Understanding The Outcome of The 2018 Mexican Presidential Elections

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Abstract

The purpose of this research paper is to provide understanding of the historical outcome of the 2018 Mexican Presidential elections. After 71 years of rule of the center-right PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) being followed by 12 years under the rule of the rightist PAN (National Action Party), the people of Mexico grew tired of the lack of progress and development in the country and the rather negative impact that the rule of both parties had on rise of violence and rise in corruption. After almost 90 years of this cycle, the people of Mexico decided to break the electoral cycle of bouncing back between the PRI and the PAN and went left to MORENA (National Regeneration movement) under the rule of Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO). The goal for this project is to answer the following proposed research question: What were the factors that led to the victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the 2018 Mexican Presidential Elections? Three proposed hypotheses will be tested in order to provide an answer to the research question: 1- The younger the voting demographic is, the more likely it was for AMLO to obtain the victory, the more corruption the people in Mexico had experienced, 2- The more likely they were to support AMLO's anti-corruption campaign, and 3- The more the people of Mexico wanted to stir away from the PRI and the PAN, the more likely they were to support the opposing candidate. The methods that will be used to test these hypotheses will be in the realm of descriptive statistics and will include but will not be limited to: Party history, approval rates for each party after served terms, voter turn out and voter demographics. These will be obtained from the INE (National Electoral Institute), the Wilson Research Center, Mitofsky Political Pollster, Transparency International (IT) and INEGI (The National Institute of Statistics and Geography)
Introduction

Mexico provides a fascinating field of study within political science. The country, as referred to by Peruvian writer Mario Vargas Llosa, has been disguised as a democracy when in reality it has developed to be the *perfect dictatorship*.\(^1\) This perfect dictatorship was constructed and carried out by the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) for 71 years and it consists on giving the illusion of democracy being exercised by having elections and political campaigns but no matter which candidate obtained the victory, the PRI always won and kept all the power in the government of the country. The only apparent democracy was that people got to "vote" for their *authoritarian* ruler. The country lived under the belief that democracy existed within its borders when actually, the candidate elected was from ruling party, the PRI.\(^2\)

It was in 2000 when the opposition party of the PRI, the PAN (National Action Party), obtained the Presidential election victory with Vicente Fox and then again in 2006 with Felipe Calderón.

After a 12-year long hiatus and the PAN being unable to deliver for the people, the PRI found themselves back in *Los Pinos* with Enrique Peña Nieto as their representative and as the ruler of the Mexican people. The people of Mexico took two steps forward in exercising their democracy by taking the PRI out of power in 2000 but took a step back when opening the gates for them again. They chose the same party hoping for a different outcome but were disappointed once again after Enrique Peña Nieto proved to be just another puppet of the political party they had fought against some years before.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador, popularly known by his initials AMLO, has been on the voting ballot every six years since 1988, while running for different positions, his persistent desire to be involved in the country’s politics and government is admirable. However, controversy and scandal have surrounded AMLO and his political career since then. The leftist candidate from the PRD (The Party of the Democratic Revolution) obtained his first political victory in 2000 as governor of Mexico City and ran for President six years later against rightist candidate Felipe Calderón from the PAN and center-right candidate Roberto Madrazo from the PRI.

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The 2000 Mexican Presidential elections sparked the most controversy throughout the country. AMLO was announced to be in the lead a couple of hours before midnight, but the victory was awarded to the PAN’s candidate Calderón. AMLO fought under the slogan *voto por voto* (*vote by vote*) with which he demanded a recount of the votes as he was sure the election had been *stolen* from him. To this day, he and many others believe that the victory was granted to Calderón as a result of a scheme made by the government at the time in order to keep him and his political party away from the power and out of the country’s government.

However, 12 years later and under his own political party, MORENA (National Regeneration Movement) this time, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador finds himself preparing to fulfill the highest political position in the country.

