

THE CURRENT POLITICAL CHALLENGES TO THE MEXICAN DEMOCRATISATION PROCESS: 2012 TO 2018

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Abstract: This paper will attempt to answer what the current state of contemporary democracy in Mexico is after the return of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) to the presidency by analysing the role of Civil Society, Political Society and the Rule of Law from 2012 to 2018. This paper will also explore if the party's return was indeed a step backwards in the process of Mexican democratisation, or whether it was simply another step on a long road in which the various political parties alternate power. In 2018, Mexico elected its new president for the next consecutive 6 years along with a fair number of congressional seats and local gubernatorial posts, an election that again put Mexican democracy through a difficult test.

Keywords: Political Parties, Democracy, Mexico, Latin America, Elections

Introduction

On the eve of its 1st of July 2012 presidential elections, Mexico seemed primed for a change after 12 years under the National Action Party (PAN) administrations. Voters returned to power the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) which had ruled the country for 7 decades. In 2012 a telegenic, young and attractive PRI former governor of the State of Mexico, Enrique Peña Nieto, won a 38% plurality enough to beat Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) and Josefina Vázquez Mota of the National Action Party (PAN). Several institutions and patterns the old regime were based upon remained intact after the transition, which made the return of the PRI almost inevitable. The two PAN administrations left many dashed hopes and frustrations and voters appeared ready to give the PRI another chance. Faced with a growing disenchantment with what was now an imperfect democracy; nostalgia for the old PRI days when there was some semblance of order, and congressional work was not entangled in a never-ending deadlock started to creep in and positioned the PRI as the favourite. Society realised democracy goes beyond respect of votes, trustworthy and free elections, and the variety of parties and ideologies. Democracy brought about a new agenda of problems. The challenge that still remains is finding the way for the new political system to be transformed, adopting new rules that would reassess obligations towards a fairer distribution of power.

1.1. The 2012 Elections and the Return of the PRI

Mexican voters shocked the world on July 1st, 2012 by allowing the PRI to reclaim the presidency following 12 years of the PAN-ruled governments. These elections were regulated by the electoral reforms adopted in 2007 and 2008¹ that were a direct result of the fraud allegations during the presidential elections of 2006. The 2012 election returned power at the federal level back to an opposition party, the PRI, thus, in terms of electoral democracy it further defined Mexican political behaviour in the electoral arena as democratic (Camp, 2014:240).

A dominant party's demise is usually hailed as success for democracy. However, how should one interpret the return to power of such a formerly dominant party? Little has been written about, and almost no literature exists on the resurgence of once dominant parties (Hicken – Martínez; Palshikar – Yadav, 2003; Pempel, 1990; Reuter, 2013; Serra, 2013). The PRI's recovery started to become clear in the 2009 election when the PRI increased its number of seats in the Deputy Chamber by 133. After 12 years of relative hiatus, the formerly hegemonic party recovered much of its influence by holding the executive, leading the legislature and dominating in subnational politics. The key moment for it occurred in the summer of 2009, when the party won a majority in the congressional elections. The victory meant that the PRI recovered control of key committees in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (Wood, 2012:98). The PRI's rehabilitation as a political force also owes much to the fact that it never left the political scene. The PRI may have lost its iron grip at the federal level with 2 unsuccessful presidential campaigns; but it retained control of state governorships and gained congressional seats, boosting a national presence in both political posts and public opinion (Wood, 2012:94).

While the PAN and the PRD had struggled to gain momentum since the 2006 presidential election, the PRI rose from its ashes. Capitalising on the PRD's self-destructive stunts and the PAN's failure to solve the nation's ailing drug and financial problems, the PRI gained enough of a following to dominate ongoing state and Congressional elections. In 2009, the PRI captured 237 of the 500 available seats in the Lower House of the Mexican Congress — a feat reflective of its strong constituency. For the 2012 elections, each party followed a different course in selecting its presidential candidate. The PRD looked to its tried-and-trusted leadership; the PRI turned to youth and dynamism as a break with the past; and the PAN sought someone

¹ These reforms reduced the campaigns length from 6 to 3 months; established a 10% limit on private funding and a 48% reduction on public funding, they also banned the sale of air time to use privately, which meant that all political parties had equal access to media as stipulated by the IFE (Langston and Morgenstern, 2009). These reforms aimed to guarantee equality and transparency (Casar, 2009).

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 (Johnson, 2013:3). The last party to name a candidate was the New Alliance Party (PANAL), a splinter group that had formed in 2005 to support Mexico's powerful teachers' union. While at the beginning, it had aligned itself with the PRI, PANAL split in January, and in the absence of an alliance with either the PAN or the PRD, presented its own candidate. López Obrador, the PRD's candidate, sought to moderate his image and move towards the centre, and promised to respect the results of the 2012 elections. Peña Nieto attempted to present himself as a change agent by distancing himself from the old PRI. (Johnson, 2013:5).

The Sunday vote was generally peaceful, once the polling booths had closed, the Organisation of American States (OAS) reported broad voter participation, robust controls, and an efficient quick-count mechanism, as well as numerous procedural improvements made since the last presidential elections in 2006.² From the onset of the campaign, Peña Nieto led the polls as a clear winner. His candidature was based upon his personal image carefully crafted during his governorship of the State of Mexico from 2005 to 2011, the media and the territorial and clientelist machinery of the PRI (Olmeda and Armesto, 2013:247).

While the PAN started as second, they were soon relegated to third place shortly after the first presidential debate. For the very first time, a mainstream political party had a woman as a presidential candidate, however, her position weakened as she was tainted by association with the 2 failed past administrations. Peña was favoured by voters all over the country, while AMLO and Vazquez Mota's support came from their traditional sectors (Magaloni, 2012). This meant that the PRI continued to be the strongest party nationally.

