9-10-2003

PRD Leadership Change Reflects Internal Struggles Among Political Parties

LADB Staff

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

Recommended Citation

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.
PRD Leadership Change Reflects Internal Struggles Among Political Parties

by LADB Staff
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 2003-09-10

The center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) will enter the next round of major elections in 2006 under new leadership, following the resignation of president Rosario Robles Berlanga. The pressure from within to oust Robles reflects the internal struggles among all of Mexico's major political parties.

The former governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) continues to experience a power struggle between the party's secretary-general and legislative floor leader Elba Esther Gordillo and another faction led by former Sonora Gov. Manlio Fabio Beltrones.

The governing center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) recently faced strong divisions in the Senate over conflict-of-interest questions regarding influential Sens. Diego Fernandez de Cevallos and Fauzi Hamdan.

Even the small Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) faced controversy when the Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion (TEPJF) ordered the party to restructure its leadership to allow greater participation by rank-and-file members. The TEPJF's decision was based on a complaint by a party member who was denied funds from the national party for a local election.

PRD leader Rosario Robles resigns under pressure

Robles came under fire for her inability to foster stronger support for the PRD at the national level during the recent congressional elections, even though the center-left party recovered most of the ground lost in the 2000 election (See SourceMex, 2003-07-09).

Perhaps Robles sealed her own fate when she promised on several occasions during campaign speeches this year that the PRD would receive 20% of the national vote in the 2003 elections. "If we fail in this goal, I have no business remaining at the head of this party," Robles said in a speech during the official launch of political campaigns on April 15. The PRD only received 17% of the nationwide vote, with a large share of the total coming from Mexico City and states where the PRD already had a strong presence, such as Baja California Sur, Oaxaca, and Guerrero.

An internal PRD study confirmed the lack of national appeal for the party. The document said the party has failed to become an option in most Mexican states, which reduced the possibilities of victory in the 2006 presidential election. "This document highlighted the party's shortcomings: the absence of a social commitment, frequent internal conflicts, a lack of concrete proposals and strategies for its own growth," said the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma, which had obtained a copy of the report. In addition to the concerns about the party's lack of effectiveness, strong concerns emerged within the PRD about the huge debt left by Robles. The debt was initially
reported at about 600 million pesos (US$54.9 million), but the actual amount was probably closer to 360 million pesos (US$32.9 million).

PRD officials hope to raise a portion of the money needed to pay the debt, about 3.5 million pesos (US$320,000), by asking its elected officials at all levels to make a donation to the party. The PRD is not the only party facing financial troubles. The PRI was forced to borrow 60 million pesos (US$5.5 million) and mortgage most of its properties to pay its workers. Robles at first denied that there were serious concerns about the PRD's campaign debt, but later defended the decision to make the expenditures. "It was inevitable that the PRD would go into debt," Robles told reporters, without specifying the debt levels. "Going into debt is not the same as stealing money, so I don't see a problem here," said Robles, who served as mayor of Mexico City before assuming the post as party president.

**Leonel Godoy replaces Robles**

Many PRD members were pleased by Robles' resignation, including her eventual successor Leonel Godoy Rangel. Godoy, who previously held the posts of interior secretary in Michoacan state and public security secretary in Mexico City, defeated federal deputy Carlos Payan for the right to lead the PRD on an interim basis through August 2004. Godoy is considered a unifying candidate for a party that has shown a tendency toward division in recent years (see SourceMex, 1999-03-24 2002-03-13).

Godoy said he would attempt to increase the PRD's competitive position in several gubernatorial elections scheduled for 2004, including states where the PRD already governs such as Zacatecas and Tlaxcala. Other states with gubernatorial elections where the PRD has fairly strong pockets of support are Veracruz and Oaxaca. Both states are currently governed by the PRI. Some PRD members defended Robles' performance in office, including her mentor and PRD founder Cuauhtemoc Cardenas. "I regret that Rosario has had to take this step," Cardenas told reporters during a tour of Brazil. "Conversely, this change in leadership demonstrates that the PRD functions as a viable institution."

Cardenas has already declared his intention to seek the PRD presidential nomination for a fourth consecutive election in 2006. He will face a formidable challenge from Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador and at least some competition from outgoing Zacatecas Gov. Ricardo Monreal. Monreal has also declared his candidacy, but Lopez Obrador has said he will not make an announcement until the end of 2005 or beginning of 2006. Still, many expect Lopez Obrador to seek and win the nomination.

Many PRD members are counting on Lopez Obrador to bring the PRD to greater prominence by winning the presidency. To do so, Lopez Obrador will have to gain support from many independent voters and members of other parties. Still, public-opinion polls continue to put the Mexico City mayor ahead. Polls by Indermec Louis Harris and Reforma in late August showed Lopez Obrador leading rivals from the PAN and PRI by more than 20 percentage points.

Only one candidate, first lady Martha Sahagun, came even with Lopez Obrador in the Reforma poll. Sahagun, who denied having any presidential aspirations, was far behind the Mexico City
mayor in the Harris-Indermec poll. In addition to Sahagun, Lopez Obrador was pitted against Interior Secretary Santiago Creel and PRI president Roberto Madrazo. Some pollsters like Vicente Licona y Galdi of Indermec Louis Harris said the one PRI candidate who could run a competitive race against Lopez Obrador was Veracruz Gov. Miguel Aleman Velasco, whom many PRI loyalists prefer over Madrazo. Aleman, who will complete his term as governor in 2004, is the son of former President Miguel Aleman Valdes (1946-1952). Like Lopez Obrador, Aleman has resisted efforts by his supporters to declare his candidacy.

