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ELECTIONS IN 14 MEXICAN STATES

A LOCAL SNAPSHOT AND A FIRST TEST OF THE "PACT FOR MEXICO"

Stefan Jost

In July 2013, 14 Mexican states held elections at various levels, one year after the presidential and congressional elections that returned the PRI to government and the gubernatorial, state congressional and local elections that were held in a number of states. The latest round of elections had been eagerly anticipated as they were expected to have a significant impact on the internal politics and personnel of both the PAN and PRD opposition parties, with potential consequences for the "Pact for Mexico" (signed by the governing and opposition parties) and for the ability of the government to successfully run the country.

Some 30.5 million voters, or around 37 per cent of the Mexican electorate, were called upon to cast their votes in the 14 states¹ in order to elect state congresses, mayors, local councils and one governor. A total of 441 state congressional deputies and 1,339 mayors² were to be elected.

- 1 | Strictly speaking, it was actually 15 states, as a by-election was required in one district of the state of Sonora.
- 2 | With respect to the number of mayors to be elected, it should be noted that, of the 570 officials to be elected in the state of Oaxaca, only 153 were to be elected in accordance with traditional electoral law, while, as a result of the high percentage of indigenous peoples in 417 of the local constituencies, the elections would take place in accordance with the customs of these local peoples, rather than in line with standard electoral procedures. The main political parties were not really involved and so the results for these areas have not been included in the statistics.

Table 1

Type of election by state

State	Governor	State Congress	Mayor/ Local Council
Aguascalientes		X	X
Baja California Norte	X	X	X
Chihuahua		X	X
Coahuila			X
Durango		X	X
Hidalgo		X	
Oaxaca		X	X
Puebla		X	X
Sinaloa		X	X
Tamaulipas		X	X
Tlaxcala		X	X
Quintana Roo		X	X
Veracruz		X	X
Zacatecas		X	X


The focus of attention was the gubernatorial election in Baja California Norte, which had had a PAN governor for the previous 24 years. This election had great symbolic importance for all the parties because it was the first Mexican state the PAN had ever won.

THE "PACTO POR MEXICO"

The political setup in Mexico changed in a very interesting and somewhat unexpected way following the presidential and congressional elections of July 2012 and the election of Enrique Peña Nieto as president. During the PAN governments of Presidents Fox and Calderón, Nieto's PRI had blocked the government's reform proposals in Congress, especially reforms in the areas of education and finance and plans to reform the energy sector. In the wake of the election results, the new government suddenly found that

the shoe was on the other foot and that it now faced the same challenge as its predecessors in government: it did not have a majority in either congressional chamber and so was reliant upon the votes of the opposition. Just a few days after taking office on 1 December 2012 the new president, Peña Nieto, surprised the Mexican people by concluding a "Pact for Mexico" between the PRI and the two largest opposition parties, the PAN and the PRD. This Pact includes joint policy agreements on more than 90 different issues.



After taking office on 1 December 2012, he concluded a "Pact for Mexico" between the PRI and the two largest opposition parties, the PAN and the PRD: President Peña Nieto (PRI). | Source: Angélica Rivera de Peña / flickr 

In spite of some heated internal debates that at times spilled over into the public domain, the Pact did appear to be working in the months that followed. Constitutional amendments signalled that initial progress had been made in some key policy areas. At the time of the elections, however, the drafting and adoption of the secondary legislation necessary to implement these constitutional changes has still not been completed. As a result, the key question was whether the elections would amount to a vote of confidence in the Pact itself and whether clear winners and losers would emerge at this early stage in the process.

The position of the main parties in the run-up to the election could not have been more different. On the one side were the PRI, which presented a very united front, while on

the other side were the two main opposition parties, which in many states formed a coalition. In the weeks leading up to the election, PAN was struggling with an internal battle between the *calderonista* faction, i.e. the supporters of former president Felipe Calderón, and the supporters of PAN president Gustavo Madero. This internal dispute was less about issues of ideology and more about personal ambition and power. At times it became so heated that it threatened the future cohesion of the party. The PRD also had its dissenters to the “Pact for Mexico” and had its own sword of Damocles in the form of a threat that the party would be split by the MORENA movement headed by the party’s former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador. The latter is keen to turn the movement into a separate, more fundamentally left-wing party.

ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, MUDSLINGING AND THE “RETURN TO VIOLENCE”

In Mexico, elections – in terms of the whole process of campaigning, voting and vote-counting – continue to unfold against a much more complex backdrop than is suggested by the reports of some international election observers. The Mexicans themselves have no illusions when it comes to elections. Government programmes, such as the “Crusade against hunger” in the PRI-run state of Veracruz, are regularly used for electioneering purposes, while traditional election campaign trickery is still commonplace in Mexico, including manipulating electoral rolls, moving people into specific voting districts, or even into other states, keeping polling stations closed or giving out confusing information about the location of polling stations or about the candidates themselves, buying votes, operating a so-called carousel³ during voting and intimidating candidates and election officers. Sayings such as “won the election, lost the vote count” are not to be dismissed lightly.

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3 | Carousel is the name that has been given to the process whereby voters whose votes have been bought are monitored when they leave the polling station to ensure that they actually voted the right way.

The hard-fought election campaign in Baja California Norte (BCN), the importance of this particular election to the PAN and the desire of the PRI to see the Pact remain in place led to rumours that some kind of deal had been done between the two parties to decide the outcome of the election in that state. However, the fact that both parties were so close in the polls and the election campaign continued throughout election day suggests that these rumours were probably unfounded.

Around two weeks before the election, the election campaign in many states took a somewhat dramatic turn. There was a marked increase in the amount of mud-slinging, with accusations of corruption on all sides and the (probably not unfounded) suggestion that regional and local financial resources were being misused to fund the party campaigns. All sorts of Kafkaesque chicaneries

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were suspected. For example, the public prosecutor's office and the PRI in the state of Aguascalientes accused the PAN of having its campaign financed by a Mafia family. PAN election materials had apparently been found in a house thought to belong to the family.

The next day, the PRI held a press conference outside the house. A journalist from the left-leaning daily paper *La Jornada* peered through one of the windows and spotted some election materials – belonging to the PRI. His resulting question led to the abrupt termination of the press conference. A short time later the house was fitted with curtains and officials from the public prosecutor's office took the PRI materials away. It remains unclear what conclusions can be drawn from this episode.

However, even more serious is what has been described as the "return to violence". The use of violence to influence candidates and voters is nothing new in Mexico, but during these elections it was to become an alarming fact in some states and present on a scale generally considered to be unsurpassed in Mexico's election history. In Chihuahua, Puebla and Durango three mayoral candidates from the PAN, PRD and PRI were murdered and a PRD party leader in Oaxaca was kidnapped and murdered. An attempt on the life of a female PRI candidate resulted in two of her family members being killed. A PAN campaign caravan was

attacked and set on fire, while there were also reports of candidates being kidnapped, receiving numerous death threats and members of their families being raped. Organised crime was generally thought to be behind the violence, but so far nothing has been proven.

A few days before the elections, many candidates withdrew their candidacy because they were afraid for their lives. According to PAN president Madero, it was not only PAN candidates who were affected, but also ordinary PAN members and some PAN supporters who were meant to be monitoring the vote count at various polling stations but who either announced that they no longer wanted to do the job or simply failed to turn up.

The PRI majority on the congressional standing committee refused to debate these incidents, so it was also impossible to take forward the opposition's suggestion that the government should use the military in certain states in order to ensure the safety of the elections. As a result, the PAN and PRD made a public appeal for the army to be deployed in the affected states, and this did indeed happen in certain critical locations.

Election day itself was overshadowed by death threats against PAN candidates in Oaxaca as well as kidnappings, closed polling stations and stolen or burned ballot boxes. The army patrolled certain towns and cities. According to the Ministry of the Interior, election day passed off peacefully and without irregularities.

THE ELECTION RESULTS

In Mexico there seems to be a general rule that the first person to declare themselves the winner, even if they are liberal with their interpretation of the numbers, is the one who determines the outcome. As a result, election night is packed with heated debates about polls and projections. The actual results and the party's overall share of the votes seem to count for much less in the public's mind. This would explain why in Baja California Norte, for example, the various parties were already claiming victory before the polling stations had even closed and why the ensuing arguments in the media went on for hours.

