Order Code RS21561
Updated July 28, 2003

CRS Report for Congress

Distributed by Penny Hill Press http://pennyhill.com

Mexico's Congress and July 2003 Elections

K. Larry Storrs
Specialist in Latin American Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

On July 6, 2003, Mexico held nation-wide elections to renew the membership of the 500-seat Chamber of Deputies and to elect local officials in ten states. Coming at the mid-point of the six-year term of President Vicente Fox, these elections, by determining the balance of power in the lower chamber of Congress, significantly affect President Fox's ability to enact his programs and set the stage for coming presidential elections in 2006. Official results indicate that President Fox's conservative National Action Party (PAN) fared poorly, while the long-ruling centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) secured a dominant position in Congress, and the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) increased representation in Congress and consolidated local control in the Mexico City Federal District. This suggests that President Fox will have even more difficulty enacting his proposals in the new Congress. This short report provides background on the functioning of the Mexican Congress and summarizes the results of the 2003 election. The report will be updated to indicate the result of pending action in the electoral tribunal. For further information, see CRS Report RL31876, *Mexico-U.S. Relations: Issues for the 108th Congress*.

Background on Mexico's Congress

Composition and Method of Election. Mexico's legislative branch includes the 500-seat Chamber of Deputies (the lower house) and the 128-seat Senate of the Republic (the upper house). The current legislature is the 58th Legislature (usually indicated by roman numerals), with the numbering coinciding with the three-year terms of the Chamber of Deputies. The Chamber of Deputies is composed of 500 deputies with three-year terms (300 elected by plurality in single-member districts and 200 elected by proportional representation in five 40-member "plurinominal" districts). The Senate is composed of 128 senators with six-year terms (64, or 2 from each state, elected by plurality; 32 elected from the first minority — the runner-up — in each state; and 32 elected by national proportional representation).

Sessions. The legislature must hold two ordinary sessions per year. The first session begins on September 1, when the President gives his report to the nation, similar to the State of the Union address; it extends until December 15, except when a new

President takes office on December 1, in which case Congress may extend until December 31. The second session begins on March 15 and extends to April 30. In case of need, extraordinary sessions may be called, more commonly at the end of the year when action on the President's budget is required. During the recess periods, the Permanent Commission, consisting of 19 members from the Chamber of Deputies and 18 members from the Senate, may act, and is responsible for convening extraordinary sessions.

Organization. The two chambers of Congress are organized into leadership bodies and into committees to prepare and consider legislation. The Chamber of Deputies has 24 ordinary commissions or committees, 6 special committees, and 2 bicameral committees; while the Senate has 48 commissions or committees. Each chamber has a leadership council, called the Directive Table (Mesa Directiva), with multi-party representation, that directs the operation of the legislative body; and each chamber also has a Political Coordination Council (Junta de Coordinación Política) with a representative from each of the political parties to coordinate policies.

Differences from U.S. Congress. Mexico's Congress is strikingly different from the U.S. Congress in several regards. **(1) Shared Leadership:** In the Mexican Congress, leadership is shared among the parties, with chairmanships accorded to all parties roughly proportionate to the share of seats in the chamber, and with major parties participating in the Directive Table. **(2) No Re-election:** Growing out of the Mexican Revolution's slogan "effective suffrage, no re-election," representatives in the Mexican Congress may not be immediately re-elected, although they may run for office in the other chamber, or run again after an intervening term. Critics argue that this no re-election provision undermines the principle of accountability and the development of expertise in a subject matter. Others see the principle of no re-election as a hard-won victory and are reluctant to change the system. **(3) Division of Committee Chairmanships between Chambers:** Under a political accord in the Mexican Congress, the parties have agreed that the same party may not control the chairmanship of the same commission or committee in both chambers. Taken together, these mechanisms create a series of checks and balances and enhance the requirements for consensus-building to enact legislation.

Results of the July 2000 Election

Mexico's 58th Legislature (2000-2003) is the product of the July 2000 elections which ended the 71-year control of the Presidency by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), and continued the trend toward dispersion of power in the two chambers of the Congress. In the period leading up to the election, several major election reforms were adopted in the 1990s that established an independent and widely respected Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), provided for the direct election of the mayor of the Mexico City Federal District, guaranteed equal access to the media, and placed controls on campaign spending. In the July 1997 congressional elections, while the PRI remained the single largest party, it lost its long-held majority in the Chamber of Deputies, it lost the two-thirds majority in the Senate, and it lost the all-important race for Mayor of Mexico City. In the July 2000 elections, these tendencies continued.

