



Mexico Intelligence Report – 10th June 2016

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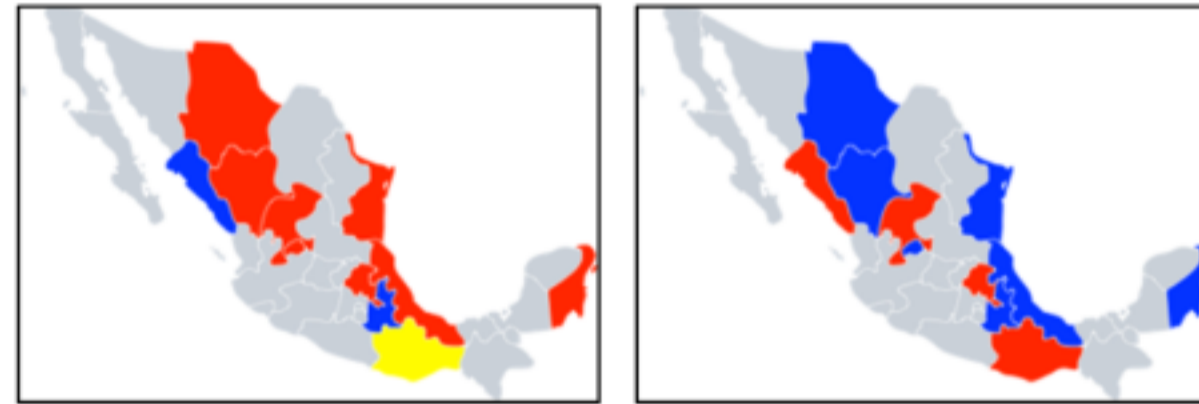
GRUPO ATALAYA

Lessons from the 2016 elections: it's the corruption stupid

Mexico's latest local elections, which took place on the 5th of June, have upended the assumption that the presidential race in 2018 was two-way contest between the incumbent PRI party and Morena, the left-wing anti-establishment party founded by Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, former Mayor of Mexico City and two-times runner up in the 2006 and 2012 presidential elections.

As the results came in it became clear that the right-wing PAN was the main winner of the day as it won seven governorships, more than double its previous historic high for local elections. In contrast to this, the PRI won five, much less than the nine governorships the party's president, Manlio Fabio Beltrones, had predicted. Perhaps more surprising still, the PAN won Veracruz, Tamaulipas and Quintana Roo (more on this below), three states that had never known governors from parties other than the PRI.

Figure 1: before and after 2016 governorship elections



In light of this, Mr. Beltrones' presidential aspirations for 2018 elections have been all but wiped out. This leaves three likely contenders within the PRI's ranks, namely, the Miguel Angel Osorio Chong the current Interior Minister, Aurelio Nuño the Minister for Education and Jose Antonio Meade the Minister for Social Development. The current governor of the State of Mexico, Eruviel Avila, has expressed his intention to add his name to the list, but this will largely depend on whether he helps to keep his state –which has the largest number of voters in the country- under PRI control in next year's governorship election.

Miguel Mancera, the current mayor of Mexico City is another politician who's chances have been practically ended for 2018. His initiative flagship political initiative to create a Constituent Assembly to draft the capital's new constitution failed to generate interest among *chilangos* (as Mexico City's inhabitants are known). Less than 30 per cent of voters turned out to elect members of the Assembly, significantly below the 53 per cent average across the 12 states who voted in their local elections.

As the dust settles, various themes from this election will remain as constant variables in the run-up to 2018. Firstly, this year's campaigns were arguably the nastiest in the country's history given that extent of mudslinging and below-the-belt tactics used across party lines (i.e. leaks of phone-tappings, smear campaigns, the use of local governments' resources to unduly influence voting and the lurking presence of organised crime in certain states' elections). In the degree to which the National Electoral Institute fails to strengthen its grip over future elections and parties continue to show no restraint in the way they operate elections, then this will only serve to grow Mexico's civil society's disenchantment with political institutions.

Secondly, although Morena failed to win any state elections, it has firmly consolidated itself as the third largest political force in the country. It won the largest among of elected seats in Mexico's City new Constituent Assembly, came second in the elections of Zacatecas and performed strongly in Veracruz, Mexico's third largest state in terms of population. This is to say that its leader, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, is the only politician who as of now can be assured will definitely be a contender in 2018. Even though his party has a two-year lead to leverage his populist rhetoric and now an institutional presence through the capital's Assembly; it is unclear to what extent 2018 might be his third-time lucky. Without forming alliances with his previous party, the decrypt PRD, his charisma might still not be enough to surpass the PRI's formidable electoral machine, nor a revitalised PAN who is now the PRD's partner of choice.

This leaves the third and most significant lesson from 2016. The central theme within Mexico's political debate is corruption. More specifically, as Mexico's democratic culture has matured, so has the exasperation of its voters with the political establishment's failure to address this issue. This year voters clearly punished the PRI for protecting governors who are widely perceived to be brazenly corrupt (not coincidentally, those of Veracruz, Tamaulipas and Quintana Roo) and for stalling on an anticorruption legislation initiative championed by an alliance of NGO's and civil society organisations.

In this sense, the PAN's performance is mainly due to the fact that it's President Ricardo Anaya capitalised this frustration by positioning his party at the foreground of this debate. In the process he has nudged his party alongside Mr. Lopez Obrador who has traditionally been associated with the anticorruption narrative, albeit his demeanour is of a more fiery and populist type than Mr. Anaya's.

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