

Historic Defeat of the Mexican Right

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The victory in Mexico was overwhelming. The ruling party won the presidency, but also seven of the nine state governorships and the majority in the Legislative Branch. A scenario of this type opens the way to promote deeper transformations, which aim at the definitive liquidation of the old PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional/ Institutional Revolutionary Party) regime of domination.

Contents

- [Beyond the Numbers](#)
- [“It’s the Economy, stupid”](#)
- [A New Type of Political Regime](#)

Beyond the purely electoral effects—winning the presidency of the Republic, seven of nine state governorships and a qualified majority to approve constitutional reforms in the Legislative Branch—the effects of the electoral defeat on the right-wing parties, despite all their impudence, dirty war and the shameless support of the forces of the international right, has opened the way to promote deeper changes that imply the definitive liquidation of the old PRI regime of domination and neoliberalism along with the search for a more just country, free and democratic.

The progressive candidate for the presidency of the Republic, Clara Sheinbaum Pardo, from the Morena party (Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional or National Regeneration Movement), in alliance with the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVE or Green Ecologist Party) and Partido del Trabajo (PT or Labour Party), obtained around 60% of the vote (36 million votes). The right-wing candidate, Xóchitl Gálvez, representing the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN or National Action Party), the PRI and the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD or Party of the Democratic Revolution) obtained 27.5% (16.5 million votes), while the candidate of the centre-right Movimiento Ciudadano (MC or Citizens’ Movement), José Álvarez Máynez obtained 10.3% of the votes.

The result for progressivism is notably higher than that obtained in 2018 by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO), when he won with 53% of the vote (30 million votes). Initially this is a ratification of his government’s policy as well as confidence in its continuity. On the other hand, the right lost 6 million votes compared to 2018.

Participation in the electoral process amounted to 60% of the total population (59, 307,000 voters), but in Mexico City and other constituencies it reached 70%. Due to problems with security 99.9% of the ballot boxes (170,159 out of a total of 170,192) were installed. On the other hand, the vote of Mexicans abroad grew exponentially reaching 76% participation, that is, 170,192 voters voted out of a total of 197,203 registered (in 2018 only 98,420 voters had exercised their right to vote, 54% of the total).

Beyond the Numbers

Although the cold electoral statistics show a clear, forceful and unobjectionable political defeat of the traditional right-wing parties - which makes any questioning or judicialisation of the electoral process unfeasible - they never manage to accurately reflect the enthusiastic popular participation that was seen in this electoral mobilisation.

The growing politicisation of a people eager to rid themselves of an old despotic, authoritarian, corrupt, racist and classist political class; the popular fatigue with the right-wing parties (PRI, PAN and PRD), which are seen as guilty of more than three decades of low wages, unemployment, corruption, privatisation of public companies, job insecurity and all the other evils of the neoliberal era, were present on election day. Thousands of videos have circulated on social networks with testimonies from people expressing their repudiation of the right-wing candidate and sympathy with the current government and its candidate, Claudia Sheinbaum.

The overwhelmingly belligerent campaign of hate, falsifications and lies by almost all national and even foreign media, conservative intellectuals and artists, important figures of the Catholic clergy combined with the intervention of personalities of the international right against President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (including against his family) and Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, consisted of accusations of being “communists” and accomplices of drug traffickers. This smear campaign had the opposite of its intended effect, as it galvanised the people and led them to turn a deaf ear to everything that the right and its mouth pieces said.

The crushing electoral defeat of the right plunged it into a state of shock, disbelief and tears, with the sudden awareness that they were living outside of reality, and rage against those who, from their own ranks, have recognised the triumph of Claudia Sheinbaum, reproaching each other for their unexpected defeat. Accustomed as they are to the efficacy of the manipulative power of their media, the possibility of a defeat, much less one of such magnitude, did not enter their heads. It is very illustrative, and even gratifying after having suffered so many grievances, to watch the videos of the different commentators on the right, observing how their state of mind is reflected in their body language.

“It’s the Economy, stupid”

It is worth returning to this expression to objectively explain one of the main reasons for Claudia Sheinbaum’s triumph. This does not mean that we leave aside the media effectiveness of López Obrador’s daily press conferences (the so-called “mornings”), where he used each question to wage a cultural battle against the right, utilising the history of Mexico to explain the counterrevolutionary and sell-out role of conservatism as he denounced the factional and coup-mongering nature of his adversaries whilst defending his governments policies and even called for mass mobilisation when the situation required it. His lectures have a huge audience in Mexico and even resonate throughout Latin America.

However, none of this would have been of any use if it had not been accompanied by a palpable improvement in the standard of living of the working class and the economy in general. This is the core of the explanation.

From the beginning of his mandate, AMLO waged a tough fight against corruption. He began by eliminating fuel theft in the PEMEX (Petróleos Mexicanos) gas pipelines, which meant a saving of 1.3 billion pesos throughout the six-year period. Large companies were charged taxes retroactively

and forced to pay their tax obligations on time (since, resorting to accounting manoeuvres, they paid practically no taxes). Between 2018 and 2022, business tax collection increased by 40.23%, reaching 1,136 trillion pesos. Even so, in this six-year term, business owners have seen their profits increase like never before, clearly justifying the urgency of a progressive tax reform.

