

Mexicans pared back President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's power in elections on Sunday, an official projection based on early results showed, delivering his MORENA party and allies a reduced majority that will make sweeping change more difficult.

The National Electoral Institute (INE) saw the ruling coalition winning between 265 and 292 of the 500 seats in the lower house, short of the two thirds majority needed to push through amendments to the constitution.

The mid-term election was seen as a referendum on the president's policies and his shake-up of Mexico's institutions.

The result, if confirmed, suggests voters want Lopez Obrador to tone down his plans to transform Mexico with an overhaul of politics and the economy. He has also toyed with constitutional changes to protect state energy companies.

Since taking office in 2018 after a landslide victory, he has strengthened the role of the state in the energy sector and radically cut back on the cost of government to channel resources to the poor and his priority infrastructure projects.

In the process, critics say, he has eroded institutional checks and balances and frequently criticized autonomous bodies, including the Bank of Mexico, prompting adversaries to sound the alarm about his concentration of power.



An indigenous Zapotec woman casts her vote at a polling station during the mid-term elections in the rural village of San Bartolome Quialana, in Oaxaca state, Mexico June 6, 2021. REUTERS/Jorge Luis Plata

The forecast outcome of the lower house election was in line with opinion polls late in the race, which showed Lopez Obrador's coalition losing some of its grip on the contest after a deadly metro accident in May and sexual abuse allegations against some of its most prominent candidates.

Mexicans also chose 15 state governors and state lawmakers on Sunday. Results are still coming in. Opinion polls in recent days showed MORENA winning most of the 15 governors' races.

'Not happy'

The contest has taken place amid the COVID-19 pandemic and high levels of violent crime, with 91 politicians killed in this election cycle, according to security consultancy Etelect.

With security forces ramping up their presence in violence-plagued states Baja California, Guerrero, Michoacan and Sonora ahead of the election, crime was a top concern for many voters.

In one incident on Sunday, a man threw a severed head at a voting station in the Terrazas del Valle neighborhood of the border city Tijuana as people voted.

To stay on top in the long term, MORENA must improve its record on crime and the economy, officials, lawmakers and voters say. Mexico's economy contracted 8.5% in 2020, the most since the Great Depression of the 1930s, though it is now clawing back ground, lifted by U.S. demand.



People sit at a polling station during mid-term election in Xochimilco, Mexico City, Mexico June 6, 2021. REUTERS/ Toya Sarno Jordan

Olivia Aguirre, a 32-year-old academic in Mexico City who voted for Lopez Obrador in 2012 and 2018, said she was disillusioned with the president for his dismissal of women's protests

against various problems including violence, a lack of support for renewable energy and what she called the “authoritarian” drift of his government.

“I’m not happy about the direction the country is headed,” she said after voting for the opposition in the city’s Roma district.

Many of her friends who had supported him felt the same way, though her parents still backed MORENA, she said. Early results pointed to setbacks in the capital for the ruling party.

Even so, while voters have been critical of the government’s record on job creation and fighting crime, skepticism of Mexico’s former rulers, now in opposition, is marked. Lopez Obrador has also benefited from a coronavirus vaccine rollout.

The INE projections showed only moderate gains for the opposition coalition despite robust campaigning portraying Lopez Obrador as a danger to democracy.

Voter Luis Dominguez, 36, in the small municipality of Cuaxomulco in the southeastern state of Tlaxcala said he was standing by the president.

“We have to support him so he can complete his mission,” said Dominguez.

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