

7-7-2010

Gubernatorial Elections Fall Short Of Pri Expectations; Coalition Wins Key States Of Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa

LADB Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex>

Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "Gubernatorial Elections Fall Short Of Pri Expectations; Coalition Wins Key States Of Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa." (2010). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5416>

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.

Gubernatorial Elections Fall Short Of Pri Expectations; Coalition Wins Key States Of Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa

by LADB Staff

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2010-07-07

The Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) had viewed the 12 gubernatorial elections on July 4 as a major stepping stone toward recovering the presidency in 2012. The PRI's confidence was so strong that party leaders were boldly predicting that the party would achieve the "carro completo," meaning that they would sweep the elections. While the PRI's performance was strong by many standards, with victories in nine states, the party lost in the key states of Oaxaca, Puebla, and Sinaloa, where the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) and the center-left parties formed uneasy coalitions. But all is not well for the conservative and center-left parties. The PAN lost the statehouse in Tlaxcala and Aguascalientes states, while the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) gave up the governor's seat in Zacatecas after 12 years in office.

While the elections did leave the PRI in a relatively strong position ahead of the 2012 presidential and congressional races, losses in the gubernatorial races in Sinaloa and the highly populated states of Oaxaca and Puebla are a significant blow to the party. The PRI won gubernatorial races in states in which the party had been heavily favored Chihuahua, Tamaulipas, and Quintana Roo. Additionally, the party scored narrow victories in Hidalgo, Durango, and Veracruz, but the opposition parties have already announced plans to challenge the results. Some analysts interpreted the election results as a sign that voters are not yet willing to give the PRI a blank check for the 2012 presidential contest and are open to giving the other parties a chance when they set ideologies. "The PRI's voting levels haven't gone down in the last few years, nor have they come up," analyst Federico Estévez of the Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México (ITAM) said in an interview with The Christian Science Monitor. "What is favoring the PRI right now is nothing within the PRI, nor between the PRI and its electorate, but rather its two main rivals that have been hurting over the last two years."

Still, some observers said the states should be analyzed on a case-by-case basis because different factors contributed to the final results. "Mexico remains an imperfect democracy, like all, but there do appear to be some mechanisms of accountability at work that allowed these elections to be meaningful referenda on local political performance," Andrew Selee, director of the Mexico Institute at the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, told The New York Times. PRI suffers key losses in Oaxaca, Puebla. When opposition parties announced plans to join forces to face the PRI in several key states, dissenting voices from the left and the right dismissed the notion, including ex-President Vicente Fox and former presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador (SourceMex, January 27, 2010). But by setting aside their historic differences, the opposition parties managed to offer an alternative in states where voters were ready for a change from the old-style authoritarian governance practiced by the PRI, namely Oaxaca and Puebla. "There was already a tendency against the PRI in those two states," said political analyst Joaquín Galindo Díaz of the Universidad de Guadalajara (UdeG).

In Oaxaca, outgoing Gov. Ulises Ruiz leaves office with a legacy of repression because of his sometimes-violent crackdown on the teachers union (Sindicato Nacional de Trabajadores de la Educación, SNTE) and other organizations (SourceMex, October 28, 2009). Oaxaca voters showed their displeasure with Ruiz by overwhelmingly throwing their support to opposition candidate Gabino Cue, who won the election with about 51% of the vote, compared with 42% for Ruiz's handpicked successor Eviel Pérez Magaña. The PAN and the center-left parties had already tested the coalition concept in the 2004 election when they came together behind Cue, who lost to Ruiz by a very narrow margin (SourceMex, August 04, 2004).

The coalition also scored a victory in the mayoral election in the capital city of Oaxaca, winning by more than 13,000 votes. Cue, originally a member of the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), is the only candidate who came from a center-left party in the five states where the right and left ran as a coalition. In other states, such as Puebla, Sinaloa, and Durango, the candidate was a former member of the PRI. But even Cue has a link to the PRI, having left the party to seek the mayoralty in the city of Oaxaca (SourceMex, October 17, 2001). In Hidalgo, the coalition candidate was Xochitl Gálvez, an independent who served in ex-President Fox's administration. Some analysts say the PRI, which governed Mexico for seven decades, remains the constant force in Mexican politics. "All candidates who won a gubernatorial election came from that party," columnist René Avilés Fabila wrote in the Mexico City daily *La Crónica de Hoy*. "Politics today is conducted by members of the PRI and former PRI members." In Puebla, Rafael Moreno Valle who represented a coalition comprising the PAN, PRD, PCD, and the Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL) obtained 53% of the vote, compared with only 42% for Javier López Zavala of the PRI and its partner the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM). The center-left Partido del Trabajo (PT), which went solo in the election, obtained 6% of the vote.