Another important success of the Obrador policy was the rescue of PEMEX and CFE (Federal Electricity Commission), which were transferred to the private sector and were on the verge of bankruptcy. Additionally important was recovering energy sovereignty which was on the verge of falling under the control of transnational companies such as Iberdrola and Repsol. This prevented energy prices from falling prey to speculation with prices increasing exorbitantly during the pandemic, as happened in other areas, with great impact on consumers and the economy in general. Throughout the six-year period, the cost of fuel has remained stable (it barely rises in line with annual inflation), ensuring supply to the entire population and serving as a brake on inflation.

Finally, although there are other progressive measures that have been beneficial for economic stability, it is necessary to highlight the importance of social programmes. This is an area misunderstood by the Mexican ultra-left, which disdainfully refers to them as “clientels”, but which instead have been shown to have great civilising relevance and to be an important factor in strengthening the internal market.

I refer mainly to the universal pension for adults over 65 years of age (there are other scholarship programmes for students or the disabled), which now amounts to 3 thousand pesos per month (USD180). This universal pension enables, at least, the food security of 12,101,111 people and equates to an expense, for this year, of 465,049 million pesos. Although, more than just an “expense”, socialists must defend this programme as a part of the human right to a dignified old age and, it must be therefore, increased annually to fully meet its objective. This pension also means relief to many families who previously provided solidarity support from within the family for their elderly adults. Furthermore, most of this money is dedicated to the personal expenses of the beneficiaries, which results in a strengthening of the internal market.

The minimum wage has increased by almost 300%. Although this is not much for one of the most depressed salaries in the world, it has served as a reference to push up contractual salaries and reduce extreme poverty which, between 2018 and 2022, went from 14% to 12.1% of the population.

This policy as a whole explains macroeconomic stability: in 2023, GDP grew by 3.2%, inflation was reduced to 3.8% annually, the unemployment rate reached 2.4% in the first quarter of this year and, in an unusual phenomenon in our history, the Mexican peso has appreciated 13% against the dollar.

The recovery of the State’s management in energy matters, the generation of jobs in emblematic works - such as the Isthmus and Maya trains -, the construction of 100 new hospitals and the new airport for Mexico City, the advances in democratic life and a modest improvement in the standard of living outweighs the major problems that remain to be solved (including security), and are the factors that explain the electoral earthquake that benefited Claudia Sheinbaum’s candidacy.

Despite all this, we cannot fail to point out that Obradorist progressivism suffers from severe limits, contradictions and inconsistencies in various political and social aspects, especially in its relationship with the working class. Let us note the lack of a solution to the mining strikes in Cananea, Sombrerete and Taxco (which have already been going on for 18 years); the labour reintegration of the workers of the Mexican Union of Electricians (with 15 years of resistance), where even their union autonomy was violated by encouraging a right-wing opposition to try to impose a docile leadership; the total cancellation of the neoliberal educational reform for education workers; the abrogation of the private pension system and the return to the solidarity system; the

condescending treatment towards the government appointed union bureaucracy and the disdain towards democratic unionism and the maintenance of salary caps for workers under a collective contract. We will expand on this topic in another article.

A New Type of Political Regime

The defeat of the neoliberal right is more than a purely electoral phenomenon. It is destabilising the right-wing parties and will force them to reinvent themselves if they are to continue to exist as a political alternative. The old PRI regime of domination, along with its political parties, is mortally wounded and something new is being born. It is not a finished model, nor is it what we as socialists would like, but, for the moment, it contains some interesting elements.

In the last 30 years, the different governments have been mere instruments for executing the dictates of an all-powerful oligarchy. There is now relative federal government autonomy with respect to the various power elites for the benefit of the capitalist system as a whole. Its class character continues to be bourgeois, but with the capacity to implement policies that go against neoliberal orthodoxy.

The new party in power does not rely on corporate control of social organisations (even if, in the case of Obrador, it is rather hostile towards any process of self-organisation of the masses). Its social relationship is reduced to considering the movements as simply voters, in an individualised manner. Consequently, Morena is not a political party in strict terms: it is a mere apparatus for electoral participation. It does not have a territorial structure for the organisation and discussion of its hundreds of thousands of members; it is controlled vertically by a bureaucratic caste that defines the appointment of its leaders and their candidacies, and now it is the refuge of thousands of turncoats (chapulines or grasshoppers) from right-wing parties.

But the above does not mean that Morena is hopeless. A latent conflict exists between sectors of the left - which still weigh in and hope to make Morena a democratic party, committed to social struggles and led by those who represent the original libertarian ideology - and a right-wing bureaucracy that seeks to maintain control of the apparatus and subject it to the designs of the governments in power. This conflict currently exists in a truce due to the electoral process. We will see how this conflict is resolved.

Unlike other countries in Latin America, where the emergence of progressive governments was a product of the push of social movements, in Mexico social movements are very weakened. They suffered various defeats and setbacks that left them divided and unable to be subjects with their own weight in the current process of change. Despite various attempts, to date we have not been able to build an alternative social pole. However, we have made modest progress with the recovery of various unions in the automotive and maquila industries [1] and the dozens of strikes which have broken out to achieve better wages and working conditions. That's all, or almost all.

However, it is important to point out that there is no Chinese wall between the irruption of the masses in the electoral field to oust the bosses' parties from power and taking advantage of the new political scenario to build authentic unions, promote the fight in defense of water, the land and the environment, achieve food sovereignty and reactivate the countryside as a producer of organic foods without agrottoxins. After all, these are two versions of the same subject, which presents itself as a citizen or as a social class. The task of Mexican socialists is to build a bridge between the two.

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Footnotes

[1] Maquila or maquiladores are foreign owned factories which use cheap Mexican labour and regressive labour laws to assemble products for export back to the owners nation state -usually the USA.