President. On July 2, 2000, Vicente Fox of the Alliance for Change, representing the conservative National Action Party (PAN) and the environment-oriented Green Ecological Party of Mexico (PVEM) was elected President with 42.52% of the vote,

marking the first election of a president from an opposition party in 71 years. He defeated Francisco Labastida of the centrist PRI who came in second with 36.10% of the vote, and Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the leftist Alliance for Mexico, representing the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) and four minor leftist parties, who came in third with 16.64% of the vote.

Chamber of Deputies. In the election for the 500-seat Chamber, final results showed the Alliance for Change (PAN/PVEM) with 38.23% of the vote and 224 deputies (207 for the PAN, and 17 for PVEM), making it the largest bloc in the Chamber. The PRI came in second place with 36.91% of the vote and 211 deputies, and the PRD/Alliance for Mexico came in third with 18.69% of the vote and 66 deputies (50 for the PRD, 7 for Labor Party (PT), and 9 for other leftist parties).

Senate of the Republic. In the election for the 128-seat Senate, final results showed the Alliance for Change (PAN/PVEM) with 38.11% of the vote and 51 senators (46 for PAN, 5 for PVEM), the largest percentage of the votes, but not the largest delegation. The PRI, with 36.74% of the vote, has 60 senators, the largest delegation, while the PRD/Alliance for Mexico, with 18.85% of the vote, has only 17 senators. The PRI has the largest delegation because of the intricacies of the senate election process.[1]

Results of the July 2003 Chamber of Deputies Election

Mexico held nation-wide congressional elections on July 6, 2003, although only the Chamber of Deputies was renewed. Electors voted for 500 deputies who serve three-year terms, with 300 deputies elected by plurality in single-member districts, and 200 deputies elected by proportional representation in five 40-member districts. The Senate is elected for six-year terms under a complicated formula, and there are no staggered terms.

Official results demonstrate that President Fox's conservative National Action Party (PAN) performed rather poorly, while the other major parties made significant advances. Public opinion polls and exit polls showed that much of the population was either apathetic or was critical of the fact that the President had failed to deliver his promised economic improvements, and final results showed that 58% of the eligible voters abstained from voting, a higher percentage than the last three presidential elections.

Results reported by the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) showed that the previous long-ruling PRI captured the lead position in the Chamber of Deputies race with 38.05% of the valid vote (including all the votes won by the Alliance for All, the coalition between the PRI and the PVEM in eleven states). The PRI won 160 of the 300 single member districts and it won 64 of the proportional representation seats, with the result that it increased its delegation in the 500-seat Chamber from 208 deputies to 224 deputies (44.8% of all deputies). This gives it a very strong position in the Chamber since it will be entitled to elect the President of the Chamber, it is only 27 votes shy of a majority, and it is in a good position to make alliances with the PVEM, with which it ran in a coalition in 11 states, and with the other leftist parties with which it has been associated to some

---

[1] For more details, including background on the major parties, see CRS Report RS20611, *Mexico's Presidential, Legislative, and Local Elections of July 2, 2000,* by K. Larry Storrs.

extent in the past.[2] Demonstrating that it has a truly national presence, the PRI won seats in the direct elections in all but 4 of the 32 states in the country. This victory is generally viewed as strengthening the presidential prospects for PRI President Roberto Madrazo, who is credited with holding the party together against various divisive tendencies.

