

A Result of Mexicans' Determination to Change

*Santiago Oñate Laborde**

Imagenlatina-Marco A. Cruz



Our main objective as a political party in developing the new electoral rules is that they make it possible to achieve full democracy.

* President of the National Executive Committee of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

Among the many positive aspects of the political-electoral reform recently approved by Mexico's different political parties and their legislators in the national Congress and the local Congresses, the Institutional Revolutionary Party would first like to emphasize that this agreement was the result of a prolonged, intense and difficult process of negotiations among the national political forces which for the first time in our history led to a complete consensus on this matter.

This is very important for the PRI because it is undoubtedly a reflection of the maturity and political goodwill of the different parties to culminate a series of reforms passed during the last decade. The main objective of these reforms is to create a system of electoral rules agreed on by all that would not be questioned, suspected or doubted by the electoral contenders.

Additionally, we consider it important that the legislation emanating from this reform will be applied during next year's federal elections, known in Mexico as intermediate elections, which are not as high-pressure as presidential elections. This will make it possible to evaluate the operation and efficiency of the new electoral institutions.

Our main objective as a political party in developing the new electoral rules is that they make it possible to achieve full democracy, governed by plurality and broad public participation in which legality, equity, probity and impartiality are all guaranteed in elections.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party never doubted nor had any reservations about supporting a new constitutional framework because it invigorates the party system, strengthens the independence of electoral bodies, enriches pluralism in the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, improves conditions of equity for parties and candidates during campaigns, legalizes elections and broadens democracy in Mexico City.

The PRI has already expressed its support for consolidating the system of political parties in our country, ensuring it as a stable, plural and competitive system.

For that reason we agreed that in order for the already existing electoral parties in Mexico to retain their legal registration status and win seats in the Congress, the minimum percentage of the vote they must receive nationwide should be 2 percent. During the negotiations, other parties demanded that the percentage be 3 percent or 5 percent, but the PRI thought this inappropriate since it would have created a high, artificial barrier and inhibited pluralism in Mexico.

Along these same lines, the Institutional Revolutionary Party agreed with establishing substantial flexibility to facilitate electoral coalitions among those parties which might want to present common candidates for deputy, senator or president.

The PRI agreed with reestablishing a legal and political category that proved its efficacy in the past: that of political groups. This will open additional spaces where citizens may carry out political activity, besides the parties.

To emphasize the solidity and stability of the party system, we agreed that the enabling legislation should facilitate the road to definitive legal registration status for political parties in Mexico, and maintain this as the only category of registered parties.¹

One of the most important steps taken in this reform, which puts an end to a long debate and an electoral model in force since 1946, is making electoral bodies completely autonomous and in-

dependent. The Institutional Revolutionary Party agreed that the executive branch should not preside or even be a member of the highest electoral body in the land, the General Council of the Federal Electoral Institute. This also means that the executive branch will not be able to appoint the council's executive secretary or any other of its officers.

Two changes have been made regarding the legislative branch's participation in the General Council: the legislature will have non-voting-member status, with the right to address the Council; and, to ensure parity, each political party will have a single member of the council if they have representatives in either of the two chambers of Congress.

The PRI also supported and promoted the public becoming more and more involved in elections and was in agreement that the Federal Electoral Institute should be headed up by a citizen-president and eight electoral councilors, all of whom should not be members of political parties and prejudiced neither in favor nor against them.

Imaginatina-Octavio Gómez



Representation. No party will have more than 300 seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

¹ Former legislation established the category of conditional registration. [Editor's Note.]

They will be elected by a two-thirds vote of the Chamber of Deputies, which means that no single party will be able to make the decision alone.

One of the most backward aspects of our electoral system—which we have overcome with this reform—is funding and media access for parties and their candidates. On these important points, the consensus was to elevate the principle of equality to the constitutional level.

A way of balancing the parties in matters of funding was found: state funds will no longer be distributed to parties exclusively on the basis of the number of votes they received in the last election. From now on, a significant part of the funding—30 percent—will be distributed equally among the parties with congressional seats. It was also agreed that public funding should predominate, which will strengthen party ties with society.

Formulas were established to guarantee fairer party and candidate access to the electronic media with regard to time slots, frequencies and the size of audiences.

The agreements arrived at about the new make-up of the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate will facilitate a

*The PRI also
supported and promoted
the public becoming more and more
involved in elections.*

more plural representation and better relations between the majority and the minorities. For that reason, the Institutional Revolutionary Party agreed that the maximum number of legislators any party can have in the Chamber of Deputies be lowered from 315 to 300, and that there be an 8 percent ceiling on the over-representation of any party based on the ratio between its percentage of the vote and its number of deputies.

The Senate was revamped so that each state will have three senators; two of the seats will go to the party which

received the majority of votes in the state and the third will be awarded to the largest minority. Another 32 senators will be elected proportionally nationwide, regardless of representation by state.

It was also agreed that controversies arising in the Mexican electoral system should go to the judicial branch, so that they may be solved with legal criteria and judicial elements by the proper jurisdictional bodies. To bolster trust in the Federal Electoral Tribunal, it will be incorporated into the judicial branch of the government and its judges will be selected by a two-thirds majority of the Senate from among proposals made by the Federal Supreme Court. It is important to underline that, in contrast with the previous legislation, the president will no longer have the faculty to nominate these judges.

Along these same lines, the presidential election of the year 2000 will not be evaluated or sanctioned by a political body—like the prior legislation's Electoral College, which was the newly elected Chamber of Deputies. The validity of the 2000 election will be decided exclusively by the Tribunal.

We must point out that the reform makes it the Supreme Court's responsibility to decide on the constitutionality of any challenged federal or state electoral law.

One of the questions about which consensus was reached early on in the negotiations was the need to broaden out political rights for citizens and the guarantee that they be able to exercise those rights: the right to vote, to be elected and to freely and peacefully associate among themselves.

Another measure was decided upon that had long been demanded by the citizens of Mexico City: the right of the city's inhabitants to elect the head of their government and their Legislative Assembly by secret, free and direct vote.

In the Institutional Revolutionary Party, we believe that this political reform, a single part of the reform of the state to which PRI members are committed, is a reflection of Mexicans' determination to change in order to move forward definitively on the road to democracy. ❧