

## Marxists, evangelicals, business executives, working-class activists — meet Mexico's strange new ruling coalition

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A street in the Mexico City suburb of Texcoco, where the mayor claimed a senate seat running on the ticket of Morena, a new party that swept to power in Sunday's elections. (Alejandro Cegarra for The Washington Post)

In winning Mexico's presidency by a landslide, Andrés Manuel López Obrador is carrying with him into office an untested swarm of politicians and neophyte bureaucrats of disparate ideologies, skills and intentions.

Now he'll have to govern with them.

López Obrador took [53 percent of the vote](#) Sunday — a full 30 percentage points over his nearest rival — and triumphed in all but one of Mexico's 32 states. The coalition led by his National Regeneration Movement, known as Morena, will probably control both houses of the National Congress, key statehouses and legislatures, and some of the country's largest cities for at least the next few years.

[López Obrador](#) is a veteran leader of the left. But his coalition's new officeholders include social progressives and evangelical Christians, committed Marxists and pragmatic entrepreneurs, longtime rebels and reviled former leaders of the once monolithic Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI.

Morena's challenge is "to maintain the integrity of our majority," said Higinio Martínez Miranda, 62, the mayor of the Mexico City suburb of Texcoco, who claimed a Senate seat on Sunday. "We come from many different paths."

Other Senate winners for Morena include the fugitive exiled leader of Mexico's miners union, a onetime U.S. immigrant freed from jail in 2016 after facing kidnapping charges and — most gratefully for many López Obrador supporters — the man widely blamed for a fraud-tinged 1988 election that denied a previous leftist candidate the presidency.



Higinio Martínez Miranda, a newly elected senator for the Morena party, in his office. (Alejandro Cegarra for The Washington Post)

Scores of inexperienced lawmakers will take office Sept. 1. Thousands of state and federal jobs will have to be filled with movement loyalists also capable of public administration. First-time cabinet secretaries, governors and mayors alike will struggle to impose López Obrador's [zero-tolerance order for corruption](#) in bureaucracies long oiled by it.

"It will be a learning process," said Luis Valdepeña, a longtime leftist activist sporting a graying ponytail and goatee who helped lead the Morena campaign here in Ecatepec, a raw and impoverished sprawl of 1.6 million people bordering Mexico City. "Nothing is going to happen right away."

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Morena trounced the PRI in Ecatepec and across the state of Mexico, the country's most populous. The state had been a PRI bastion for nearly a century — [President Enrique Peña Nieto](#) was governor here, the beneficiary of a political machine that dominated the state for decades.

But the PRI held on to only three of 45 state assembly seats. Morena also claims 38 of the state's 41 seats in the federal Chamber of Deputies, the lower house of Congress, and 44 of 125 city halls, including those in the teeming working-class suburbs of Mexico City that account for most of the state's population.



Luis Valdepeña gives instructions to his employees in the headquarters of Morena in Ecatepec. (Alejandro Cegarra for The Washington Post)

The party's mayor-elect here in Ecatepec, Fernando Vilchis, is a lawyer and longtime leader of a left-leaning grass-roots organization but has never held public office. He will now have to administer one of Mexico's largest, poorest and most violent cities. Ecatepec employs more than 6,500 people, including about 2,500 police officers.

"We are going to bring in experts to train people, including in the most important issue, which is honesty," said Vilchis, 42. "There are some people who despite being from other parties are good public servants. One thing is a lack of training, another is a failure to govern. Past governments didn't want to."

Some residents doubt Vilchis and his team are up to the task.



“He doesn’t have a political career,” said Victor Villanueva, a 65-year-old PRI stalwart whose father held elective posts in the city for decades. “We don’t know with whom he is going to govern, and this city has many problems.”

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López Obrador founded [Morena](#) little more than four years ago after the Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD — on whose ticket he lost two previous presidential runs — made a pact with the PRI and center-right National Action Party to pass free-market energy, education and labor overhauls reviled by many on the left.

The party started small, with just other PRD deserters, and built slowly by attracting independent unions and those fleeing the other parties. In its debut election in 2015, Morena won about 8 percent of the vote in federal midterm elections, as well as five of Mexico City’s 16 districts and city halls and state assembly seats elsewhere.



Victor Villanueva stands in front of his house in Ecatepec. He is a longtime supporter of the PRI, which was Mexico’s dominant political party during the past century but was demolished in elections last weekend. (Alejandro Cegarra for The Washington Post)

The coalition led by Morena in this year’s election includes the Workers’ Party, which condemns capitalism as the root of Mexico’s inequality, and the conservative Social Encounter Party, or PES. The PES is a tiny evangelical Christian party that supports

López Obrador's anti-corruption message but little of his more socially liberal agenda.

Striving to forge even wider consensus, López Obrador has spent this week making nice with his political rivals and Mexico's powerful business organizations, trying to calm both investors and the public.

After meeting with Peña Nieto, the president-elect said that his administration would respect the independence of Mexico's central bank and would not be seizing any private property. Mexico's trade-focused and business-friendly macroeconomic policies would continue, he said.

"We have to agree on many issues," López Obrador said of Peña Nieto, who leaves office Dec. 1. "That there are no shocks, that there is confidence in economic and financial matters. Above all, that peace and tranquility be guaranteed in this transition period."

Maintaining the economic status quo may not sit well with many of López Obrador's more radical followers. Neither will the electoral deals López Obrador made with political leaders, many of them formerly tied to the PRI, to win niche votes.



A portrait of Andrés Manuel López Obrador hangs next to one of Che Guevara, the iconic fighter in the Cuban revolution, in a Morena office. (Alejandro Cegarra for The Washington Post)



[Manuel Bartlett](#), the former interior minister accused by many of fixing the 1988 presidential election, will take a seat as Morena's senator from central Puebla state. López Obrador sought and received the support of Elba Esther Gordillo, the once PRI-allied former leader of Mexico's 2 million-strong teachers union, who remains under house arrest on corruption charges from six years ago.

"That hurt for many of us," Rocio Lopez, 51, a former federal congresswoman and longtime López Obrador ally, said of the deals with former PRI leaders. "But Andrés Manuel decides and we have to follow. They are on probation."

Less controversial for Morena is the Senate win of [Napoleón Gómez Urrutia](#), the leader of the national Miners Union who has lived in Canada since being accused by federal prosecutors of fraud involving a deadly coal mine explosion in 2006. Formal charges have long since been dropped, but Gómez Urrutia has remained in Canada for fear of facing new ones should he return to Mexico. López Obrador and others have defended him as a victim of government persecution.



A field in Texcoco, Mexico. (Alejandro Cegarra for The Washington Post)

[Nestora Salgado](#), another incoming senator, will win immunity from pending kidnapping charges related to her brief stint as head of a volunteer community police force in the violent southern state of Guerrero. Supporters say the charges were a political attack by a former state governor. Her release from prison is being appealed by state prosecutors.

Morena leaders say they are intent on maintaining party discipline. They want to avoid the factional infighting that crippled the Party of the Democratic Revolution, which many assume will soon disappear.

“We must unconditionally support López Obrador,” said Martínez Miranda, a surgeon who has been involved in leftist politics for more than four decades.

“His program isn’t to make revolution,” he said of López Obrador. “It’s to allow people to hope again.”

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