

CRS Report for Congress

Received through the CRS Web

Mexico's 2006 Elections

Colleen W. Cook
Analyst in Latin American Affairs
Foreign Affairs, Defense, and Trade Division

Summary

Mexico held national elections for a new president and congress on July 2, 2006. Conservative Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party (PAN) narrowly defeated Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the leftist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in a highly contested election. Final results of the presidential election were only announced after all legal challenges had been settled. On September 5, 2006, the Elections Tribunal found that although business groups illegally interfered in the election, the effect of the interference was insufficient to warrant an annulment of the vote, and the tribunal declared PAN-candidate Felipe Calderón president-elect. PRD candidate López Obrador, who rejected the Tribunal's decision, was named the "legitimate president" of Mexico by a National Democratic Convention on September 16. The electoral campaign touched on issues of interest to the United States including migration, border security, drug trafficking, energy policy, and the future of Mexican relations with Venezuela and Cuba. This report will not be updated. See also CRS Report RL32724, *Mexico-U.S. Relations: Issues for the 109th Congress*, by Colleen W. Cook; CRS Report RL32735, *Mexico-United States Dialogue on Migration and Border Issues*, by Colleen W. Cook; and CRS Report RL32934, *U.S.-Mexico Economic Relations: Trends, Issues, and Implications*, by M. Angeles Villarreal.

Background

Mexico held presidential and congressional elections on July 2, 2006. The presidential vote was the second since the end of the Institutional Revolutionary Party's (PRI) 71-year authoritarian rule in 2000. President Vicente Fox of the National Action Party (PAN) was constitutionally prohibited from seeking re-election. The three major candidates were populist Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD), conservative Felipe Calderón Hinojosa of the PAN, and Roberto Madrazo of the PRI. Mexican law requires only a plurality of votes in a presidential race and does not provide for a second round of voting.

Presidential Election Results and Aftermath

After a highly contested election, PAN candidate Felipe Calderón was named president-elect of Mexico on September 5, 2006, and is due to be sworn into office on December 1, 2006. According to the final vote count, Calderón won just under 36% of the vote, defeating PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador by less than 234,000 votes. Voter turnout was 59%.

Although Mexico's Federal Elections Institute (IFE) planned to announce results on July 2, the vote was too close to call. At the end of the preliminary vote count, Calderón held a slight lead over López Obrador, prompting the PRD candidate to call for a full recount of the votes. López Obrador challenged the July election results, alleging fraud at the polling places and illegal interference in the election by President Fox and conservative business groups. Mexico's Federal Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF), whose decisions cannot be appealed, issued a series of decisions related to fraud allegations in the presidential campaign and vote. First, it ordered a recount of 9% of polling places in early August. In a unanimous decision issued August 28, the Tribunal held that although there were some irregularities, the election was fair. The Tribunal annulled nearly 238,000 votes as a result of irregularities. On September 5, 2006, the Tribunal ruled unanimously that, although President Fox's comments jeopardized the election, they did not amount to illegal interference in the campaign. The Tribunal also found that commercials paid for by business groups at the end of the campaign were illegal but that the impact of the ads was insufficient to warrant the annulment of the presidential election. As a result of these findings, the Tribunal named Felipe Calderón president-elect on September 5, 2006.¹

After the vote, Andrés Manuel López Obrador led a campaign of civil disobedience, including the blockade of Mexico City's principal avenue, Paseo de la Reforma, until mid-September. It reportedly cost Mexico City businesses over \$500 million in revenue. On September 1, 2006, PRD members of congress prevented President Fox from delivering the state of the union address at the Mexican congress. López Obrador rejected the election tribunal's September 5 ruling and was named the "legitimate president" of Mexico at a democratic convention held on September 16 at the Zocalo, Mexico City's main square. The PRD candidate is due to be sworn in as president of a "parallel government" on November 20. The convention also created three committees: one responsible for political negotiation, another to coordinate future civil disobedience, and a third to call a constituent assembly to draft a new constitution. It is not clear how this parallel government will operate or how much support it has. In mid-September PRD founder Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas criticized López Obrador's tactics as undemocratic and criticized him for surrounding himself with advisors who helped to orchestrate what many believe to be Carlos Salinas de Gortari's fraudulent defeat of Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas in the 1988 elections.²

¹ Arturo Zárate Vite, "Tribunal ratifica ventaja de Felipe," *El Universal*, Aug. 29, 2006; "Mexico: Calderón Moves Closer to Presidency," *LatinNews Daily*, Aug. 29, 2006; "Declara Trife Presidente a Calderón," *Reforma*, Sept. 5, 2006; and, Manuel Roig-Franzia, "Court Names Calderón Mexico's President-elect," *Washington Post*, Sept. 5, 2006.

