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## Center-left, Conservative Parties Join Forces To Challenge PRI in 2010 Gubernatorial Elections

by LADB Staff

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The center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) and the conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) have proposed forming coalitions in the states of Oaxaca, Durango, and Hidalgo to challenge the incumbent Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in gubernatorial elections in 2010. The two parties are exploring similar alliances in states like Veracruz, Campeche, and Puebla, where the PRI has also been dominant. But the move has attracted strong criticism from key leaders of the two parties, including former President Vicente Fox and ex-presidential candidate Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador. The alliances could threaten many political and electoral reforms proposed by President Felipe Calderon early this year, as the PRI, which previously gave conditional support to much of the executive's plan, has now threatened to block many of the initiatives.

The PRD, meanwhile, is experiencing an internal fracture that could jeopardize its 12-year hold on the governorship of Zacatecas. Coalitions formed in states governed by PRI The national party structures of the PRD and the PAN have endorsed the concept of joining forces against the PRI in as many as six states, although much of the coalition-building work is being left up to the state party organizations. Ten states are holding gubernatorial elections on July 4, seven of which are governed by the PRI. Sinaloa, another state in the hands of the PRI, is scheduled to elect a new governor on Oct. 10. A PAN-PRD alliance has raised some eyebrows around the country because the two parties stand on opposite ends of the political spectrum and have a history of animosity dating back to the 2006 presidential election, which Calderon won by an extremely narrow margin (SourceMex, July 12, 2006). A handful of Lopez Obrador's supporters have refused to recognize Calderon as the legitimate president of Mexico, which continues to cause friction between the PAN and the PRD.

One key Lopez Obrador supporter, Sen. Gabino Cue of the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), has publicly recognized Calderon as the legitimate president, removing an obstacle for the PAN to back him in the Oaxaca gubernatorial election. The PAN backed Cue in the 2004 gubernatorial election, which the PRI won by a narrow margin amid charges of vote buying and fraud (SourceMex, August 04, 2004). In announcing his decision to recognize Calderon as Mexico's legitimate president, Cue said that he values institutions and that it is important for state governments to have a strong relationship with the federal government. Although the PRD and the PAN have announced a clear intention to join forces in at least three gubernatorial elections, and perhaps a handful of state legislative elections, the two parties remain suspicious of each other. For example, the PRD has accused the center-right party of trying to impose Xochitl Galvez as the coalition candidate in the Hidalgo gubernatorial race. Galvez served as director of the indigenous-affairs office during President Fox's administration (SourceMex, November 29, 2000).

The PAN, meanwhile, is unhappy that the PRD has threatened to join the PRI in blocking Calderon's electoral- and political-reform proposals. The reforms, announced at the beginning of the year, would, among other things, reduce the size of the Chamber of Deputies, allow independent

candidacies, and allow re-election of federal legislators and mayors (SourceMex, January 06, 2010). The PRI, which initially gave conditional support to Calderon's 10-point plan, is now objecting to many of the president's proposals. The PRI voiced concerns that the plan would give the executive more power at the expense of the legislative branch. Additionally, PRI president Beatriz Paredes suggested that the proposal to allow independent candidacies would create an opening for "factions and groups from the ultraright" to impose their agenda. "If the PRI has any say, these reforms will not be approved," said Paredes. Paredes did not link the electoral reforms to the PRD-PAN alliances but in separate comments questioned the motives of the two parties.

The PRI president described the proposed alliances as an effort to "divide...poison the environment, and erode the relationship with the voters in those states where we represent the majority." Deputy Francisco Rojas, who heads the PRI delegation in the lower house, went one step further, threatening to break any agreements in Congress if the PAN and the PRD proceed with their plan to form alliances to challenge the PRI in gubernatorial elections. Sen. Jesus Murillo Karam, who is also the PRI's secretary-general, said the party is considering bringing the matter to the electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion, TEPJF). "It is possible to bring a legal complaint because the law says that a coalition has to have a common platform," said Murillo, pointing to the wide differences in political philosophies between the PAN and the center-left parties led by the PRD. PAN and PRD leaders suggested that the PRI would have no reason to react so angrily if party leaders were not worried about the coalition efforts. "Why are PRI leaders so worried if, from their point of view, they have such a strong advantage in the elections?" asked PAN president Cesar Nava. Some observers noted that the PRI had been looking to the 2010 gubernatorial elections to consolidate its power ahead of the big race in 2012. "These statements from PRI leaders are intended to warn the Calderon government that they won't allow any obstacles to their ultimate goal, which is to win the 2012 presidential election," wrote Ruben Cardenas in the daily newspaper *El Siglo de Durango*. "PRI leaders are saying that they have no doubt that this alliance is 'perverse' and that it's 'against the laws of nature' because it involves two parties that consider each other illegitimate," said Luis Rubio, a columnist in the Mexico City daily newspaper *Reforma*. "Still, the PRI statement shows a real concern that an alliance could divert votes in some of its traditional strongholds like Oaxaca, Puebla, and Veracruz." "Beatriz Paredes' comments remind us that the PRI has not learned to be another party within the system of parties," wrote Denise Maerker in the Guadalajara daily newspaper *El Informador*. "It insists on presenting itself as the only true representative of the motherland."