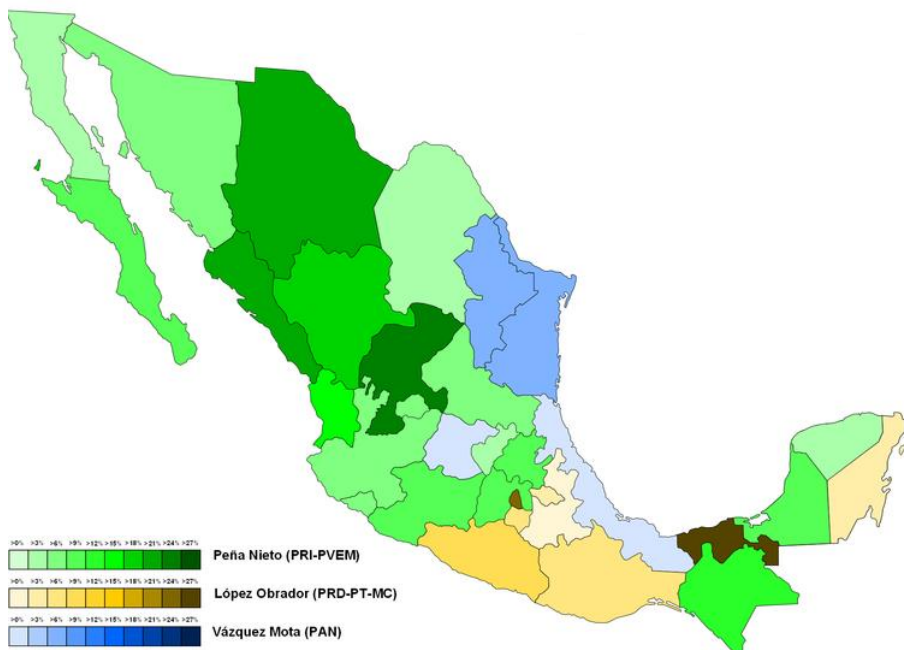
Despite having promised he would respect the outcome of the 2012 elections, and contrasting with Calderón's gracious announcements, López Obrador claimed that widespread irregularities, vote-buying, and illegal campaign spending by the PRI had defrauded him out of 5 million votes. On July 9th, 2012, he demanded a full vote recount. In so doing, he seemed to be reprising his performance of 2006 after losing narrowly to Calderón (Johnson, 2013:7). On August 30th, 2012, the Federal Electoral

² To comply with what had been agreed prior to the election, the Organisation of American States, and with the agreement of all political parties, the organisation carried out supervisory tasks to make sure the elections followed democratic standards and there were no issues that could affect the result. The organisation published the report entitled Electoral Observation Missions and Recommendations Database: Mexico, the coming November of the same year. This can be accessed from:

<http://www.oas.org/EOMDatabase/moeInfo.aspx?Lang=En&Id=244>

Tribunal certified the election results. On September 9th, Obrador told followers he would part ways with the PRD and would create a new political vehicle out of the Movement for National Regeneration (MORENA), a group that had supported him in the past and would challenge the 3 major political parties so far in Mexican politics. This would mean that Mexico would have a fourth party on the left, with the PRD and Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) staking out moderate positions, and the Labour Party (PT) and MORENA representing a more statist view.

Map 1.1 Margin of Victory of the 3 Leading Presidential Candidates per State, 2012



The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

In 2012, 6 governorships along with the head of Mexico City were also elected. the PRI won in Chiapas, and Jalisco, this last one being ruled by the PAN since 1995. the PAN was able to retain Guanajuato and the PRD took Tabasco, a formerly PRI-ruled state, Morelos where the PAN had ruled for 12 years; along with Mexico City a traditional PRD niche. From those results, the PRI in 2012 governed in 22 states out of the 32 in the country; the PAN in 8 and the PRD in 3 plus Mexico City and an alliance with the PAN and PT in Oaxaca.

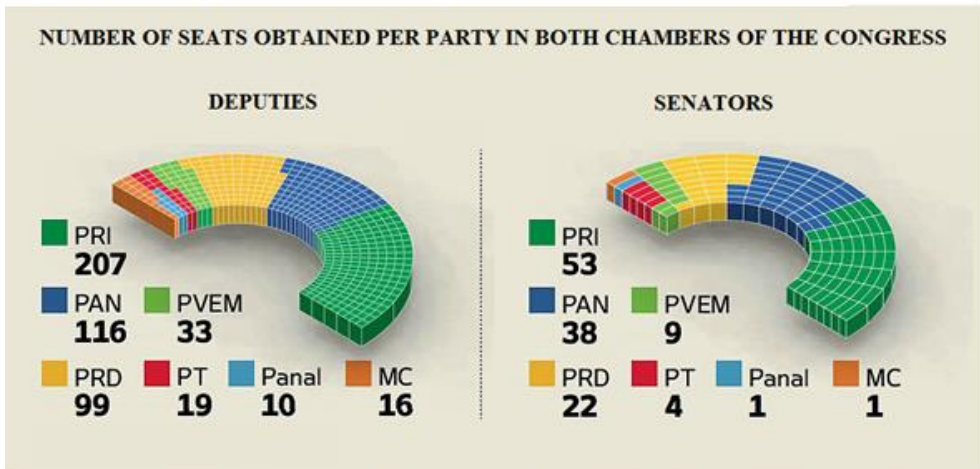
At the legislative level, the PRI obtained the 2 most numerous blocs at both chambers: 42% of the seats, however, its participation was reduced by 6% if compared to the previous legislature. This distribution forced the president to find support in other political forces. At the senate, the PRI went from having almost a quarter of the chamber to 40% of the senators. From this new composition, the PAN was again relegated to the third force and the left alliance, the PRD, PT and MC, got its largest representation ever in history. In the same year's election, the whole Congress was renewed: 500 deputies for a period of 3 years and 128 senators for 6 years. In these elections, the PRI again obtained a majority of the votes although it did not gain legislative majority. The PAN suffered a dramatic loss and was relegated to the third force in the Congress.

Map 1.2. State Governorships by Political Party from 2000 to 2016



The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

Figure 1.1 Composition of the Congress after the 2012 Elections



The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

Looking at the results above, it can be said that when it comes to political party competition, the scenario in Mexico is also concentrated in those three main parties and they have alternated in either first, second or third places in the last three presidential elections. This shows that voters have diversified their votes suggesting that the current electoral system is competitive though highly characterised by a moderate-exclusive pluralism of three main parties (Espinoza and Meyenberg, 2001:361). When it comes to political party competition, the scenario in Mexico is also concentrated in those three main parties and they have alternated in either first, second or third places in the last three presidential elections.³ Voters have diversified their votes suggesting the current electoral system is competitive though highly characterised by a moderate-exclusive pluralism of three main parties (Espinoza and Meyenberg, 2001:361).