² "Mexico: López Obrador Declared 'Legitimate President,'" *LatinNews Daily*, Sept. 18, 2006; and "Critica CCS intolerancia perredista," *La Reforma*, Sept. 14, 2006.

Profiles of Major Presidential Candidates

Felipe Calderón Hinojosa. Harvard-trained economist Felipe Calderón, the PAN presidential candidate, has been active in the conservative PAN since his youth. He served two terms in the Chamber of Deputies (1991-1994 and 2000-2003), was PAN party president (1996-1999) and Energy Minister (2003-2004) under President Vicente Fox. Calderón surprised many by winning the PAN nomination, since many observers anticipated that former Interior Minister Santiago Creel would easily win the nomination. Although Calderón was relatively unknown to the Mexican electorate in December 2005, by mid-June 2006 polls showed that he was in a tight race with PRD candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Calderón's rise in the polls was believed to be the result of missteps by López Obrador and negative advertisements claiming the PRD candidate is a "danger to Mexico."³

Running under the campaign slogan "Felipe Calderón: Jobs President (presidente de empleo)," Calderón maintained that Mexico's main problem is a shortage of well-paid jobs, which leads many Mexicans to migrate to the United States. He stressed that investment and competitiveness are keys to economic growth and job creation. Calderón pledged to create a positive investment climate by pursuing sound macroeconomic policies, balanced and sustainable budgets, and social investment; strengthening the rule of law; and creating funds to support social investment during economic downturns.⁴ He also expressed support for a development plan, similar to the European Union plan that stimulated the Irish and Spanish economies, funded by NAFTA members to increase jobs and reduce migration from under-developed regions of Mexico. Calderón also proposed opening Mexico's oil sector to private investment in the form of joint-ventures with the state-owned Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX) to further explore Mexican oil reserves, particularly potential deep-water reserves in the Gulf of Mexico. Calderón pledged to address Mexico's public security crisis by, among other measures, combating corruption; creating an agency to combat drug trafficking; extraditing criminals; unifying all federal police forces; and creating a national crime database to better understand the nature of criminal activity in Mexico. Calderón indicated he will pursue an active foreign policy, and work to restore relations with Venezuela, even though he does not support its ideology.⁵

Andrés Manuel López Obrador. PRD presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, a native of the southern state of Tabasco, studied political science and public administration at Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM) before returning to Tabasco to work with the Chontal Indian community. In the late 1980s, he aligned himself with Cuahtémoc Cárdenas, who had left the Institutional Revolutionary

³ "People Profile - Felipe Calderón Hinojosa," *LatinNews*, Oct. 4, 2005 and Will Weissert, "Mexican Candidate Says U.S. Investment Could Help Stem Illegal Immigration," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 9, 2006.

⁴ Felipe Calderón campaign website, accessed at [<http://www.felipe.org.mx>] on June 14, 2006.

⁵ Ibid; Laurence Iliff, "Mexico's Final Presidential Debate Focuses on Drug Crackdown," *Dallas Morning News*, June 7, 2006; Mark Stevenson, "Mexico Stands at Crossroads on Energy Policy; Oil Boom May Lead to Bust," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 13, 2006; and Will Weissert, "Mexican Candidate Says U.S. Investment Could Help Stem Illegal Immigration," *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 9, 2006.

Party (PRI), and founded the PRD in 1989. López Obrador was named party president for Tabasco in 1989, served as national party president (1996-1999), and was elected mayor of Mexico City (2000-2005). Extremely popular as mayor, he was expected to win the presidency easily in 2006. He led in the polls until late April 2006, when he lost support likely due to comments deemed disrespectful of President Fox and because of his refusal to take part in the April 25, 2006, presidential debates. In mid-June 2006, polls again showed López Obrador with a slight lead over PAN candidate Felipe Calderón.

