

2-16-2005

PRI Dynasty Falls in Guerrero; PRD Scores Comfortable Win in Gubernatorial Race

Guest Author

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

Recommended Citation

Guest Author. "PRI Dynasty Falls in Guerrero; PRD Scores Comfortable Win in Gubernatorial Race." (2005).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/4831>

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 Dynasty Falls in Guerrero; PRD Scores Comfortable Win in Gubernatorial Race

by Guest

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2005-02-16

[The author is a public-radio producer and freelance journalist. He visited Guerrero in late December during the height of the state's gubernatorial campaign]

Residents of the southern state of Guerrero are already marking Feb. 6, 2005, as one of the most important dates in their history. Crowds poured into the main plazas of the state's cities that evening to celebrate the defeat of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) after more than 75 years in the governor's office.

Zeferino Torreblanca Galindo, a charismatic federal deputy and former mayor of Acapulco (1999-2002), trounced the PRI's Hector Astudillo Flores in an intensely fought election. Torreblanca was the standard-bearer for the center-left Alianza por Guerrero coalition led by the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). Other partners in the coalition were the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD) and the Guerrero-based Partido de la Revolucion del Sur (PRS).

Torreblanca won with slightly more than 55% of the ballots, compared with 42.2% for Astudillo, said Guerrero's electoral agency (Consejo Electoral Estatal, CEE). The defeated PRI candidate, a federal senator, was also supported by the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) and the Partido del Trabajo (PT) in the Todos por Guerrero coalition.

President Vicente Fox's Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), long a marginal force in Guerrero politics, barely registered any showing. PAN candidate Porfiria Sandoval received a mere 1.05% of the ballots cast. The PAN chose to run solo in the Guerrero election, in contrast to the race in neighboring Oaxaca in 2004, when it formed part of a broad coalition (see SourceMex, 2004-08-04).

Guerrero only held gubernatorial elections, with citizens scheduled to hold a separate vote for 76 mayors and a new state legislature in October of this year. The PRD used a strong performance in the 2002 state legislative and mayoral elections as a springboard for the 2006 gubernatorial race (see SourceMex, 2002-10-16).

Observers attributed Torreblanca's stunning victory to several factors, which included splits in the PRI; PRD control of local governments in the state's most populated centers; the ability of the center-left party to overcome potentially fatal internal disputes regarding the governor's candidacy; and the impressive deployment of opposition poll monitors on the day of voting. Several prominent individuals who had previously identified with the PRI defected to the Torreblanca camp.

Despite the enthusiastic support for Torreblanca, only about half the registered voters cast ballots. Torreblanca's victory was considered by many the culmination of a decades-long struggle for the

democratization of Guerrero, a bloody undertaking that witnessed army and police massacres of unarmed civilians, guerrilla uprisings, mass disappearances carried out by government security forces during the "dirty war" of the 1970s, and the killings of hundreds of PRD activists after 1989. Speaking about his historic victory to supporters, Torreblanca said he intended to bury the old Guerrero of social and economic backwardness and replace it with a new state in which "liberty, justice, and equity" prevail.

The PRD began winning local, state, and federal offices in the early and mid-1990s. In 1999, PRD gubernatorial candidate, then federal Sen. Felix Salgado Macedonio, lost a narrow election to Rene Juarez Cisneros of the PRI amid widespread charges of fraud (see SourceMex, 1999-02-10). To protest the fraud, Salgado's supporters organized a march, which included 10,000 participants, from Guerrero to Mexico City that was called the "Exodo por la Democracia" (Exodus for Democracy).

Besides promising to shake up state politics traditionally dominated by a handful of rich families aligned with the PRI, Torreblanca's win could have significant repercussions in the 2006 presidential race. PRD president Leonel Godoy, who had rated the Guerrero governor's race as his party's number-one priority for 2005, said Torreblanca's triumph was comparable to the party's achievement in Mexico City in 1997. That year, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas won the mayoral election in Mexico City after decades of PRI dominance.

A riveting campaign characterized by vibrant campaigning on the part of Torreblanca and Astudillo, the Guerrero election stood out at a time when politics and politicians have fallen into disfavor with broad sections of the populace. "The PRI has always won the governorship," said Acapulco supermarket worker Francisco Martinez. "But there is an expectation now because the PRD is strong with Zeferino."

Torreblanca's campaign logo, a striking "Z" styled after El Zorro, the masked champion of the downtrodden, was everywhere on billboards, on bumper stickers, and on buttons. As mayor of Acapulco, Torreblanca was credited with attacking corruption, fixing financial irregularities in city government, and bringing public works to poor sections of the municipality. Boasting a reformer's reputation, Torreblanca's bid for the statehouse took on the air of a mass citizens' movement for change and attracted tens of thousands of participants to rallies.

The campaign was fought on an ideological terrain framed to the left. Sounding similar themes, both Torreblanca and Astudillo called for greater support of the ailing countryside, for creating jobs, instituting better social programs, and respecting the cultural integrity of Guerrero's four indigenous groups. With an estimated 800,000 Guerrero citizens currently residing in the US, the Astudillo campaign organized an immigrant committee in a bid to reach out to US residents who might convince their relatives back home to vote for the PRI.