Participation percentages in the last four federal elections have also seen a slight decrease: in 1994 turnout was 77.16%, in 2000, 63.97%, in 2006, 58.90 and in 2012 increased slightly to reach 63.34% (INE, 2015). This shows a general trend that the electorate has chosen to refrain from voting, and this decision can be a rational one based on the evaluation of implications of their vote (Verge, 2007; Günther, 2003). The margin of victory between the winner and the runner up has also decreased

³ In 2000, the PAN won followed by the PRI and the PRD; in 2006, the PAN won again followed by the PRD and the PRI, and in 2012 the PRI won, followed by the PRD and the PAN (INE, 2015).

considerably: in the elections of 1994 the margin of victory was of 23.49%; in 2000 was of 6.56%; in 2006 was of 0.58%, and in 2012 it was of 7.21% (INE, 2015). Elections have also become more competitive. This would show how Mexico was moving towards a competitive, moderate political party system of moderate pluralism (Lenk and Neumann, 1980; Ware, 1996; Nohlen, 1997).

1.1.2. Factors Contributing to the Return of the PRI

The return of the PRI did not come as a surprise, those following closely the success of the party at the state and local levels throughout the Fox and Calderón administrations, would have detected its underlying electoral strength. The PRI had also consistently maintained high public opinion ratings since the middle of Calderón's administration (Wood, 2012:98).

The election of the PRI in 2012 was largely due to the many disappointments of the Calderón administration, the joint challenges of the Mexican economy, public insecurity and an emerging nostalgia (Wood, 2012:97). When Calderón came to power in 2006, he faced an economic and political system desperately in need of reform, as well as a divided Mexican populace clamouring for greater social justice, employment and rising living standards. For many voters, it was Calderón's drug war and the PAN's failure to bring about significant economic growth and employment that turned them away from the victory in the 2012 elections (Wood, 2012:98).

If the PRI won in 2012, it was also largely in part due to weak competition. The PRD failed to attract independent and undecided voters by nominating a discredited candidate with a polarising reputation. The PRI ran a strong campaign, not only did it remain popular due to its governing experience, but it also was able to unify around a charismatic candidate with an apparent image of competence. Peña Nieto was positively regarded by a substantial majority of Mexicans. For this new election, the PRI had identified a new generation of pragmatic and sophisticated party members, and the PRI repeatedly proved to have the best-oiled political machine. Notably, the PRI still governed in more states and municipalities than all other opposition parties combined. The meagre achievements of the 2 PAN administrations – not enough economic growth but considerable violence, created greater openness to non-democratic alternatives and the disarray of the leftist parties aided the PRI's return to power.

1.2. The Peña Nieto Administration: 2012–2015

The candidacy of Enrique Peña Nieto was slowly and carefully crafted through constant media exposure and his convenient marriage with an actress, and through the alliances with the new PRI governors all over the country. The decision of López Obrador to start his own party would prove to be beneficial for the PRI: the PRD was left in limbo, which facilitated negotiations between 3 mainstream parties.

Peña Nieto's programme of government could be understood as presidentialism in coalition. Shortly after assuming power, and knowing the PRI lacked absolute majority in the Congress, Peña Nieto negotiated and approved a set of guidelines under the name of Pacto por México (Pact for Mexico) that would allow the federal government to reach agreements with the opposition in order to overcome the congressional impasse. As a result of this agreement between opposition forces and the federal government, they were able to negotiate and approve 11 structural reforms within the first 21 months of his administration that would give the PRI the legitimacy *post factum* it lacked (Olvera, 2016:289). Unfortunately, the parity of the peso with the dollar reached 20 pesos during the last years of his administration. The reduction in the price of oil, as well as a considerable reduction in public expenditure meant that the economic structural reforms that Peña Nieto had started at the beginning of his administration proved to be fruitless and gave people the impression that the country was undergoing a systematically negative economic dynamic. This considerably damaged the political image, reputation and legitimacy of the incumbent president.

Structural Reform	Main Objectives
Energy Reform	This reform aimed at laying the foundations for the modernisation of a key sector. It allowed private domestic and foreign, participation in exploration, oil production in deep seas and shale gas. Increased and made participation mechanisms more transparent.
Economic Reform	It established three strategic reforms: 1. A new institutional design that allowed for more efficient and effective implementation of the public antitrust policy. 2. Expansion of the list of possible antitrust behaviour 3. Improved legislative framework to deal with these issues.
Telecommunications Reform	It created an industry regulator able to label as “dominant” any company with more than 50 percent of the telecoms markets; raised the legal maximum shareholding of foreign investors to create effective and fair competition to favour cheaper access to such technology.
Fiscal Reform	Aimed at increasing tax revenues as well as making its process more effective by increasing tax collection and making spending more transparent. It also extended VAT to food and medicines, reduced income tax exemptions and simplified tax payments.
Financial Reform	Promoting competition in the financial sector; boosting and providing access to credit to promote economic development;
Labour Reform	New contracts were established: probationary and training, which facilitate access to the labour market by making it more flexible. Subcontracting or outsourcing would also be regulated.
Educational Reform	Professionalisation of teaching, the establishment of minimum standards for the operation of schools, the improvement of syllabuses and curricula, strengthening programs designed to improve facilities, the use of information and communications technology, as well as periodic evaluations of all the components of the education system. Reduce unequal access to education by strengthening programs for schools located in areas with high levels of marginalisation

National Criminal Procedure Reform	Prior to the issue of the National Criminal Procedure Code that was the key result of this reform, there were 34 different criminal procedure codes, 32 local, the federal and the military. Following the issuance of the National Criminal Procedure Code, a single criminal procedure model was created for nationwide application.
Appeal Law Reform	Expand the protection provided for citizens' rights, in order to make the administration of justice more expeditious and effective; simplify and modernize the legal process and strengthen the Judicial Branch of the Federation.
Political-Electoral Reform	<p>The president is empowered to form a coalition government with any of the political parties represented in Congress; the Senate will ratify all secretaries of state, with the exception of the Secretaries of National Defence and the Navy; citizens may reelect representatives and senators elected in the 2018 polls for up to four consecutive terms for deputies and two consecutive terms for senators; the maximum number of years in each of these posts is 12 years. Constitutional autonomy is the Attorney General's Office and the National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy. The start of the president's administration will be put forward to October 1 as of 2024.</p> <p>Amendments to electoral rules and institutions: The National Electoral Institute (INE) will replace the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) and will be able to organise elections at any level of government; ensuring gender equality in elections by obliging parties to give 50% of their legislators' candidacies to women. Strengthening independent candidacies, to ensure that citizens running for popularly elected posts by this means obtain public resources and media time. Facilitating the exercise of voting rights of Mexicans living abroad and guaranteeing the right of indigenous peoples and communities to elect representatives and to the exercise of their internal forms of governance.</p>
Transparency Reform	It expanded the list of individuals obliged to provide transparent information. Citizens are able to access the information available to political parties and trade unions, as well as autonomous bodies, trusts, and the Executive, Legislative and Judicial branches of the three levels of government.

