

9-15-1999

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## **PRI Holds First-Ever Primary Debate; Front-Runners Garner Most Attention**

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 1999-09-15

On Sept. 8, the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) held its first-ever candidate debate ahead of its Nov. 7 presidential primary. Four candidates participated in the debate, but front-runners Roberto Madrazo Pintado and Francisco Labastida Ochoa attracted most of the attention. Madrazo is governor of Tabasco state but has been granted a leave of absence during the campaign. Labastida is a former interior secretary and former Sonora state governor. The two front-runners, both of whom have hired US political consultants as campaign advisers, used the debate to trade insults and question each other's integrity.

### *Candidates call each other "candidate of Carlos Salinas"*

At one point, both Madrazo and Labastida attempted to link the other with disgraced former president Carlos Salinas de Gortari, whose name has become synonymous with cronyism and corruption. Salinas, widely blamed for the devaluation of the peso in 1994 and the ensuing economic crisis, is living in self-imposed exile in Dublin, Ireland.

During the debate, Madrazo accused Labastida of forming his election team with former collaborators of Salinas. But Labastida turned the tables on Madrazo. "Roberto, you are the candidate of Carlos Salinas," responded Labastida. "He was the one who made you senator and later governor of Tabasco." Madrazo primarily pressed on with his strategy of trying to portray Labastida as the hand-chosen candidate of President Ernesto Zedillo and the PRI hierarchy. "The official candidate just wants to continue with the same failed policies we have now," Madrazo said, glaring at Labastida. "And that's logical, because he represents everything you and I want to change."

Madrazo's statements followed his controversial television advertisement last month that urged voters to "knock out the dedazo," the practice by which the president anointed the governing party's next candidate (see SourceMex, 1999-08-18). During the debate, Labastida acknowledged strong support from the traditional PRI base, but he insisted that he was not hand-picked like many other presidential candidates before him. Still, it will be difficult for Labastida to shake off the label of "official PRI candidate."

On the eve of the debate, Labastida received the endorsement of the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM), a strong ally of the PRI for many years. Labastida attacked Madrazo's media blitz, accusing the Tabasco governor of focusing more on his campaign than on the needs of his state. "You spent more in self-promotion than in helping street children," said Labastida.

Labastida also urged Madrazo to release personal financial information. Madrazo's election as governor is clouded by the allegations that he spent 30 times the state spending limits. An

investigation by the Procuraduria General de la Republica was later dismissed because of a technicality (see SourceMex, 1995-08-30). Additionally, Labastida called Madrazo "two-faced," saying the Tabasco governor presented one position to foreign investors and another to the Mexican public on such matters as the privatization of the state-run oil company PEMEX.

The Madrazo-Labastida feud overshadowed statements by the two other candidates, former Puebla governor Manuel Bartlett Diaz and former federal legislator and PRI president Humberto Roque Villanueva. Some political experts said the debate allowed Roque to gain name recognition among the voters. "Roque could be considered the winner of the debate," said Mexican syndicated columnist Sergio Sarmiento. "Despite his low standing in the polls, he was the one who succeeded in increasing his name recognition after the debate." Public opinion polls split on which candidate won. Most public-opinion polls taken after the debate split on whether Madrazo or Labastida turned in the best performance.

Several daily newspapers conducted surveys immediately after the debate, with Reforma, Cronica de Hoy, and Uno Mas Uno declaring Madrazo the winner, while respondents to surveys from El Universal, El Heraldo de Mexico, and El Economista said Labastida was the victor. The major polling organizations also reported varied results. A survey by professional polling organization Louis Harris-Indermec, in cooperation with TV Azteca, showed 37.7% support for Madrazo, 29.1% for Labastida, 14.8% for Bartlett, and 10% for Roque. In contrast, the prestigious Gallup organization, in cooperation with the Camara de la Industria de Radio y Television (CIRT), said 34% of respondents said Labastida won the debate, while 26% gave the nod to Madrazo, 16% to Roque, and 9% to Bartlett.

