to radically alter Mexico's approach to combating drug cartels, emphasizing social programs to uplift the downtrodden who might be attracted to the underworld. He further rejected security assistance from Washington and advocated transferring army and navy counter-narcotics authorities to the police, organized under a unified command.

Peña Nieto attempted to present himself as a change agent by distancing himself from the old PRI, stressing accomplishments as governor, and by avoiding details in his proposals that would subject them to controversy. Still, Peña Nieto owed his rise in politics to former Mexico State PRI governor Arturo Rojas Montiel and was by most accounts a beneficiary of the Atacomulco group, an informal organization of former PRI governors and inside power brokers. Stories of his major accomplishments such as lowering the state's murder rate had to be revised when critics pointed out discrepancies. And, despite missing details in his campaign platform, the thrust of his wide-ranging goals actually hinted at a head-on attack against some cherished, though outdated, institutions.

Among these pledges, he made five general commitments to 1) restore peace by reducing violent crime rates by half, 2) greatly expand economic growth to add jobs to the formal sector, 3) make Mexico more socially inclusive by lifting some 10 percent of the population out of extreme poverty, 4) improve education by making public schools more responsive to parents and students, and 5) boost Mexico's position of leadership in the world.

In a 10-point economic plan he promised to restructure Pemex to permit private investment, overhaul regulations to end monopolistic practices, and develop a new trade strategy to better compete with China and India. His four-point security strategy sought to reduce drug violence by improving crime prevention through social programs, creating a police force specialized in combating organized crime, focusing efforts on most violent areas, and sharing responsibility at all levels of government and with civil society. His proposal to create a specialized police force evolved into a Gendarmería Nacional concept, based on Spain's Guardia Nacional and France's Gendarmerie Nationale. Despite qualms on the direction of outside security assistance, he advocated continued cooperation with the United States, and announced that Colombia's retired national police chief, General Óscar Naranjo Trujillo, would become his external security adviser.

Josefina Vázquez Mota used her status as the mother of three and the first female presidential candidate of a major party as proof that she was different from predecessor Felipe Calderón. Moreover, she asserted that Mexico's transition to democracy, begun when the PAN's Vicente Fox was elected president, was still incomplete and needed another PANista at the helm. She dismissed López Obrador's candidacy in terms of failed populism of the past and tried to paint her PRI competitor as the scion of an old corrupt and authoritarian party establishment. Her four-pillar action plan—1) reduced violence and improved public safety, 2) better social programs, 3) economic

growth and improved competitiveness, and 4) a greater leadership role in regional and global affairs—resembled Peña Nieto’s five-point strategy. However, the 400 action plans that supported her pillars proved difficult to articulate. Some include reform of labor laws, more scholarships for students, and construction of a trustworthy police force. None represented the bold stroke that some observers claimed she needed. Luis de la Calle, a former undersecretary of international trade, commented, “The average Mexican is a lot more modern than our politicians. The average Mexican is willing to hear more about Mexican taboos like reforming the energy sector or really changing the tax system.”¹⁰

Whether anyone was paying attention, PANAL’s Gabriel Quadri de la Torre attempted to engage the modern voter, focusing on 18 priority areas beginning with education and ending with culture and sports. While he did not call for curbing the power of Mexico’s teachers’ union, he at least promised to promote a merit-based public education system. He also proposed a conservative fiscal policy, keeping deficits under control and public debt under 40 percent of gross domestic product. He recommended restructuring Pemex as a public corporation similar to Petrobras in Brazil and requiring the electricity monopoly to use a certain percentage of renewable energy resources. On security he suggested creating a single federal command for police and abolishing municipal forces, as well as pursuing closer cooperation in limiting arms trafficking and sharing more intelligence from the United States. Quadri also proposed reforming Mexico’s *ejido* system of small-plot farms to modernize agriculture and make it more productive. He called for electing labor leaders by secret ballot. And he recommended investing in centers of science and technology to attract more doctoral students and train researchers.¹¹