The data used to create this chart was brought together by the author of this research using information available at: [http:// reformas.gob.mx/las-reformas](http://reformas.gob.mx/las-reformas)

Table 1.1. Enrique Peña's Eleven Structural Reforms

The initial success of the reforms led to domestic and international press to tout "Mexico's moment" and the rise of "the Aztec tiger." However, optimism was short-lived due to disappointing economic results but also due to the inability of Peña Nieto to curb the security crisis.

On June 7th, 2015 Mexico held elections in which all 500 seats in the Lower House of the Congress were up for election, as were 9 governorships, 17 state legislatures, and scores of local mayorships for a total of more than 2100 posts nationwide. The PRD had the most noticeable change in the 2015 elections by losing almost half of their deputies in the Congress. The 2015–2018 composition of the Congress meant it would no longer belong to either of the 3 big political parties: the PRI, PAN and the PRD, and the newly created MORENA would become the fifth political force just behind the PVEM (See table below).

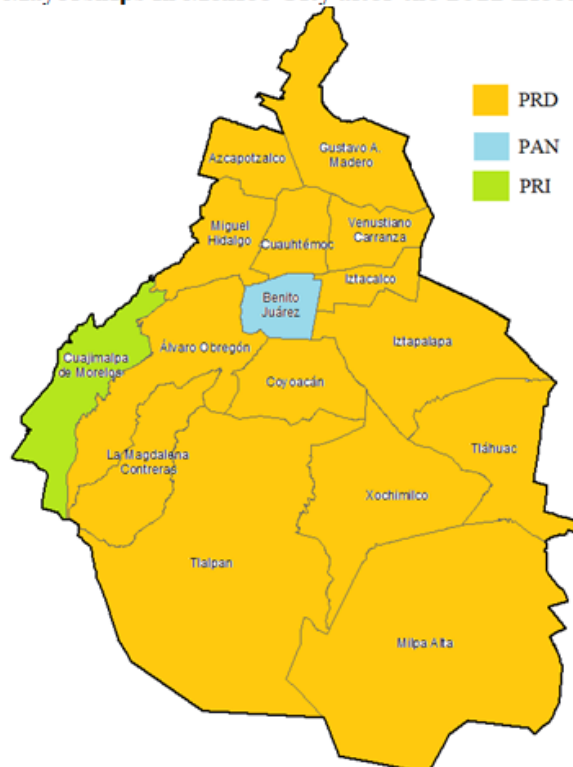
Table 1.2 PAN, PRI and PRD Percentages in Federal Elections for Relative Majority Deputies 1997-2015

	1997	2000	2003	2006	2009	2012	2015
PAN	26.6%	38.2%	31.8%	34.2%	29.6%	27.3%	21%
PRI	39.1%	36.9%	24%	28.9%	38.9%	31.5%	29.2%
PRD	25.7%	18.7%	18.2%	29.7%	12.9%	17.3%	10.9%
TOTAL	91.4%	93.8%	74%	92.8%	81.4%	76.1%	61.1%

The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

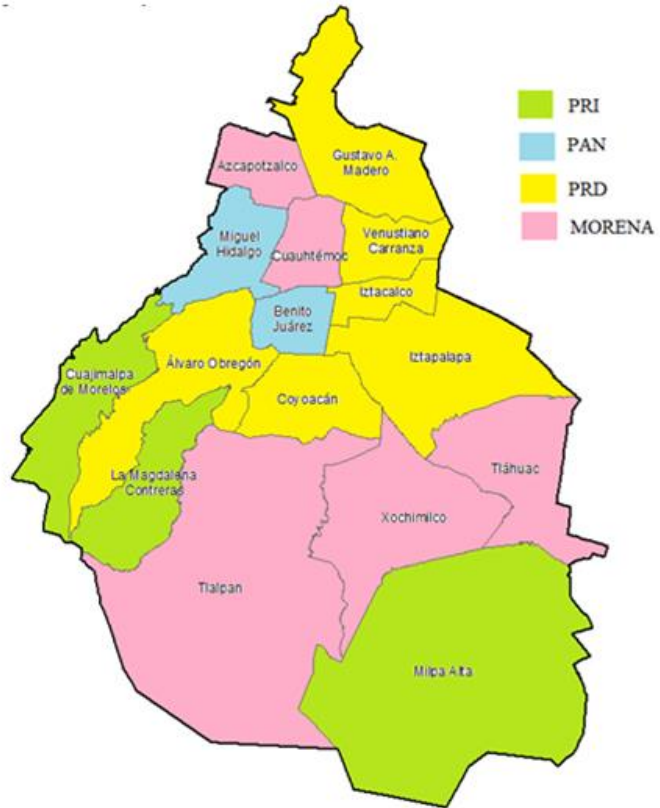
The most significant change after the Federal Elections of 2015 was the decline of control the three big political parties (Angulo and Bagatella, 2016:36). This meant that MORENA was on the rise, it secured 5 out of the 16 delegations up for grabs in Mexico City, including the key downtown delegation of Cuauhtémoc. Another important result of these elections was that an independent candidate won the governorship of Nuevo León, a crucial state in the north of the country thanks to the 2012 Constitutional Reform that opened electoral competition to independent candidates. Jaime “*El Bronco*” Rodríguez’ election was also a result of the people’s discontent for the way elections and political agendas were being structured. The PRI, however, still managed to keep the largest portion of seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

Map 1.3 Distribution of Mayorships in Mexico City after the 2012 Elections



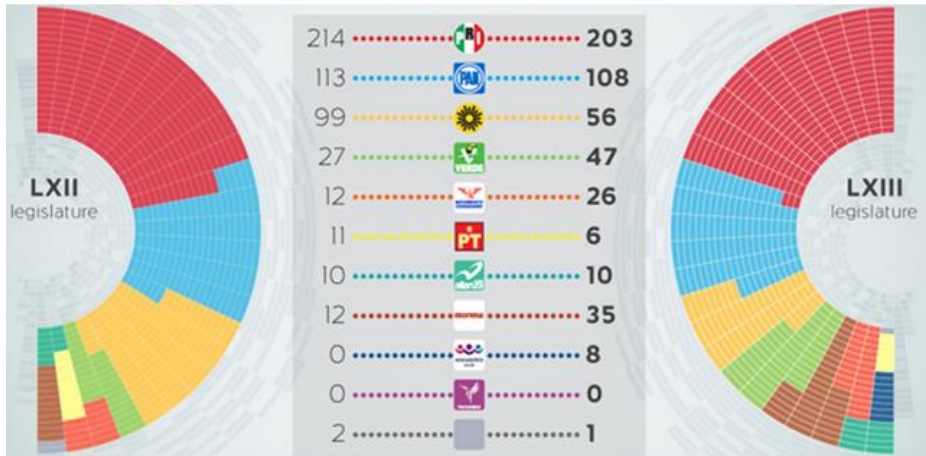
The map above was created by the author of this research using data provided by the Electoral Institute of Mexico City available at: <http://portal.iedf.org.mx/resultados2012/index.php>