In a touch of irony, the PRI historically identified with state and national governments that repressed popular movements in Guerrero attacked Torreblanca from the left. In particular, PRI opponents called into question Torreblanca's background as a businessman. Among other things, Astudillo's supporters accused Torreblanca of being the veritable flip-flopper, blowing whichever

way the political winds took him. "I don't know what [Torreblanca's] ideology is," commented Alejandro Areco, an Astudillo campaign coordinator in Acapulco. "If it's with the political group he belongs to, the PRD, or the right."

PRD leader Felix Salgado, who this year served as Torreblanca's campaign coordinator in Acapulco, countered that his candidate was a "nationalist businessman" who seeks to develop Guerrero's economy for the benefit of the people and restore its crown as king of the tourism trade, a title long ago lost to rival Cancun.

Noticeably low in the political debate, however, was the issue of the environment. Even though Guerrero suffers from a host of environmental problems ranging from deforestation to water pollution, the candidates did not mention any specific plans to address the growing environmental crisis, according to columnist and environmental activist Silvestre Pacheco of the Zihuatanejo-based nongovernmental organization SOS Bahia. "All of the candidates' pronouncements are very general when they talk about the environment," said Pacheco. Guerrero a "laboratory" for 2006 presidential race Pacheco and other observers view the governor's race as a laboratory for the 2006 presidential election.

If the fight for Los Pinos (the Mexican White House) resembles in any way what occurred in Guerrero, then 2006 promises to be an image-smashing, politically polarizing, psychologically numbing, and exaggeratedly expensive bout. As the Guerrero campaign unfolded, widespread reports of old-fashioned vote-buying in low-income colonias and campaign spending above the limits established by state election rules, especially by the PRI, proliferated. Additionally, an array of newer tactics many of which mimicked US-style politics was also unveiled.

Notable was an apparent press assault on Torreblanca's personal integrity, featuring murky stories erroneously reporting that a Cuban advisor was directing the opposition candidate. There were also some pieces that tried to link Torreblanca with individuals responsible for the 1970s dirty war, a carnage really unleashed by PRI-run federal and state governments. Imitating the triviality of much of the North American media, stories appeared that delved into Torreblanca's divorce and alleged estrangement from his daughters. Suddenly, family values were an issue.

Contrasting an effort to portray Torreblanca as a dour and heartless man was the image promoted in television spots of Astudillo as a friendly and loving family man surrounded by a smiling wife and children. At the height of the Mexican Christmas-tourism season, Astudillo's supporters projected a giant portrait of their man onto the wall of one of Acapulco's towering hotels. Other tactics likewise grabbed public attention.

To the apparent annoyance of many, Astudillo's supporters engaged in heavy phone banking, making repeated calls to potential voters at home. Another innovative campaign technique was the direct mailing of personal birthday greetings on a targeted individual's birth date. Surprised recipients opened up the modest cards to see personal wishes from their new "friend, Hector Astudillo." How the Astudillo campaign managed to obtain voters' birth dates and addresses has not been publicly revealed.

A furor then arose when stickers were found anonymously plastered on public telephone booths in Acapulco. They featured a prominent "Z" embedded in the acronym EZLN and included a photo of hooded members of the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional next to the question, "Will Guerrero Be Better?" Torreblanca's campaign coordinators were not amused with the obvious poke at the candidate's name and slogan and announced plans to file a complaint with the Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR), charging election-law violations. Astudillo's spokesman Alejandro Arceo denied that his organization had anything to do with the stickers.

Possible light was shed on the origin of controversial campaign tactics just days prior to the election when media in Acapulco and Mexico City published a document purported to be from the national PRI leadership and entitled "Faro 2005." An alleged blueprint for a PRI victory, the document recommended employing many of the tactics used during the election campaign as well as inhibiting voters and annulling opposition votes.

Opposition activists immediately denounced "Faro 2005" as a plan to destabilize democracy, but PRI leaders denied any connection with the document and even suggested that the PRD was the real author.

Heightened tensions were evident prior to election day, as violence erupted in several corners of the state. Among the incidents were the gangland-style murder of the director of the scandal-ridden Acapulco Convention Center, the shooting of a PRD activist in the rural town of Tlapa, and the killing of three municipal police and a youthful bystander in Acapulco by shooters firing automatic AK-47 rifles. In the end, calm prevailed on election day, although a few minor incidents were reported in different parts of the state.

Even as he basks in a bright ray of popularity, Torreblanca, who assumes office on April 1, faces the toughest job of his political career as he attempts reforms in a state steeped in semi-feudal political traditions, poverty, and violence. While vowing not to tolerate corruption or impunity, Torreblanca is toning down his comments and appealing for Guerrero's citizens to put aside past differences and unite for the common good. Addressing supporters in the state capital of Chilpancingo, Torreblanca called for "patience and more patience," asking citizens to give him time to implement the sweeping changes for which so many are hungering.

-- End --