PRI Faction Elects Candidate to Oppose Front-Runner Madrazo

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 Faction Elects Candidate to Oppose Front-Runner Madrazo

by LADB Staff
Category/Department: Mexico
Published: 2005-08-17

Several dramas are evolving within the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) as the former governing party prepares for the 2006 presidential election. Two events are of special significance: Mexico state Gov. Arturo Montiel has emerged to challenge front-runner Roberto Madrazo; and a federal electoral court has ruled that secretary-general Elba Esther Gordillo has the right to replace Madrazo as party president. Both developments have the potential to deepen divisions within the PRI.

A third subplot is a controversial change in leadership in the powerful Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM), which has traditionally supported the PRI. The new CTM leader, Joaquin Gamboa Pascoe, was appointed to replace Leonardo Rodriguez Alcaine, who died on Aug. 6. The petroleum workers union (Sindicato de Trabajadores Petroleros de la Republica Mexicana, STPRM), which was pushing for its leader to head the CTM, is questioning Gamboa's qualifications for the job. This rift could also have repercussions for the election.

Mexico state Gov. Arturo Montiel to compete for presidency

The most significant of the three events was the emergence of Montiel as an alternative to Madrazo. The Mexico state governor received the most votes in a survey, conducted by Unidad Democratica, a faction that came together to oppose Madrazo. The faction, informally known as Todos Unidos Contra Madrazo or TUCOM, does not think Madrazo can win the presidential election in July 2006 (see SourceMex, 2005-05-25 and 2005-07-20).

Montiel, who concludes his term as Mexico state governor in September, attained the victory through a complicated process involving polls conducted by three prestigious polling companies: Consulta Mitofsky, Pisos-Bimsa, and Parametria. The three companies together conducted two separate polls, one involving the general public and the other PRI loyalists. The results were then merged under the supervision of the Mexico chapter of the anti-corruption organization Transparencia Internacional.

The polling organizations did not release exact figures, but PRI sources said the election came down to a race between Montiel and Sen. Enrique Jackson, whom many considered a better choice because of his reputation as a consensus-builder. The other candidates were former governors Tomas Yarrington of Tamaulipas and Manuel Angel Nunez of Hidalgo and Gov. Enrique Martinez of Coahuila.

Montiel's victory was not surprising, given the amount of money he spent on the campaign. The daily newspaper El Universal, which monitored television and radio expenditures of all the candidates, estimated that Montiel easily spent 76 million pesos (US$7.14 million) between April 15
and the first week of August, which provided him strong name recognition. Political observers said Montiel had displayed his fund-raising prowess in the Mexico state gubernatorial election in July, helping boost the coffers of PRI candidate Enrique Pena Nieto, who won the election in a landslide (see SourceMex, 2005-07-20).

"In Pena Nieto's election, Montiel demonstrated that he could tap the old resources available to the PRI and engage in old-style Mexican politics," said Samuel Schmidt, a columnist for the Mexico City political newspaper La Crisis. Montiel insisted that the results were more a victory for TUCOM than a personal achievement. "This is not a victory for Montiel but a collective victory, and in a special way [a victory] for my colleagues," Montiel said in reference to his four rivals. "We are going to demand with all firmness that the [PRI nomination] process be democratic, transparent, fair, and acceptable to all of us."

Skeptics are taking a wait-and-see attitude regarding whether Montiel truly becomes an effective adversary for Madrazo. "It will be interesting to see whether Enrique Jackson, Manuel Angel Nunez, Tomas Yarrington, and Enrique Martinez will really promote Arturo Montiel," said columnist Julio Cesar Hernandez Gutierrez, who writes in the Guadalajara-based daily newspaper Ocho Columnas. Montiel and Madrazo will face each other in a nationwide primary sometime in November or December. While Montiel insists that he is capable of beating Madrazo, only a handful of opinion polls have shed any light on the upcoming election. One poll, by La Crisis, showed Madrazo with 46.3% of support, compared with 37.1% for Montiel and 16.6% undecided."

A decisive factor will be the campaigns and especially the debates," said La Crisis. Endorsements from PRI legislators and governors could also make a difference. While Montiel appears to have strong support among independent governors like Eduardo Bours of Sonora and Natividad Paras of Nuevo Leon, Madrazo is running strong in the Congress. In an informal poll by PRI Deputy Miguel Lucero Palma, 200 of the 224 PRI legislators in the lower house are backing Madrazo.

**Party-leadership dispute threatens PRI**

The wild card in the PRI primary could be party secretary-general Elba Esther Gordillo, who has had her share of run-ins with Madrazo (see SourceMex, 2003-12-03). Gordillo, considered a divisive figure within the PRI, is in line to succeed Madrazo as party president when he finally resigns to begin his campaign in earnest. Party statutes stipulate that the secretary-general is to assume the top post if the president leaves. Madrazo says he has delayed his departure because the strong opposition to Gordillo could leave the party unstable.

