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Three Gubernatorial Elections, Municipal Races Scheduled on July 2

by LADB Staff

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Mexicans will be electing new chief executives in three states and Mexico City on Sunday, July 2, the same day as the country's all-important federal presidential and congressional elections. The three gubernatorial seats up for grabs are in Guanajuato, Morelos, and Jalisco, three states governed by the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN). The center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) has governed Mexico City since 1997.

Public opinion polls suggest the PAN is likely to retain control of the statehouses in Guanajuato and Morelos, but is facing an extremely competitive race with the former governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in Jalisco. In Mexico City, the PRD is apparently headed for a relatively easy victory despite attractive PAN and PRI candidates in the race.

Top candidates in Jalisco accused of drug ties

Next to the federal elections and the mayoral election in Mexico City, the race in Jalisco is the most significant election on July 2. The PAN, which has governed the state for two six-year terms, appears in very real danger of losing to the PRI, which previously held the post for many generations. The Jalisco elections also include a race for the mayoral seat in Guadalajara, Mexico's second-largest city. The state elections and the Mexico City race have seen some of the same negative campaigning and allegations of corruption that have permeated the presidential elections.

In Jalisco, gubernatorial candidates Arturo Zamora Jimenez of the PRI and Emilio Gonzalez Marquez of the PAN are both under a black cloud because of allegations that each has had connections to drug cartels. The allegations about Zamora Jimenez stem from news that the US Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) is investigating the outgoing mayor of Zapopan, a suburb of Guadalajara, for protecting drug traffickers. Zamora, who has not been charged with any crime, suggested the DEA investigation was the result of information presented to the agency by President Vicente Fox's administration to support PAN candidate Gonzalez Marquez, the outgoing mayor of Guadalajara. "These are clearly leaks from the government," said Zamora. "They and the PAN are all over this."

The Procuraduria General de la Republica (PGR) has also begun to look into allegations that Gonzalez's administration offered protection to local drug dealers during his term as mayor of Guadalajara. The PGR investigation was launched at the request of PRI federal deputies. Gonzalez has denied the allegations. The corruption allegations could affect the gubernatorial race, which most polls show as very close.

One poll by the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma and its Guadalajara sister newspaper Mural showed Gonzalez with 46% of the vote, compared with 44% for Zamora. Enrique Ibarra of the PRD

and coalition partners the Partido del Trabajo (PT) and Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD) was far behind with only 5% of the vote.

A separate poll by Comunicacion Consultores SC, published in the Guadalajara newspaper Ocho Columnas in early June, showed Zamora with 47% support, compared with only 40% for Gonzalez and 9% for Ibarra. A third poll conducted among likely voters in the Guadalajara metropolitan area, which includes both Guadalajara and Zapopan, had Zamora leading by five percentage points.

The PAN is expected to retain the mayoralty in Guadalajara, with its candidate Alfonso Petersen leading Leobardo Alcala of the PRI. Similarly, PRI candidate Jesus Casillas is expected to succeed Zamora to head the Zapopan government on July 2. One poll shows Casillas leading PAN rival Juan Sanchez Aldana by 15 percentage points. The possibility that the PRI could regain the governorship of Jalisco may be attributed in part to Zamora's lack of ties to the PRI old guard in Jalisco.

The PRI is blamed for many problems in the state through the years, including a tragic gasoline explosion in Guadalajara in 1992 (see SourceMex, 1992-05-06 and 1992-06-03) and the assassination of Cardinal Juan Jose Posadas Ocampo in 1993 (see SourceMex, 2001-06-13). Those two incidents contributed to the PAN's capture of the Jalisco statehouse in 1995 (see SourceMex, 1995-02-15).

"The biggest advantage for the PRI in this election is the nomination of Arturo Zamora, who is not a career PRI politician but just another citizen," said political analyst Carlos Ramirez, whose syndicated column is carried in several Mexican newspapers. "His candidacy dilutes the negative legacy of the PRI in this state."

At the same time, an erosion of support for the PAN may be in part a result of the perception that the ultraconservative faction known as El Yunque may have taken control of the party's state organization. "Gonzalez looks like a fusion of the traditional PAN and the ultraconservative elements of the party," said Ramirez. The PAN's national president Manuel Espino Barrientos is said to have close ties to El Yunque (see SourceMex, 2005-03-30).