PAN and PRD leaders urged the PRI not to "contaminate" the discussions on electoral and political reforms with its own electoral agenda. "If we are not capable of reaching agreements on electoral reforms it's because we weren't able to find the political will to look beyond the immediate political future, because we set conditions in Congress that were tied to partisan electoral agendas," said PAN Sen. Gustavo Madero. Vicente Fox, Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador oppose alliances But there are strong personalities in the PAN, the PRD, and the Partido del Trabajo (PT) opposing the coalition. The most vocal PAN opponents include former President Fox and ex-party president Manuel Espino. "The PRD has no principles, no values, and, therefore, there is nothing that needs to be shared with them," Fox told reporters in an interview at his ranch in Guanajuato. Espino, who is linked to the ultraright wing of the PAN, said Lopez Obrador would have to publicly recognize Calderon as the legitimate president of Mexico before a coalition would be possible.

Lopez Obrador said he remained close to Cue but would not campaign for him because of the decision to form an alliance with the PAN in Oaxaca. "I have told Gabino very clearly...I cannot [campaign for him] because of my principles," said the center-left leader. "I do not support these types of alliances." The ex-presidential candidate later reinforced that position saying that under no conditions would he support any center-left candidate who aligned himself or herself with the PAN or the PRI. "They are cut from the same cloth," said Lopez Obrador. "There is no difference whatsoever [between the two parties]." Mario DiCostanzo, one of Lopez Obrador's top aides, reiterated that view, saying that the movement created by the former presidential candidate would not form alliances with "those who stole the presidency in 2006."

PT Deputies Gerardo Fernandez Norona and Jaime Cardenas also rejected the coalitions, which they said were conceived by the faction of the party that has been at odds with Lopez Obrador's center-left coalition. That faction, which is aligned with party president Jesus Ortega, is commonly known as Los Chuchos. "The PRD of Los Chuchos has taken collaboration to the point of treason against the people," said Fernandez Norona. Some observers agreed with the critics in the center-left movement, questioning whether supporting outside candidates or recruiting outsiders to run as PRD candidates has served the interests of the party. In a piece in the Mexico City daily newspaper *La Jornada*, columnist Arnaldo Cordova noted that the PRD had failed to advance party interests and the left's principles by supporting coalition candidate Antonio Echeverria in the Nayarit elections in 1999 (SourceMex, July 07, 1999) and recruiting businessman Zeferino Torreblanca in Guerrero in 2005 (SourceMex, February 16, 2005) and disgruntled PRI member Juan Sabines in Chiapas in 2006 (SourceMex, August 23, 2006). "The moral is that alliances are made to win an election, not to win over other parties as allies," said Cordova. "We are talking about pure pragmatism." Cordova noted that the PRD displayed some of the same tactics in the 2004 gubernatorial election in Tlaxcala, where outgoing Gov. Alfonso Sanchez Anaya attempted to impose his wife, Sen. Maricarmen Ramirez, as the party's candidate. The move left the PRD fractured in Tlaxcala, allowing the PAN to gain a narrow victory (SourceMex, November 17, 2004).

Mexico City mayor, other key PRD officials support alliances Despite opposition from Lopez Obrador and his supporters, many PRD legislators and elected officials are solidly behind a coalition with the PAN as long as the center-right party does not set unreasonable conditions. Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, who is widely expected to compete with Lopez Obrador for the PRD candidacy in the 2012 presidential election, called the possibility of a PAN-PRD alliance "valid and legitimate." Some analysts are already projecting the 2012 presidential election as a race between Ebrard and popular Mexico state Gov. Enrique Pena Nieto of the PRI. PRD officials said a major goal of an alliance with the PAN is to end the undemocratic "cacique" system in some states where the PRI has retained absolute power through vote buying, corruption, and coercion. "Our coalition represents 'pure poison' for the governing class that has converted some states into its personal fiefdom," said Ortega, in response to Paredes' criticism of the proposed PAN-PRD alliances. "The first step for us is to implement the conditions where we can have true competition in the electoral process," said Manuel Camacho Solis, who served as PRI mayor of Mexico City before defecting to the PRD. "Those conditions do not exist." Sen. Carlos Navarrete, who heads the PRD delegation in the Senate, accused the PRI of hypocrisy. "Why is the PRI spending so much energy to discredit our coalition? They have said nothing about those times when they joined forces with our party to take back municipalities from the PAN," said the PRD senator. But Navarrete also pointed out that the PAN has a similar hold in Guanajuato state as the PRI has in other states. "Even though the

conditions are different, [this state] will also require change," he said. Guanajuato will elect a new governor in 2012.