Public Opinion

Enrique Peña Nieto was a front-runner well before he announced his candidacy in November 2011 with close to 50 percent favorability. But those numbers began to drop as the other campaigns got organized. By comparison, Josefina Vázquez Mota and Gabriel Quadri de la Torre failed to gain momentum by being latecomers to the race in February 2012. In fact, Quadri de la Torre rarely polled beyond 1 percent, except right after the first presidential debate. In February, polls showed Peña Nieto with 40 percent popularity, compared to 25 percent for Vázquez Mota and 18 percent for López Obrador. Those numbers remained fairly consistent until after the first candidates’ debate in May, when an *El Universal* poll found Peña Nieto with 50 percent, Vázquez Mota with 23 percent, and AMLO surging toward 25 percent.¹² By June, López Obrador was firmly in second place.

All of the candidates had misfortunes that could have tripped them up. Peña Nieto appeared out of touch with ordinary Mexicans during his book launch and in one speech even talked of creating a society of “justice and inequality” before correcting himself. To illustrate a point, López

10. Damien Cave, “A Wary Mexico Sizes Up Contenders for the Presidency,” *New York Times*, March 31, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/01/world/americas/mexicos-presidential-race-could-be-pivotal.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>.

11. Nueva Alianza, “Plataforma Presidencial,” Gabriel Quadri, Un Ciudadano Presidente, 2012–2018, <http://www.nuevaalianza.mx/gabrielquadri/plataforma.php#revolucion>.

12. According to Consulta Mitofsky in Simon Gardner, “Mexican Front-Runner Vows Swift Drop in Drug Violence,” Reuters, April 2, 2012, <http://www.borderlandbeat.com/2012/04/mexican-front-runner-vows-swift-drop-in.html>.

Obrador held up a photograph of Peña Nieto and former president Carlos Salinas upside down during the first presidential debate that earned him temporary ridicule. Neither of the PANista presidents in Mexico's history, Felipe Calderón nor Vicente Fox, supported Vásquez Mota's candidacy. In fact, Fox endorsed Peña Nieto in June shortly before the election, drawing attention to the PAN's internal fissures.¹³ None of this seemed to change the direction of most opinion polls.

There were three presidential debates, two sponsored by the Federal Electoral Institute on May 6 and June 10, and the third by the student movement #Yo Soy 132 on June 19. The first debate aired on two minor television channels and competed against a soccer match for viewers. In it, the candidates appeared stiff. Among them, López Obrador seemed most at ease and reportedly connected better with viewers, perhaps helping to propel him into second place.¹⁴ The second focused mainly on the economy and social programs. Although Vásquez Mota was clearly more on the attack than her rivals, post-debate polling gave López Obrador a modest victory.¹⁵ The third debate was most interesting and spontaneous, spurred by growing youth discontent with the front-runner.

Citizen Participation and #Yo Soy 132



The #Yo Soy 132 youth movement emerged on the national scene when Peña Nieto was jeered from an auditorium at the Ibero-American University during a May 11 speaking engagement. Some of the attendees used the occasion to decry his use of force to break up a demonstration in 2006 when he was governor. PRI officials and the mainstream media alleged that the hecklers were not students but activists brought in by the other candidates. Afterwards, the story goes that 131 protesters displayed their student ID cards on YouTube and sympathizers quickly began identifying themselves as student number "132." The movement spread to the Monterrey Technological Institute of Superior Studies and eventually to other campuses including the National Autonomous University of Mexico. Describing itself in terms that would seem sympathetic to López Obrador—autonomous, independent, and anti-neo-liberal—it may have given him a bump in the public opinion polls at Peña Nieto's expense. It urged the media to resist manipulation by political bosses and charged all of the parties to become more democratic.

It also successfully urged authorities to broadcast the second presidential debate, and in June, organized the unprecedented outdoor presidential debate in the Coyoacán section of Mexico City in which all candidates except Peña Nieto participated. The movement focused on the mass media, especially the Televisa network's role in allegedly supporting Peña Nieto's campaign.

