

A brief history of elections in Mexico, and the recent elections of 2006
Summary of a lecture given by Arturo Borja, director of Comexus, July 21, 2006

After the Mexican revolution, the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) was created to bring together those with military power in order to create national stability and discourage further revolution. The PRI was created, not to compete for power, but to administer it. The leaders believed that elections would legitimate their power. Because Porfirio Díaz had controlled Mexico for thirty-five years prior to the revolution, the new constitution states that no president will be reelected. Instead of being reelected, each PRI president named a member of his cabinet as his successor. The PRI held power from 1929 to 2000. The transition to democracy, however, began much earlier. Stability in Mexico led to the growth of the middle class in urban areas—people who viewed themselves as citizens who could demand some accountability from the government.

In the 1930s an opposition party, the PAN (National Action Party), which was linked to the Catholic Church, began to nominate candidates for the presidency.

In 1968 as Mexico prepared to host the Olympic Games, some segments of society were very critical of the PRI and advocated a change to a real democracy. In October 1968 leftist student protesters were massacred at Tlatelolco. It is unknown how many people were killed because the PRI controlled most of the media.

In the 1970s leaders within the PRI began lobbying for reform. Conflicts within the party resulted in changes to the electoral law, introducing proportional representation within the legislature. This law remains in effect today. Some representatives are elected directly; others are chosen from lists submitted by each party in proportion to the number of votes received by each party in the elections.

By 1988 many Mexicans had less confidence in the government. Several peso devaluations caused increased economic insecurity and increased support for opposition parties. The candidates were Carlos Salinas de Gortari (PRI), Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas (FDN—Democratic National Front), and Manuel Clouthier (PAN). At that time, the Secretary of the Interior was in charge of conducting the elections. On election day, the PRI announced that the computer system had broken down. Salinas de Gortari was declared the winner with 50.4% of the vote. This obvious fraud angered many and led to growing demands for change. Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas created the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) in 1989.

In 1996 President Ernesto Zedillo created an autonomous agency, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE), to be in charge of Mexican elections. In 2000, Vicente Fox (PAN) won the election and the PRI lost power for the first time in seventy-one years.

In 2006, there were three major candidates: Felipe Calderón (PAN), Andrés Manuel López Obrador (PRD), and Roberto Madrazo (PRI). On July 2, 2006, the day of the elections, no major problems were reported with the voting. Under the IFE system, citizens are selected at random to serve at the 133,000 polling places. (Those selected may accept or decline to serve in that role.) Those three people (two assistants—*vocales*—and one chair—*jefe de casilla*) per polling place are trained by IFE to work at the polling place. In addition, each party sends a representative to monitor each polling place. Each eligible voter has a photo identification card issued by IFE. When a person votes, her card is punched and her thumb is printed with indelible ink. Votes are secret, and each voter places his folded ballot in a clear plastic box. At the end of the day, the

ballots are removed from the box in the presence of the poll workers and the party representatives. The ballots are counted, and each person must agree to the count. The results are entered on a tally sheet (*acta*) which is then faxed to the Federal Electoral Institute for tabulation. A large copy of the tally sheet is posted on the door of each polling place for the community to see.

Meanwhile, IFE statisticians do an initial sampling and make a preliminary estimate of the results. Three statistical methods were used. The margin of error made it impossible to declare a winner at that time.

Sampling Method	Calderón (PAN)	López Obrador (PRD)
Robust Method	35.25% - 37.40%	34.24% - 36.38%
Classic Method	35.68% - 36.53%	34.94% - 35.70%
Bayesian Method	35.77% - 36.40%	35.07% - 35.63%

Therefore, at 11:00 p.m. Sunday night when the announcement was scheduled to be made, IFE announced that the final results would be available Wednesday morning. Despite prior promises to wait for a definitive statement from IFE, López Obrador declared victory by a margin of half a million votes. Calderón declared that the preliminary results favored him.

The Program of Preliminary Results (PREP) is based on the tally sheets from each polling place. The faxed *actas* were tabulated. Those that were hard to read were placed in a basket labeled “*actas inconsistentes*” to be clarified later, according to a procedure that was agreed upon by IFE and the political parties in February. The first count was available by 7:00 a.m. Monday morning and the second by Tuesday.

PREP	Calderón (PAN)	López Obrador (PRD)
First count with illegible ballots removed	36.38%	35.34%
Second count with illegible ballots included	35.91%	35.29%

The final official computation (*Computo Distrital*) based on original copies (not faxes) of the tally sheets, tabulated and double-checked for any errors, was announced Wednesday morning, July 5. Felipe Calderón prevailed by a margin of 240,000 votes out of 41 million cast, a difference of just 0.58%.

	Calderón (PAN)	López Obrador (PRD)
Official Results	35.89%	35.31%

López Obrador made accusations of fraud, calling for a recount or nullification of the election. Protesters rallied to the Zócalo (main plaza) in Mexico City throughout the month of July. Supporters blocked roads and tollbooths, severely snarling traffic in the capital and preventing the government from collecting tolls. The Federal Electoral Tribunal, which must declare the winner of the elections by September 6, called for a partial recount in the 12,000 polling places (9% of the total) with discrepancies.

Ballots annulled during the recount were evenly split between the parties. On August 28, IFE declared the results official and named Calderón as the President Elect. It remains to be seen whether López Obrador will eventually give up his protest.