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## RETURNING TO THE PAST OR ENTERING A NEW PHASE OF TRANSITION?

### THE PRI WINS THE MEXICAN PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS<sup>1</sup>

*Stefan Jost*

The 1<sup>st</sup> of July 2012 was the big election day, the Mexican “Super Sunday”. More politicians and officials were elected than on any other day in Mexico’s history. 7,490 candidates stood for 2,127 positions and seats. In addition to the President, the people also had the opportunity to elect members of Congress (Senate: 128 seats and Chamber of Deputies: 500 seats); the governors of six states and of the capital, Mexico City; members of the state congresses in 14 federal states (580 members) and 912 mayors. While the results at state and municipal level are of course important for the balance of power within the country, it was the presidential and congressional elections that were the focus of attention.

Election researchers had certainly done their homework, at least as far as the final position of the various candidates is concerned. Polls had been predicting for months that the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and its candidate, Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN),<sup>2</sup> a former state deputy and governor of Mexico state, would form the next government. At various times, Peña Nieto’s support in the polls was as high as 46 per cent. There is no second round of voting in Mexico and a simple majority is sufficient, so there were no big surprises about the outcome of the presidential election. After playing the unfamiliar role of opposition party for 12 years, the PRI, the “Institutional Revolutionary Party”,

1 | The author would like to thank Marie Ciobanu and Martin Friedek for their help in compiling data.

2 | A list of acronyms can be found at the end of this article.

was finally back in power. These elections represent a key moment in the ongoing Mexican process of transition.

### THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN

The PRI had been in power since 1929 and had vast experience in the implementation and systematic expansion of structures and systems of authoritarian government and the hegemonic exercise of power – the Peruvian author and Nobel Prize winner Vargas Llosa once spoke of a “perfect dictatorship”. Following 71 years of uninterrupted rule, the party was finally toppled from power in 2000, when Vicente Fox, the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN) candidate, won the presidential election. In 2006 the PAN was able to repeat this success with Felipe Calderón, albeit with a very narrow and controversial win over second-placed Andrés Manuel López Obrador, also known as AMLO, the candidate from the Movimiento Progresista left-wing alliance. The key question was whether the PAN would be able to continue with the transition it had started when it was elected in 2000, or whether this transition would enter a new, possibly even backward-looking phase, if the PRI were to win.

The election campaign went off without any particular high points. There was an obvious mood for change in the country and this was the backdrop against which the debates and discussions between the various candidates played out. The polls had been predicting the winner for months, albeit with some differences in percentages and leads over the other candidates. Nobody could have been in any real doubt that the winner would be Enrique Peña Nieto, who had been running an ongoing presidential election campaign as the preferred candidate of the PRI since leaving his job as governor of Mexico State in 2011.

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The dinosaur authoritarian PRI party, one of the “most corrupt organisations in the Western world”,<sup>3</sup> saw in EPN the opportunity to present itself as the young, fresh, and totally revamped party for a modern Mexico. He was young, good-looking and popular with the tabloids as a result of

3 | Sebastian Schoepp, “Morden in Mexico”, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 10 Oct 2011.

his marriage to a well-known former telenovela actress. At the same time, the party was keen to divert attention away from the fact that the power structures and old-boy networks that had been in place for decades in the old PRI might still exist today – at national level, but particularly at state level, in the shape of governors and traditional power cartels.

Only the results that might be achieved by the other two rival candidates from the PAN and PRD promised to create any real sense of interest, while the Nueva Alianza candidate, Gabriel Quadri de la Torre, played no part from the very beginning. While the PRI stood for election in a coalition with the green Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico (PVEM) and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) formed a left-wing alliance Movimiento Progresista with the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC), the PAN and its candidate Josefina Vázquez Mota (“Josefina”) entered the race without any coalition partners. The former member of Congress and respected minister under Fox and Calderón lay in second place for a considerable length of time, followed by López Obrador.

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However, it was clear that Josefina’s election campaign never really got going. The PAN’s hopes of repeating the success of the 2006 presidential election campaign, in which its candidate Felipe Calderón was able to overturn AMLO’s significant lead in the polls, were soon to be dashed. Its figures in the polls were stagnant at best, and as a result, the PAN candidate gradually came to be seen less and less as a serious challenger to Peña Nieto. On the other hand, many of those who wanted to prevent a return of the PRI started to look towards López Obrador as a potential counterweight.

Another development that would shake up what appeared to be very stable voter intention patterns was the #YoSoy132 movement. This protest movement, predominantly supported by young people, grew up after Peña Nieto spoke at the Ibero-American University. The PRI candidate felt that he had been asked highly critical questions and then later tried, with the help of friendly media, to present the students as little more than politicised hooligans. 131

students then admitted to being amongst his critics, but produced their student ID cards to show that they were indeed students, and not trouble-makers who had been manipulated by the PRI's opponents. This led to a nationwide solidarity campaign under the banner of "I am 132". This was followed by demonstrations in many cities throughout the country, in which thousands of young people took part. They demonstrated against the PRI's return to power and against the role of the media, especially Televisa.