13. E. Eduardo Castillo, "Vicente Fox, Mexico's Former President, Causes Outrage with Opposition Endorsement," *Huffington Post*, June 4, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/06/04/vicente-fox-mexico-opposition-endorsement_n_1569328.html.

14. *Economist*, "Political lucha libre," May 7, 2012, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/americasview/2012/05/mexicos-presidential-election>.

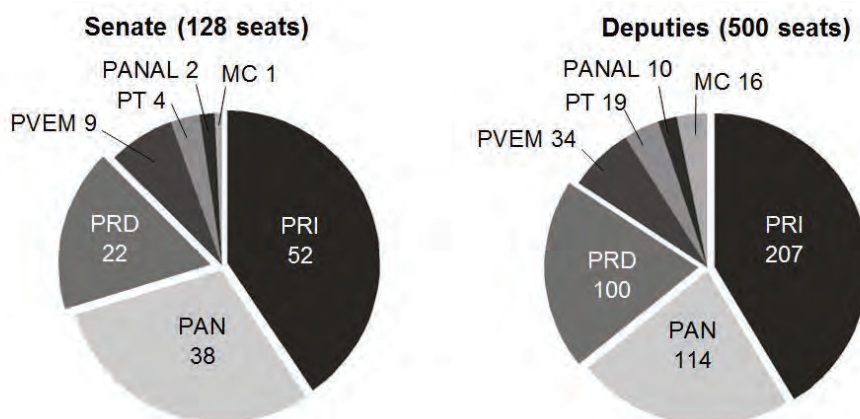
15. Arturo Gallardo, "Updated: Second presidential debate in Mexico," *My San Antonio*, June 11, 2012, <http://blog.mysanantonio.com/beyondtheborder/2012/06/quick-look-at-mexico's-second-presidential-debate>.

PRI Captures Los Pinos and Dominates Congress

All campaign activity ceased four days before the July 1, 2012, election day, as required by the election rules. The Sunday vote was generally peaceful, although some irregularities were alleged, such as vote buying by supposed PRI activists handing out preloaded supermarket credit cards.¹⁶ The Organization of American States sent 91 observers, led by former Colombian president César Gaviria. At the close of the day, it reported broad voter participation, robust controls, and an efficient quick-count mechanism, as well as numerous procedural improvements made since the last presidential election in 2006.¹⁷

Some 49 million out of 77 million registered voters turned up at the polling stations for an estimated turnout of about 63 percent.¹⁸ Results tallied by the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) showed Enrique Peña Nieto winning with 38.2 percent of the vote, followed by Andrés Manuel López Obrador with 31.6 percent, Josefina Vázquez Mota with 25.4 percent, and Gabriel Quadri de la Torre with 2.3 percent. Congressional results followed a similar pattern, although the PRI and its coalition partner, the Mexican Green Ecological Party (PVEM), failed to achieve a simple majority in either house. In the senate, the PAN now holds the next-highest number of seats at 38 (gaining five over the previous congress), and in the chamber of deputies, the PRD holds 100 seats (a gain of 31). In either case, the PRI and the PAN or the PRI and PRD could work together to pass reforms, although coincidence on reforms between PRI and PAN lawmakers seems more feasible (see the graph below).

Mexico's Congress, 2012-15



Sources: Instituto Federal Electoral, <https://prep2012.ife.org.mx/prep>; and Clare Ribando Seelke, "Mexico's 2012 Elections," Report R42548, Congressional Research Service, September 4, 2012, p. 12

16. SanDiegoRed.com, "Soriana-gate: las versiones de los hechos," July 9, 2012, <http://www.sandiegored.com/noticias/26982/Soriana-gate-las-versiones-de-los-hechos>.

17. César Gaviria Trujillo, "Declaración del Jefe de la Misión de Observación Electoral de la OEA," Comunicado de Prensa, Organización de Estados Americanos, July 1, 2012, <http://www.oas.org/es/sap/deco/moe/mexico2012/docs/cp2.pdf>.