Map 1.4 Distribution of Mayorships in Mexico City after the 2015 Elections



The map above was created by the author of this research using data provided by the Electoral Institute of Mexico City available at: <http://portal.iedf.org.mx/resultados2015/index.php>

Table 1.3 Comparison of the Chamber of Deputies by Political Parties in 2012 and 2015



The data of the charts above is available at:

http://www.e_veracruz.mx/nota2015_08_25/congreso/asi-llegaran-los-partidos

Map 1.5 Goverships per Political Party after the 2015 Local Elections



The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

The PRI suffered one of its major losses in the 2016 local elections: it lost 7 out of the 12 governorships to be elected and handed 4 of those 7 to opposition: Durango, Quintana Roo, Veracruz and Tamaulipas. Javier Corral was able to win back Chihuahua for the PAN, ruled by the PRI since 1998. Aguascalientes opted for an opposition government too and Puebla voted to remain the PAN. The defeat of the PRI was the largest in recent governorship elections. They had never lost and conceded so many states to the opposition. Since 2009, the map of electoral results had benefited the PRI greatly. In that year the PRI won 5 out of 6 governorships to be elected that were up for election in 2016, the PRI won 9 states out of 12 (See map below for the 2010 electoral results).

Map1.6 Governorships per Political Party after the 2010 State Elections



The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

The political scenario portrayed in the maps above showed Mexico was moving towards a more competitive system guaranteeing fair and equal electoral competition and showing a considerable degree of moderate pluralism with political parties having little ideological differences among them making governance easier (Lenke and Neumann, 1980; Ware, 1996; Nohlen, 1997). These results are also evidence of a more mature state of democracy in Mexico with increased political participation, the existence of numerous parties are no longer subjugated to the control of the hegemonic party, and the development of a more open, critical and participative civil society (Bassiouni, 1998; Sartori, 1976).

The data shown above confirms that the PRI does well in municipalities which are more rural and in which illiteracy is high. This conforms with the broad understanding that the PRI performs best where the population is uneducated and vulnerable because of its education, lack of access to urban-based media, and its economic marginality. In contrast, the PAN's best performances are in municipalities that are more urban and more industrialised. Again, this fits with past descriptions of the PAN as a party with a urban, middle-class base (Barraza and Bizberg 1991). The PRD's electoral base is less easy to describe. On the one hand, it has become a party of non-industrial areas. In this feature the PRD's base of support looks like the PRI's. On the other hand, however, the PRD does better in areas where the illiteracy rate is low, unlike the PRI and more like the PAN. This suggests that the PRI does well in rural areas where the manufacturing base is weak, and the population is less educated while the PRD does well in all areas where the manufacturing base is weak, but the population is better educated.

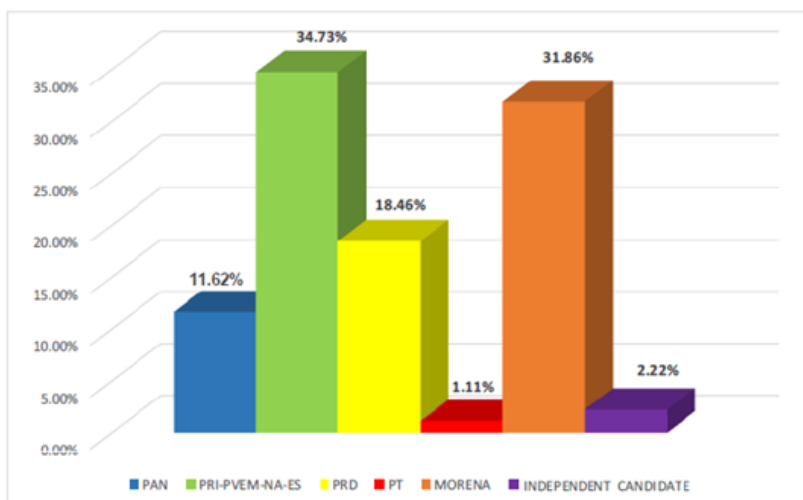
1.3. 2017 Elections

In 2017 four states in Mexico had elections: Coahuila and Nayarit elected a governor and renew their local Congress; Estado de Mexico, elected a governor; and Veracruz renewed all its local municipalities mayorships. Estado de México because of its size and significance for the PRI was the most important of all those states having electoral processes. The State of Mexico has always been considered key during electoral processes as it is the most populated state in the whole country with 17,363, 387 inhabitants, 14% of the total population of Mexico, and home to 11 million voters registered on the electoral roll. This state also has the largest share of the public budget and has the largest contribution to the country's GDP with 9%, just behind Mexico City, and therefore represents a major victory for any political party. It is also the only state apart from Coahuila, that has not experienced political party transition. The PRI has been the ruling political party in both states since 1925 and 1929, for 93 and 89 years respectively

The State of Mexico is also the most important PRI bastion. Its leadership carries a strategic, symbolic and practical importance that places the state as a primary objective for all political parties. For the PRI, the State of Mexico is the Crown Jewel, and Alfredo del Mazo's victory heralded the return of the Atlacomulco Group⁴ and assured the continuation of the rule of the party for the following 6 years.

⁴ This is an alleged political organization made up of powerful political figures within the PRI, who have repeatedly denied its existence. The group is alleged to be based in Atlacomulco, a city just an hour away from Toluca, the capital of the State of Mexico, and to have been very influential in the politics of Mexico State and the federal government. The group was considered to be one of the pillars of the PRI. the influence of the Grupo began to diminish in the 1980s

Table 1.4 State of Mexico 2017 Governorship Electoral Results per Political Party



The data contained in this chart was brought together by the author of this research using information from the Electoral Institute of the State of Mexico available at:
<http://www.ieem.org.mx/memoelec/estadistico/indexesta.html>

As it can be seen in the table above, the PRI 3 percentage-point margin of victory in the central State of Mexico was a close call for President Enrique Peña Nieto. The narrow defeat did not end the aspirations of Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, an early favourite for the 2018’s presidential race as the contender of MORENA.