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This movement contributed in part to a fall in Peña Nieto's ratings in the polls and helped López Obrador to move up to second place. López Obrador had only narrowly lost to Calderón, the PAN candidate, in the 2006 presidential elections. He had refused to accept the election results and he and his supporters occupied the centre of Mexico City in protest. In the 2012 elections, he tried to distance himself from this legacy with a clear display of moderation, even going as far as to call for a "loving republic" (*república amorosa*). This new-found moderation on the part of López Obrador came as a surprise to most people and had two fundamental effects, which to a certain extent cancelled each other out during the course of the election campaign. His more radical supporters were clearly disappointed by his attempts to come across as warm and fuzzy, but he also became potentially more acceptable to others, at least in some areas. However, his limited popularity amongst the electorate was mainly due to the fact that many people found him too populist, too fundamentalist, too leftist, and most of all too unpredictable.

Against the background of this situation just a few weeks before the election and in the face of growing anti-PRI feeling because of the #YoSoy132 movement, the question of who could stop the PRI was gaining renewed importance. At this point the idea of a *voto útil* (useful vote) became a central plank of election campaign strategies, and basically amounted to calling on people to opt for tactical voting for the greater good, irrespective of ideological or party considerations. While experience has shown that a *voto útil* can work in favour of one party or person, in this presidential election it actually had a double effect. It worked in López

Obrador's favour because of all the voters who sought to prevent the PRI from returning to power. These included those voters who "don't (believe) in the new PRI, because many of their old practices, such as corporatism, privileges for certain social groups, buying of votes and other similar phenomena, are still in evidence in many PRI-run states today, and also because many former PRI governors had close links to organised crime and were responsible for unacceptable levels of debt in the states concerned".<sup>4</sup> But the *voto útil* also worked in the PRI's favour because of those voters who wanted to keep López Obrador from getting into power and because the old Latin American saying: "más vale lo malo conocido que lo bueno por conocer" (than the good thing you don't know) favoured the PRI as being the old state party that had been around for years.

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The PAN could no longer be considered a serious alternative and was fighting on two fronts. No strategic secret recipe could save the party, even if one had actually existed and even if the party had been willing and in a position to work together to implement it. Another problem for the PAN had been the internal party nomination process for the presidential candidature. In contrast to the PRI and the PRD, which had been able to settle any differences on their choice of respective candidates in good time and mostly behind closed doors, the PAN was forced to have an internal primary election. While Josefina Vázquez Mota came out of the primary as the clear winner (with 54 per cent), there were two obvious losers, including President Calderón's favourite candidate, his former finance minister Cordero (38 per cent) and Santiago Creel (6 per cent). This process proved to be an insurmountable burden as far as the election campaign was concerned, as the PAN was only in a position to present its candidate to the public in February 2012, just four months before the presidential elections. By then, the PRI and the PRD had already been campaigning for some time.

But what this internal party wrangling really showed was that the PAN was not in a position to properly close ranks for the election. Initially the only real sign of division was

4 | Rocío Bravo Salazar, "Vor den Wahlen in Mexiko: Rückkehr der PRI an die Macht?", *Ibero-Analysen*, Berlin, Vol. 24, 19.

a somewhat passive – but obvious to the public at large – attitude of non-acceptance towards Vázquez Mota on the part of Calderón and some of the party, while the candidate herself found her hands tied on certain key staffing issues due to the president's influence. Vázquez Mota's speech at party headquarters on election night spoke volumes, especially in terms of what she chose not to say and whom she failed to thank. Her demand for everybody to think very carefully about what they had or had not done was clearly aimed at some very specific people, above all at President Calderón.

As the election campaign entered its final phase, the PAN had to endure two very public blows. The first was when the former party leader decided to align himself with the PRI. He had been expelled from the party some time earlier after massive internal disagreements and had formed his own movement (*Volver a empezar*), which was originally intended to serve as an external stimulus to help rejuvenate the PAN and Mexican politics generally. The second blow came shortly afterwards with the much more symbolically damaging defection of the first PAN state president Vicente Fox, who declared that he was going to support the "leaders in the polls", which, on the basis that the polls had hardly changed in months, could only have meant Peña Nieto and his party. In doing so, he effectively stabbed his own party and their candidate in the back. It is highly likely that it was this decision by Fox that would lead to the split between the party and its first former president. In contrast to these specific problems being faced by the PAN and PRD, the PRI found itself in a relatively comfortable position. At the height of this battle, Peña Nieto pursued the strategy of simply making sure that he made no mistakes, and in this he was largely successful.

What really characterised these elections, however, was the clear mood for change that had remained constant over many months. This desire for change can be traced back to several interlinked causes. After twelve years of PAN government, there was clearly a certain amount of weariness creeping in. Calderón's time in power, with its agenda dominated by the "war on drugs", resulting in thousands dead, and by security issues, had clearly also left its mark. In this

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respect, there is no doubt that the Calderón government and the PAN in general suffered from a certain amount of punishment voting (*voto castigo*) during the election. Interestingly, however, the PAN was also able to benefit in certain areas where the security situation is particularly difficult, so it would be wrong to deduce that the election results were simply a reaction against the Calderón government's strategy on drug and security issues.