**A Turning Point**

Every six years, Mexicans attend the polls to exercise their democratic right to vote and as a result a new President and new congress are elected. Even though the democratic processes in Mexico are far from flawless and even further from complete, the people exercise their democratic rights effectively and often. Mexico lived though a “PRI-ista” illusion that gave way to the “Perfect Dictatorship” model for a long time when the country exercised a uni-party system, until the multiparty system was introduced in the country in the 1940’s.\(^3\) When multi-party elections were made possible and legal, people began to express their dissatisfaction with the system, the parties, the candidates and the overall status of the country all together.

Corruption can be defined as a fraudulent and dishonest path to complete or reach something or get something done easier or on a faster manner, this path however is more often than not illegal as it ignores the established laws and often involves bribes. In the country, unfortunately, it has become customary to get things done individually and look out for one self rather than as a collective society. Having lived under these circumstances, the people of Mexico saw a glimpse of hope in new leftist party MORENA when Andrés Manuel López Obrador announced he was running for the presidency in 2018 against Ricardo Anaya from the PAN, José Antonio Meade with the PRI but most of all, against corruption and against the failed system. The 2018 Mexican general elections marked the first time in Mexican history that a leftist candidate was elected as President and also, the first time that electoral rules changed in order to allow independent candidates to participate.

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\(^3\) Huesca-Dorantes, Patricia. *The Emergence of Multiparty Competition in Mexican Politics*. Routledge, 2018
On July 1, 2018, the general elections took place. Over 90 million Mexicans were registered and ready to vote, voter turn out and citizen participation were one of the highest Mexico has ever seen with a total of over 63% of the population participating in the electoral processes. The desire that the Mexican people had for a change in their day to day lives is what drove 53% of the population to support Lopez Obrador’s newly-formed leftist party during their debut election participation. Voters hoped for a change in their future, their children’s future and country’s future on the international stage.

**Political Spectrum**

To better understand the relevance of this paper it is vital that we first define the Mexican political parties in the political spectrum in order to better appreciate the difference between the political stand point where the country was and the one where it stands today.

Figure I. Mexican political parties spectrum.

The left-right spectrum is used to represent the differences between political party positions based on their ideologies, with the left often representing equality and the right emphasizing social hierarchy. Figure I depicts the political spectrum, according to Consulta Mitofsky, from 1 (being the most leftist side and 5 being the most rightist) and places the Mexican political parties within, according to their views and beliefs.

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Mexico has had three main dominant parties for the past 50 years; The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), the PAN (National Action Party) and the PRD (The Party of Democratic Revolution) represented in Figure I at 3.8, 4.5 and 2.4 respectively on the scale. Mexico has gone back and forth between the PRI and the PAN for the past 12 years and while the PRD seemed to increase in popularity over the years, never took the lead.

The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), founded in 1929, functioned as the country’s only political party until the PAN (National Action Party) was established in 1939 as an opposition to the PRI. However, even with the establishment of an opposing party, the PRI managed to stay in power for 71 years. Their ever growing corruption and ties to illegal activities led to many of its members to leave the party and establish their own, the PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution) was established in 1989.

The growing popularity of the PAN and the PRD in the country led to the PRI’s downfall in 2000 when the PAN took the presidency. Despite losing the presidency in 2000 and 2006 to the PAN, the PRI still holds the majority of governorships and state legislatures in the country, as well as local governments.

The PAN (National Action Party) was established in 1939 as a response to leftist actions by the PRI that included nationalization and land confiscation. The party was widely supported by the growing business sector, the Roman Catholic Church and several other opponents to the PRI’s actions and policies at the time. Among the PAN’s principles is less government involvement in the economy which is the complete opposite of the PRI’s basis. The PAN won two back to back elections, in 2000 and 2006, taking away the electoral monopoly of the PRI.