López Obrador's campaign slogan was "For the good of all, the poor first (Por el bien de todos, primeros los pobres)." Not surprisingly, then, many of his 50 campaign pledges focused on poverty reduction, job creation, indigenous rights, and infrastructure investment. Proposed measures included guaranteeing a pension to all Mexicans over 70 years of age; protecting the rights of the indigenous and reducing poverty in indigenous communities; expanding access to education and improving its quality; increasing access to health care; creating incentives for maquila operators to stay in Mexico; and building high-speed rail lines. Of particular interest to the United States was his pledge to re-open NAFTA negotiations to protect Mexican corn and bean farmers. López Obrador opposes opening the state-owned oil company, Petróleos Mexicanos (PEMEX), to private investment, and charges that PEMEX's inefficiency is the result of corruption and a bloated bureaucracy. He planned to make Mexico self-sufficient in gasoline within three years of his taking office. López Obrador indicated that he would focus on Mexico's internal problems, not foreign policy, as president. Nevertheless, López Obrador stated that he will have a positive relationship with the United States. He planned to reduce emigration by addressing poverty and job creation. López Obrador, like Calderón, said he would be an advocate for the rights of Mexican migrants in the United States. In the June 6 debate he indicated that he would employ Mexico's consulates as branches of the Attorney General's office to protect Mexican migrants from discrimination. During the debate, López Obrador also stated that he would increase the role of the army to combat narcotics trafficking. Some observers feared that López Obrador would become an ally of Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, while others disputed this, pointing to the candidate's statements that he will focus on Mexico, not foreign policy.⁶

Roberto Madrazo Pintado. Another native of Tabasco, attorney Roberto Madrazo Pintado, was the PRI candidate for president. The son of a prominent PRI leader, he has served as a federal deputy (1976 and 1991-1993), senator (1988-1991), Governor of Tabasco (1994-2000), and national PRI party president (2002-2005). Opinion polls consistently put Madrazo in third place throughout the campaign. Already a divisive candidate within the PRI, his poor showing in polls led some PRI leaders to shift their support to Calderón or López Obrador while encouraging PRI voters to do the same rather

⁶ Andrés Manuel López Obrador campaign website, [<http://www.lopezobrador.org.mx/>], accessed June 15, 2006; Dane Schiller and Sean Mattson, "Five Presidential Candidates Square Off in Debate," *San Antonio Express-News*, June 7, 2006; Manuel Roig-Franzia, "Mexican Presidential Hopefuls Vow to Seek Immigration Pact," *Washington Post*, June 7, 2006; and, Laurence Iloff, "Mexico's Final Presidential Debate Focuses on Drug Crackdown," *Dallas Morning News*, June 7, 2006.

than “waste” votes on Madrazo. On May 30, the PRI expelled 28 leaders who endorsed one of the two leading candidates.⁷

During the campaign, Madrazo pledged to create jobs, improve security, facilitate remittances from the United States to Mexico, modernize the energy sector by permitting joint ventures between PEMEX and private companies, and increase the number of Mexicans who benefit from stable macroeconomic policies and export growth. He proposed shifting public investment to infrastructure and public works and improving linkages between the export sector and the internal market. He supported an immigration accord with the United States and said that more job creation is needed to prevent Mexican emigration. Madrazo also pledged to improve public security by placing federal police forces under a unified command and expanding the authority of the “preventive police” to include the investigation and prosecution of crimes.⁸

Congressional Elections

Mexico has a bicameral legislature comprised of a 500-member Chamber of Deputies and a 128-member Senate. Mexican voters elected a completely new congress on July 2, 2006. Consecutive re-election is prohibited. Deputies are elected to three-year terms with 300 elected by direct vote and 200 proportionally elected from party lists in five 40-member districts. Senators are elected to six-year terms. Each of Mexico’s 32 states directly elects three senators; the two from the slate winning the plurality of votes and the first candidate from the second-place list. Another 32 senators are elected by proportional vote from national party lists.