Several factors characterised the last few years of Peña Nieto’s administration:

Political and Credibility Crisis: Enrique Peña Nieto was the worst ranked president in recent decades. Around 75% of the population disapproved of his performance. A contributing factor was the performance of PRI governors in other states. A contributing factor was the performance of PRI governors Javier Duarte in Veracruz, Rubén Moreira and his brother Humberto Moreira in Coahuila, and Roberto Borge in Quintana Roo accused of corruption; Tomás Yarrington in Tamaulipas, accused of links with the organised crime; and Manuel Velasco in Chiapas and Eruviel Ávila in the State of Mexico who left their states in a severe crisis of ungovernability and with unprecedented high levels of violence. All of the above, generalised the opinion among society that the PRI would drag the country into yet another political crisis.

with the waning of the PRI. The Grupo Atlacomulco has operated mostly to get its members into high positions in both the state and federal governments.

Legitimacy Crisis: In 2014 the disappearance of 43 students from the rural school for teachers Isidro Burgos of Ayotzinapa in Guerrero would become a thorny issue during Peña Nieto's administration. It became the start of the downfall of his administration and showed the severe human rights crisis in Mexico.

Economic crisis and the Trump Effect: The parity of the peso with the dollar reached 20 pesos during the last years of his administration. The reduction in the price of oil, as well as a considerable reduction in public expenditure meant the economic structural reforms of Peña Nieto were fruitless and gave people the impression the country was undergoing a negative economic dynamic. By the end of his term there were 62 million people earning below living wage, 1 million and a half more than by the start of his presidency. (CONEVAL, 2018) By the end of 2017 debt reached 10.88 billion, a 41% increase from 2012 to 2017 (FUNDAR, 2018). This damaged the political image, reputation and legitimacy of the president.

Social Discontent and anti-systemic options: The factors above led society to believe traditional, mainstream political parties would no longer provide a credible answer. In October 2017, the Pew Research Centre carried out a survey among 38 countries to find out the support for representative democracy. In the case of Mexico, the results showed public opinion less engaged with representative democracy, deeply unsatisfied with democratic performance, and having low trust in their government. This explains the sudden rise in the popularity of a presidential candidate that had failed to win the last two presidential elections.

The election of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in 2018 amounted to a profound rejection of the establishment. His presidency might resemble the last one: Enrique Peña campaigned on a platform of fulfilling pledges, promised an extensive reform package on everything from education to energy policy – and failed to deliver visible results. It is still too early to say whether his administration will end up being a repeat of previous ones. Another, and more likely possibility, is that we see the rise of the state level machines that have only weak linkages to national party structures. This would resemble the situation in the 1920s (that ironically gave rise to the PRI) and could produce divided and dysfunctional national legislatures and a retrenchment of local political machinery. Reinforcing the idea, Mexico, despite showing a more competitive electoral system, could be moving towards the typology of polarised pluralism or atomisation (Lenk and Neumann, 1980; Nohlen, 1997).

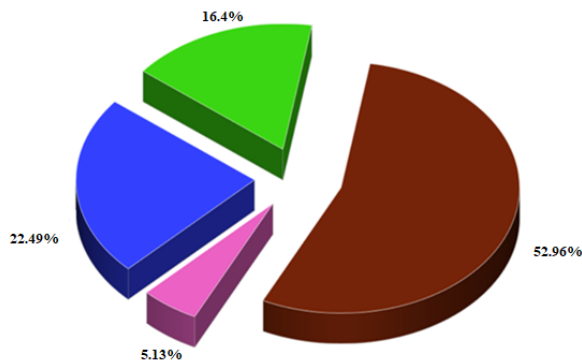
1.4. The 2018 National Elections

Last July's 1st, 2018 general elections in Mexico were historical for many reasons. First, MORENA's victory gave Mexico its first left-leaning government in democratic history. Second, the 30% López Obrador had over the second-place candidate, Ricardo Anaya, is the largest victory margin since the 1982 presidential elections when Miguel de la Madrid won by 55%. Third, this election could be the first step forward towards a new party system where the once all-mighty PRI loses relevance, the PAN is deeply fractured, the PRD loses its left-wing monopoly, and MORENA becomes the primary political force in the Congress.⁵ (See Table below)

López Obrador will be the first president in the post 2000 transition to have an absolute majority in the Congress. Out of 9 states up for election, he won 5, and obtained a majority in the 19 out of the 27 congresses at local level were also up for grabs (Bravo, 2018). At the same time, the opposition had never seemed so weak. The PAN and the PRI obtained their lowest results since 2000. In the Deputy Chamber, the PAN controls only 17% of it, and the PRI went down from 41% to 11%. The PAN is still the second force in the Senate, but with less than half the seats that those of MORENA.

Table 1.5 2018 Mexico's Presidential Elections Results per Candidate and Political Party

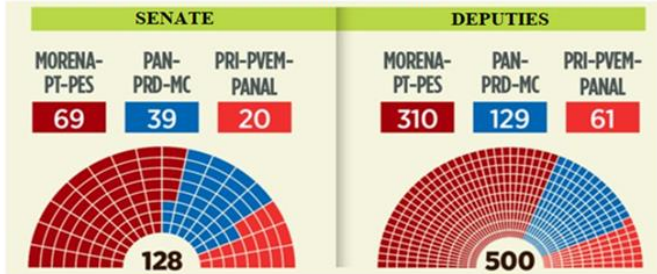
■ Ricardo Anaya (PAN/PRD/MC) ■ José Antonio Meade (PRI/PVEM/NA) ■ López Obrador (MORENA/PES/PT)
 ■ Jaime Rodríguez (Independent)



The chart above was created by the author of this research using information from the National Electoral Institute of Mexico, available at: <https://prep2018.ine.mx>

⁵ This composition of the Congress contrasts sharply with the last Legislature elected during the 2012 presidential elections where the number of representatives per political party were as follows: For the Senate: PAN, 38; PRI, 52; PRD, 22; PT, 6; PVEM, 9; and NA, 1; for a total of 128 senators. In the Deputy chamber: PAN, 114; PRI, 212; PRD, 104; PVEM, 29; PT, 15; MC, 16; and NA, 10; for a total of 500 deputies. Please see <http://www.congreso.gob.mx/> for a more detailed breakdown of the composition of the congress.