**PRI and PAN also face internal divisions**

The PRI is facing its own leadership conflicts, with many party members unhappy with the decision of legislative floor leader Elba Esther Gordillo to also retain the post of party secretary-general (see SourceMex, 2003-07-23). Gordillo recently offered to surrender the secretary-general post only if other key members of the executive committee (Comite Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN) also submit their resignations.

Among those whom Gordillo said should resign are party spokesperson Carlos Jimenez, legal affairs director Miguel Angel Yunes, and international relations deputy secretary Alberto Aguilar Inarritu. Her list did not include party president Roberto Madrazo. Some observers said Gordillo's offer to resign as secretary-general also represented another chapter in the tug-of-war with Beltrones, whom she hinted should step down as an officer with the Confederacion Nacional de Organizaciones Populares (CNOP).

Gordillo has also made enemies of some influential PRI members in the Senate, who are suspicious of her close relations with President Vicente Fox. Sens. Manuel Bartlett Diaz and Oscar Canton recently failed in an effort to censure Gordillo for suggesting that she would support private participation in Mexico's energy sector (see SourceMex, 2003-09-03).

The Senate has also been the scene of controversy for the PAN, with influential Sen. Diego Fernandez de Cevallos the principal lighting rod. Fernandez de Cevallos recently lost his bid to lead the Senate because of ethical questions regarding the decision of his legal firm to represent clients with claims against the government. The firm recently won a claim of 174 million pesos (US $15.9 million) against the state in a dispute over property rights. The participation of Fernandez de Cevallos and fellow PAN Sen. Fauzi Hamdan in litigation against government entities has drawn fire not only from opposition parties but from many members of the PAN. A contingent of PAN senators, led by Luisa Maria Calderon, Rafael Morgan, Jesus Galvan, and Herbert Taylor, withdrew their support for Fernandez de Cevallos to lead the Senate.

Fernandez de Cevallos had been poised to gain that post under an agreement with the PRI and the PRD. Instead, the post went to PRI Sen. Enrique Jackson Ramirez. Responding to the criticisms, Fernandez de Cevallos defended his law firm's participation in litigation against state entities, saying no rules or laws prohibit legislators from engaging in such activities. This stance angered many PAN senators, who joined with opposition parties to support a new code prohibiting federal legislators from engaging in activities that constitute a conflict of interest. "Almost any deputy or senator could find himself in a situation involving conflict of interest," PAN Sen. Cesar Jauregui said in explaining his decision to support this measure.
Some PAN senators also called for the removal of Fernandez de Cevallos as leader of the party in the Senate, not only for conflict of interest, but also because of his autocratic practices. The PAN senator is accused of "discretionary" use of party funds and a "demeaning attitude" toward other legislators.

Electoral court orders PVEM to restructure leadership

The PVEM was also under scrutiny for its autocratic practices. In early September, the TEPJF ordered the party to rewrite its bylaws and hold new leadership elections within six months of completing the changes. The party was given 60 days to rewrite the bylaws, but the period does not begin until after a meeting of the general council of the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE), said institute director Arturo Sanchez Gutierrez.

The TEPJF decision resulted from a complaint filed in 1998 by disgruntled party member Jose Luis Amador, who objected to the national party's tight control of funding provided by electoral authorities for local and national races. In many cases, said Amador, party leaders declined to provide funding for local elections. Amador said the court decision also struck down the party leadership structure, which was open to only a few individuals. This practice, contends Amador, violates the Mexican Constitution. "This is the fault of the current party leaders, a group of friends who have held the party hostage," Amador told reporters.

The court decision means that Sen. Jorge Emilio Gonzalez, who has led the party since 2001, will have to relinquish his post as president. Partly leaders said they plan to challenge the court decision. "It's an arbitrary and authoritarian decision because it is meddling in the internal life of a political organization," said Deputy Manuel Velasco, one of the PVEM leaders in the Chamber of Deputies.

Some dissidents say they will not wait for the PVEM leadership to follow the court order and will seek other means to oust the current party officers. "We will seek a hearing to remove Gonzalez and other officers like Sens. Sara Castellanos Cortes, Veronica Velasco, Gloria Lavara, and Emilia Patricia Gomez from their party posts," said dissident Carlos Macias. "They committed several anti-democratic acts." Gonzalez, known as "El Nino Verde," has dismissed the challenge from the dissidents. "We know that our conflict is not with them, but with the government," he said.

Gonzalez went as far as accuse key members of the Fox administration and the PAN, especially Interior Secretary Santiago Creel, of orchestrating the TEPJF decision as revenge for the PVEM's decision to form an alliance with the PRI in this year's congressional elections. The PVEM formed a coalition with the PAN in 2000, contributing to strong victories for Fox and the center-right party that year. "This is a political coup," said Gonzalez. Creel denied that the PAN or the administration had any role in the decision. "This is an independent and autonomous agency," said the interior secretary. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on Sept. 10, reported at 10.92 pesos per US$1.00] (Sources: Agencia de noticias Proceso, 07/23/03; El Sol de Mexico, 07/25/03; Associated Press, 08/09/03; Epoca, 08/11/03; La Jornada, 08/27/03, 08/28/03; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 09/04/03; Notimex, 08/10/03, 09/01/03, 09/05/03; The Herald, 09/05/03; Associated Press, 09/03/03, 09/07/03; Unomasuno, 07/23/03, 07/24/03, 09/08/03; Milenio Diario, 07/24/03, 07/25/03, 07/31/03, 09/10/03; La Cronica de Hoy, 07/24/03, 08/13/03, 09/04/03, 09/05/03,
09/10/03; Reforma, 07/25/03, 08/12/03, 08/19/03, 09/05/03, 09/10/03; El Universal, 07/28/03, 07/30/03, 08/06/03, 08/18/03, 08/19/03, 08/29/03, 09/08/03, 09/10/03)

-- End --