The PRD (Party of the Democratic Revolution)’s political history has been a rocky despite being one of the most important and influential parties in the country. It is the party that saw the rise of AMLO but has never occupied Los Pinos before. AMLO chose to step away from his own party, despite assured seniority, on the basis that corruption was clouding their purpose, traditional strategies and that tactics had gone stale. The party was created in 1989 by former members of the PRI that accused the party of involvement in corruption and other illegal activities. The PRD’s principles

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include addressing social welfare issues effectively and fighting against economic reforms that have taken place in the past three decades.\textsuperscript{8} The PRD aims to renegotiate the terms of NAFTA with the United States and Canada as well as to gain more control of the economy of the country.

MORENA (National Regeneration Movement) was established by Andrés Manuel López Obrador and his team in 2014 under the slogan of social democratization, anti-corruption campaigns, and promises to the people. Compared to the other parties mentioned above, MORENA is shown on Figure I as 1.8 on the political party spectrum. The establishment of this newly formed political party has not only opened the door to a new dimension of Mexican politics but has given the public hope for change.\textsuperscript{9} MORENA calls for the people of Mexico to stand against corruption and authoritarianism in the country. AMLO emphasizes market competition and economic policy reforms.

\textbf{Andrés Manuel López Obrador}

Popularly known by his initials, AMLO, Andrés Manuel López Obrador is a Tabasco native who succeeded Enrique Peña Nieto as President of the Mexican Republic. At 65 years of age, AMLO will begin his term in office on December 1st of 2018 after winning the general elections on July 1st.

AMLO began his political career under the hegemony of the PRI in 1976 in his home town where he would later become the party leader in the state of Tabasco. It was not until 1989 that he would join the PRD and become the party’s governor candidate for the same state. In 2000 he was elected as head of government of Mexico City which he resigned to in 2005 in order to run in the 2006 Presidential elections.\textsuperscript{10} Often underrated and considered a populist, AMLO’s relevance to Mexican politics is undeniable, as is his resilience. He ran for office once again in 2012 but found himself on the losing side of the elections once more. In 2014 he vowed to his new, leftist party MORENA which aims to regenerate Mexican politics and operates under the slogan \textit{juntos haremos historia} (Together we will make history) and so he did when he was elected as the President in the 2018 Mexican general elections.

\textsuperscript{8} “Political Parties in Mexico.” Rice University’s Baker Institute, 14 June 2018, www.bakerinstitute.org/political-parties-mexico/.

\textsuperscript{9} Lopez Obrador, Andres Manuel. \textit{2018 La Salida}. Planeta, 2017

\textsuperscript{10} Lopez Obrador, Andres Manuel. \textit{2018 La Salida}. Planeta, 2017
AMLO has been known for his controversial proposals, especially those in the most recent election campaign. Among his proposals are increases in financial aid for students and the elderly, amnesty for drug war criminals, universal access to higher education colleges, a referendum on energy reforms that includes the end of the PEMEX monopoly history in the country, support for the country’s agricultural sector as well as better opportunities for rural workers, construction of more and better oil refineries in the region and one of the most controversial, the decrease and even cancelation of politicians and former president’s salaries and perks.

**Dependent and Independent Variables**

This essay attempts to answer the question of *What were the factors that led to the victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador?*. It develops an explanation for the outcome of the country’s most recent general elections of 2018.

My explanatory framework was made possible by leading initial studies of the Mexican political system, the multiparty system, electoral rules and Mexico’s ever changing democracy.

My dependent variable consists of the outcome of the 2018 general elections in Mexico which will be accounted for and explained by the independent variables of voter demographics, corruption levels and PRI/PAN exit approval rates. Given AMLO’s political participation in the country’s general elections before, there are factors that have not yet been accounted for, or very well changed, in the shift to the left which I will explore and expand on.

**Hypotheses:**

Voter demographics represent certain characteristics of a population such as age, education levels, employment, gender and the groups within. These will be divided into two categories; previous and actual voting trends in order to better show the contrast and changes, if any, between the two. In order to account for previous voting

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11 Illades, Carlos. “AMLO y Las Nuevas Izquierdas.” *Nexos*, 1 May 2017

trends I will look at previous elections and the voting trends that existed then and contrast them with the ones produced by the most recent election in the country.

