

Mexicans vote in midterm elections seen as referendum on president

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??Mexican voters cast ballots at polling station in the rural village of San Bartolome Quialana, in Oaxaca state, Mexico. (Photo: Reuters/Jorge Luis Plata)?

Mexico City, June 7 (RHC)-- Voting drew to a close on Sunday as Mexicans chose a new lower house of Congress, state governors and local lawmakers, in a race seen as a referendum on President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's policies and shakeup of Mexico's institutions.

All 500 seats in the lower house, 15 state governorships and thousands of local leadership positions are up for grabs, with some 93.5 million Mexicans eligible to vote.

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

Since taking office in 2018 after a landslide victory, Lopez Obrador has expanded 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.

Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is said to be in the lead among Mexican voters. Many going to the ballot box expressed their skepticism of Mexico's former rulers, now in opposition. Lopez Obrador has also benefited from the vaccine rollout.

"I stand by my president. They've attacked him a lot but I see that he's doing things right ... I'm voting for (the ruling) MORENA party across the board," said 36-year-old Luis Dominguez in the small municipality of Cuaxomulco in the southeastern state of Tlaxcala. "We have to support him so he can complete his mission," said Dominguez.

Recent polls suggest his National Regeneration Movement (MORENA) may lose some of its 253 seats in the lower house, but is still likely to retain a majority with the help of the allied Green and Labor parties. The Mexican Senate is not up for election.

By law, Lopez Obrador can only serve one term, so keeping or expanding a majority in the lower house would allow him to help "pave the way for a friendly political succession in 2024," said Goldman Sachs economist Alberto Ramos.

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