Polls show PAN ahead in Guanajuato, Morelos

Concerns about El Yunque have also surfaced in the Guanajuato gubernatorial race but appear to be having little effect. Opponents have attempted to link PAN candidate Juan Manuel Oliva Ramirez to the party's ultraconservative faction, particularly during a recent gubernatorial debate. "I would have liked to have debated the traditional PAN of [party founder] Manuel Gomez Morin and [ex-presidential candidate] Manuel Clouthier," said Manuel Chico Herrera, who is representing the PRI and the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) in the election. "Instead, I am debating the candidate of Elias Villegas." Villegas is a businessman from the city of Leon who is said to be one of the top leaders of El Yunque.

The allegations of El Yunque involvement in the Guanajuato election do not seem to be having the effect that they have had in Jalisco, however. One public-opinion poll has Juan Manuel Oliva of the PAN and its coalition partner Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL) leading Chico Herrera by a 2-to-1 margin.

As in Jalisco, the PRD-PT-PCD coalition is running a distant third in Guanajuato, the home state of President Fox. To make matters worse, PRD-PT-PCD candidate Ricardo Garcia is fighting allegations that he committed tax and business fraud. In Morelos, the PRD and PRI candidates have attempted to link Marco Adame Castillo of the PAN to the administration of outgoing Gov. Sergio Estrada Cajigal, who survived an attempt by the state legislature to remove him from office because of allegations of corruption and ties to the drug trade (see SourceMex, 2004-04-21). The allegations appear to be having minimal effect on the candidacy of Adame Castillo, a federal senator, who obtained 32% of preferences in a public-opinion poll by the Mexico City daily newspaper El Universal.

Lagging behind are Maricela Sanchez Cortes of the PRI-PVEM with 22% of support and Fernando Martinez Cue of the PRD-PT-PCD with 21% of the vote. PANAL candidate Victor Benitez Quintero obtained a mere 2% of the voter preferences.

PRD heavily favored to retain Mexico City

In Mexico City, the PRI and PAN candidates have attempted to portray PRD rival Marcelo Ebrard as a public official who promoted and tolerated corruption during his tenure as head of the city's public-safety department (Secretaria de Seguridad Publica). Ebrard, considered the protege of ex-mayor and PRD presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, won the nomination in a contentious primary with Sen. Jesus Ortega (see SourceMex, 2005-08-03).

Demetrio Sodi, a former PRD senator who defected to the PAN and later won the party's nomination, was especially critical of Ebrard during a debate in mid-June, accusing him of allowing the unrestricted growth of the drug trade on the streets of Mexico City. Furthermore, he charged that Ebrard failed to make necessary improvements in the Mexico City transportation system during his tenure as government secretary during the administration of ex-Mayor Manuel Camacho Solis in the late 1980s. Camacho and Ebrard are both former members of the PRI.

Ebrard has also faced strong criticisms from PRI candidate Beatriz Paredes, who served as governor of Tlaxaca state in 1987-1992. Paredes' attacks on Ebrard have not been as severe as those from Sodi, but she has not hesitated to blame Ebrard for an increase in the crime rate in Mexico City. Ebrard has responded to the criticisms by pointing out that the rise in crime in Mexico City has resulted from the failure of federal programs during the Fox administration.

"We're going to win on the national level," said Ebrard, referring to Lopez Obrador's presidential candidacy. "Things will get better in the [capital] because federal economic policy will change."

While a Lopez Obrador victory is still very much up in air because of the tightness of the race with PAN candidate Felipe Calderon, the chances appear extremely good that Ebrard will win the mayoral race in the capital. A poll released by the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma showed Ebrard with 51% of support, compared with only 25% for Sodi and 23% for Paredes. Sodi and Paredes talked about joining their campaigns to form a united front against Ebrard, but the effort fell apart. (Sources: El Informador-Guadalajara, 05/24/06; Ocho Columnas-Guadalajara, 06/09/06; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 06/12-14/06; La Cronica de Hoy, 06/13/06, 06/14/06; El Universal, 05/16/06, 05/24/06, 06/06/06, 06/13-15/06; El Economista, Excelsior, The Herald-Mexico City,

06/13-15/06; Milenio Diario, 06/15/06; La Jornada, 05/28/06, 06/13-16/06; Reforma, 06/05/06, 06/09/06,
06/14-16/06; Notimex, 06/16/06)

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