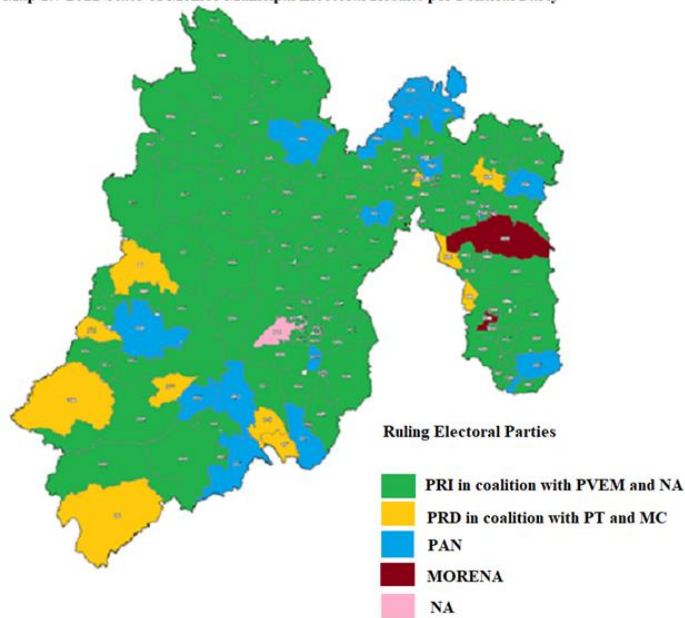
Table 1.6 2018 Composition of the National Congress by Political Party



The chart above was created by the author of this research using information from the National Electoral Institute of Mexico available at: <https://prep2018.ine.mx/#/presidencia/nacional/1/1/1/1>

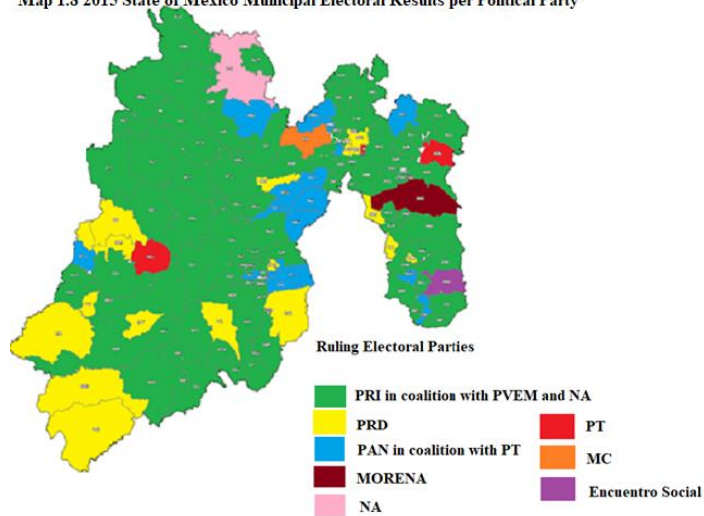
The results of these elections meant for the first time in 24 years, the president will have a legislative majority: His main congressional opposition will come from the coalition led by the PAN, but its capacity to spoil the government’s agenda will be limited by having only 140 and 38 seats in the 2 Chambers. As can be seen in the maps below, the most shocking result for the PRI was in the State of Mexico where MORENA won control of the capital, Toluca, as well as 8 municipalities that form part of the greater Mexico City’s Metropolitan Area. Atlacomulco, the birthplace of Enrique Peña Nieto, and long considered a political cradle of other noted PRI politicians also fell into MORENA’s hands.

Map 1.7 2012 State of Mexico Municipal Electoral Results per Political Party



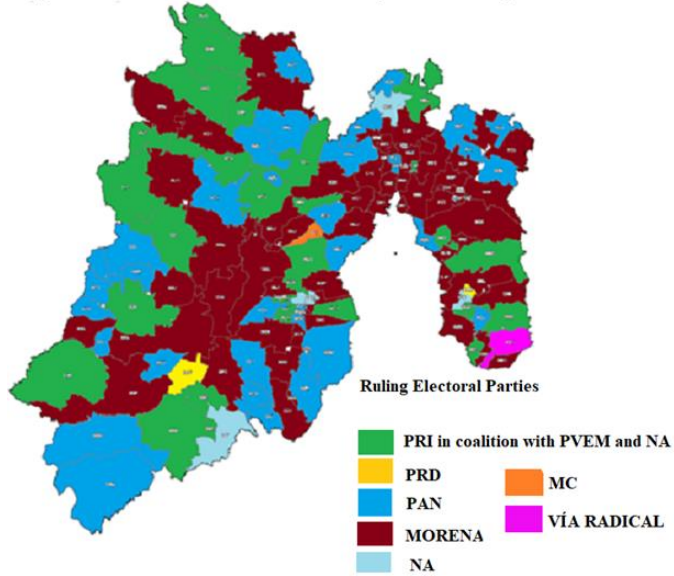
The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

Map 1.8 2015 State of Mexico Municipal Electoral Results per Political Party



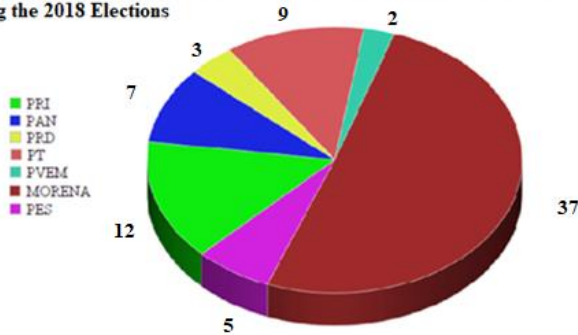
The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

Map 1.9 2018 State of Mexico Electoral Results per Political Party



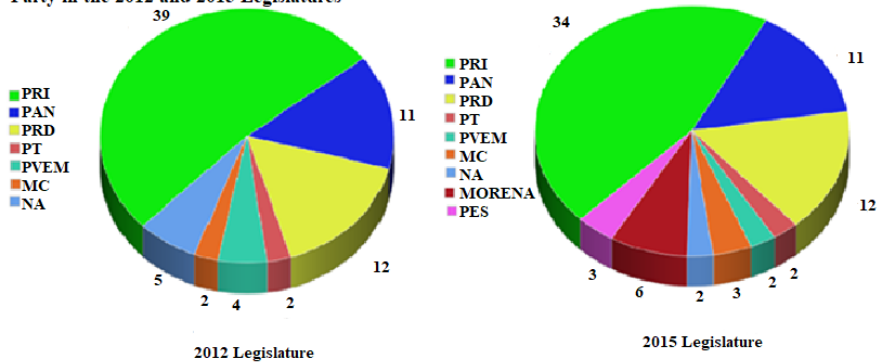
The data contained in this map was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