For example, Vázquez Mota achieved above-average results in Nuevo León, Tamaulipas and Veracruz compared to her showing nationwide and actually finished ahead of the PRI in all three states, albeit with a very slim margin in Veracruz. In Nuevo León she got 39.79 per cent of the vote (PRI: 33.20 per cent), 41.74 per cent in Tamaulipas (PRI: 34.35 per cent) and 33.63 per cent in Veracruz (PRI: 33.58 per cent). The PAN also did very well in these three PRI-run states in the congressional elections. There were other remarkable individual results on the day too, such as the chamber of deputies election in Tamaulipas, where the PAN turned the previous balance of power on its head (PAN: 62 per cent, compared to 8 per cent in 2009, PRI: 38 per cent, compared to 92 per cent in 2009), or the state congressional election in Nuevo León, in which the PAN beat the PRI by a significant margin. It is also worth mentioning the PAN victories in cities with major problems such as Monterrey and Juárez, to name just two examples.

In general, however, it was clear that the PAN had used up the moral capital that it had gained after presenting itself as a credible alternative in 2000 and defeating the PRI. There was a widespread feeling in the country that the parties were interchangeable, which made it easier for the PRI to win sufficient votes again. The problem for the PAN was that it had no effective way of combating the very desire for change it had had a substantial hand in creating. This is also partly due to a not insignificant level of disappointment experienced by its own supporters about its time in government. While people were prepared to make allowances for Vicente Fox during the first transition government, they expected Calderón, a true party man, to really stamp PAN's identity on the government's work. They ended up being disappointed in many key areas.

## THE ELECTION RESULTS

As expected, there were few surprises on election night. The PRI candidate was the victor, and the margins between the candidates were significant. After adopting a fairly measured tone on election night, saying that he would wait for the full results and then decide what to do, López Obrador announced the following day that he would challenge the election results through the courts on account of electoral fraud and the fact that constitutionally defined equal opportunities had not been observed during the election. This challenge, initially made to the Federal Election Institute and then to the Federal Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF), was based on several arguments: the PRI had exceeded the maximum allowed expenditure during the campaign; the PRI had bought huge numbers of votes; the PRI had made agreements with various media, including the Televisa TV company, to promote PRI candidates and to manipulate polling results.

On 30 August Mexico's Federal Electoral Tribunal rejected the more than 800 complaints submitted by the Movimiento Progresista, in language that in many instances could only be described as terse. The finality and all-encompassing nature of the Tribunal's decision surprised many, bearing in mind all the debates that had taken place and the information about processes and procedures that had been circulating openly in the run-up to the election. However, it is difficult to argue that each individual violation, or even several violations, should necessarily result in the elections being deemed null and void. And this is even more the case when it is a question of proving that the contested procedures were responsible for the difference of around 3.3 million votes between Peña Nieto and López Obrador.

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However, this "lock, stock and barrel" rejection of the complaints was met with fierce criticism in the press. They were especially critical of the superficial manner in which the complaints were handled using the strictest interpretation of legal standards, without a detailed investigation of the individual accusations. The daily paper *La Jornada* described the judgement as "highly damaging to the



country's political institutionalism".<sup>5</sup> The weekly *Proceso* characterised the court's decision as "a convenient and legalistic judgement, and what is worse, one biased towards the interests of the inner circle". The judges had decided to "sit on the fence and waive their right to have the individual violations examined in detail". *Proceso* spoke of "a missed opportunity to use the constitution as a reference point".<sup>6</sup> The decision created a sense of discomfort and left a bad taste in people's mouths, neatly summarised by the daily newspaper *El Universal*: "We are left with three potential alternatives (interpretations): 1. The PRI committed the 'perfect crime'. 2. The left has no idea how to provide evidence or to argue their point. 3. The legal system needs more 'bite' and – once again – the electoral law system needs reforming".<sup>7</sup>

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The decision by the Federal Electoral Tribunal was also criticised delaying until January before a ruling was made on whether the parties had violated the rules of funding, with the result that this basic information was not available to the court. One of the PAN's suggested reforms proposed that the elections be rerun in the event of violations of the rules of funding. But it remains to be seen whether in reality these changes and their monitoring by the judiciary would actually result in the parties running their campaigns in a way that conforms to the law.

Even if, at various different levels, Mexico has taken another important step towards the acceptance of political change with these elections, the media's mantra-like repetition of how impressive the losing politicians were in accepting their defeat demonstrates how the Mexicans themselves still believe their democracy is very fragile.

5 | Cf. *La Jornada*, 31 Aug 2012, 2.

6 | Cf. *Proceso*, 2 Sep 2012, No. 1870, 9.

7 | Cf. *El Universal*, 31 Aug 2012, A 11.

Table 1

**Results of the presidential elections  
(2006 and 2012 in per cent)<sup>8</sup>**

<b>Party (candidate)</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>2012</b>
PRI-PVEM (Roberto Madrazo – 2006) (Enrique Peña Nieto – 2012)	22.27	38.21 (19,158,592 votes)
PAN (Felipe Calderón – 2006) (Josefina Vázquez Mota – 2012)	35.89	25.41 (12,729,400 votes)
PRD-PT-MC (Andrés Manuel López Obrador 2006 und 2012)	35.31	31.59 (15,848,827 votes)
Nueva Alianza (Roberto Campa – 2006) (Quadri de la Torre – 2012)	0.96	2.29 (1,142,954 votes)
PASC (Partido Alternativa Socialdemocrata y Campesina) (Patricia Mercado – nur 2006)	2.7	—

Source: [http://ife.org.mx/documentos/proceso\\_2011-2012/resultados.html](http://ife.org.mx/documentos/proceso_2011-2012/resultados.html) (accessed 27 Sep 2012).