Some influential PRI members accuse Madrazo of procrastinating on his resignation so he can continue to use the party apparatus to promote his candidacy. "It is clear that he is using the PRI structure to advance his presidential ambitions," said Sen. Dulce Maria Sauri Riancho. Still, opposition to Gordillo's ascent to party leadership continues to create discord in the PRI. Many party loyalists are angry with Gordillo for her open support of President Vicente Fox, a member of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN).

Furthermore, Gordillo and other PRI members broke ranks with the national party leadership and supported a coalition candidate in the gubernatorial elections in Oaxaca in August 2004 (see
"A Gordillo presidency does not guarantee a democratic process in the selection of our presidential candidate," said the PRI state committee in Oaxaca.

In July, members of the PRI executive council (consejo ejecutivo nacional, CEN) said they would be willing to allow Gordillo to keep the top post for a year, meaning she would lead the party through the 2006 election. Key leaders like Deputy Emilio Chuayffet said Gordillo should be allowed to hold the post until October 2006. Gordillo has said, however, that she wants to continue far beyond that point, which the CEN opposes.

The controversy regarding Gordillo's tenure made its way to the country's top electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion, TEPJF), which voted in favor of Gordillo in a unanimous decision handed down in early August. Members of the PRI CEN, however, said they might not heed the TEPJF decision, arguing that the selection of a party leader is an internal matter.

Many PRI members continue to push for Gordillo's ouster, but any such move would have negative repercussions for the PRI in the 2006 election. Some Gordillo supporters have registered a new political party, the Partido Nueva Alianza (PNA), which she could lead if expelled from the PRI. If Gordillo leaves, she could take with her a large share of the powerful teachers union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educacion, SNTE), which she once led.

For now, Gordillo is proceeding on the assumption that she will head the PRI during the 2006 election. In a meeting with members of Unidad Democratica in Toluca, she pledged to ensure that the process of the party primary later this year is fully impartial.

Election of labor leader could also affect presidential race

Even if the PRI is able to maintain unity in the face of the Gordillo situation, other pitfalls could create some fractures in the party, such as the controversy regarding the election of Gamboa Pascoe to head the CTM. Gamboa, who has headed the Mexico City workers union (Federacion de Trabajadores del Distrito Federal (FTDF), was elected to succeed Rodriguez Alcaine, who died of heart failure. Rodriguez had led the CTM since 1998, succeeding powerful leader Fidel Velazquez (see SourceMex, 1997-02-07 and 1998-03-25).

The CTM is facing a controversy of its own after the STPRM questioned the legitimacy of Gamboa Pascoe's election to lead the organization. There have been some criticisms about Gamboa's lack of
experience as a blue-collar worker, something the new CTM leader has acknowledged. "I've been an administrator from a young age," he said. The biggest controversy, however, is whether Gamboa was unjustly moved ahead of STPRM leader Carlos Romero Deschamps in the CTM election.

Sen. Ricardo Aldana Prieto, also a STPRM leader, said Romero Deschamps should have been elevated to head the CTM under the labor organization's statutes. "There is a numeric order by which new secretary-generals are selected," said Aldana. Romero Deschamps may have been carrying too much baggage to be considered for the top post, however.

Both Romero Deschamps and Aldana were at the center of controversy in the 2000 election, when the STPRM was accused of conspiring with PRI officials to use public funds in this case from the state-run oil company PEMEX to finance the presidential campaign of PRI candidate Francisco Labastida (see SourceMex, 2002-01-30). As a result, the federal elections watchdog (Instituto Federal Electoral, IFE) levied a hefty fine on the PRI (see SourceMex, 2003-03-19).

The Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) later dropped money-laundering and racketeering charges against the STPRM and the PRI (see SourceMex, 2003-07-30). Some political observers suggest Madrazo would have gained the most if Romero Deschamps had been elected leader. "No one doubts that with the money from the PEMEX union and the full support of the CTM, [Madrazo] would have practically won the PRI candidacy," said El Financiero columnist Soto. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on Aug. 17, reported at 10.63 pesos per US$1.00] (Sources: Associated Press, 08/04/05; Los Angeles Times, 08/05/05; Spanish news service EFE, 08/04/05, 08/06/05; El Siglo de Torreon, 08/09/05; El Economista, 08/05/05, 08/11/05; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 08/08/05, 08/10/05, 08/11/05; Ocho Columnas, 08/11/05; The Herald-Mexico City, 08/11/05, 08/12/05; Notimex, 08/06/05, 08/15/05; La Jornada, 08/05/05, 08/11/05, 08/12/05, 08/16/05; La Cronica de Hoy, 08/05/05, 08/08/05, 08/11/05, 08/12/05, 08/16/05; El Financiero, 08/04/05, 08/05/05, 08/09/05, 08/12/05, 08/15/05, 08/17/05; La Crisis, 08/05/05, 08/08/05, 08/09/05, 08/11/05, 08/12/05, 08/15-17/05; El Universal, 08/05/05, 08/08/05, 08/09/05, 08/12/05, 08/15-17/05)

-- End --