PRI Has Upper Hand in Upcoming Election in Mexico State

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.
PRI Has Upper Hand in Upcoming Election in Mexico State

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2005-05-25

The opposition parties are fighting an uphill battle against the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in the upcoming gubernatorial race in Mexico state on July 3. The conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) have agreed to cooperate closely to expose unfair electoral practices on the part of the PRI, but the two parties have enough differences to prevent them from forging any formal coalition. The PRD is already running in an alliance with the Partido del Trabajo (PT) called Unidos para Ganar, while the PAN has forged an electoral partnership with the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD) in a grouping known simply as PAN-Convergencia.

The PRD-PT and the PAN-PCD coalitions are at a major disadvantage because of the popularity of outgoing PRI Gov. Arturo Montiel Rojas. In a public-opinion poll by the Mexico City daily newspaper La Crisis in late April, Montiel obtained a 70% approval rate. More important, in a separate poll by the daily newspaper El Universal in late April, almost half the respondents said they would take into account Montiel's record when deciding which candidate to back in the upcoming election.

Polls show PRI candidate with double-digit lead

Montiel's coattails are translating into strong support for the PRI's gubernatorial candidate Enrique Pena Nieto, who is also representing the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) in a coalition known as Alianza por Mexico. The Mexico daily political newspaper La Crisis said its weekly polls indicate that Pena Nieto has gradually increased his support from 28% in mid-April to almost 35% in mid-May.

PAN-PCD candidate Ruben Mendoza Ayala, who defected from the PRI to seek the PAN nomination, has seen his standing in the polls drop gradually from about 22% in the April 12 poll to 19.9% in the May 18 poll. The PAN continues to receive most of its support in the suburbs of Naucalpan, Atizapan, and Tlalnepantla, northwest of Mexico City. The party recently received a boost when Isidro Pastor, the former PRI director in Mexico state, publicly endorsed Mendoza Ayala. Pastor's support is expected to result in very few defections of PRI supporters to the PAN candidate, however.

The numbers for PRD-PT candidate Yeidckol Polevnsky Gurwitz have fluctuated. In mid-April, 17.8% of respondents said they supported her. That number increased to 19.2% by May 10, but declined to 18.4% in the May 18 poll. Polevnsky has received a boost from carryover support for highly popular Mexico City Mayor Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. At some locations, Lopez Obrador has campaigned on behalf of Polevnsky, a former director of the Camara Nacional de la Industria de Transformacion (CANACINTRA).
The challenge for Mendoza and Polevnsky is to gain the support of the 27% of registered voters who remain undecided. Polevnsky, in particular, faces an uphill battle, as one recent poll by a major Mexico City newspaper suggested that many undecided voters lean toward Pena Nieto or Mendoza Ayala. In that poll, Pena Nieto would receive 44% of the vote, followed by 35% for Mendoza Ayala and 21% for Polevnsky. PAN, PRD accuse PRI of illegal, unfair campaign practices and Mendoza and Polevnsky are trying to gain ground against Pena Nieto by attempting to link the Montiel administration and the Pena campaign to corrupt practices.

On May 17, officials from the PAN, the PRD, and their allies called for the Instituto Estatal Electoral del Estado de Mexico (IEEM) to void Pena Nieto's registration because he violated campaign-spending limits. PRD president Leonel Cota Montano said the center-left party is planning to file a complaint with the special electoral enforcement agency (Fiscalia Especial para Delitos Electorales, FEPADE) against Pena Nieto for surpassing spending limits by about 30%. FEPADE is a unit of the federal attorney general's office (Procuraduria General de la Republica, PGR).

Cota Montano said Pena Nieto has already spent 282 million pesos (US$25.8 million) on his campaign, surpassing the spending limit of 214 million pesos (US$19.6 million) established for candidates in this particular election. The Mexico City daily newspaper El Universal reports that Pena Nieto has already outsized both his rivals by a large margin. "If the PRI candidate continues his campaign expenditures at the current pace between now and July 3, the total cost of his campaign could reach a scandalous level of 450 million or 500 million pesos," said El Universal columnist Jorge Cisneros.

Cisneros said that Pena Nieto has directed a large share of his funds to television and radio advertisements. "These spots do not offer any concrete proposals," said Cisneros. "They only serve to promote the PRI candidate as a family man and a likeable fellow, particularly among women voters." The PAN and PRD have also accused Montiel of spending funds from the state treasury and using the governor's office to boost the image of the PRI, which indirectly benefits the Pena Nieto campaign.