The two chambers of Mexico's Congress have different legislative periods. The Senate is elected for six years, while the Chamber of Deputies is elected for three. Re-election is not permitted in Mexico, or at least immediate re-election to the same position, though in theory re-election to another post or seat is possible. As a result there is a significant number of politicians who are constantly switching between positions and seats.

8 | The tables included in this article have been compiled from data taken from the IFE or the respective regional electoral institutes and corresponding publications in newspapers.

Table 2  
**Results of the congressional elections (Senate and Chamber of Deputies) 2006, 2009 and 2012<sup>9</sup>**

	<b>2009 Deputies</b>	<b>2006 Senators</b>	<b>2012 Deputies</b>	<b>Senators</b>
PAN	142	50	114	38
PRI	242	33	208	52
PVEM	22	7	33	9
PRD	63	24	100	22
PT	14	5	19	4
MC	6	5	16	2
Nueva Alianza	8	—	10	1
Independents	3	4	—	—
<b>Total</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>128</b>

Source: [http://ife.org.mx/documentos/proceso\\_2011-2012/resultados.html](http://ife.org.mx/documentos/proceso_2011-2012/resultados.html) (accessed 27 Sep 2012).

Table 3  
**Elections for state governor 2006 and 2012**

<b>State</b>	<b>Winning party 2006 in per cent</b>	<b>Winning party 2012 in per cent</b>
Chiapas	PRD-PT-Convergencia (46.98)	PRI-PVEM-NA (67.14)
Distrito Federal	PRD-PT-MC (46.37)	PRD-PT-MC (63.55)
Guanajuato	PAN-NA (61.86)	PAN-NA (48.32)
Jalisco	PAN (45.19)	PRI-PVEM (38.64)
Morelos	PAN (35.14)	PRD-PT-MC (43.29)
Tabasco	PRI (51.77)	PRD-PT-MC (63.55 51.43)
Yucatán	PRI-PVEM (49.92)	PRI-PVEM-PSD (50.82)

9 | Even though there were two electoral alliances (PRI-PVEM and PRD-PT-MC), the seats of each individual party are shown separately. As Mexican electoral law for the Congress is extremely complex, no detail has been given about the distribution of constituency seats, electoral list seats and seats arising from proportional representation.

The elections of governors for a six-year term in 6 of the 32 states and the Mexico City FD resulted in the PAN losing two of the three states it had previously held: Jalisco and Morelos. Jalisco was a particularly bitter blow, as the PAN had ruled the state for 18 years, and it was considered to be a PAN stronghold. While it was able to hold on to Guanajuato, it still lost almost 15 per cent of the votes there. The PRD and PRI lost one and two states respectively. As a result, the division of power at state level for the first years of the new PRI government will be as follows:

Table 4

**Division of power in the states (governors)**

Party	States	Elections 2013
PRI	20	State congressional and local elections in ten states
PAN	6	Gubernatorial election in one state and state congressional and local elections in two states
PRD	4	No elections
PVEM	1	No elections
MC	1	State congressional and local elections

So once again the PRI has a dominant position in the federal states. Even though the number of "local deputies", i.e. members of the state congress, has relatively little influence on the power of the state governor, it is still worth having a brief look at the changes in the state congresses between 2009 and 2012. At this level we can see a somewhat different division of power, which is in large part due to the existence of a significant number of state-specific coalitions.

Table 5  
**Results of the state congressional elections<sup>10</sup>**

State	Winning party/ seats 2009	Second-placed party/seats 2009	Winning party/ seats 2012	Second-placed party/seats 2012
Campeche	PRI / 20	PAN / 14	PRI / 20 *	PAN / 1 *
Chiapas	PRI / 12	PAN / 9	PRI-PVEM / 10	PVEM / 9
Colima	PRI / 14	PAN / 7	PRI / 11	PAN / 7
Distrito Federal	PRD / 34	PAN / 15	PRD / 34	PAN / 12
Estado de Mexico	PRI / 39	PAN / 12	PRI-PVEM-NA / 26	PRD / 12
Guanajuato	PAN / 22	PRI / 8	PAN / 19	PRI / 12
Guerrero	PRD / 20	PRI / 14	PRD / 18	PRI / 9
Jalisco	PRI / 18	PAN / 17	PRI / 17	PAN / 15
Morelos	PRI / 15	PAN / 6	PRD-PT-MC / 13	PRI / 8
Nuevo León	PRI / 20	PAN / 17	PAN / 20	CCNL (alliance including the PRI) / 15
Querétaro	PAN / 10	PRI / 10	PAN / 10	PRI / 6
San Luis Potosí	PAN / 10	PRI / 9	PRI / 9	PAN / 6
Sonora	PAN / 14	PRI / 12	PAN-PANAL / 15	PRI-PVEM / 15
Tabasco	PRI / 19	PRD / 10	PRD-PT-MC / 18	PRI / 4
Yucatán	PRI / 15	PAN / 6	PRI / 15	PAN / 7

The PRI, alone or in coalitions, was able to win a clear majority in the states of Campeche, Estado de Mexico and Yucatán. One result worth highlighting is the first election ever of a PVEM representative to governor. While this PVEM success may have been partly the result of being in a coalition and benefiting from the endorsement of the PRI, this is still a remarkable victory for a party that is comparable to European green parties. For its part, the PAN lost badly in Campeche and Chiapas. The PRD was able to continue

10 | At the time of submission of this article the allocation of seats on the basis of electoral lists had not been finalised in all states. The figures marked with an \* therefore refer to directly-elected deputies only.

its dominance in the Distrito Federal, i.e. Mexico City, with over 63 per cent of the vote, and was also able to increase its territorial presence at state level with a win in Tabasco.