Both the PAN and PRD gained significant representation in the new congress sworn in on September 1, 2006, while the PRI was significantly weakened in both houses. The PRI delegation in the Chamber of Deputies fell from the largest to the third largest; PRI fell to the second largest delegation in the Senate. Although the PAN is the largest party in both houses, it failed to win a majority. Given the tension between the PAN and PRD stemming from the presidential election, some analysts believe the PRI will be influential in the upcoming congress as the PAN delegation seeks additional votes to pass legislation.

Table 1. Chamber of Deputies Election Results

	PAN	PRD	PRI	PVEM	Convergencia	PT	NA	Alternativa
2003	153	95	224	17	5	6	—	—
2006	206	125	105	19	16	16	9	4

⁷ “PRI: What’s Going on in the South?,” *Mexico & NAFTA*, June 2006; “People Profile: Roberto Madrazo Pintado,” *LatinNews*, Feb. 1, 2005; and, Roberto Madrazo campaign website [<http://www.mexicoconmadrazo.org>], accessed June 20, 2006.

⁸ Roberto Madrazo campaign website [<http://www.mexicoconmadrazo.org>], accessed June 20, 2006; Mark Stevenson, “Mexico Stands at Crossroads on Energy Policy: Oil Boom May Lead to Bust,” *San Diego Union-Tribune*, June 12, 2006; Manuel Roig-Franzia, “Mexican Presidential Hopefuls Vow to Seek Immigration Pact,” *Washington Post*, June 7, 2006; and, Wilson Center Mexico Institute, “Roberto Madrazo on Security Policy,” June 20, 2006.

Table 2. Senate Election Results

	PAN	PRD	PRI	PVEM ^a	Convergencia	PT ^a	NA ^a
2000	46	17	60	5	—	—	—
2006	52	29	33	6	5	2	1

a. PVEM=Green Ecological Party, PT=Labor Party, NA=Nueva Alianza

Implications for U.S.-Mexico Relations

The United States and Mexico have a multifaceted relationship, with recent emphasis on migration, border security, drug trafficking, trade, and energy policy. President-elect Felipe Calderón is likely to continue Mexico's advocacy for immigration reform in the United States. Differences over migration policy and border security are likely to continue to strain U.S.-Mexico relations. During the campaign, Calderón indicated his support for legalization of Mexicans who have been illegally present in the United States for five years. He also opposed construction of additional barriers along the U.S.-Mexican border. In September 2006, President-elect Calderón charged that the border fence under consideration by the U.S. Congress will be ineffective in combating illegal immigration.⁹ In October, the Mexican government officially requested that President Bush veto the Secure Fence Act of 2006 (H.R. 6061) approved by Congress on September 29, 2006, that would authorize construction of a border fence along 700 miles of the U.S.-Mexico border. President Bush is expected to sign the bill and on October 4, 2006, signed the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act for 2007, which provides \$1.2 billion to build the fence. Calderón recently re-emphasized his support for the extradition of drug kingpins to the United States and called for Mexico's political parties to work together to develop legislative and law enforcement solutions to the drug violence that plagues Mexico.¹⁰

NAFTA stipulates further opening of agricultural trade in 2008, including the sensitive bean and corn crops, causing concern in Mexico about the potentially adverse effects on domestic production. President-elect Calderón indicated during the campaign that he would address these concerns within the NAFTA framework, in contrast to López Obrador's call to re-open NAFTA negotiations. President-elect Calderón has also proposed the opening of Mexico's oil industry to private investment.

President-elect Felipe Calderón pledged to continue the active foreign policy pursued by the Fox administration. During the campaign he expressed hope of restoring Mexico's ambassador to Venezuela. Calderón also presented himself as an alternative regional influence to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez. His first trip abroad as president-elect, in early October, was to nine Central and South American nations. Calderón has indicated that he will re-orient Mexico's foreign policy to emphasize its relationships with its southern neighbors.¹¹

⁹ "Mexico's Calderón Rips Border Wall Plan," *Associated Press*, Sept. 25, 2006.

¹⁰ "Mexican President-Elect Decries Violence," *Associated Press*, Sept. 27, 2006.

¹¹ "Mexico: Calderón Starts International Trip," *LatinNews Daily*, Oct. 3, 2006.