The results shown below are not fully comprehensive because the elections were declared to be null and void in certain areas and will have to be held again in 2014, while appeals are pending in the appropriate electoral courts against some of the other election results. It should also be noted that it is not possible to summarise in detail the very complex nature of the many political coalitions that exist in Mexico and, as coalitions are the norm, the results given below are limited to the various leading parties.⁴

The Gubernatorial Election in Baja California Norte

The vote count was halted in the early hours of the morning when, according to a statement by the Federal Electoral Institute, there had been “an algorithm error, which did not however affect the overall result”.

After a neck-and-neck race in the polls, the vote count in the gubernatorial election developed into something akin to a mystery thriller in the media. The vote count was halted in the early hours of the morning

when, according to a statement by the Federal Electoral Institute, there had been “an algorithm error, which did not however affect the overall result”. Preliminary results prior to halting the vote count suggested the PAN could win the gubernatorial election and this was officially confirmed ten days later. The PAN-led four-party coalition “Alianza Unidos por Baja California” and its candidate Francisco “Kiko” Vega received around 25,000 votes, three per cent more than the four-party coalition led by the PRI “Compromiso por Baja California”. The result meant that PAN had won “its” state for the fifth time in succession.

Particularly within PAN itself, the gubernatorial elections were afforded excessive significance. Whereas a victory might be seen as nothing unusual, a defeat could have been the point of no return for the current party leadership. The fact that a broad coalition helped to clinch the victory and that a vote for change would not be unusual after 24 years in power and all the associated attrition seems not to have occurred to either PAN or the general public. As a result, all the other election results on this marathon election day seemed much less significant in the eyes of both the party and the public as a whole. The most important internal

4 | The following tables are based on the author’s own summary of a wide range of results from official national and regional sources and those quoted in newspapers. Because there are so many different sources, it is not possible to quote them all individually.

result of this election was that, in spite of all the ongoing criticism and internal squabbling, the leadership position of Madero and his supporters has, for the time being at least, been strengthened, whereas the loss of Baja California Norte would have been the end for them.

Results of the state congressional and mayoral elections

A glance at the distribution of seats in the state congresses in 2013 compared to 2010 shows that all three major parties lost seats to a whole number of smaller parties and coalitions in various different states (Table 2). The results of the mayoral elections in the thirteen state capitals are particularly interesting (Table 4).

Table 2

Distribution of seats in the state congresses

State	Seats	Party			
		PRI	PAN	PRD	Other
Aguascalientes (2013)	27	10	7	-	10
Aguascalientes (2010)	27	14	4	1	8
Baja California (2013)	25	7	10	-	8
Baja California (2010)	24	13	6	1	4
Chihuahua (2013)	33	5	4	1	23
Chihuahua (2010)	33	20	6	1	6
Durango (2013)	30	12	-	-	18
Durango (2010)	29	17	4	1	7
Hidalgo (2013)	30	18	-	-	12
Hidalgo (2010)	30	14	3	4	9
Oaxaca (2013)	42	11	14	-	17
Oaxaca (2010)	41	11	15	10	5
Puebla (2013)	41	8	18	-	15
Puebla (2010)	41	13	13	2	13
Quintana Roo (2013)	25	14	1	-	10

State	Seats	Party			
		PRI	PAN	PRD	Other
Quintana Roo (2010)	24	11	4	3	6
Sinaloa (2013)	40	21	3	-	16
Sinaloa (2010)	40	19	13	2	6
Tamaulipas (2013)	36	16	6	-	14
Tamaulipas (2010)	36	22	5	1	8
Tlaxcala (2013)	32	10	3	3	16
Tlaxcala (2010)	32	10	9	4	9
Veracruz (2013)	50	26	4	-	20
Veracruz (2010)	50	29	13	3	5
Zacatecas (2013)	30	12	5	-	13
Zacatecas (2010)	21	9	6	3	3
Total (2013)	441	170	75	4	192
Total (2010)	428	202	101	36	89