The PAN-PRD-PCD-PANAL alliance also won the mayoral election in the capital city of Puebla and a plurality of seats in the state legislature. The Puebla vote appeared to be a repudiation of outgoing Gov. Mario Marín Torres, who is accused of conspiring with businessman and friend Kamel Nacif Borge to imprison prominent independent journalist Lydia Cacho on bogus charges (SourceMex, February 22, 2006). Although the high court later ruled that Marín did not violate Cacho's rights (SourceMex, December 05, 2007), the perception that the governor was attempting to skirt the Mexican Constitution might have hurt the PRI in the election. "Mario Marín is the only one at fault in this historic defeat of the PRI in Puebla," said Lautaro Córdova Delgado, a spokesperson for *Antorcha Campesina*, an organization that has supported the PRI. "[This loss] is the result of his poor job performance during the past six years." The alliance of the PAN and center-left parties also achieved success in the mayoral and state legislative elections in Chiapas, but the results were not as highly publicized because there was no governor's race in that state this year.

The coalition formed by the PAN, PRD, and two other small parties won the mayoral races in the state's three largest cities: Tuxtla Gutiérrez, San Cristóbal de las Casas, and Tapachula. In addition, the coalition won a comfortable majority in the state legislature. The role of drug cartels in the elections In Sinaloa, the PRI loss was not blamed so much on outgoing PRI Gov. Jesús Aguilar Padilla as on its candidate, Jesús Vizcarra Calderón, who was also representing the PVEM. Vizcarra Calderón had to fight allegations of connections with the Sinaloa drug cartel after the daily newspaper *Reforma* published a photograph of the candidate posing with Ismael Zambada,

commonly known as El Mayo, and other members of the drug-trafficking organization (SourceMex, June 02, 2010).

Although there was no proof of any connections with Zambada, Vizcarra was unable to shake off the allegations, which might have contributed to the loss. In the final tally, PAN-PRD-PCD candidate Mario López Valdez took 52% of the vote, compared with 46% for Vizcarra, a former mayor of Culiacán. In the mayoral elections in the state's two largest cities, the PRI-PVEM managed to retain Culiacán, while the PAN-PRD-PCD coalition was the victor in Mazatlán. In another election where drug-cartel connections were alleged, center-left candidate Francisco Gerardo Mora Vallejo, a last-minute replacement, was unable to overcome the disadvantage that followed the arrest of his predecessor Gregorio Sánchez on charges of taking bribes from the Beltrán Leyva and Zetas drug organizations while mayor of the municipality of Benito Juárez, which includes the resort city of Cancún (SourceMex, June 02, 2010). Before the allegations surfaced, Sánchez who was representing the PRD, PT, and PCD had been given at least a fighting chance in the race against PRI-PVEM candidate Roberto Borge Angulo. The final tally showed Borge Angulo with 52% of the vote, compared with 26% for Mora Vallejo and 17% for Alicia Ricalde of the PAN. Still, despite the charges against Sánchez, the PRD-PT managed to retain the mayoral seat in the municipality of Benito Juárez. The biggest influence of the drug cartels might have been in the states of Tamaulipas and Chihuahua, where voter turnout was about 30%.

Many would-be voters in the two states said they were afraid to go to the polls because of the possibility of violence by the cartels. In Tamaulipas, the murder of PRI candidate Rodolfo Torre was still fresh on the minds of voters (SourceMex, June 30, 2010). Even with the sparse participation, the PRI managed to get its supporters to the ballot box. Egidio Torre, a last-minute substitute for his murdered brother, took 64% of the vote, compared with 31% for José Julián Sacramento Garza of the PAN. The PAN won the mayoral election in Tampico, the largest city in Tamaulipas, but the PRI scored a victory in the capital city of Ciudad Victoria. In Chihuahua, the PRI won the gubernatorial election by a wide margin. César Duarte Jáquez of the PRI took 61% of the vote, compared with 36% for Carlos Borrueal of the PAN and 3% for Luis Adolfo Orozco of the PRD. The PRI also wrested the mayoralty of the capital city of Chihuahua from the PAN and retained the mayoral post in the embattled border city of Ciudad Juárez.