Table 6

**Distribution of seats by party in the state congresses<sup>11</sup>**

Party	2009 1 <sup>st</sup> place	2012 1 <sup>st</sup> place	2009 2 <sup>nd</sup> place	2012 2 <sup>nd</sup> place
PRI	(8) 9	(6) 7	(6) 5	(8) 7
PAN	(5) 4	(5) 4	(8) 9	(5) 6
PRD	2	4	1	1
PVEM	0	0	0	1

One thing that is noticeable here is that there was much more evidence of coalitions being formed than in 2009. Five of the first and second places were taken by coalitions.<sup>12</sup> An overview of the results in the major cities (Table 7), based on the mayoral elections, also highlights the problems experienced by the PAN and the relative success of the PRI.

The PAN lost three crucial municipalities, especially León in Guanajuato, but was able to win Mérida, although the PRI candidate won the gubernatorial election in Yucatan. The PRD won one municipality and lost another, while the PRI was able to win four additional municipalities, three of them to the detriment of the PAN.

11 | There may be a small change to the second place figures in Campeche when the count has been finalised.

12 | The figures in brackets for the PAN and the PRI reflect the fact that in 2009 and 2012 both parties had the same number of seats.

Table 7  
**Results of the mayoral elections in major cities  
 in the federal states 2006 and 2012<sup>13</sup>**

City	Pre-2012		Elections 2012	
Districts in Mexico City FD	PRD PAN	13 3	PRD PAN PRI	14 1 1
Campeche	PAN		PRI *	
Chilpancingo	PRI		PRI	
Colima	PRI		PRI	
Cuernavaca	PRI		PRD *	
Guadalajara	PRI		PRI	
Guuanajuato	PRI		PRI	
Hermosillo	PAN		PAN	
León	PAN		PRI *	
Mérida	PRI		PAN *	
Monterrey	PAN		PAN	
Morelia	PRI		PRI	
Querétaro	PAN		PRI *	
San Luis Potosí	PRI		PRI	
Toluca	PRI		PRI	
Tuxtla Gutierrez	PRD		PRI *	

13 | In those states marked with an \* there was a changeover of power between the parties.

## THE PRI AFTER THE ELECTIONS

Even though the PRI's success in the elections owed a lot to the strategic mistakes made by the PAN and a sense of concern amongst the electorate about the unpredictable black box of Mexican politics, López Obrador potentially taking over the reins of power, this victory is not as surprising as it might appear at first glance. While the PRI had indeed been in opposition at national level for both of the previous *sexenios*,<sup>14</sup> it had certainly not disappeared off Mexico's political map. For one thing, it had successfully avoided any major splits or even an implosion following its defeat in 2000. Because of this, it had also been able to maintain its municipal and regional power base. It now runs two-thirds of the federal states and in 10 of them it has been in power for 65 years without a break.

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This overwintering by the PRI in their regional strongholds could prove to be a major problem for the party and its future national president, Peña Nieto. As "under the aegis of the governors [...] the traditional practice of patronage was re-established and the various internal interests of the old party system of corporatism [...] were reflected in the distribution of resources and positions", so the "strengthening of the central state through a renewal of presidentialism should be a central pillar of the political position to be adopted by Peña Nieto."<sup>15</sup>

This is likely to form the basis of the internal party arguments and discussions that are expected to take place, not only between the various factions and wings of the party, but also between those working at national level and the governors themselves. These no doubt bitter confrontations will serve to prove just what skills Peña Nieto really possesses and which of his own strongholds and power bases he can rely on, bearing in mind that many see him as little more than a modern face pasted onto the old PRI.

14 | This Spanish term refers to the six-year legislative period for the presidency.

15 | Günther Maihold, "Auf der Schmalspur zur Macht: Die PRI kehrt in das Präsidentenamt von Mexiko zurück", *GIGA Focus*, No. 7, Hamburg, 2012, 4, [http://giga-hamburg.de/dl/download.php?d=/content/publikationen/pdf/gf\\_lateinamerika\\_1207.pdf](http://giga-hamburg.de/dl/download.php?d=/content/publikationen/pdf/gf_lateinamerika_1207.pdf) (accessed 9 Sep 2012).



This will also depend upon whether, and to what extent, these internal party conflicts have impacted the PRI, the new government and Mexican politics in general can be shaped and, if necessary, limited.

Whether and to what extent the PRI has actually changed is an issue that generates both indifference as well as real concern in Mexico. Even if many Mexicans would describe themselves as a "people with no memory", the governing practices of this traditional state party are very much a part of the country's past and present. There are a significant number of people who fear the old party will resurface and try to hold onto power for decades. This concern will not have been helped by Peña Nieto's suggestion in 2011 not to rely on coalition governments but instead to introduce a *clausula de gobernabilidad* (clause ensuring governability) of the type that existed during earlier PRI times, but was

**There is a genuine fear of a return to the old days. At the same time there is also the hope that civil society, and not just the opposition, will play an important role in a modern Mexico.**

later abolished. The effect of this would be that a party with 30 per cent of the vote would be given an absolute majority in Congress. There is a genuine fear of a return to the old days. At the same time there is also the hope that civil society, and not just the opposition, will play an important role in a modern Mexico, as had been the case in the past, and that twelve years of transition will have strengthened the power of democratic resistance to such an extent that the reintroduction of authoritarianism by the back door will no longer be possible.