1. The younger the largest voter demographic age group is, the more likely they are to lean towards a leftist candidate whom, during his campaign, promised free education in all levels and better and more job opportunities within the country for them as well as a set welfare salary for the “NiNi’s” (Neither-Nor’s, Neither they study nor they work”).

Corruption levels will be measured internationally in order to place Mexico on the international stage after each term completed since 2000. The purpose is to provide an overall image of the situation that is lived in the country by illustrating the system that corruption represents in the country and how it is used as a political tool in order to achieve goals and purposes.

Corruption is a human tendency which lures the human being into taking the easiest possible path to get to their destination and in Mexico, it could be assumed as a basic instinct of survival and prosperity\textsuperscript{13}. Corruption has strengthen over time in the country due to the continuous practice of it and the little to no effort made to slow it down or eradicate it. Corruption has only gained popularity among the elites and their constant competition with the masses in the country.\textsuperscript{14}

Even though corruption has always prevailed in Mexico, the introduction of the multi party system, the creation of an opposition, the changes in electoral rules and social media have made it harder for corruption to be kept quiet and to shove it under the rug in order for people not to notice.

2. The more people were concerned about corruption, the more likely they were to vote for AMLO and MORENA given their anti- corruption campaign promises.

I examine approval rates which are based on opinion polls conducted by polling and research centers in order to gain insight into the popular opinion of the people regarding a political candidate, a political party or the status of the country in various characteristics. For the purpose of my research, the research on approval rates will reference previous PRI/PAN terms completed.


\textsuperscript{14} Best, Heinrich, et al. \textit{The Palgrave Handbook of Political Elites}. Palgrave Macmillan, 2018
Mexico has been moving slowly towards democracy and has done so by introducing multi party elections, by allowing independent candidates to participate as well as creating policies to better handle the country's insecurity and violence. However, corruption and gaps between social classes in the country as well as rises in poverty levels and lack of employment and education opportunities, suggest that the progress being made is far from enough.

3. The more people wanted to step away from the PRI and the PAN and their controversial past and involvement in corruption and violence, the more likely people were to vote for a political party that had no past and promised to eradicate corruption, lower violence in the country, take away perks that past Presidents and politicians still enjoy as well as the incarceration of all of those politicians that have been known to participate in illegal activities in the past but have had no repercussions. A vote for MORENA was a vote against the established system.

Testing

The data used to test the proposed hypotheses was obtained from the National Electoral Institute of Mexico (INE) which is the Mexican institution that oversee’s the electoral processes such as elections, voter registration, vote count and election day set up. I will also be using data from Transparency International (IT), specifically looking into Mexico and the latest elections. Transparency International is a non-governmental organization which is also not affiliated to any political party. This organization is dedicated to combating corruption on a national and international level and placing said issues on the global agenda. The Wilson Research Center also aided this research by providing data regarding voter demographic profiles in order to better understand the big voting picture of the country regarding these past elections that took place July 1st. Data was also obtained from The National Institute of Statistics and Geography (INEGI) in order to explore Mexico by the numbers.

1. The younger the voter demographic is, the more likely it is for a leftist candidate, to obtain the victory given AMLO’s controversial campaign promises that offered free education in all levels and better and more job opportunities within the country.

Figure II. The demographic of actual Mexican voters in the 2018 Presidential Elections by age group.
Source: INE (National Electoral Institute)

Figure III. Actual Mexican Voters by Age Group in the Mexican General Elections in 2006, 2012 and 2018. Source: INE (National Electoral Institute)
The average Mexican household makes around $10,552 pesos per month which translates, roughly, to $555 USD. The average Mexican family is composed of 3.7 members and while the participation of women in the workforce has only increased in past years, so has the devaluation of the Mexican peso making it harder to make ends meet for families.

