

2-16-2005

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## February Elections Offer Glimpse of Changing Political Trends in Mexico

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2005-02-16

The gubernatorial elections in three states on Feb. 6 offered a glimpse of changing political trends ahead of the 2006 presidential elections. The elections, held in Guerrero, Quintana Roo, and Baja California Sur, appeared to indicate that the wind has shifted in favor of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). The PRD scored sweeping victories in Guerrero and Baja California Sur and turned in a respectable showing in Quintana Roo, where the winner was the former governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI).

The PRD performance was especially strong in Guerrero, where former Acapulco Mayor Zeferino Torreblanca Galindo took 55% of the vote, compared with only 42% for Hector Astudillo Flores of the PRI. Torreblanca's wide margin of victory provided a strong boost for the PRD, which had anticipated a tight race. (For more coverage of Guerrero election, see separate article in this issue of SourceMex).

The PRD, in partnership with the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), also swept elections in Baja California Sur, where Narciso Agundez Montano took 44% of the vote, compared with 35% for Rodimiro Anaya of the PRI and its coalition partner the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM). The PRD-PCD coalition also won 14 of 16 directly elected seats in the state legislature and four of the five mayoral races, including the state's largest city of La Paz. Agundez replaces his cousin Leonardo Cota Montano, also a PRD member.

The PRD came in a strong second in the gubernatorial election in Quintana Roo, which was won by Felix Gonzalez Canto of the PRI-PVEM coalition. Representing the PRD and its coalition partner, the Partido del Trabajo (PT), was Juan Garcia Zalvidea, the former PVEM mayor of Cancun, who received 34% of the vote. Addy Joaquin Coldwell, who defected from the PRI, obtained only 22% of the vote for the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and its coalition partner, the PCD.

While the PRI retained the governor's seat in Quintana Roo, the party will no longer completely dominate the state legislature. The PRI-PVEM alliance took 11 of the 25 directly elected seats, with the PAN-PCD and PRD-PT alliances each winning seven state legislative races. Results negative for PRI Based on its disappointing performance in Guerrero and its failure to make inroads in Baja California Sur, the PRI was considered a loser in these elections.

The losses were even greater for the PAN, however, which received support in the single digits in Guerrero and Baja California Sur, in what was considered another referendum on President Vicente Fox's performance in office. Even though the center-right party had not expected to do well in the two states, its failure to increase its support does not bode well for the PAN, which came in fourth in Baja California Sur.

The PAN's performance in Quintana Roo was mixed, with its candidate coming in a distant third in the gubernatorial elections. This was offset by moderate gains in mayoral and state legislative elections. In the mayoral races in Quintana Roo, the PRI won handily in Chetumal and managed to recover the mayoral post in Cancun but lost the seat in Cozumel to the PAN-PCD alliance.

While the PRD appeared to be the biggest winner in the February races, analysis offered by pundits was quite different from November 2004, when they declared that the PRI had taken the next step toward reclaiming the presidency in 2006. In elections held on Nov. 14, the PRI swept gubernatorial races in Puebla and Tamaulipas and won a narrow race in Sinaloa (see SourceMex, 2004-11-17). At that time, the PRD was labeled the loser because of its poor showing in the three races and in the Tlaxcala election, which it lost because of major divisions within the party.

The PAN's narrow victory in Tlaxcala was more a product of divisions in the PRD and PRI and not of its strength in the state. Still, when considering trends, the November races may have been an aberration in what appears to be an uncomfortable trend for the PRI, whose performance in other elections in 2004 was less than stellar. The party won elections in Oaxaca and Veracruz states by uncomfortably narrow margins (see SourceMex, 2004-08-04 and 2004-09-15) and was soundly defeated by the PAN in Yucatan (see SourceMex, 2004-05-19) and by the PRD in Zacatecas (see SourceMex, 2004-07-14).

### *Elections in four states could bring picture into focus*

The fortunes of the PRI and other parties could be further defined by upcoming gubernatorial elections in Hidalgo state on Feb. 20, Mexico state and Nayarit on July 3, and Coahuila on Sept. 25. Nayarit and Coahuila will also vote for new state legislators and mayors, while Hidalgo will hold a state legislative election. Both the PRD and the PRI have said they are confident of winning the upcoming Hidalgo gubernatorial and state legislative elections.

The PRD, however, enters the Hidalgo elections as a fractured party, with many rank-and-file members unhappy that the national leadership imposed Juan Guadarrama Marquez as the gubernatorial candidate. The divisions are reminiscent of the Tlaxcala election in 2004, where the rank and file and the leadership had different ideas about whom to support (see SourceMex, 2004-07-14 and 2004-11-17).

A handful of public-opinion polls in Hidalgo put PRI candidate Miguel Osorio Chong as much as 20 percentage points ahead of Guadarrama. The highest stakes this year may be in Mexico state, one of the country's most populous states. PRI candidate Enrique Pena Nieto appears to have a strong advantage because of the popularity of outgoing Gov. Arturo Montiel. Opposing Pena will be Yeidckol Polevnsky for the PRD and Ruben Mendoza Ayala for the PAN. Both the PRD and PAN candidates have faced their share of controversy. Some state rank-and-file party members oppose Polevnsky, recently director of the Camara Nacional de la Industria de Transformacion (CANACINTRA), because they feel her candidacy was imposed by the national party leadership. Mendoza Ayala was almost disqualified from the race when the state electoral institute (Instituto Electoral del Estado de Mexico, IEEM) questioned his campaign expenditures.