The low participation in Tamaulipas and Chihuahua raised strong concerns among party leaders and members of Congress. "It is a very grave situation when you consider that only 26% of the registered voters in Tamaulipas participated in the election," said PRD Deputy Arturo Santana, chair of the congressional committee established to study electoral trends (Comisión de Participación Ciudadana). Luis Carlos Ugalde, former president of the federal elections watchdog Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE), said the cartels were attempting to influence the elections through violence, including the murders of Rodolfo Torre and mayoral candidate José Mario Guajardo Varela in Tamaulipas and the indiscriminate killings in communities like Ciudad Juárez (SourceMex, April 14, 2010). "The drug trade has had a major presence in Mexico for at least 20 years, and never before have traffickers interfered with elections," said Ugalde, who noted that drug traffickers also tried to block authorities from setting up the electoral infrastructure in some locales this year. "Never before have they taken such actions as interfering with the establishment of voter stations." The low turnout was also attributed to Hurricane Alex, which caused devastation in many communities in Tamaulipas and Nuevo León states, including Monterrey, less than a week before the election.

There were no elections in Nuevo León this year. Some observers suggested the storm might have had more to do with lack of voter participation than drug-related violence. "The high rate of abstentionism is not acceptable, but it was not because of insecurity but because of Hurricane Alex," said Carlos Renán Castillo Gutiérrez, president of the local chapter of the Confederación Patronal de la República Mexicana (COPARMEX) in Ciudad Victoria in Tamaulipas. Close elections in Veracruz, Durango The election results were too close for comfort for the PRI in a handful of states, including Veracruz, Durango, and Tlaxcala. In Veracruz, Javier Duarte, representing the PRI-PVEM, took about 45% of the vote, compared with 40% for Miguel Ángel Yunes Linares of the PAN and 15% for Dante Delgado of the PCD-PT-PRD. There were allegations that outgoing Veracruz Gov. Fidel Herrera's administration might have manipulated the elections through patronage and other illegal campaign practices (SourceMex, June 30, 2010). In addition, the PAN questioned the "disappearance" of more than 416,000 votes from the final results, compared with the preliminary reporting process (Programa de Resultados Electorales Preliminares, PREP).

The PAN has announced plans to bring a formal complaint about the Veracruz elections to the federal electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federación, TEPJF). The relative strength of the PAN was evident in the mayoral elections, with the conservative party winning in the city of Veracruz, the state's largest municipality. The PRI won the election in the capital city of Xalapa. But the reality is that, if the PAN and center-left parties had formed a coalition in Veracruz, as they did in Oaxaca, Puebla, and Sinaloa, they might have toppled the PRI. The votes obtained by Yunes and Delgado would have amounted to 55% of the total, 10 percentage points above the vote obtained by Duarte.

The same could be said about Durango, where José Rosas Aispuro Torres, representing a coalition formed by the PAN, PRD, and two other small parties, obtained 46% of the vote, compared with 49% for Jorge Caldera of the PRI. The PT, which opted not to join the opposition coalition, obtained slightly more than 4% of the vote.

If the PT had joined the PAN and PRD, the total for Rosas Aispuro might have reached 50%. In Hidalgo, Galvez obtained about 47% of the vote, compared with 53% for Francisco Olvera Ruiz of the PRI-PVEM-PANAL. The PAN and its center-left allies are planning to challenge the results in Durango and Hidalgo, but it is very unlikely that the outcome will be reversed. In Veracruz, the PRI agreed to a PAN request for a recount, but party leaders expressed optimism that their victory would stand. PAN, PRD lose big in Aguascalientes, Zacatecas The success of the PAN-PRD coalition was marred by the loss of former strongholds in Aguascalientes and Zacatecas. The PAN, which had governed Aguascalientes for two six-year terms, not only lost the gubernatorial race but also the mayoral elections in most cities and the state legislature. The party's decline was attributed in large measure to an internal feud between outgoing Gov. Luis Armando Reynoso Femat and gubernatorial candidate Martín Orozco Sandoval. Reynoso Femat said he would rather support the PRI than Orozco, putting the governor at odds with the national party leadership. Orozco Sandoval also faced charges that he appropriated land belonging to the city of Aguascalientes. He was later cleared of those charges, but this might have tainted his candidacy. PRI-PVEM-PANAL candidate Carlos Lozano de la Torre won the election with 49% of the vote, compared with 44% for Orozco Sandoval.