Figure II represents the age diversity in the nation according to age groups. The nation is made up by 17.17% of people between the ages of 18-24, 23.16% of those between 25-34, 29.22% between 35-49, 19.11% between the ages of 50-64 and 11.32% above 65 years old.\textsuperscript{16}

Figure III represents the number of actual Mexican voters divided into age groups in order to better appreciate the age variable in the outcome of the elections. The age demographic turnout from 2018 is contrasted against the one from 2006 and 2012 in order to get a better visual of the past 3 elections and whether or not the age variable was decisive.

Figure IV Illustrates the employment status of voters by self-employment, those who are employers, employees with fixed salaries and those who are employed but do not have salaries or a fixed income per month.

2. The more people were concerned about corruption, the more likely they were to vote for AMLO and MORENA given their anti-corruption campaign promises.

As we have established, the PRI and the PAN, both have an extensive history with controversy regarding corruption of many types\textsuperscript{17}. From buying of votes, to bribing of local police and other law enforcements to making alleged treaties with drug trafficking related groups in the country for their own benefit at the time. It is clear that for a long time in Mexico, the people that make up the nation were not the priority of the elected leaders.

As a result of the corruption that has prevailed in the country and still prevails in the administration of former President Enrique Peña Nieto (2012-2018), people have taken matters into their own hands in order to have a voice and be heard\textsuperscript{18}. Teachers refused to work until their salaries were revised and augmented, leaving thousands of students without classes for months as a side effect of the protests. Many university students have been murdered on government-operated massacres for protesting against the corruption in the country as they campaigned for political opposition and the end of corruption. The law is often ignored by law enforcers as they would rather expect a bribe which is commonly referred to as a \textit{mordida} (bite), it is referred to as a bite because that is the only way them and their families get to eat\textsuperscript{19}.

According to Transparency International (IT), 61% of Mexicans believe that the level of corruption has increased in the past year and that the government is not doing the necessary to stop this, compared to an 87% from Venezuela and a 53% in Honduras\textsuperscript{20}.

The Peña Nieto administration has been at the head of the country, representing the PRI and the people of Mexico, for the past six years, this past 2018 marked the last year of the Peña Nieto administration in the Presidency of the country. According to

\textsuperscript{17} Martínez Cazares, German. “¿Por Qué Apoyo a Andrés Manuel?” Nexos, 23 May 2018

\textsuperscript{18} Dresser, Denise. “Can Mexico Be Saved?” Foreign Affairs, Foreign Affairs Magazine, 22 Aug. 2018


Paul Zachary and William Spaniel and their article “Getting a Hand by Cutting Them Off: How Uncertainty Over Political Corruption Affects Violence”, political corruption increases as the administration gets ready to vacate their positions of power. Since re-election is not possible in the Mexican democratic system, the administration tends to get the most out of it, in order to insure their future. As political corruption increases so does violence in the country\textsuperscript{21}.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{corruption_level.png}
\caption{Public Opinion Poll on Corruption Level in Public Organizations}
\end{figure}

Figure IV illustrates the answers to the question “Do you think the members of these public Organizations are corrupt?”. The group that almost half of the population believes is corrupt is their local police department with the least, but still corrupt, being religious leaders.

According to further data analysis from Transparency International, 1 out of every 2 (51\%) Mexicans had had to pay a bribe to the local police in order to avoid further issues and 4 out of every 10 Mexicans have had to pay bribes in order to receive access to public services such as education and healthcare services. Mexico is

followed by Dominican Republic at 46% and Venezuela with 38%. Even though 7 out of every 10 Mexicans answered that they would be willing to take action in order to end corruption in the country as they are aware that their actions also have an impact on the reality of the country and have even contributed to the existence of such, corruption exists in the country because people, in all levels, have allowed it to. Corruption has become a system, a web even, of people who get something out of keeping each other close. Even when people in the country try to speak out loud and condemn the corruption they have witnessed or experienced, they are met with negative consequences from authorities.

3. The more the people of Mexico wanted to stay away from the PRI and the PAN, the more likely they were to lean towards a new opposition party.