18. Nick Miroff and William Booth, "Peña Nieto is winner of Mexican election," *Washington Post*, July 1, 2012, http://articles.washingtonpost.com/2012-07-01/world/35487146_1_pe-a-nieto-lopez-obrador-mexico-city.

Besides Enrique Peña Nieto and the PRI, other winners were the PRD and small leftist parties that swept the capital and governorships of Tabasco and Morelos. The splinter PVEM emerged with 9 senators and 34 deputies, representing an increase in both houses. The Workers' Party (PT) lost a senate seat but gained 6 deputy seats. Quadri's PANAL did less well, losing 3 senate races but gaining 3 deputy slots, while the Citizens Movement (MC) lost 3 senate positions but gained 10 seats in the chamber of deputies. In the losing column, the PAN picked up 5 senate seats but lost 28 deputy positions and important governorships. Moreover, rifts surfaced between followers of different leaders such as Calderón and Vásquez Mota. Andrés Manuel López Obrador reneged on his pledge to honor the IFE vote count, damaging his credibility within the PRD, while the #Yo Soy 132 movement cast its lot with López Obrador, taking it farther toward the political fringe and away from its middle-class university origin.

For his part, outgoing President Felipe Calderón praised voters and electoral authorities for an election that “took place in a climate of peace and tranquility in most of the country.” He also congratulated the apparent winner, Enrique Peña Nieto, and promised “my government has a complete willingness to collaborate with his team in an orderly, transparent and efficient transition.”¹⁹

AMLO's Repeat Performance

Contrasting with Calderón's gracious announcements, López Obrador claimed that widespread irregularities, vote buying, and illegal campaign spending by the PRI had defrauded him out of 5 million votes. On July 9, he demanded a full recount.²⁰ In so doing, he seemed to be reprising his performance of 2006 in which he claimed to be the legitimate president of Mexico, after losing narrowly to Calderón. Astutely, President Calderón agreed that the charges should be investigated and subsequently the IFE conducted a partial recount affecting 78,000 of 143,000 polling stations for the presidential contest and about two-thirds of all stations for congressional races. However, AMLO never produced much evidence to support his claims, nor did IFE show real interest in tracking down possible witnesses or conducting an exhaustive investigation of its own. The seven-member Federal Electoral Tribunal finally certified the election results on August 30.

On September 9, López Obrador told followers who had gathered in Mexico City's Zócalo or main plaza that he would part ways with the Democratic Revolution Party and its coalition partners the Workers' Party and Citizens' Movement, wishing them all well. He said he would create a new political vehicle out of the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA), a group that had supported him in the past. This would mean that Mexico would have a fourth party on the left, with the PRD and MC staking out moderate positions, and the PT and MORENA representing more statist views.²¹ With support for AMLO waning inside the PRD, his place at the helm of MORENA would seem to give him a fresh wind with which to run for president in 2018.

19. Ibid.

20. Lizbeth Diaz, “Mexican leftist refuses to accept election result,” Reuters, July 9, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/07/09/us-mexico-election-idUSBRE8680M320120709>.

21. On January 7, 2013, MORENA began registering as a national political party.

Calderón's September Surprise

Not to be counted out before the end of his term, President Felipe Calderón presented lawmakers with an expansive labor-reform proposal in September, just as the new congress convened. It amounted to the first major overhaul of the labor sector since Mexico's code was enacted in 1931. Far from the last gasp of a lame-duck presidency, the initiative had the tacit approval of president-elect Peña Nieto and tested the chemistry of PRI-PAN coalition politics in the new legislature. For more than two months, the bill went back and forth between chambers, finally passing the senate on November 13. Although it lacked requirements for transparent union finances and rules to ensure the democratic election of labor leaders, it introduced some 300 changes that streamlined the hiring and termination of workers, allowed for new-hire trial and training periods, enabled stronger safeguards against child labor, better protected against gender and sexual-orientation bias, provided for hourly wages, and ended the "closed shop" or requirement that workers had to belong to a union in order to be hired—all pleasing to Mexico's business community. Calderón signed it into law November 29, his next-to-last day in office.