#### **THE PRD: ETERNAL BRIDESMAIDS – FOREVER DESTINED TO BE ON THE OUTSIDE?**

For the Mexican left, these elections could prove to be the catalyst for future change. The choice of López Obrador as candidate for a second time and two very different election campaigns have shown that this left-wing coalition has probably gone as far as it can with this candidate, despite enjoying a remarkable level of success at a national level – making a future presidency seem highly unlikely. On the other hand, the coalition did have some significant successes, such as a repeat of its victory in Mexico City with over 63 per cent of the vote, as well as a whole series of impressive successes at regional and municipal level.

The most interesting and surprising moment in these elections was the emergence of the #YoSoy132 movement. This can be seen as a rejection of the traditional “strong individualism and simplistic rejection of any type of collective action”.<sup>16</sup> This actually worked to López Obrador’s advantage during a specific phase of the campaign, even though the main focus of the movement was anti-PRI, rather than pro-Obrador. However, there was to be a repeat of the experience of the Colombian presidential elections in 2010, where, for a variety of reasons, the media hype surrounding these types of movements which generally owe their rapid growth to social media was disproportionate to their lack of real importance when it came to the moment of truth at the ballot box. It is unlikely that this kind of amorphous movement will bring the left any kind of significant success in future elections.

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During his two election campaigns, López Obrador embodied the core ideas of the Mexican left, united under the banner of the Movimiento Progresista. The announcement of his retirement, at least from the alliance’s day-to-day politics, could pave the way for the reform-oriented social democratic faction to split away from the much more radicalised left. Even if this results in an initial slump in support in upcoming elections, it might also help to significantly improve the credibility of the alliance in the long run. This second failure by López Obrador should also have shown any lingering doubters in the alliance that it is not possible to sustain – at either institutional or personal level – the kind of balancing act attempted by AMLO between 2006 and 2012, when he tried to reconcile the radicalisation of the electorate, including months-long blockades in the capital and political obstruction, in 2006 with a course of action in which he suddenly appeared to have swallowed his pride and decided to build a “loving republic” (*república amorosa*).

In terms of the three party system (PRI-PAN-PRD), the presidential elections have effectively been reduced to a choice between the PAN and the PRI since the year 2000. This run is not likely to be broken by the Movimiento

16 | Jorge G. Castañeda, *Mañana o pasado. El misterio de los mexicanos*, Editorial Aguilar, México, 2011, 20.

Progresista any time soon, judging by its track record over recent years. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen whether this latest election defeat will result in further splits in the alliance, or whether there will be an attempt to rebalance the various streams within the alliance, both within the PRD itself, the largest party in the alliance, and in its relationship to the two other alliance partners, the PT and the MC, before contesting the next elections.

The true shape of the internal relationships within the Movimiento Progresista and whether the social democratic wing is capable of developing into the majority should become clear over the coming months. The way the Mexican left reorganises itself in terms of both its policies and structure will have a significant impact on the potential strategic restructuring of the Mexican party system as a whole and on the possibilities for future majorities and coalitions at all political levels.

#### **THE PAN FACES DIFFICULT TIMES**

**There was a significant amount of self-criticism to be heard coming out of the PAN camp, even during the election campaign itself and even when it was still hopeful of ending up in second place.**

These elections represent a bitter defeat for the former PAN ruling party, and not only in terms of the presidential and congressional elections. As we have seen, the party endured significant losses at the state and municipal level as well. There was a significant amount of self-criticism to be heard coming out of the PAN camp, even during the election campaign itself and even when it was still hopeful of ending up in second place. Once the elections were over, the self-criticism became more pointed and public, with many of the criticisms even being published in the monthly newspaper of the Fundación Rafael Preciado Hernández,<sup>17</sup> which is generally pro-PAN.

Some of the criticisms directed at the party was that its election campaign never really got going because it tackled the wrong issues and failed to adequately communicate with the voters and stimulate debate. By the time the second TV debate came round, in which Vázquez Mota scored by coming across as much more aggressive and decisive, it was too late. Their campaign slogan "Josefina diferente"

17 | See various articles in *Bien Común*, No. 209, Jun/Jul 2012.

proved to backfire, as right from the beginning it made it impossible for the PAN candidate to get across her own ideas and make a new beginning while at the same time attempting to reconcile in a credible way a sense of continuity with the previous PAN governments and avoid looking as if she was trying to distance herself from the party's tradition. "Josefina diferente" – but different to what, compared to whom, to what extent and in which political areas? The PAN was never really able to communicate what it meant. And simply having a female candidate with a focus on women's and family issues was nowhere near enough. Vázquez Mota was also criticised for not removing inefficient and ineffective staff at the right time.