The bigger loss for the PAN was in Baja California, a state that did not have a gubernatorial race but held municipal and state legislative elections. The PRI won the mayor's race in all major cities, including Mexicali, Tijuana, Rosarito, Ensenada, and Tecate, plus 13 of the 16 electoral districts in the state legislature. This was a devastating loss for the PAN because Baja California had been one of its two original strongholds in the 1980s when the PRI dominated the rest of the country. The PAN also lost Tlaxcala, but the defeat was not unexpected because the conservative party was a surprise winner in the 2004 election (SourceMex, November 17, 2004). The PAN's Adriana Dávila Fernández obtained 39% of the vote, compared with 50% for González Zarur of the PRI. The PRD, which once governed Tlaxcala, obtained support only in the single digits. The dynamics for the PRD's defeat in Zacatecas were similar to those for the PAN in Aguascalientes. A divided center-left movement, both within the PRD and between the PRD and allies like the PT, opened the door for the PRI to win the Zacatecas election (SourceMex, June 30, 2010) Antonio Mejía Haro, representing the PRD-PCD, obtained only about 23% of the vote, compared with 43% for Miguel Alonso Reyes of the PRI-PVEM, 17% for Cuauhtémoc Calderón Galván of the PAN, and 14% for David Monreal of the PT. The PRD decline was also evident in the state legislative elections, with the party winning a single district, while the PAN and PT each won two directly elected seats. The PRI-PVEM won the other 13 seats in the 18-seat legislature.

The 2011 and 2012 elections The successes in Puebla, Oaxaca, and Sinaloa have emboldened national PAN and PRD leaders to talk about creating similar alliances in 2011, including for gubernatorial races in five states. Three of those states Michoacán, Guerrero, and Baja California Sur are already governed by the PRD. The PRI governs the two other states, Nayarit and Mexico state. The PAN and PRD believe that a big victory in Mexico state could weaken outgoing Gov. Enrique Peña Nieto, widely considered the front-runner to win the PRI nomination for the 2012 presidential elections. Several important PRI members, including Peña Nieto, said they were not concerned about the possibility that the PAN and the center-left parties would form an alliance in Mexico state in 2011. But others, like Deputy Carlos Ramírez Marín, one of the PRI floor leaders in the lower house, urged the party to take the threat seriously ahead of the 2012 presidential election. Some critics suggested that the PAN and PRD first determine whether their alliances in Puebla, Sinaloa, and Oaxaca are going to work before launching new ventures.

Ugalde said the new governors are going to face natural conflicts because they will not know which interest to promote. "The winning candidates are going to have to reconcile diverse interests and personalities in order to govern states like Oaxaca and Puebla," said the former IFE president. "And this could lead to conflicts in the long run." The possibility is not stopping powerful politicians like Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard of the PRD from openly touting the successes in Puebla, Sinaloa, and Oaxaca. "What is most significant is that these states have been governed by only one party," said Ebrard, who is mentioned as a potential PRD candidate for the center-left movement. "After 80 years, the citizens of these states attained a peaceful transition, and surely this is the beginning of a new era." But not everyone in the PRD shares the measured outlook of Ebrard or the strong enthusiasm of party president Jesús Ortega.

Former presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas said the coalitions do not benefit the PRD because the party is entering into alliances "that contradict its principles." Ebrard has not yet announced whether he is going to run for president. But if he decides to throw his hat into the ring, he will have to compete with López Obrador, who on July 7 confirmed his intention to seek the post

in 2012. The ex-presidential candidate ruled out a run as an independent, which means he would compete with Ebrard and possibly Ortega to lead a center-left coalition.

-- End --