

9-15-2004

PRI Retains Veracruz Governorship, Loses Ground in Legislature, Cities

LADB Staff

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

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "PRI Retains Veracruz Governorship, Loses Ground in Legislature, Cities." (2004). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/4782>

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.

PRI Retains Veracruz Governorship, Loses Ground in Legislature, Cities

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2004-09-15

In a surprisingly tight election, the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) retained the governor's seat in Veracruz state by the narrowest of margins in an election held on Sept. 5. The Mexico City daily newspaper *La Jornada* described the election as the "most competitive in the history of the state." The PRI ran in partnership with the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) in a coalition known as "Fidelidad con Veracruz," a name that reflected its candidate, Sen. Fidel Herrera Beltran. Herrera won the gubernatorial race by about 26,000 votes, or less than 1% of the total ballots cast, over Sen. Gerardo Buganza Salmeron, a member of President Vicente Fox's center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), the Instituto Electoral Veracruzano (IEV) reported.

Herrera received 34.5% of the total, while Buganza obtained 33.7%. A third candidate, Dante Delgado Rannuario of the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), also ran a competitive race, receiving more than 25% of the ballots cast. The PCD ran the race in partnership with the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) and the Partido del Trabajo (PT), in a coalition known as Alianza Unidos por Veracruz. The PCD-PRD-PT coalition was strongest in Veracruz city, the state's largest metropolitan area.

The IEV said 65% of registered voters cast ballots, a relatively high percentage compared with other states that have held elections this year. Half or fewer of the registered voters participated in elections in Zacatecas, Oaxaca, and Yucatan this year (see SourceMex, 2004-05-19, 2004-07-14, and 2004-08-04). Analysts said strong discontent with Gov. Miguel Aleman Velasco might have motivated many voters to turn up at the polls this year. "The Veracruzanos went to vote despite the great odds for the PRI, and with their vote they have carried out a punishment against the government of Miguel Aleman," said analyst Rafael Fernandez de Castro of the Instituto Tecnologico Autonomo de Mexico (ITAM).

For those voters who were discontented with both the Aleman government and the Fox administration, PCD founder Delgado represented a credible alternative as a protest candidate, the analysts said. "What occurred in Veracruz is healthy for democracy because we have ended the bipartisanship that had dominated gubernatorial elections," said Roy Campos, director of the polling agency Mitofsky. "The prospects are good that we could have a competitive [presidential] election in 2006."

Close election fosters nasty campaigns

The closeness of the race resulted in nasty campaigns. The PAN and the PRI exchanged accusations of fraud and unfair electoral practices during and after the election. The PRI charged the Fox administration with using the resources of the federal government to conduct an illegal campaign on behalf of Buganza, including an increase in expenditures through federal welfare programs such as Oportunidades.

The PAN, in turn, accused outgoing Gov. Aleman of using the state resources to boost Herrera's candidacy. The center-right party also said it suspected the PRI of manipulating the final vote count, and it has officially challenged the results through the country's top electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion, TEPJF). "It was a very negative campaign, and, because of the razor-thin margin, this election will be decided in the courts," said political analyst Leo Zuckermann of the Centro de Investigaciones y Docencia Economica (CIDE).

The disappointing performance in the gubernatorial race does not bode well for the PRI, which had seen Veracruz as an important stepping-stone toward regaining the presidency in the next election. "For the PRI, Veracruz was a strategic stop on the way to the 2006 presidential election," said the Agencia de noticias Proceso (apro). "This is a state with 4 million voters and the home of former Presidents Adolfo Ruiz Cortines (1952-1958) and Miguel Aleman Valdes (1946-1952).

Herrera was leading Buganza by 24 percentage points in some public-opinion polls early this summer, but the margin had shrunk to about five points by August. In the last gubernatorial election in 1998, PRI candidate Aleman Velasco, son of Miguel Aleman Valdes, defeated the PAN by more than 20 percentage points (see SourceMex, 1998-08-05). Even after the narrow win, Herrera proclaimed in his victory speech that the Veracruz election put the PRI in a good position for retaking the presidency in 2006. "We now have one foot in Los Pinos [presidential palace]," a confident Herrera told supporters.

PRI losing large share of state's popular vote

Some analysts said Herrera's overconfidence masks a disturbing trend for the PRI, which appears to have lost a large share of the popular vote, as reflected in the elections for the state legislature and for several mayoral seats, which also took place on Sept. 5. In the legislative elections, the PAN won 14 districts, the PRI-PVEM won 13 seats, and the PCD-PRD-PT was the victor in three districts. Including the at-large positions allocated based on percentage of the vote, the PRI will only control 17 legislative seats in the state congress, compared with 27 seats previously. This is despite the redistricting process, which increased the number of seats in the Veracruz state legislature from 45 to 50. The PAN will double the number of seats under its control to 22 in the upcoming legislature.

The PRI also fared poorly in mayoral elections, suffering a net loss of 22 mayoral seats, including key cities like Orizaba and Poza Rica. "The results confirm that the PRI does not have as secure a base in Veracruz as it had thought," said independent researcher Alberto Olvera. "The vote is going to be divided in this state in 2006."

This is the second uncomfortably close election for the PRI, which barely won the gubernatorial race in Oaxaca state in August against a coalition comprising the PCD, the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), and the PAN (see SourceMex, 2004-08-04). As was the case in Oaxaca, the PRI's prospects in Veracruz were damaged by divisions within the party. Federal Deputy Miguel Angel Yunes Linares and several members of the PRI broke ranks with the party to support Buganza. Yunes has since left the PRI.

