

3-24-1999

Controversy Surrounds Election of Leaders for PRI, Center-Left PRD

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Controversy Surrounds Election of Leaders for PRI, Center-Left PRD." (1999). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/4055>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Latin America Digital Beat (LADB) at UNM Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in SourceMex by an authorized administrator of UNM Digital Repository. For more information, please contact amywinter@unm.edu.

Controversy Surrounds Election of Leaders for PRI, Center-Left PRD

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 1999-03-24

The governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) are facing major internal divisions as they select new party leaders ahead of the 2000 presidential election. For the PRI, the race to succeed outgoing president Mariano Palacios Alcocer reflects the split between President Ernesto Zedillo's administration and his congressional allies and some PRI factions in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate.

Palacios Alcocer and PRI secretary-general Carlos Rojas Gutierrez unexpectedly announced their resignations on March 17, effective on April 1. The two party leaders had planned to step down sometime later this year, but the timing was unexpected by most party members. Palacios and Rojas made the announcement at the start of the new session of the PRI's governing council, surprising most of the 300 delegates in attendance. Palacios urged the PRI to use a more democratic process to select the new leaders to "renew the party ahead of the 2000 presidential election."

Opposition-party leaders suggested Palacios' resignation and his pronouncements in favor of a democratic selection of his successor were a ploy to hide Zedillo's intention to manipulate the selection of the party's presidential candidate through the traditional *dedazo*. "The PRI wants to present a democratic face, but this is still all about the traditional masquerade," said Luis Bravo Mena, president of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN).

Palacios' succession raised suspicions among some PRI members, who questioned why only one candidate, Labor Secretary Jose Antonio Gonzalez, stepped forward to seek the party presidency. Similarly, former Yucatan governor Dulce Maria Sauri Riancho was the only announced candidate for the secretary-general post being vacated by Rojas.

Dissident PRI groups push for more democratic process

Sen. Humberto Mayans Canabal, who leads the Grupo Galileo faction of PRI dissidents in the Senate, accused PRI congressional leaders Deputy Arturo Nunez and Sen. Maria de Los Angeles of hand-picking Gonzalez, a close ally of Zedillo. "Moreno and Nunez sent a clear message that they intended to skew any vote in favor of Gonzalez Fernandez," said Canabal. "We are not acting as a democratic party."

The dissident PRI groups, which also include the Corriente Renovadora and the Grupo de Reflexion, recruited former federal legislator Rodolfo Echeverria to run against Gonzalez Fernandez to ensure that the election for the new party leader would not be uncontested. Sen. Jose Luis Soberanes was selected to run against Sauri Riancho for the post of secretary-general. Echeverria is the nephew of former president Luis Echeverria Alvarez (1970-1976). The Echeverria and Soberanes candidacies were immediately endorsed by former Puebla governor Manuel Bartlett Diaz and Tabasco Gov. Roberto Madrazo Pintado, who are seeking the PRI presidential nomination in 2000. Both candidates

have raised concerns that they will be shut out from the PRI presidential- selection process if Zedillo and other party leaders resort to the dedazo.

PRD delays election results because of fraud charges

The PRD's election of a party president on March 14 to succeed Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador was also controversial. The winner, who will serve for a three-year term through 2002, will help set strategy for the 2000 presidential election. The PRD, the only political party in Mexico to choose its leader through primary-style open elections, said 500,000 members nationwide participated in the process.

The party had expected to declare a winner a day or two after the vote, but the results were delayed while party electoral authorities investigated charges of vote-tampering in at least 10 states. Complaints ranged from theft of ballot boxes and stuffing of ballots to falsifying official results, "shaving" voter rolls, and expelling polling place observers. Several prominent party members, including Sens. Mario Saucedo, Amalia Garcia, and Rosa Albina Garavito, and former party secretary-general Jesus Ortega led the field of nine candidates seeking the party's top leadership post.

Ortega, considered the favorite before the vote, met a strong challenge from Garcia, the daughter of former Zacatecas governor Francisco Garcia Estrada. As of March 23, Garcia was leading Ortega by a few thousand votes, with more than 90% of the vote tallied. But most votes that had not been counted came from states where irregularities and fraud were alleged. The election of the PRD leader also reflected divisions between the party's two declared presidential candidates, with federal Deputy Porfirio Munoz Ledo accusing Mexico City Mayor Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of manipulating the process in favor of Garcia. "We know there are intentions to control and manipulate the next party council," Munoz Ledo told reporters.

The PRD's national council will be responsible for setting the rules and mechanisms for deciding the party's presidential candidate. When asked about the allegations, Garcia responded, "I will not make any comments on a matter on which I have no proof." Some PRD supporters expressed concern that the delay in announcing the results and the conflicts among the various factions may have damaged the party's image.

But outgoing party leader Lopez Obrador said the party was willing to annul the results of the election and start all over if an audit showed significant irregularities. (Sources: Associated Press, 03/16/99, 03/17/99; The Dallas Morning News, 03/18/99; Los Angeles Times, 03/19/99; Reuters, 03/15/99, 03/17/99, 03/18/99; Spanish news service EFE, 03/14/99, 03/15/99, 03/17/99, 03/22/99; El Economista, 03/15-19/99, 03/22/99, 03/23/99; The News, 03/15/99, 03/16/99, 03/19/99, 03/22/99, 03/23/99, 03/24/99; Novedades, 03/15/99, 03/17-19/99, 03/23/99, 03/24/99; El Universal, 03/15/99, 03/16/99, 03/18/99, 03/19/99, 03/22-24/99; La Jornada, 03/15/99, 03/16/99, 03/19/99, 03/22-24/99; Excelsior, 03/16-19/99, 03/22-24/99)

-- End --