

» Influence Groups in the New Government of López Obrador

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This year, over 40 countries held elections to choose their heads of state. Several developments have affected the perception and realities of democracies across the globe. Mexico's recent elections (July 1st) marked a historical milestone, with around 56 million people (of a potential turnout of 89 million) casting their votes among an unprecedented list of candidates that resulted in the victory of Andrés Manuel López Obrador as the country's elect president.

With the greatest voter turnout in Mexico's history, and amid a context of clear rejection of preceding models of government, over 30 million voters elected a pure left-wing leader to govern the second largest economy in Latin America for the first time in decades.

Collective discontent, blatant corruption throughout public administration, inequality indices, and a rising wave of violence and delinquency in the country set the stage perfectly for the crushing victory of MORENA¹ in the elections. However, we must also point out the

extraordinary negotiating efforts by Andrés Manuel and sympathetic groups to facilitate the process of new political leaders coming to power. They paved the way for one of the most effective transitions seen since the advent of democratic elections in the country.

When launching the main points of this government's agenda, careful handling of the different management styles of those in power can mean the difference between success or failure. Formulating a long-term project as a party objective may depend on it. In this sense, it is worth noting that MORENA accepted a broad slate of different individuals as party members once its victory appeared to be imminent, causing internal divisions and polarization.

Although the party's charter² and national legislation prohibit undercurrents or subgroups, this does not prevent the natural formation of influence groups that directly or indirectly have a bearing on the decision-making processes of the country's leader.

INFLUENCE GROUPS

Given the focus on centralism and the highly vertical form of management, we can assume groups that may influence the president will have the chance to do so at any stage of his government. The classification of influence groups has been debated by analysts from different points of view; what follows should be considered an outline rather than a circumscribing approach to the profiles and types of bonds that comprise them. Rather than just a list of names, it is meant to be a catalyst for a profound analysis of the relationships with the president elect and the way in which these may have a bearing on issues affecting the general public.



¹ Political party and leftist-nationalist social movement created in 2012 by Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

² Publication DOF 2014 charter of MORENA

FIRST GROUP: THE “RED CIRCLE”

This group includes people who are very close to the president and with whom he normally shares a personal bond. After 12 years of effort to become head of state and reflecting his well-known personality, only his most loyal followers are considered part of this group. Its members can question or examine some of his important decisions.

The group also includes his children (Andrés “Andy,” Gonzalo and José Ramón López Beltrán, in order of confidence) and his wife Beatriz Gutiérrez Müller. Along with “Andy,” the innermost circle is shared with the head of the government elect in Mexico City, Claudia Sheinbaum. For over 15 years, she has been a loyal supporter of López Obrador’s project, and many think she could be a successor to the president elect.

We must also mention César Yáñez. Despite his trustworthiness and his role as overseer of strategic communications during the campaign, he will have to consider maintaining a discreet distance from the president, due to a recent media scandal spurred by the publication of photos taken at his wedding.

Another member of this group is Jesús Ramírez, director of social communication of the President’s Council, and Alejandro Esquer Verdugo, private secretary to the presidency and head of the presidential agenda.

Other members of the group are Julio Scherer, legal advisor, and Alfonso Romo, head of the office of the presidency. Both have gained places within this inner circle as a result of years of personal and professional service provided to Andrés Manuel.

SECOND GROUP: OPERATORS

This group is for individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the functioning of the office of the presidency over the years and those who have shown effectiveness in fulfilling their political duties.

These individuals include President and General Secretary of MORENA Yeidckol Polevnsky and federal deputy Tatiana Clouthier, both of whom played key roles in the campaign; Secretary of Energy Rocio Nahle, who has become a closer ally in the past three years; and Bertha Luján, who is the mother of the Minister of Labor María Luisa Alcalde and has accompanied López Obrador since his term in the government of Mexico City.

Others in this group are MORENA founder Raquel Sosa and leader of State Coordinators Gabriel García Hernández, who will oversee the work of 32 state delegates and 264 regional delegates in Andrés Manuel López Obrador’s government. There is also Carlos Slim, who is the entrepreneur with the second closest relationship to the president elect, after Marcos Fastlich.

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THIRD GROUP: PROFESSIONALS

High-profile professional politicians are not part of the president elect’s most trusted inner circle. Nonetheless, it is of vital interest to López Obrador to maintain a relationship of confidence with some of them to deal with the many challenges that will emerge during his term.

Appearing in this group are Secretary of Foreign Affairs Marcelo Ebrard, senators Ricardo Monreal and Martí Batres, Vice-President of the Executive Board of the Chamber of Deputies Dolores Padierna and her former husband René Bejarano, who are at the head of one of the sub-cultural movements associated with the party in Mexico City.

The group also includes individuals who are better known for their achievements as entrepreneurs but are considered trusted allies of the president: Secretary of Education Esteban Moctezuma and presidential advisor José María Riobóo.

NEW NATIONAL REALITY

The list of names will surely continue to grow as the new leader goes about tackling the titanic challenge of achieving the country’s needed transformation. Therefore, looking beyond the cut-and-dried naming of individuals, all these key players will have to comprehend the changes that have come with what many think will be remembered as not only a new six-year period, but a new political system.

For companies and organizations, knowledge of these influence groups will allow them to better segment efforts of communication and collaboration in order to focus the development of intelligence on those who stand a greater chance of having a bearing on high-level decisions.

However, we are witnessing the emergence of a new way of seeing and doing things in Mexico, in which this government seeks to do away with paradigms and break away from the paths trod by past administrations. Therefore, rather than simply identifying the influencers or decision-makers of the country’s political arena, what is needed is a credible and legitimate process of adaptation to a new way of doing things in the quest for the common good of all Mexicans.

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