

7-12-2006

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### Recommended Citation

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<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5002>

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## **PRI Shut Out Completely in Presidential Elections, Loses Plurality in Congress**

*by LADB Staff*

*Category/Department: Mexico*

*Published: 2006-07-12*

The long-governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) continued to tumble, with the party coming in a distant third in the presidential race and losing its plurality in both chambers of Congress during the 2006 elections. The PRI, which governed Mexico for seven decades, lost the presidential race for the second consecutive election, with its candidate Roberto Madrazo Pintado receiving only about 22% of the vote. Even worse, Madrazo did not win a single state, losing to either Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) or Felipe Calderon of the conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN). Each of the PRI's two rivals won 16 states. In 18 states, the PRI came in third.

Among the states Madrazo lost to Lopez Obrador was Tabasco, the home of both candidates. The PRD candidate defeated his PRI rival even in Madrazo's home precinct in the state capital of Villahermosa. "Perhaps because his neighbors know him well, they did not vote for [Madrazo]," said syndicated columnist Miguel Angel Grandos Chapa in a piece published in the Mexico City daily newspaper Reforma. "He was not even able to claim victory in the precinct where he cast his vote."

The percentage of the vote received by Madrazo is an all-time low for the PRI, which at one time dominated the electoral scene, often taking more than 90% of the vote against token opposition in a de facto single-party system. The party's dominance began to erode in 1982, when Miguel de la Madrid obtained only 68% of the vote. The PRI was behind the PRD early in the count during the 1988 election, until a mysterious "computer glitch" halted the vote count. The final numbers gave Carlos Salinas de Gortari the victory with only 50% of the vote, compared with about 31% for Cuauhtemoc Cardenas.

In 1994, Ernesto Zedillo again won with about 50% of the vote, defeating Diego Fernandez de Cevallos and Cardenas. The PRI lost its first presidential election in 2000, when its candidate Francisco Labastida obtained only about 36% of the vote, compared with 42% for Vicente Fox of the PAN. PRI expected to become power broker in Congress The decline of the PRI's political fortunes was also evident in the congressional elections, with the party losing its plurality in both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate (see other article in this issue of SourceMex).

Still, the party maintains some strength in Congress because voters in some traditional PRI strongholds cast ballots for rival candidates in the presidential race and for the PRI in the congressional races. While the PRI's numbers have declined significantly in the lower house, the party remains strong enough to act as a powerbroker with either the PRD or the PAN. In the Senate, the PRI remains the second-largest party. "The new president will seek a coalition of forces to pass reforms," said David Penchyna, a PRI official who helped coordinate Madrazo's campaign. "The PRI can show that despite its defeat it is willing to contribute to the country's growth."

"The PRI is the kingmaker," agreed analyst Federico Estevez of the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM). "If they make the right deals, they can get themselves several Cabinet positions."

Following the election, PRI party president Mariano Palacios Alcocer resigned. Palacios, who was handpicked by Madrazo, only served in the post for a few months. Several prominent party members said they would seek a candidate to replace him who would unite the party. Among the names mentioned most prominently are Sen. Enrique Jackson, Mexico City mayoral candidate Beatriz Paredes, and legislators Emilio Chuayffet and Juan Millan. Paredes, Chuayffet and Millan are all former governors. A unifying force would counter the abrasive style of Madrazo, who served as party president before seeking the presidential nomination.

Madrazo openly feuded with several factions of the party, including several governors and legislators and ex-party secretary Elba Esther Gordillo (see SourceMex, 2003-12-03, 2004-08-04, and 2005-08-17). Gordillo, a leader of the teachers union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE), remained with the PRI while helping to form the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL). PANAL presidential candidate Roberto Campa Cifrian, a former PRI member, may have siphoned off some votes from Madrazo.

### *Oaxaca teachers' conflict, Puebla scandal also hurt PRI*

The SNTE may have also been instrumental in diverting some potential PRI votes to the PRD in Oaxaca and other states. The teachers union in Oaxaca state became embroiled in a major dispute with the state and federal governments regarding a pay raise, organizing several demonstrations and blockades and calling a general strike to make their point that Mexican teachers receive very low pay.

Among other things, the SNTE called for the removal of Gov. Ulises Ruiz, a member of the PRI, whom they accused of blocking a raise and failing to negotiate in good faith. In mid-June, Gov. Ruiz sent state police to dislodge thousands of teachers from the center of Oaxaca city, where they had been camped for three weeks.

The incident resulted in a bloody confrontation between state officers and SNTE members and their sympathizers. The operation failed to discourage the SNTE, which threatened to boycott and disrupt the July 2 elections. The union later dropped its threat, but urged members not to vote for either the PRI or the PAN. The PAN has traditionally been weak in Oaxaca, but the state had been one of the PRI strongholds.

Teachers returned to classes on July 10 without a resolution to their demands but promised to continue to press for higher pay. The PRI lost ground to the PAN in Puebla state, which had been another stronghold of the party. Many would-be PRI voters may have defected to the PAN because of the scandal involving PRI Gov. Mario Marin, who is accused of conspiring with local businessman Kamel Nacif to falsely imprison journalist Lydia Cacho (see SourceMex, 2006-02-22 and 2006-04-26). Cacho wrote a book implicating Nacif in a pedophile scandal. (Sources: Reuters, 06/14/06, 07/04/06; Reforma, 07/02-06/06; El Economista, 07/05/06, 07/06/06; The Herald-Mexico City, 06/09/06, 06/15/06, 07/05-07/06; El Universal, 07/04/06, 07/06/06, 07/07/06, 07/11/06; La Crisis,

07/05/06, 07/06/06, 07/11/06; Excelsior, 07/05/06, 07/07/06, 07/10/06, 07/11/06; Milenio Diario, 07/06/06,  
07/10/06, 07/11/06)

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