Table 1. Number of Deputies by Party in Mexico's Chamber of Deputies

	PRI	PAN	PRD	PVEM	PT	CONV.
2003	224 (44.8%)	153 (30.6%)	95 (19%)	17 (3.4%)	6 (1.2%)	5 (1%)
2000	208 (41.6%)	205 (41%)	54 (10.8%)	17 (3.4%)	8 (1.6%)	3 (0.6%)

President Fox's PAN came in second with 31.88% of the valid vote, but because of the intricacies of the election its delegation in the Chamber will decline from 205 deputies to 153 (30.6% of all deputies). The PAN won only 82 of the 300 single member districts, just over half as many as the PRI won, and it obtained 71 proportional representation seats. The PAN won direct vote seats in 22 states, but failed to secure victories in 10 states, nearly a third of the total. The PAN will be going into the 2006 presidential race with a weak legislative base, and with recognition that Fox himself did not emerge from the mainstream of the party. While much jockeying will occur in the next few years, Santiago Creel, Fox's Minister of the important Government Ministry, and Francisco Barrios, Fox's former anti-corruption czar and new leader of the PAN delegation in the Chamber, are often mentioned as possible presidential candidates in the 2006 contest.

The PRD came in third with 18.23% of the valid vote, but because it was not in coalition (as it was in 2000) its delegation will increase significantly, from 54 to 95 (19% of all deputies). The PRD won 55 deputies in single member districts, and it won 40 deputies through proportional representation. It elected deputies in single member districts in only 8 states, and failed to win seats in 24 states, three fourths of the total. As a result of the local victory in the stronghold of Mexico City (see below), the popular Mayor, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, is being viewed as an attractive and promising candidate, but the national results for the PRD suggest the difficulty of moving from a local victory to a national victory.

The PVEM, which was in alliance with the PRI in eleven states, came in a distant fourth with 4.15% of the valid vote on its own, and presumably a similar portion of the 14.02% won by the Alliance for All, with the result that its congressional delegation will have 17 deputies (3.4% of all deputies), the same number as it had in the previous legislature. The PVEM won 3 deputies in single member districts, and it won 14 deputies through proportional representation.

The PT came in fifth with 2.48% of the valid vote, giving it a delegation of 6 deputies, all won through proportional representation, while the Convergence party came

---

[2] Results are from the website of the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE) [http://www.ife.org.mx], including the official results and Press Release 066, July 13, 2003; and a graphic display on the "New Chamber of Deputies" on the website of Mexican daily *Reforma* at [http://www.reforma.com/nacional]

in sixth with 2.34% of the valid vote, giving it 5 deputies, all won through proportional representation. A number of mostly leftist minor parties — Party of Nationalist Society (PSN), Social Alliance Party (PAS), Mexico Possible, Mexican Liberal Party (PLM), and Citizens' Force — received less than two percent of the national votes, and accordingly failed to gain representation in the new Chamber of Deputies, and failed to maintain their registry as a political party.