Peña Nieto and the Reform Agenda

Sworn in on December 1, 2012, Enrique Peña Nieto proceeded to appoint experienced technocrats to his cabinet, a surprisingly sure-footed step for a politician given to generalities and miscues on the campaign trail. According to Mexico scholar and CSIS senior associate George W. Grayson, he "knows what he doesn't know and appoints experts to advise him in areas where he is not conversant." His picks included a range of PAN, PRD, and PRI hands that bring specialized knowledge to his cabinet. From the PAN, he tapped José Antonio Meade to be foreign secretary and Eduardo Medina Mora to be ambassador to the United States.²² Meade was energy secretary under Calderón while Medina Mora was his capable attorney general. From the left, he chose Manuel Mondragón to be subsecretary of security and institutional planning and Rosario Robles for secretary of social development. Mondragón was Ebrard's security chief in Mexico City and AMLO's choice to be public security secretary in case he won the election. Robles was a former PRD congressional deputy known for social activism. Among PRI notables were Luis Videgaray Caso as secretary of finance and Emilio Lozoya Austin as head of Pemex. Videgaray ran Peña Nieto's successful campaign and was his finance secretary in Mexico state; Lozoya had been a key figure in attracting international investment to Mexico and previously worked for the Inter-American Development Bank and World Bank.

The next day, Peña Nieto presided over the rollout of his *Pacto por Mexico*, a document containing pledges of cooperation on 95 subject areas, signed by him and the leaders of Mexico's three major parties. Notable highlights included promises to:

- Reorganize and consolidate the public health sector (Promise 1),
- Develop a professional education system (Promise 12),

22. For a complete list, see George W. Grayson, "Mexico: Enrique Peña Nieto's Cabinet," Americas Program Blog, Center for Strategic and International Studies, December 3, 2012, <http://csis.org/blog/mexico-enrique-pena-nietos-cabinet>.

- Advance reforms in human rights protection (Promise 21),
- Promote competition in telecommunications services (Promise 44),
- Keep hydrocarbon resources in state hands (Promise 54), but
- Reform Pemex to be a world-class public enterprise (Promise 55),
- Reform and simplify taxes to improve collection and reduce evasion (Promise 69),
- Establish a system of community policing (Promise 75),
- Create a gendarmerie branch of federal police (Promise 76),
- Establish a national commission to fight corruption (Promise 85),
- Reduce the time between presidential election and inauguration from December 1 to September 15 (Promise 88), and
- Review the possibility of reelection of legislators (Promise 94).²³

The document was remarkable not for its pledges, as most of them lacked detail, but for the community of purpose that it appeared to produce. Some of the more important reforms require constitutional changes, meaning that two-thirds of state legislatures must ratify them after they are passed by Congress. The signatures of Mexico's three main party leaders signal the breadth of agreement possible to make this happen.

Since the *Pacto's* release, action has been swift. On December 7, finance minister Luis Videgaray unveiled a US\$281 billion zero-deficit budget for 2013. It would raise revenue to offset a 2.3 percent boost in spending, some of which would come from an assumed \$1-per-barrel increase in Mexican crude-oil prices (the federal budget receives a third of its income from Pemex). It was the first time Los Pinos had presented a balanced budget since 2009 and demonstrated the administration's confidence that Mexico was recovering from the global economic downturn.²⁴ Initial press reports indicated a favorable reaction from international markets—a sign that the Mexican government would pursue investor-friendly economic policies. The new budget was approved December 27.