Table 1.7 Number of Deputies per Political Party in the Local Congress of the State of Mexico following the 2018 Elections



The data contained in the chart was brought together by the author of this research, using the information publicly available of the National Electoral Institute of Mexico. (IFE)

Table 1.8 State of Mexico Deputy Chamber Distribution by Number of Representatives per Political Party in the 2012 and 2015 Legislatures



The data contained in these charts was brought together by the author of this research using information available from the National Electoral Institute of Mexico (IFE)

These elections meant PRI was now a weakened third force whose influence at federal and local levels have been well and truly surpassed by MORENA. Without support from state and local level victories, it will be hard for the PRI to build a winning campaign for the next electoral process. The 1st of July results limit the party’s access to state and local support, and they will not be able to move their political agenda in the Congress alone. These results are troubling for the PRD in particular: the party stepped down to the national fourth place.

The great winner from this electoral process is undoubtedly MORENA. López Obrador, under the banner of a newly nascent party defeated long-established parties that had for decades secured complex webs of patronage. (Lansberg, 2018). They not only won the presidency, but they did so in a dominant way by winning 53% of the vote. This landslide victory is complemented with a majority in the Congress. López Obrador will have an enormous amount of political power.

Another important factor in the sudden success of MORENA was the fact that the nominal list increased by ten million in 6 years, from 2012 to 2018. These elections saw the largest percentage of voters under the age of 39. Out of 89 million Mexicans eligible to vote, 44.5 million falls within that range. 12 million were also able to vote for the first time. This composition of the Mexican electorate had a significant impact on the results. There is a widespread feeling of disenchantment among the youngest sector of the Mexican electorate. They show a significant level of political disaffection towards political organisations, parties and institutions. Electoral abstentionism in the last three presidential elections (2000, 2006, 2012) has been the norm. From the beginning of his campaign, López Obrador had been perceived as the only truly anti-establishment candidate by the youngest section of the electorate. The emergence of anti-

establishment, anti-system and even fringe leaders can be explained by the fall in support for democracy in Mexico; such candidates have capitalised on this collective discontent to gain popularity.

Despite this overwhelming victory, it is relevant to ask if success can be sustained or if the party will deflate once the leader, López Obrador, steps away from the political scene. MORENA is a party created by López Obrador to present himself as a presidential candidate once the PRD moved away from him, and MORENA candidates at local and state levels rely heavily on him. With this mechanism, the party must be able to expand the success to other instances where the leader is not directly involved. The next 6 years will be key for the survival of the party. Either López Obrador's presidency will be a success or the support they got from voters in 2018 will switch to whatever option seems better when the next election comes around.

1.5. 2018–2024 Administration: Andrés Manuel López Obrador

López Obrador remains a cipher to many. Bringing on board the traditional far-left fringe PT with the largest socially conservative religious PES. This menagerie of incongruous interests and outlooks was able to remain cohesive while in opposition, united against an establishment they abhorred in common. MORENA support flows, in a large part, from citizens' sense of democratic failure. López Obrador has not escaped the charge of playing politics. How it might fare now that it has become the establishment remains to be seen. López Obrador's needs to be able to see that his pursuit to defeat Mexico's corrupt establishment ended when he became president and he became the establishment he long criticised. He needs to be careful that the multitude of promises he pledged to fulfil once in power, do not end up just as the empty promises of previous administrations. He could end up becoming an administration with a pretentious rhetoric and no coherent ideology or public policy (Lansberg, 2018).

The current honeymoon for López Obrador will not last his entire administration, as elections will be held for the Chamber of Deputies in 3 years. If the Mexican Congress passes unpopular policies, voters will have an early chance to change the dynamics. It is unlikely the administration of López Obrador will have a radical impact on policy, but the reconfiguration of the party system following the election will have a radical impact on the country's politics. López Obrador also faces a serious dilemma: to create a democratic state based upon strong and functional political institutions, or to perpetuate the authoritarian use of power. He needs to go beyond himself to prevent becoming a victim of his own system and end up creating a replica of the hegemonic presidentialism that took decades to dismantle. He needs to create institutions that truly reflect the rule of law, his personal example is not enough anymore. If he fails to build a

democratic state, there will be a generalised feeling of disenchantment among the population. López Obrador must be careful not to isolate himself. This is what destroyed and tainted the past administration of Peña Nieto. Peña ruled in coalition with the opposition, the PRD and the PAN, however he was never close to civil society. López Obrador could make the same mistake.

Conclusions

This paper looked the current state of democracy in Mexico is following the regime change. López Obrador's overwhelming victory in 2018 could also become a curse rather than a blessing, one determinant factor to shape any government is the relationship it builds with those in opposition. Opposition enriches public deliberation and help promote plurality as well as provide a critical view. Also, if the opposition can restrict the ample freedom of management that a government has, it can force it to become a more inclusive and shared decision-making process (Bravo, 2018).

Mexican democracy has yet to have a true opposition that works effectively as a balance of power and helps build a new institutional framework. The incoming administration of López Obrador, will lead a government with virtually no opposition, meaning he will rule without checks and balances.

López Obrador's administration could face 3 risks: he could mistake his strength and legitimacy for infallibility, and become arrogant; he could wear off too quickly as he will be unable to provide significant results in the short-term or medium-term, and this would leave the Mexican electorate with no real option to turn to but a truly anti-system Mexico could slip back from being a moderate pluralist political party system to a polarised pluralism system characterised by a fragmented system with dissimilar political ideas; or the atomisation of political parties, characterised by a high degree of fragmentation. Both systems would make governance of the country almost impossible.

To prevent these dangers, López Obrador would need to recognise the legitimacy of his opponents, admit the validity of alternative opinions, and stop stigmatising those who disagree with or criticise him. López Obrador needs an opposition that sets his limits and demands efficiency. This is the strongest mandate given to any leader and political party since the emergence of multi-party system democracy in Mexico in 2000 (Aguilar, 2018). This radical change in government orientation, combined with the reduction of party pluralism in the Congress, spells the foundation of a new political hegemony in Mexico (Aguilar, 2018).

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