## *Opposition to party president Madrazo fractures PRI*

While the PRI enters the Mexico state election fairly united, the party must overcome major divisions at the national level heading into its second-ever presidential primary. Current PRI president Roberto Madrazo Pintado lost a bloody battle to eventual nominee Francisco Labastida in the party's first primary in November 1999 (see SourceMex, 1999-11-10).

Since that loss, Madrazo has been building up his resume, in an effort to gain the PRI nomination for the 2006 election. The PRI president has made some enemies along the way, however, and could face another bruising battle in the primary, scheduled for sometime in late 2005. A handful of governors, former governors, and federal legislators have formed a coalition specifically to oppose Madrazo.

The coalition, called Todos Unidos Contra Madrazo (TUCOM), is spearheaded by Govs. Enrique Martinez of Coahuila, Miguel Angel Nunez of Hidalgo, Arturo Montiel of Mexico state, Natividad Gonzalez of Nuevo Leon, and Eduardo Bours of Sonora. Prominent legislators such as Senate leader Enrique Jackson Ramirez, Sen. Emilio Gamboa, and Deputy Roberto Campa Ciprian also helped form TUCOM. Others who have joined in the opposition to Madrazo are several former elected officials, including Labastida and former Deputy Arturo Nunez.

Madrazo is perceived to be part of the PRI old guard, associated with corruption and authoritarian policies within the party. Montiel, Jackson, and Nunez have all declared their intention to seek their party's nomination, but all have said they would relinquish their candidacy if the PRI could find a "unity candidate" who would unite all party factions.

Still, TUCOM did not waste time in blaming the PRI's poor performance in the February elections on Madrazo and his protege, outgoing Gov. Rene Juarez Cisneros, who had dismissed the losses claiming the PRI was recovering. "There are those who think the PRI is in the process of recovery. Nothing could be further from the truth," said Gov. Montiel, pointing to the PRI's disappointing performances in Guerrero, Veracruz, and Oaxaca.

The internal strife in the PRI was evident in the Congress in early February, where 44 PRI senators endorsed Jackson as their candidate. Two days later, 165 PRI deputies pledged their loyalty to Madrazo. PRD forges fragile unity behind Mexico City mayor The fortunes of the PRD in the 2006 presidential election could depend on whether Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador survives an effort in Congress to remove him from office. Public-opinion polls have shown Lopez Obrador ahead of most likely rivals despite a series of corruption scandals that have rocked his administration (see SourceMex, 2004-03-10 and 2004-11-10).

Lopez Obrador has been accused of violating the Mexican Constitution by ignoring several orders from the courts (see SourceMex, 2004-05-06). Congress is expected to vote before this summer on whether the mayor should be removed. If ousted from his post, Lopez Obrador may have to serve time in prison, which would bar him from seeking the presidency in 2006. The former Mexico City mayor has defied opponents from the PRI and the PAN, pledging to continue a campaign for the presidency even if he is behind bars.

The effort to oust Lopez Obrador has united most factions behind his potential presidential candidacy. Even three-time candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, who has officially announced his intention to run a fourth time in 2006, has said he would withdraw from the race if Lopez Obrador was not allowed to run. Still, there are other signs of fracture in the PRD, including a controversy regarding the selection of the party's new leader to replace outgoing president Leonel Godoy. Some critics grumbled that the Mexico City mayor imposed outgoing Baja California Sur Gov. Cota Montano as the next party president.

Cota, who was chosen over Camilo Valenzuela, Saul Escobar, and Alfonso Ramirez Cuellar, left the PRI to run as the PRD candidate in the Baja California Sur election in 1999. "This is a political nightmare," said former PRD Deputy Marco Rascon. "The PRD has been picking up a group of very mediocre politicians who have risen to power in our party when they were unable to do so in the PRI."

Valenzuela, who heads a PRD faction known as the Red de Izquierda Democratica, said Cota lacks knowledge of the challenges facing the PRD at the national level. "He has made valuable contributions in [Baja California Sur], but has not been involved in the internal matters of our party," said Valenzuela. Still, some high-profile PRD officials endorsed Lopez Obrador's choice for party president. "[Cota Montano] has leadership qualities, experience, and knowledge of our country's problems," said Zacatecas Gov. Amalia Garcia. (Sources: Spanish news service EFE, 02/07/05; The Associated Press, The New York Times, 02/07/05; The Herald-Mexico City, El Financiero, 02/07/05, 02/08/05; The Dallas Morning News, Los Angeles Times, The Chicago Tribune, 02/08/05; The Christian Science Monitor, 02/11/05; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 02/07/05, 02/09/05, 02/10/05, 02/11/05, 02/14/05; La Cronica de Hoy, 02/07/05, 02/09/05, 02/10/05, 02/13/05, 02/14/05, Notimex, 02/07/05, 02/15/05; The Financial Times-London, 02/08/05, 02/15/08; La Crisis, 02/07-09/05, 02/16/05; El Universal, 02/07-11/05, 02/14/05, 02/16/05; La Jornada, 02/07-10/05, 02/12/05, 02/16/05)

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