But the self-criticism goes beyond the election campaign and the subsequent defeat. These are seen much more as inevitable consequences of other factors and problems within the party, including a failure to attract the right kind of members. It was possible to simply join the party via the internet, something which opened up the party to all sorts of opportunists. It is expected, and indeed hoped, that many of these party members will in fact quickly leave the PAN now that it is in opposition.

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The selection of candidates for the various positions and posts also needs to be improved, but most importantly, the PAN needs to find a way to smoothen the internal frictions that exist at all levels within the party. In the final months leading up to the election, an internal party court of arbitration had to deal with over 800 disputes between party members and party organisations relating to the nomination of candidates, all of which was covered in the media.

These internal party conflicts only really started to flare up once Calderón had resigned as president. There were then several organisational issues that needed to be sorted out, and it was important to resolve these issues quickly. At the end of August, Madero, the new leader of the party, announced that following the end of Calderón's term as president, his close ally Cordero, former finance minister, Calderón's first choice for presidential candidate and speaker for the PAN senate faction in the new Congress should stand for this office.

The publicly repeated suspicion amongst PAN politicians that Calderón and the PRI had come to some sort of arrangement as early as 2006, only added fuel to the fire.<sup>18</sup> Calderón for his part blamed every imaginable individual and institution for the election results except those in his own government and certainly not himself. He felt that there was a need to reorganise party structures, which has already led to some clear differences of opinion between him and the PAN party leader Madero.



“Josefina diferente”? PAN candidate Josefina Vázquez Mota was not able to fulfil her party’s expectations. | Source: M. Friedek.

The party now needs to go through a painful process of addressing a whole series of fundamental internal issues, including party organisation and the review and realignment of policies and ideology. Essentially, it needs to decide just what the party’s real identity is after twelve years in government. The party can now look forward to a difficult period of rebuilding. The PAN needs to ask itself what Fox and Calderón might have missed in terms of restructuring the old PRI state, and what it would like to change in the future in order to once again be able to present itself as a credible political and moral alternative within the Mexican party set-up. Following her long holiday in Europe (which puzzled many people), it remains to be seen whether, to

18 | Cf. *La Jornada*, 3 Sept 2012, 2 et seq.

what extent and especially how seriously Vázquez Mota will become involved in these internal debates. In any case, the first important decisions on various positions within the party were made without consultation with her key staff.

The main challenge for the PAN will be carrying out this process of renewal in a fundamental, but also structured and speedy way, in order to be able to demonstrate to the Mexican people in time for the 2013 elections in 14 of the 32 federal states that it has at least started down the path to a credible and irreversible rebirth. Only in this way can it hope to avoid further defeats at both municipal and state level.

### THE CHALLENGES AHEAD FOR MEXICO

The new government now faces not only the challenges it has defined within its own manifesto but also those already besetting the country.<sup>19</sup> First and foremost there are security problems and the country's war on drugs. On these particular issues, the signals coming from Enrique Peña Nieto are somewhat ambivalent. During the election campaign he recruited the recently-retired Colombian chief of police, General Naranjo, as a security advisor. This should help to send a signal of continuity, not only within the country, but also to the USA, which has a particular interest in these matters. At the same time, Peña Nieto has promised to adopt a strategy of "reducing the levels of violence"<sup>20</sup> in the country, but without actually saying how this is to be achieved. During the election campaign, the PAN candidate spoke of dealings between the PRI and organised crime, something that Peña Nieto denies. How exactly Peña Nieto will fulfil his promise to reduce the number of murders and abductions by 50 per cent currently remains his secret. A policy of de-militarising the war on drugs by creating a type of national guard to support smaller police units does not on the face of it appear to be enough. Other goals include combating money laundering,

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19 | For the parties' manifestos, see [http://ife.org.mx/portal/site/ifev2/Plataformas\\_electorales](http://ife.org.mx/portal/site/ifev2/Plataformas_electorales) (accessed 4 Oct 2012); see also Salazar, n. 4, 9 et seqq.

20 | Interview with the *New York Times*, 10 Jun 2012, <http://nytimes.com/2012/06/11/world/americas/priorities-in-mexicos-drug-war.html> (accessed 27 Sep 2012).

improving the country's legal institutional systems, setting up an anti-corruption commission and a reform of the energy laws.

The draft laws on tax reform, internal security, job market reform and telecommunications, to name but a few, which fell victim to PRI blocking tactics in Congress during the Calderón government's time in office, will place significant demands on the government. The potential for more private ownership in the state energy company PEMEX and the financing of social security systems are also likely to be long-drawn-out and potentially contentious issues for the new government. The success of the PRI and Peña Nieto will also be measured by their ability to meet other ambitious goals relating to combating poverty, social inclusion, reform of the education sector with a view to becoming number one in Latin America in the PISA rankings and the creation of a million new jobs per year.

So far they have been fairly vague about Mexico's potential future foreign policy. Statements have largely been generalisations about Mexico adopting a leading role on issues such as climate change and the trafficking of weapons, drugs and humans. Remarkably, there have been few concrete references to political reform, in the proper sense of the word, in terms of electoral law or the introduction of a second round of voting in presidential elections, for example. So far, the only announcement Peña Nieto has made is that the Chamber of Deputies will be reduced in size by 100 seats. However, taken as a whole, this is an ambitious agenda for the future president and one fraught with challenges. He needs to show whether he can live up to his own Obama-like election slogan "Sí, se puede!" (Yes we can).