On December 11, Peña Nieto sent another bill to Congress contemplating substantial reforms in the nation's public education system. The measure would wrest control of teacher hiring from the powerful SNTE teachers' union and its boss for the past 23 years, Elba Esther Gordillo. On her watch, teacher positions reportedly could be bought or inherited. Besides instituting a system of hiring on merit, the new law would create an independent agency to evaluate teacher performance. The measure won congressional approval in December and was ratified by 18 of 31 state legislatures by mid-January.²⁵ Another reform awaiting imminent release is a bill to open Mexico's telecommunications sector to competition.²⁶ Measures to modernize the energy sector may be expected later in 2013.

23. Presidencia de la República, *Pacto por México*, December 2, 2012, <http://www.presidencia.gob.mx/ha-llegado-el-momento-del-encuentro-y-el-acuerdo>.

24. Jose Oliveros, "Citigroup embraces Enrique Peña Nieto zero-deficit budget," VOXXI, December 13, 2012, <http://www.voxxi.com/citigroup-pena-nieto-zero-deficit-budget>.

25. Associated Press, "Sweeping education reform approved in Mexico," *Miami Herald*, January 16, 2013, <http://www.miamiherald.com/2013/01/16/3186133/sweeping-education-reform-approved.html>.

26. Dow Jones Newswire, "Mexico Government to Seek Telecommunications Reform Next-Officials," Fox Business, January 18, 2013, <http://www.foxbusiness.com/news/2013/01/18/mexico-government-to-seek-telecommunications-reform-next-officials>.

Conclusions

As Mexican voters thought about presidential choices in 2011, what looked certain was a need to change the prevailing policies in their country. Opinion polling suggested that President Calderón's crackdown on drug cartels was on target and necessary. People even continued to view the military and police favorably, yet ratings for those two institutions and confidence in the chief executive were on a downward slide. At the time, Calderón's citizen security policies seemed to be making little progress and crime's persistence in news cycles put Mexico's worst profile on a billboard for the world to see, complete with U.S. State Department warnings to travelers.



What seemed uncertain was where Mexico might go beyond this struggle, and who might lead it in a new direction. There was the Mexico that started the free-trade movement in Latin America. There was the Mexico that had been the manufacturing leader and number two trade partner of the United States. There was the Mexico that had weathered the 2008 global downturn. But there was also the Mexico of corruption, of out-migration, of stunted educational opportunities, and of limited possibilities for competition in key business sectors. All of these seemed to be part of a menu attracting public attention in the run-up to the 2012 elections.

Speaking at a CSIS panel discussion on January 9, 2013, former IFE president and current CSIS senior adviser Luis Carlos Ugalde argued that one frame of reference for the pre-electoral battleground was the failure of two PAN governments to use their time in office to clean house and tackle truly bold reforms.²⁷ In that scenario, the public came to view another PANista government as delivering more of the same. In fact, several aspects of the PAN campaign may have supported that impression. Josefina Vázquez Mota stumped on a vague four-point platform and a package of 400 hard-to-remember proposals that may have seemed unachievable. She used her gender to distinguish herself from the other candidates but could not make that stick as an issue. Finally, the PAN seemed in disarray internally, and is unlikely to overcome the deep personal antagonisms any time soon.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador had a loyal following in the Mexican left, but as his rival in the PRD Marcelo Ebrard suspected, his past quixotic performances proved a brake on his campaign. His platform was another brake—a curious mix of holding back on structural reforms, relying on government programs to cure social ills, and no new taxes. His message was anti-PRI, which found purchase among university students and boosted his popularity over Vázquez Mota, but his prescriptions did not coincide with the existing groundswell for reform.

Both Vázquez Mota and López Obrador raised questions over the possible return of the old PRI, the party notorious for vote fraud, backroom deals, and repressive security policies. Some of these fears were justified as many stalwarts still occupied important positions. On the other hand, reformists and newcomers had begun turning the old party inside out in some states and municipalities. Although Peña Nieto owes his fortune, in part, to old-time bosses, his inner circle seems

27. CSIS, "Mexico: From the PAN to the PRI—A Preview of the Next Sexenio," Panel discussion at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., January 9, 2013, <http://csis.org/event/mexico-pan-pri-preview-next-sexenio>.

