

Roderic Ai Camp,
Mexico: What Everyone Needs to Know

What was the impact of the 1964 electoral reforms?

In the second half of the twentieth century, the Institutional Revolutionary Party, facing increasing criticism of its semi-authoritarian political model, decided to introduce electoral reforms that altered the distribution of majority districts and added what became known as party deputies to the federal legislative branch. Prior to the reforms, the lower house of congress, the Chamber of Deputies, consisted of 178 congressional districts. Between 1949 and 1961, the PRI only lost thirty-three out of a total of 807 district seats. In 1964, it decided to alter the composition of the congressional seats, introducing an additional thirty-six to forty-one party deputy seats during the congressional sessions from 1964 to 1979. The law relied on a formula based on the percentage of votes cast for congressional candidates in each election. The underlying rationale the PRI used for introducing this change was to create the impression that the electoral system was more democratic and competitive than was actually the case, assigning these seats only to opposition party candidates. For example, in the 1964 elections, in addition to the 178 seats assigned to the victorious candidate in each congressional district, of which the PRI won 175 districts (fairly or through

fraud), thirty-six additional seats were assigned to three other parties. The majority of those seats were allocated to the National Action Party up to 1979. In 1977, President José López Portillo passed new legislation, which not only increased the number of majority districts to three hundred seats, but also created a plurinominal system to replace the party deputy system, allocating one hundred additional seats, a fourth of all congressional seats, to the new plurinominal system. Years later, an additional one hundred plurinominal seats were added, bringing the total to five hundred seats, the current number in the Chamber of Deputies.

The 1964 reforms creating the party deputy system (which ultimately became the plurinominal system) produced a significant, long-term impact on the composition of the legislative branch and on the composition of party leadership in the opposition parties, particularly on the PAN, which was the first opposition party to defeat the PRI for the presidency in 2000. Because the PAN could not elect many of its most active and notable partisan supporters to the majority districts, the leadership of the party designated candidates who would receive the party or plurinominal seats. This process centralized control over the nominations in the hands of the party bureaucracy in Mexico City, thus inhibiting the more rapid development of regional and municipal party affiliates who could promote successful candidates to the only national offices PAN politicians could win: seats in the legislative branch. Those legal changes helped institutionalize the importance of PAN leadership and the national party bureaucracy from the Federal District.