Nationally syndicated political columnist Miguel Angel Granados Chapa said the polls taken immediately following the debate may not necessarily predict the voting patterns in the PRI's Nov. 7 primary. "It is hard to know the true impact of the debate on the decisions of PRI voters on Nov. 7," said Granados. "There are still two months left in the campaign."

### *Opposition alliance continues negotiations*

The winner of the Nov. 7 primary could face a single candidate representing a coalition of eight opposition parties or separate candidates from the conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). The PAN, PRD, and six other parties have been in difficult negotiations to form an alliance for the presidential and congressional elections on July 2, 2000. The coalition has found it extremely difficult to agree on how to select a common candidate, mainly because the likely candidates for the PAN and the PRD have both said they would like to represent the alliance.

Both candidates former Guanajuato governor Vicente Fox Quesada of the PAN and outgoing Mexico City Mayor Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the PRD have accused the other of creating obstacles that could prevent the alliance from becoming a reality. As recently as Sept. 9, Fox said he expected the presidential election to feature three candidates: Labastida for the PRI, Cardenas for the PRD, and himself for the PAN. Cardenas has not disputed this. "For the time being I plan to concentrate on campaign preparation to obtain the PRD's nomination," said the PRD mayor, who has already agreed to represent the Partido del Trabajo (PT) in the election. Deputy Porfirio Munoz Ledo, who

intends to compete with Cardenas for the PRD nomination, has agreed to represent the Partido Autentico de la Revolucion Democratica (PARM) in the election. The PARM is not part of the eight-party coalition, but Munoz Ledo is pushing for its inclusion in the alliance.

Despite the obstinacy of the PAN and PRD candidates, representatives of the eight parties have continued negotiations on a format for candidate selection. "The negotiations [for an alliance] are going ahead," PAN Deputy and alliance negotiator Santiago Creel told the Mexico City daily newspaper *The News*.

The persistence of the alliance negotiators appears to have paid off. On Sept. 13, representatives of the eight parties announced an agreement on a list of 14 academics, business leaders, attorneys, and journalists who will help the coalition decide on a format to select its candidate. The advisory group includes such prominent names as Sergio Aguayo, former president of the Academia Mexicana de Derechos Humanos; political columnist Miguel Angel Granados Chapa; attorney Javier Quijano, former president of the Barra Mexicana de Abogados; Martha Perez Bejarano, coordinator of independent citizens group Alianza Civica; and Antonio Sanchez Diaz de Rivera, former president of the Confederacion de Camaras Nacionales de Comercio (CONCANACO).

Party leaders were clearly pleased about this agreement. "The creation of this citizen council guarantees an impartial selection for the coalition candidate," said PRD president Amalia Garcia. Garcia said the advisory group will hold initial deliberations without the participation of any party members. Once a proposal is drafted, they will remain in constant communication with party leaders before completing a final plan. (Sources: Notimex, 09/08/99; Los Angeles Times, The Washington Post, San Antonio Express-News, La Jornada, 09/09/99; The Dallas Morning News, El Universal, 09/09/99, 09/10/99; The Miami Herald, El Diario de Yucatan, 09/10/99; Proceso, 09/12/99; Spanish news service EFE, 09/05/99, 09/09/99, 09/13/99; Reuters, 09/07/99, 09/08/99, 09/12/99, 09/13/99; Associated Press, 09/08/99, 09/09/99, 09/12/99, 09/13/99; The New York Times, 09/09/99, 09/10/99, 09/13/99; Excelsior, 09/08-10/99, 09/13/99, 09/14/99; El Economista, 09/09/99, 09/10/99, 09/13/99, 09/14/99; Novedades, 09/08-10/99, 09/14/99, 09/15/99; The News, 09/09/99, 09/10/99, 09/14/99, 09/15/99)

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