

3-30-2011

Recent Developments Favor PRI in July Gubernatorial Election in MÃ©xico State

Carlos Navarro

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

Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Recent Developments Favor PRI in July Gubernatorial Election in MÃ©xico State." (2011).
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/5482>

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.

Recent Developments Favor PRI in July Gubernatorial Election in México State

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Politics, Elections

Published: Wednesday, March 30, 2011

The cards seem to be falling right for the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) ahead of the gubernatorial election in México state this summer. The PRI not only emerged from its nomination process as a united party but opposition efforts to form a unified front are crumbling despite a successful consultation on March 27 in which a majority of participants voted to support a coalition between the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) and the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN).

The stakes are high in the México state election, scheduled for July 3, because the results could test the PRI's strength ahead of the 2012 presidential election. Demographically, the state is the most populous in the country and accordingly has the largest number of congressional districts (40 of 300). "All three major parties have had strong representation in the state legislature and in the municipal governments," said syndicated columnist Miguel Ángel Granados Chapa.

Barring unforeseen circumstances, outgoing and extremely popular México state Gov. Enrique Peña Nieto is expected to represent the PRI in its effort to retake the presidency, which has been in the hands of the PAN for two terms. Opposition parties are pulling out all the stops in an effort to bring Peña Nieto down a notch, and a victory on July 3 would go a long way toward this goal. The proposed PAN-PRD coalition was one strategy that the opposition parties discussed ([SourceMex, Sept. 29, 2010](#)).

PRI foregoes "dedazo," selects consensus candidate

The PRI was well-aware of the opposition parties' efforts to join forces, and adjusted its strategies accordingly during the process to select the candidate for the gubernatorial election. On March 27, the same day as the PRD-PAN consultation, the PRI announced that Eruviel Ávila Villegas, mayor of the municipality of Ecatepec, would be its gubernatorial candidate. Sources said the move was orchestrated by the national PRI organization (Comité Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN) and the party's new president Humberto Moreira, who convinced Peña Nieto to forego the unofficial tradition of having the outgoing governor anoint his successor through a process known as the .

"Eruviel Ávila was not Enrique Peña Nieto's first choice," said nationally syndicated columnist Carlos Martínez González. "The winds were blowing in the direction of Alfredo del Mazo Maza, a former state cabinet member and current mayor of Huixquilucan who was in charge of Peña Nieto's political strategy."

Martínez González and other analysts said Peña Nieto would have been allowed to handpick the PRI candidate had it not been for the high stakes in the election. Del Mazo has strong political bloodlines, as both his father, Alfredo del Mazo González, and his grandfather, Alfredo del Mazo Vélez, served as governors in México state. Del Mazo was not only Peña Nieto's chief strategist but he was also the first cousin of the outgoing governor.

"Peña Nieto had to set aside his personal desires and family ties in favor of a candidate who would guarantee unity for his party and a victory in the July 3 elections," columnist Néstor Ojeda wrote in Milenio.com.

Ávila Villegas was considered the candidate with the most experience and the widest appeal, having served in the Chamber of Deputies and as mayor of Ecatepec, a suburb of Mexico City and one of the largest municipalities in México state.

At the ceremony announcing the candidacy, Ávila was accompanied by del Mazo and Luis Videgaray, Ernesto Nemer, Ricardo Aguilar and Azucena Olivares, all of whom had initially announced their intention to seek the nomination but dropped out after discussions with state and national PRI leaders.

There was talk that the PAN and the PRD had viewed Ávila as a potential candidate for their coalition in case Peña Nieto had chosen del Mazo.

"The alliance was built on single foundation: that the PRI candidate would be Alfredo del Mazo and that Eruviel was going to abandon that party and would lead the opposition," said Jorge Fernández Menéndez, a columnist for the Mexico City daily newspaper . "It wasn't out of the realm of possibility; the PRI had already made the mistake several times last year."

The formula of recruiting a disgruntled PRI member to lead a PAN-PRD coalition worked in the gubernatorial elections in Sinaloa and Puebla states in July 2010 ([SourceMex, July 7, 2010](#)). A candidate who had been recently jilted by the PRI also led the PRD to victory in Guerrero in February of this year ([SourceMex, Feb. 9, 2011](#)).

An alliance between the PAN and the center-left parties led by the PRD also won the election in Oaxaca last July.

"After the defeats in Sinaloa, Guerrero, Oaxaca, and Puebla, the PRI could not give itself the luxury of committing the same mistake in México state," said Ojeda.