Table 3

Distribution of mayoral positions

State	Municipalities	PAN		PRI		PRD		Other	
		2010	2013	2010	2013	2010	2013	2010	2013
Aguascalientes	11	0	3	11	3	0	0	0	5
Baja California	5	0	2	5	3	0	0	0	0
Chihuahua	67	24	16	41	51	2	0	0	0
Coahuila de Zaragoza	38	2	9	33	28	1	0	2	1
Durango	39	18	5	21	32	0	0	0	2
Oaxaca	153	74	66	78	63	0	0	0	24
Puebla	217	105	95	103	84	0	0	9	35
Quintana Roo	10	5	0	5	10	0	0	0	0
Sinaloa	18	9	3	9	15	0	0	0	0
Tamaulipas	43	7	8	35	35	1	0	0	0
Tlaxcala	60	9	16	27	16	10	10	14	18

State	Municipalities	PAN		PRI		PRD		Other	
		2010	2013	2010	2013	2010	2013	2010	2013
Veracruz	212	90	42	81	99	37	32	5	39
Zacatecas	58	15	9	25	36	14	7	4	6
Total	931	358	274	474	475	65	49	34	130

Table 4

Comparison of the distribution of mayoral positions in the state capitals in 2010 and 2013

State	Capital	Party	
		2010	2013
Aguascalientes	Aguascalientes	PRI	PAN-PRD
Baja California	Mexicali	PRI	PAN
Chihuahua	Chihuahua	PRI	PRI
Coahuila de Zaragoza	Saltillo	PRI	PAN
Durango	Victoria de Durango	PRI	PRI
Oaxaca	Oaxaca de Juárez	PRD-PAN	PRI
Puebla	Puebla de Zaragoza	PRI	PAN-PRD
Quintana Roo	Chetumal	PRI	PRI
Sinaloa	Culiacán Rosales	PRI	PRI
Tamaulipas	Ciudad Victoria	PRI	PRI
Tlaxcala	Tlaxcala de Xicohténcatl	PRI	PAN
Veracruz	Xalapa-Enríquez	PRI	PRI
Zacatecas	Zacatecas	PRI	PRI

Despite some striking regional losses such as in Durango, Veracruz, Quintana Roo and Chihuahua, PAN was able to gain good ground in other states such as Aguascalientes, Coahuila, Baja California Norte, Oaxaca and Tlaxcala. It is noteworthy that although PAN experienced losses in smaller municipalities, it made clear gains in the state capitals and larger cities. This is clearly shown by a comparison of population figures in municipalities governed by PAN. At the time of the 2010 elections, the PAN-run municipalities had 9.2 million inhabitants, but this had increased to 12.5 million by the time of the latest vote. This provides

a considerable stock of political capital in those states that still have to elect their governors.

All in all, PRI and PAN are fairly content with these results. PRI held on to first place, but has to come to terms with the loss of certain state capitals and in particular deal with the accusations of manipulation on the part of PAN and PRD. The aim of presenting a new PRI after the marketing success of the presidential elections has certainly not been achieved with this vote.

On the other hand, PAN can be quite satisfied with the results. After its clear losses in the 2012 presidential election and the disastrous impression made by the party and congressional parties in the weeks and months before the election, it would have surprised no one if it had been punished in these elections. But clearly PAN's regional and local party structures and above all the majority of voters were largely unaffected by the party's national quarrels. The aforementioned clear losses in certain states were largely a result of local factors, such as the way the voters refused to accept the coalition between PAN and the leftist PT in Durango.

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The result is to some extent a disaster for the PRD. In Veracruz, one of its former bastions, its votes fell from 800,000 in the presidential elections to just 250,000. The party failed to win any seats in the state parliament and also lost out in the mayoral elections. This has added fuel to the fire of internal debates on the identity of the Mexican left and their forms of organisation. It remains to be seen how the PRD will carry on in the "Pact for Mexico" in light of the imminent central reforms and to what extent this will lead to a split within the PRD, at least in terms of the congressional parties, and to a strengthening of the left outside of parliament, particularly in the shape of López Obrador and his MORENA party.

