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MEXICAN POLITICS

CSIS Report: Politics Parties, Actors Bracing for 2006 Elections

WASHINGTON, Nov. 25, 2003 – Mexico remains a far cry from a Jeffersonian democracy, but the country has taken giant strides to open up its once autocratic, single-party dominant system, according to a CSIS report.

The report, *Beyond the Mid-term Elections* (http://csis.org/americas/mexico/0310_grayson.pdf), by **George Grayson**, CSIS senior associate, examines the results of the recent election in Mexico and asserts that it was characterized by many firsts. “This was the first election without an Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) incumbent president; the first in which the president of the PRI was selected in an internal election rather than by the nation’s chief executive,” the report states. “The first in which the PRI established a broad-based coalition; the first during the administration of President Vicente Fox Quesada, the first with 11 registered parties; and the first since Andres Manuel López Obrador was elected mayor of Mexico City.”

On July 6, voters selected all 500 members of the Chamber of Deputies, all 16 of Mexico City’s mini-mayors, governors and state and municipal officials in six of the nation’s 31 states. The abstention rate soared to its highest level in modern Mexican history with only 41.8 percent of eligible voters participating. Additionally, 957,410 citizens who did show up at the polls either intentionally or inadvertently spoiled their ballots. Although President Fox retained a high level of personal popularity, those who did cast valid votes registered their discontent with the performance of the incumbent chief executive.

“The new composition of the Chamber of Deputies places the burden on the PRI to show whether it can make the shift from self-serving obstructionism to creative policy making. In the past, the PRI has depended on the chief executive to set a positive legislative agenda,” the report states.

“The PRI’s loss of the presidency and Fox’s inability to select his successor have changed the rules of the political game,” the report states. “As a result, with three years left in the *sexenio*, one can’t swing a dead cat in Mexico City without hitting a presidential wannabe.”

The report examines President Fox’s legislative strategies, the implications of the abstentions and spoiled ballots, possible changes to Mexico’s electoral system, presidential politics, and the significance of the elections.

“The recent voting sounded the starting gun for the 2006 presidential race,” the report concludes. “The fate of the PAN in 2006 depends on Fox’s performance during the next three years. If he can forge an alliance with the PRI to pass several important initiatives, his party will recover some of the ground lost on July 6.”

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