The case was similar in Oaxaca, where ex-governor Diodoro Carrasco and PRI secretary-general Elba Esther Gordillo put their support behind the PAN-PRD-PCD coalition led by Gabino Cue. The

coalition has challenged the Oaxaca results before the TEPJF, and Cue a member of the PCD has organized a tour of the state to garner support for the challenge. The TEPJF has thrown out some of the complaints presented by Cue and his supporters but has yet to rule on others. The court has said that the two complaints that were discarded "do not affect the final outcome of the election."

PRD faces controversy, divisions ahead of Tlaxcala election

The upcoming gubernatorial election in Tlaxcala is also surrounded by controversy, but the dispute involves an internal fight within one party rather than a struggle among various political parties. The trouble began in July of this year, when rank-and-file members of the PRD overwhelmingly elected federal Sen. Maricarmen Ramirez Garcia to represent the party in the Nov. 14 election (see SourceMex, 2004-07-14). She won the primary election by 10,000 votes over her nearest rival. Ramirez, the wife of outgoing PRD Gov. Alfonso Sanchez Anaya, participated in the primary despite advice from the PRD leadership that she should withdraw from the race because of a potential conflict of interest.

PRD president Leonel Godoy and other top party strategists raised concerns that Ramirez could be violating the constitutional principle of nonsuccession by replacing her husband in the governor's seat. She is currently on leave from her Senate post. Party officials, also worried that Ramirez's candidacy would affect the party's image for the 2006 presidential election, offered the senator the choice of withdrawing from the gubernatorial race or having Gov. Sanchez Anaya resign his post.

Ramirez and Sanchez both declined the PRD requests that they withdraw, forcing party officials to annul the July election and select federal Deputy Gelacio Montiel Fuentes as her replacement. This unilateral decision by the national party angered PRD members in Tlaxcala and created a small crisis within the party.

Violent fights erupted between supporters of Ramirez and Montiel in some communities of Tlaxcala following the PRD decision to appoint Montiel as its gubernatorial candidate. An official for the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) said Ramirez's candidacy technically did not violate the nation's electoral code because there is no language that prohibits a close relative of an elected official from running for the same post. "While it's understandable that political parties are trying to prohibit this to promote equality in the political process and avoid nepotism, they are not the ideal body to establish these guidelines," said IFE consultant Virgilio Andrade Martinez.

The PRD leadership took this issue to heart, however, because party officials had joined the chorus of complaints when rumors had arisen that first lady Martha Sahagun was planning to seek the PAN presidential candidacy in 2006 with the blessing of her husband President Fox (see SourceMex, 2004-06-02 and 2004-07-14). Ramirez, who received support from newly elected PRD Gov. Amalia Garcia of Zacatecas, took her case to the TEPJF in late August. "The will of the people must be respected," Ramirez told reporters. In a ruling in mid-September, the seven-member electoral court ruled that the PRD had no right to prevent Ramirez from seeking the gubernatorial post. "Democracy won in our state," Ramirez said shortly after learning of the TEPJF decision.

PRD leaders said they respected the TEPJF ruling and agreed to place Ramirez's name on the ballot instead of Montiel. Still, leaders expressed discontent with the electoral court. "This was a gross

interference in the internal affairs of our party," said PRD president Godoy. Ramirez faces an uphill battle in the November election. In one recent public-opinion poll, 32% of participants said they would vote for Ramirez, compared with 43% for Mariano Gonzelez Zarur of the PRI. Hector Ortiz of the PAN is running a distant third with 11% of the vote. (Sources: El Financiero, 07/20/04; The Christian Science Monitor, 08/05/04; Reuters, 09/06/04; La Opinion-Veracruz, 09/06/04; Liberal del Sur-Coatzacoalcos, 09/06/04, 09/07/04; Financial Times-London, 09/07/04; Spanish news service EFE, 07/19/04, 07/22/04, 08/09/04, 08/14/04, 08/26/04, 09/04/04, 09/06/04, 09/09/04; Notimex, 07/20-22/04, 08/09/04, 08/26/04, 09/06/04, 09/08/04, 09/09/04, 09/13/04; Unomasuno, 07/23/04, 07/26/04, 08/18/04, 08/24/04, 08/27/04, 08/31/04, 09/07-10/04, 09/13/04; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 07/19-22/04, 07/26/04, 08/09/04, 08/24-27/04, 08/30/04, 09/02/04, 09/05-08/04, 09/10/04, 09/13/04, 09/14/04; Associated Press, 09/06/04, 09/14/04; El Universal, 07/19-23/04, 07/26/04, 08/05/04, 08/23/04, 08/25-27/04, 09/02/04, 09/07/04, 09/08/04, 09/13-15/04; La Cronica de Hoy, 07/19-22/04, 07/26/04, 08/18/04, 08/27/04, 09/06-10/04, 09/13-15/04; The Herald-Mexico City, 07/20-23/04, 09/07/04, 09/09/04, 09/10/04, 09/15/04; La Jornada, 07/22/04, 08/27/04, 08/31/04, 09/03/04, 09/06-10/04, 09/13-15/04; Orizaba en Red, 09/06/04, 09/07/04, 09/15/04; Notiver, 09/07/04, 09/15/04)

-- End --