REALITIES AND INTERPRETATIONS

Election results are one thing, but the way they are interpreted by interest-led parties is often something quite different. And here we have no exception. On the one hand,

there is no doubt that these election results are a reaction to the parties' performance over the last twelve months. But this interpretation only applies in part. In many states and municipalities it seems the national quarrels among the various parties have had little impact on the party base and, above all, the voters.

Overall, it seems the focus remained firmly on local and regional issues and on the candidates themselves. So these elections should not be seen as a vote on the "Pact for Mexico" or on the performance of the individual parties in this Pact. However, the PRD and PAN will be paying closer attention to the question as to whether they should remain in the Pact. Both opposition parties voiced strong criticisms during the latter stages of the election campaign and even on election night. PRD leader Zambrano spoke of the return of the "authoritarian PRI" and its support by organised crime. PAN chair Madero questioned whether it would be possible to return to the "Pact for Mexico" table in light of the PRI's actions.

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We should not attach too much importance to statements made on election night, and indeed, once emotions had cooled down, political rationality soon returned. However, it should be noted that neither the PAN nor the PRD have a unified view of Pact policies, but tend to see them as decisions made by party leaders without the approval of their members, and these differences can be instrumentalised in the context of internal party quarrels. There is also a growing sense of unease among the congressional parties. They tend to feel they are the "lackies" of the Pact's coordinating committee and are keen to have a greater say in decision-making.

So both Madero and Zambrano will find themselves being judged on their election night statements by opponents within their own parties. A simple "carry on" may be possible among the parties to the Pact, but it will be much more difficult within the individual parties. A first sign of this was the decision by the parties to the Pact to deal with the political reforms put forward mainly by PAN and PRD before the more controversial plans for fiscal reform and

reform to the energy sector. This reorganisation of the Pact's agenda is an expression of the fear felt by PAN and PRD that once they have agreed to the PRI's central reform policies they will no longer be able to persuade the PRI to change its negative stance towards political reform.

However, in the first weeks after the elections it has become clear that the "Pact for Mexico" is capable of shouldering the burdens that emerged during the campaign. The upper house has passed legislation on education reform, despite massive protests by the teachers' unions. In the long-term, these reforms will lead to the break-up of the decades-long fossilisation of this anachronistic form of corporatism.⁵ The Pact's resilience is largely thanks to the national political responsibility borne by PAN and PRD. Any other outcome would have resulted in the "Pact for Mexico" and thus Mexico itself being the true loser in these elections.

OUTLOOK

One election is over, but others are looming on the horizon. It is true that the only elections in 2014 will be state and municipal elections in the small states of Nayarit and Coahuila, whose small populations (1.1 and three million inhabitants respectively) mean the results are not of great political significance. However, these elections will not be ignored by the parties, as the Peña Nieto government will be one-third of the way through its term and these PRI-governed states will be able to use this vote to send a clear signal.

2015 will be an even more decisive year. Fifteen states will be holding elections at different levels, predominantly state and municipal elections in five states (Colima, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí and Sonora) and gubernatorial elections. These electoral districts are home to some 62 million inhabitants, with about 18 million of these voting in the gubernatorial elections. 2015 will also see

5 | The core element of this reform is ongoing teacher assessment in order to increase teaching quality. These assessments may lead to the dismissal of teachers.

elections for the Chamber of Deputies in Congress.⁶ These elections will be critical for the second half of Peña Nieto's term in office. Since the end of the 1990s, Mexico has had a *gobierno dividido* (divided government). This means that the government does not have its own parliamentary majority in Congress or in either of the two chambers and therefore needs the support of other parties to push through its policies. Under former presidents, this led to a considerable backlog of policies and reforms that is now being tackled by the "Pact for Mexico". So these mid-term elections are about whether the government will be able to win a majority in the Chamber of Deputies and therefore to some extent mitigate the problem of the *gobierno dividido*, or whether the opposition will be able to prevent this. The 2015 elections will consequently be important in setting the course for the main event – the presidential and congressional elections (Senate and Chamber of Deputies) in 2018.

6 | The two congressional chambers have different legislative periods: Three years for the Chamber of Deputies and six years for the Senate.