A group of PAN federal legislators claim that Montiel has spent about 200 million (US$18.3 million) to 300 million pesos (US$27.4 million) in state funds to promote his party. The two parties said they would also ask the IEEM to investigate whether Montiel violated the Mexico state Constitution by asking participants at an official state ceremony to vote for the PRI in the upcoming gubernatorial race.

Election also reflects internal struggle in PRI

The PRI has responded to the accusations saying they are desperate acts from two campaigns that are losing ground. "Having detected a loss of support, the campaigns of Ruben Mendoza Ayala and Yeidckol Polevnsky are searching for anything they can find to disqualify the legitimate campaign conducted by Enrique Pena," said PRI federal Deputy Pablo Bedolla Lopez. PRI president Roberto Madrazo has directed his criticisms toward President Vicente Fox, accusing the chief executive and Mexico City Mayor Lopez Obrador of plotting to bring down the PRI ahead of the July 3 elections in Nayarit and Mexico state (see SourceMex, 2005-03-18).
Madrazo said the "maneuvering efforts" by Lopez Obrador and Fox would actually help the PRI. "We are very grateful to the federal government, the PAN, and the PRD because their crusade against us will actually unite our party," said the PRI president. Regardless of Madrazo's efforts to place the blame solely on the PRD and the PAN, Mexico state continues to play a central role in a PRI internal power struggle.

The PRI president is in the midst of a struggle with Gov. Montiel, who has joined a group of governors and legislators seeking an alternative to Madrazo to represent the party in the 2006 election. The group, Todos Unidos Contra Madrazo (TUCOM), does not believe Madrazo can win the election (see SourceMex, 2005-02-16). Montiel, former Hidalgo Gov. Manuel Angel Nunez Soto, Sen. Enrique Jackson, and others have declared themselves viable alternatives to Madrazo.

"Both Montiel and Madrazo have huge stakes in the [Mexico state] race's outcome," said Kelly Arthur Garrett, a columnist for the Mexico City English-language newspaper The Herald. "Both want the PRI presidential nomination, and Montiel is a prominent member in what might be called the 'Anybody but Madrazo' movement within the PRI. Each will be working to get the credit if Pena wins, and to pin the blame on the other if he loses."

**Corruption uncovered at state electoral institute**

The PRD and PAN complaints against Pena Nieto have been complicated by chaos in the IEEM, which fell into disarray after Isael Montoya and Bernardo Garcia, members of the institute's governing council, admitted receiving 25 million pesos (US$2.3 million) in kickbacks from the printing company Cartonera Plastica in exchange for obtaining the contract to develop the ballot boxes, ballots, and other printed materials for the July 3 election. The company was selected even though its bid was higher than rivals. Former Zacatecas Gov. Ricardo Monreal Avila, appointed by the PRD to represent the party on the IEEM, blew the whistle on the two council members in mid-May.

The councilors initially refused to step down, forcing the intervention of national party presidents Cota Montano of the PRD and Manuel Espino Barrientos of the PAN. The two leaders threatened legal action unless the situation was rectified. The intervention of the national party leaders then forced the Mexico state legislature to step in.

Legislators put pressure on Montoya and Garcia to step down, along with all other members of the governing council. In a press conference, state legislators said the resignations were necessary to ensure the integrity of the upcoming election. "We have agreed to accept the resignations of the electoral councilors," said legislator Jose Cipriano Gutierrez, a member of the PRD. "This is a safeguard to the accuracy, impartiality, objectivity, and transparency of the elections." The resignation of the governing council forced the legislature to hold an emergency seven-hour session to select replacements.

For now, the new IEEM governing council is planning to honor the contract with Cartonera, although an investigation is continuing. If more irregularities are uncovered, the contract could be voided and given to one of the other bidders, said IEEM secretary-general Emmanuel Villicana. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on May 25,
reported at 10.93 pesos per US$1.00] (Sources: Agencia de noticias Proceso, 05/16/05, 05/18/05; Spanish news service EFE, 05/18/05; The Herald-Mexico City, 04/24/05, 05/17/05, 05/19/05; Notimex, 05/18/05, 05/20/05, 05/22/05; La Crisis, 04/14/05, 05/03/05, 05/05/05, 05/09/05, 05/17/05, 05/19/05, 05/20/05, 05/24/05; La Cronica de Hoy, 04/06/05, 04/07/05, 04/12/05, 04/15/05, 05/17/05, 05/20/05, 05/25/05; La Jornada, 04/07/05, 04/08/05, 05/02/05, 05/03/05, 05/06/05, 05/13/05, 05/18-20/05, 05/23-25/05; El Universal, 04/07/05, 04/19/05, 04/26/05, 05/02/05, 05/03/05, 05/06/05, 05/17-20/05, 05/22-25/05)