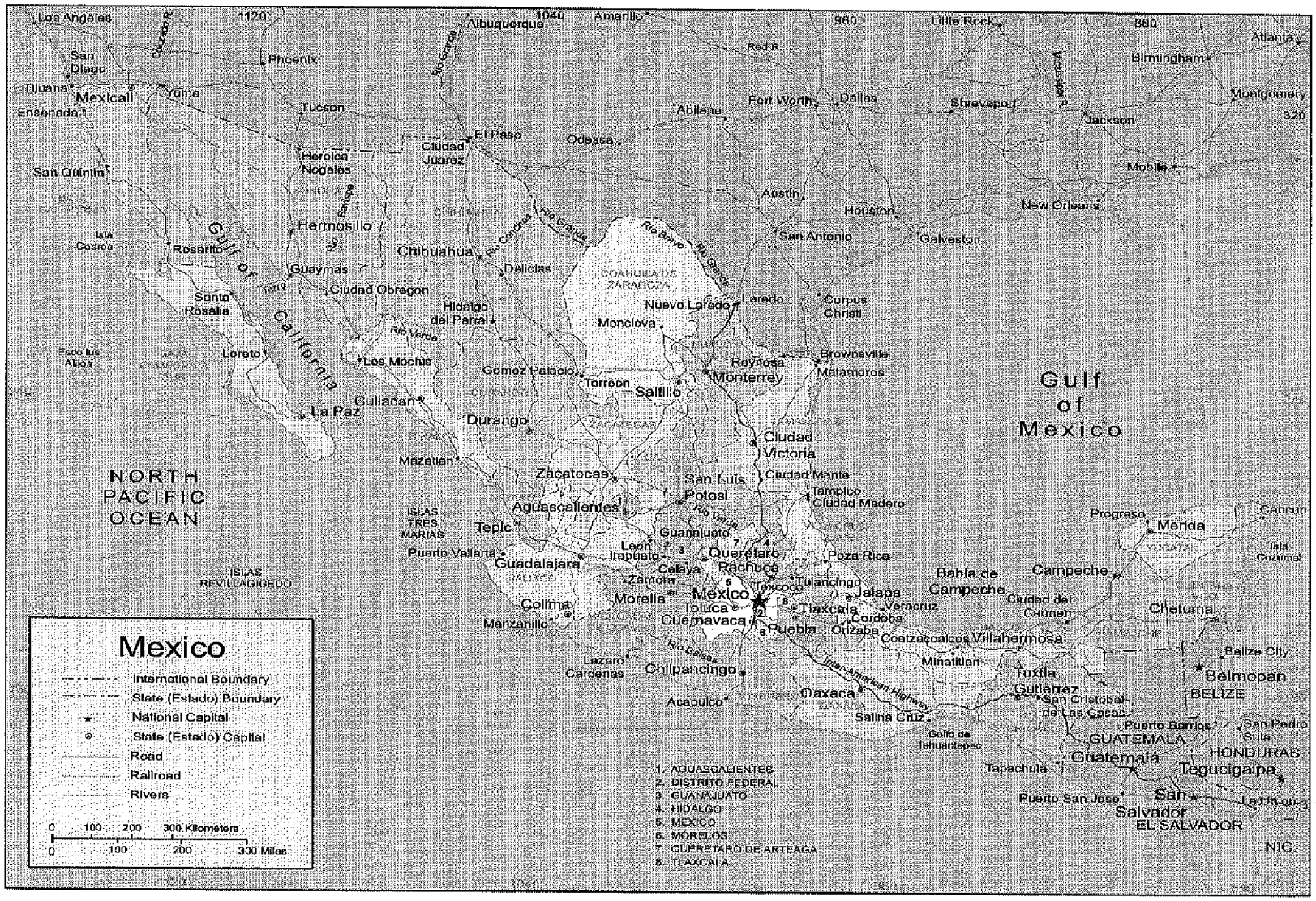
In the past, many of President Fox's programs have been blocked by an opposition-dominated Congress, and many observers worry that he could become a lame duck president and it could become even more difficult with the strengthened opposition in Congress to obtain approval of major legislation, including a tax and fiscal reform and a proposed energy reform that would permit greater private participation in the hydrocarbon and electricity sectors. Shortly after the announcement of the preliminary results, President Fox called for cooperation among the parties for the good of the country since the electorate had again chosen to deny a majority to any party or coalition, and since the announcement of the final results he has been meeting with major party leaders.

Results of the July 2003 Local Elections

State and local elections were held on the same date in ten states, including the Mexico City Federal District. While some states elected representatives for the state legislatures and local officials, governorships were in contention in the northern states of Sonora and Nuevo Leon; the central states of San Luis Potosi, Querétaro, and Colima; and the state of Campeche in the Yucatan Peninsula. In these elections, the PRI retained power in Sonora, Campeche, and Colima, and captured the important industrial state of Nuevo Leon from the PAN. The PAN retained power in Querétaro and captured San Luis Potosi from the PRI, and it is contesting before the Federal Electoral Tribunal, the results in Sonora and Campeche.

The PRD consolidated its hold in the Mexico City Federal District by winning leadership of 13 of the 16 delegations or boroughs of the city, and by winning 37 of the 40 seats in the direct elections for the local legislative assembly, with the PAN winning the other three. Even with the PAN winning 14 seats through proportional representation, the PRI winning 6, the PVEM winning 5, and the Mexico Possible Party winning one, the PRD held 56% control of the 66-seat assembly. This victory in the all-important capital city is seen as strengthening the stature of Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the popular Chief of Government (or Mayor) of Mexico City and the presumed PRD presidential candidate in 2006, although the PRD's weak results in the national contest suggest the difficulty of replicating the local results on a national level.

In other state legislature and municipal leadership contests, the PRI generally fared better in Campeche, Sonora, and Nuevo Leon, while the PAN generally fared better in Guanajuato, Jalisco, Querétaro, and San Luis Potosi, with Morelos and Colima being split to some extent, mostly between the PRI and the PAN.



Source: Map Resources. Adapted by CRS.