Several commentators have weighed in, pointing to the obvious philosophical differences between the PRD and the PAN. "The ideological and practical differences are huge, and therefore the criticisms are merited," wrote columnist Jorge Gonzalez Garza in the Mexico City daily newspaper *Reforma*. But Gonzalez also suggested that the proposed alliance goes well beyond ideology. "What these alliances are proposing is a much simpler concept than pure ideology: a political alternative that ends the cacique system and foments more-democratic conditions," said the columnist. Denise Dresser, a respected political scientist and syndicated columnist, said the 2000 election that brought Vicente Fox to office resulted in a true political transformation in Mexico at the presidential level. "But this change did not alter the structure of politics at the gubernatorial level," said Dresser, pointing in particular to Gov. Ulises Ruiz in Oaxaca. "During the past several years we have witnessed the return of authoritarianism, where the new powerful rulers govern with corruption and impunity." Ruiz has lost favor with a large part of the electorate in Oaxaca because of his heavy-handed repression of protesters from the teachers union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educacion, SNTE) and a coalition of civic groups (Asamblea Popular del Pueblo de Oaxaca, APPO) in 2006 (SourceMex, August 02, 2006 and November 01, 2006). This style of governance has also manifested itself in Puebla, where Gov. Manuel Marin has been accused of abusing his power by prosecuting a journalist who wrote a book that criticized one of his associates (SourceMex, February 22, 2006 and September 27, 2006).

Oaxaca election seen as key Observers agree that a PRI defeat in the Oaxaca gubernatorial election would send one of the strongest signals rejecting the PRI style of governance, not only by Ruiz but also by his predecessor Jose Murat. Murat was accused of fabricating an assassination attempt to win sympathy votes for Ruiz in the 2004 election (SourceMex, June 09, 2004). Cue, who lost narrowly to Ruiz in the disputed 2004 election, is widely expected to lead a coalition in Oaxaca that would include the PCD, the PRD, the Partido del Trabajo (PT), the PAN, and the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL). Local state officials expect the coalition to get a much larger share of the vote this year than in 2004, based on public-opinion polls. PAN state leader Carlos Alberto Moreno Alcantara said a voter survey showed that the five coalition parties have a total of 56% of the vote compared with 45% for the PRI and its coalition partner, the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM). Another state to watch is Hidalgo, where the PAN has proposed Xochitl Galvez to represent the coalition. Several PRD candidates, including Sen. Jose Guadarrama, are also vying to represent the opposition alliance. The PAN and PRD must overcome this difference before the alliance can move forward. Some analysts said Galvez would be an ideal candidate because she is not affiliated with any party, is very personable, and has a strong work ethic. "The option of Xochitl could awaken a social consciousness that no other candidate could provide," said *Reforma* columnist Gonzalez Garza. In Durango, the PAN, PRD, and PT have invited a PRI member, former federal deputy and ex-mayor of Durango city Jose Rosas Aispuro, to represent the coalition in the gubernatorial elections. Rosas Aispuro said he is considering the request.

The PRD, meanwhile, attempted to lure another Fox associate, fundraiser Lino Korrodi, to represent the party in the Tamaulipas gubernatorial election. Korrodi, an old friend of PRD president Ortega, headed Fox's campaign-fundraising organization Amigos de Fox and later served as the president's principal liaison with the business community. The possibility of Korrodi as a PRD gubernatorial

candidate raised eyebrows because of his association with corrupt campaign practices. In 2003, the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE) levied heavy fines against the PAN and its then coalition partner, the PVEM, for major campaign-finance violations (SourceMex, October 15, 2003). In the end, the PRD opted not to have Korrodi as its candidate because of strong opposition from its coalition partner, the PT. But Korrodi, who considered himself an independent "citizen candidate," was already inclined to reject the invitation because the party and its allies were not united behind his candidacy.

The PRI, which is likely to retain the seat in Tamaulipas, is running in coalition with the PVEM and PANAL in that state. The PRD, meanwhile, is treading on perilous electoral ground in Zacatecas, with many party members disgruntled by what they perceive as an effort by outgoing Gov. Amalia Garcia and national party leaders to impose Sen. Antonio Mejia Haro as the party's candidate in the July 4 election. At least three PRD activists have decided to form an independent movement, known as Movimiento Regeneracion, to run their own candidate. The PRI has taken advantage of the internal dispute in the PRD in Zacatecas to convince that party's coalition partner, the PT, to join forces in the gubernatorial election. The PRI has promised to consider outgoing PT mayor David Monreal, brother of ex-PRD governor Ricardo Monreal, as a possible candidate. This situation has raised a red flag with the PRD. "We are going to do whatever possible to prevent the PRI-PT alliance," said Sen. Navarrete.

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