Who Voted and Why

Grupo Reforma, publisher of the newspaper *La Reforma*, conducted an exit poll of voters on July 1. Like most surveys it supplied a snapshot—in this case a sampling of what 3,096 respondents were willing to report as they left 80 voting centers throughout the country. Despite the small sample compared to the overall number of voters, it produced some interesting findings:

- Enrique Peña Nieto won thanks largely to support from voters with a basic education, conservative sympathies, and rural backgrounds.
- Andrés Manuel López Obrador appealed more to younger city voters with higher educational attainment and liberal sympathies. He also won over a larger proportion of independents than his competitors.
- Josefina Vázquez Mota attracted the most support in PAN strongholds in northern Mexico, obtaining 85 percent of the PANista vote. However, she attracted poor support from women. Instead, Peña Nieto won 41 percent of the female respondents' vote, compared to 29 percent that went for AMLO, and 27 percent for Vázquez Mota.
- Those who approved of President Calderón favored Vázquez Mota, followed by Peña Nieto. Those who disapproved of him said they voted for López Obrador, followed by Peña Nieto.
- People attracted to ideas and proposals mostly voted for Peña Nieto; those looking for an honest candidate largely went for AMLO; and those seeking continuity tended to select Vázquez Mota.

Overall, respondents were evenly balanced between men and women and mostly fit the age category from 30 to 49 years.

Source: Alejandro Moreno, "Así votaron," *La Reforma*, July 2, 2012, <http://mediosenmexico.blogspot.com/2012/07/asi-votaron.html>.

to belong to the latter group. According to Duncan Wood, director of the Woodrow Wilson Center for International Scholars Mexico Institute who also spoke at the CSIS conference, Peña Nieto's team sensed the hunger for reform better than the other major campaign teams.²⁸ His campaign talked about changes that were already in public discourse and how to implement them through effective government.

On his way out, Felipe Calderón must have understood the ingeniousness of this approach and calculated that the time was right to deal with PRI lawmakers on labor reform. Now, there is a window of opportunity to do much more. Constitutional changes affecting public education have already been ratified. New telecommunications laws permitting greater competition may be on the way. Initial energy-sector reforms could be enacted over the next year. And tax reform could decrease reliance on the state oil company for federal revenues.

28. Ibid.

Even if all of these initiatives are successful—and that is not a given—it still leaves a lot of work to be done as American University economist Manuel Suárez-Mier pointed out at the CSIS conference. Many state and local governments are nearly bankrupt, and the difference between taxation and spending at the federal level cannot be sustained for long, even if Pemex is restructured and regains financial health.²⁹ Moreover, Mexico’s public security problems are a long way from being addressed, despite Peña Nieto’s December reorganization of the federal police. State and local police, the courts, and the country’s woeful penitentiary system are all still a work in progress—and will be for a long, long time.

Even as this set of challenges and opportunities looks clear for Mexico going forward, the remaining uncertainty is what approach the United States should adopt in engaging its close neighbor. Mexico’s political system has evolved since the first truly democratic elections in 2000. Mexico is now a rising middle-income country whose economy is more modern and complex than it was 20 years ago. It is negotiating membership in the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which contemplates a trade agreement among 11 Pacific and Asian nations. It has gone from being a prickly critic of the United States in foreign relations, to a cooperative partner in trade and security affairs, something unthinkable in the 1990s. Former U.S. ambassador to Mexico Jeffrey Davidow thinks there must be some recognition of that progress.³⁰ As Mexico is much more advanced than it was 20 years ago, U.S. officials should avoid regarding it in old terms and be more guarded in publicly chastising its government for its rate of reform. That is not to say that U.S. diplomats should ignore continuing corruption, human rights, crime, and migration matters that impact the United States—any more than Mexico’s government should stop pressing Washington on concerns it deems important—such as more effective cooperation on arms trafficking. However, it means being more respectful of the fact that Mexicans have a political system better able to cope with challenges than in the past, and one that seems to be moving quickly to address them. ■



29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.



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