#### **CONTINUATION OF "GOBIERNO DIVIDIDO"**

**The state president has not had a majority in both chambers of the country's Congress since 1997 (Chamber of Deputies) and 2000 (Senate) respectively.**

Any success in overcoming these challenges will be heavily influenced by another key consequence of the congressional election results, the continuation of the *gobierno dividido*. The state president has not had a majority in both chambers of the country's Congress since 1997 (Chamber of Deputies) and 2000 (Senate) respectively. This has led to what the Mexicans see as *gobierno dividido* (divided

government) or *pluralismo equilibrado* (balanced pluralism), whereby the president needs to negotiate with other parties in order to obtain a majority for his proposals in Congress. The PRI also failed to get an absolute majority in both chambers in these elections. Ironically, this means that the new government will need to do a great deal of negotiating within Congress if it wants to implement the very reforms that the PRI itself blocked during the Calderón government's time in office. For the foreseeable future, the PRI will probably have to rely on the PAN in particular if it wants to achieve a majority, as the position of the left-wing alliance is unclear, with the various factions oscillating between a policy of blocking everything and being prepared to talk on certain issues. The PAN has in fact indicated that it will pursue a policy of constructive opposition and has rejected the idea of a united anti-PRI front in Congress. However, it remains to be seen what impact the party's attempts to deal with the election defeat will have on its overall strategy and the way it chooses to act in Congress. The more pressure there is on the PAN to actively address the issues that brought about its election debacle, to rediscover its sense of identity and to return to the roots of its former success, the more there might be a temptation to try to achieve this by adopting a strategy of taking ideologically-based and fundamentalist stances on various issues.

As president, Peña Nieto will therefore have to rely on the opposition in order to progress the very reforms that the PRI had blocked in the past in its role as the largest party of opposition. This could represent a considerable obstacle to the kind of exercise of power we should expect from the PRI and make it essential to create specific mechanisms for political consensus within the framework of Mexican politics. Even some Western parliamentary democracies have had the experience of seeing some heads of government preferring no overall majority to being at the mercy of their own parties with an absolute majority, however contradictory that might seem. The needs of coalition building tend to produce discipline within the party's own rank and file.

**Even some Western parliamentary democracies have had the experience of seeing some heads of government preferring no overall majority to being at the mercy of their own parties with an absolute majority.**



It remains to be seen what impact this will have on the PRI and how long Peña Nieto will be able to count on the patience and willingness to compromise of his own party. It is probably not unreasonable to speculate that the PRI's traditional instinct for power will make it want to see the last 12 years in opposition as an exception and consign it to the dustbin of Mexican history. We will see if in attempting to achieve this goal it is also tempted to return to its old brand of authoritarianism.

### **OUTLOOK**

The PAN was voted out of power and banished to the third rung on the political ladder. What is not clear is what direction will now be taken by the transition ushered in through the PAN victory in the 2000 elections. Will the dinosaur PRI have the political will or indeed be in a position to continue the democratisation of Mexico's political system and its opening up on the international stage? Which side of the PRI will come to the fore (entrenchment or moderation and a willingness to reform) during the expected internal debates on the future direction of the party and the government? Will there be a polarising of the political system or do the restrictions dictated by the *gobierno dividido* mean that more reform and consensus-oriented cooperation between the government and the opposition is likely or at least possible? Will dealing with existing reform issues be limited to the political establishment or will the abilities of civil society groups and organisations to formulate and articulate solutions continue to be developed and will these groups grow, not only in terms of economic and media influence, but also in direct influence as a result?

There is probably good reason to suspect that "the modernising of Mexico [...] is unlikely to succeed without a modernisation of the PRI".<sup>21</sup> The 64,000 dollar question is just how modern the PRI has actually become, aside from having a leader with a modern image. And can both modernisation processes run in parallel, or is it more likely that the necessary modernisation of the PRI will lead to rifts and problems that will actually make the country's reform process much more difficult, or halt it entirely, and bring the country's politics and society to the breaking point.

21 | Cf. Maihold, n. 15, 7.

It remains to be seen whether there will be a general debate about the nature of the transition, people's expectations of it, what has and has not been achieved and potential threats to the process. Included in this should be discussions about the *poderes fácticos* (the "real power factors"), such as economic monopolies, caciquism, union corporatism and especially drug dealing and organised crime, which, so the theory goes, were so inextricably bound up with the old PRI regime that they were effectively kept under a certain amount of control. As the old system started to break down during the new transition phase, these *poderes fácticos* were actually able to blossom and have become a real challenge to the state.<sup>22</sup> It will also be interesting to see how the PRI deals with these *poderes fácticos* in light of the challenges posed by them. The latest *sexenio* in Mexico's history, starting on 1 December, promises to be an interesting one.

#### ACRONYMS

IFE	Instituto Federal Electoral
MC	Movimiento Ciudadano
NA	Nueva Alianza
PAN	Partido Acción Nacional
PRD	Partido de la Revolución Democrática
PRI	Partido Revolucionario Institucional
PT	Partido del Trabajo
PVEM	Partido Verde Ecologista de Mexico
TEPJF	Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación

22 | See also "La Transición imposible", interview with the journalist Jo Tuckman about her book *México: democracia interrumpida*, Yale, 2012, in *Proceso - Semanario de información y análisis* 1869, 21 et seqq.