Mexico has moved slowly but steady in the democratization process. Coming from a one party system, the PRI, and their rule for many decades, Mexico has embraced the multiparty system. The debate between the efficiency of a multiparty system over a two party system like the one in the United States has been greatly debated in the scholar world and the verdict remains inconclusive. Mexico has shown a pattern in their political party emergence. The pattern consists of the creation of parties that represent the opposition to an already established party, the case of the PAN and the PRD with the PRI and now the case of MORENA with all of the above.

Figure V reflects the popularity and preference for each political party in Mexico from 2000-2018. The dates were chosen in order to reflect the relevance of the multiparty system in the country as before 2000, the PRI was the political hegemon of the country since its revolution.

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More so than his proposals during the campaign process, it was the anti-system vote that led AMLO to the victory in the elections thereby making the support for him conditional. In a study conducted by Consulta Mitofsky it was deducted that for the people of Mexico it represented more of a priority to remove the PRI from power than whether or not AMLO could deliver on his campaign proposals. When asked the question “In these elections, what’s more important: removing the PRI or keeping AMLO from gaining the presidency?”, 59% of people answered that their priority was to remove the PRI while 24% answered that their priority was to keep AMLO from winning.

**Conclusion**

The victory of The National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) and Andrés Manuel López Obrador can be attributed to many different factors but first of all, Lucia Fernandez argues, it should be acknowledged as a cry for help from the people of Mexico. The people of Mexico are beginning to understand that the country belongs to them and that they are able to take matters into their own hands and only then will they truly manage to make a difference in the country.

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The multiparty system should be composed by different parties, with different goals and therefore, different results. This has not been the case in Mexico, although there have been two opposing parties in the leadership they have given the same results in the long run, increase in violence and corruption and no real, positive change for the people in the country. Given its geography and natural resource pool, Mexico has so much potential in the trade industry, renewable energy updates, agriculture and commerce evolution as well as technological and academic achievements, however, this will only be possible once the government rearranges its priorities and learns to prioritize the people.

MORENA has been positioned as an opposition party to the PRI, the PAN and the remainders of the PRD but the party is in reality composed by many former members of said parties who align with the beliefs and goals of MORENA. During the 2018 presidential campaign, the PRI and the PAN lost most of the credibility they had due to their poor choice of candidates, not to mention the 43 students and the escape of one of Mexico's biggest and most wanted drug cartel leaders under the Peña Nieto administration.

“All politicians come demanding a mandate but AMLO really has one” said Political Scientist Emily Edmonds-Poli during the “Mexico’s Transition: What to expect from Mexico’s Next President” forum that took place at the University of San Diego this past November, during his campaign he positioned himself against the existing system and argued that he would abolish the corruption era. Andrés Manuel thought through his campaign thoroughly so that he would be able to provide something to look forward to for every single group in Mexico. He won the youth over with education opportunities as well as better job prospects for after they complete their higher education. The working class with higher wages as well as the decrease of his won, not to mention the cancelling of benefits that former politicians would enjoy as well as the doubling of pensions to those who have or will retire.

The private sector with the possibility of investment in government projects such as the Tren Maya and lastly, the part of the population that has been incarcerated due to cartel related activities were convinced by AMLO's amnesty proposal in which their charges would be dropped and they would be released.

Recent events such as the caravan from South America have only highlighted the weakness of the Mexican government. These are the conditions that AMLO is walking into, a government whose weaknesses are strongly highlighted by governments
abroad. Especially the Trump administration in the United States. Whether or not these situations will present themselves as leverage for AMLO to further negotiate with the Trump administration has yet to be decided.

The 2018 Mexican Presidential Elections were ones that were based on emotions rather than on rationale. Andrés Manuel López Obrador presented the people of Mexico with a view of Mexico that could only be seen with rose-colored glasses and took people on a journey of hope throughout his campaign, promising people the change they crave but have never seen before.
Sources:


8. Illades, Carlos. “AMLO y Las Nuevas Izquierdas.” Nexos, 1 May 2017