Voters overwhelmingly endorse PAN-PRD coalition

By all accounts, the consultation on whether the PAN and PRD should form an alliance was a huge success, at least from the standpoint of those who supported the concept. The citizen organization Alianza Cívica, which organized the vote, said almost 80% of the participants voted in favor of the coalition. Only about 3,000 of the 225,000 votes cast at 964 polling sites in the state were nullified because of irregularities.

The vote was open to all citizens of México state with voting credentials, and there were charges by the opposition parties that the PRI had launched a campaign to convince participants to cast a "No" vote. The PRI denied the charges, although it is not beyond the realm of possibility that some party members might have worked to secure as many "No" votes as possible. A defeat would have meant that the PAN and PRD would field separate candidates, clearing the path for the PRI to win the election easily.

While the huge margin of victory for the "Yes" vote was impressive, some observers said the election results should be put into perspective. "The truth is that the 250,000 voters who expressed their opinion in this consultation represent only a fraction of the millions of citizens who inhabit México state," columnist Luis Walter Juárez wrote in Milenio.com.

And even though many citizens in the state expressed support for the coalition, there is no guarantee that the PAN and PRD will be able to agree on a mutually acceptable agenda, much less a common candidate. With Ávila out of the picture, no consensus candidate has emerged, although suggestions have been made that the two parties draft a private citizen with no party affiliation to head the ticket.

The PRD has faced extreme divisions about the coalition from the moment it was first proposed by former party president Jesús Ortega and ex-PAN president César Nava in 2010. Ortega's Nueva Izquierda faction was an enthusiastic supporter of the coalition, especially given successes in the gubernatorial elections in Puebla, Sinaloa, and Oaxaca in 2010. But the Izquierda Democrática faction, which generally aligned itself with ex-presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador, wanted nothing to do with the PAN. The faction not only points out that the political and economic philosophies of the two parties are not compatible but López Obrador claims that the PAN might have stolen the 2006 election that saw President Felipe Calderón rise to the presidency.

PRD divisions put coalition in doubt

López Obrador's differences with Ortega and the Nueva Izquierda faction grew so wide that on Feb. 20 he announced that he was taking a leave from the PRD. The ex-presidential candidate, former Mexico mayor, and one-time party president left the door open to return to the PRD. "I gave it a lot of thought, and beginning today I will take a leave from the party," said López Obrador. "I do not want any relations with the current PRD leadership, which entered into this agreement with Felipe Calderón and abandoned the principles that gave origin to the party."

Jesús Zambrano Grijalva, who was then a deputy and later was elected to succeed Ortega as party president, responded by accusing López Obrador of dividing the left with his dramatic departure from the PRD, even if temporary. Zambrano changed his tune a few weeks later after he was elected to lead the PRD. "I will be inclusive and tolerant," said Zambrano, who became party president after an extremely divisive and acrimonious election. In a gesture to López Obrador's supporters, and in an effort to maintain party unity, the PRD executive council (Consejo Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN) selected Dolores Padierna as secretary-general of the party.

But the fragile unity remained under threat by differences regarding the coalition. As Zambrano was reveling in the results of the consultation, Padierna disqualified the process. "This PRD is not going to accept any dialogue with [President] Calderón, no coalition of any sort with the PAN," she said.

Zambrano responded by suggesting that Padierna's disqualification of the consultation made her "similar" to PRI president Moreira, who also downplayed the vote.

Caught in the middle of the feud is Mexico City Mayor Marcelo Ebrard, who openly supported the coalitions with the PAN in the 2010 gubernatorial elections but has remained more low key about his support for such an alliance in the México state election.

Ebrard, who has presidential aspirations, would be competing directly with López Obrador to represent a center-left coalition in 2012. Some analysts believe the Mexico City mayor has the broad appeal that could unite all factions of the left, but only if López Obrador does not become an obstacle. "López Obrador is going on the premise that Marcelo has already surpassed him and is the candidate to beat," said columnist Ricardo Alemán, shortly after López Obrador announced his temporary break with the PRD.

Deputy Alejandro Encinas, who served as an interim mayor of Mexico City after López Obrador launched his first presidential campaign in 2005, has thrown his hat into the ring to represent the center-left parties, including the PRD, the Partido del Trabajo (PT), and the Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD), in the México state election. Encinas had gone back and forth on whether he would accept leading a coalition that included the PAN, but in the end he ruled out that possibility.

"I am convinced that the alliance that we need is one that will unite all the parties on the left," said Encinas.

Some members of Nueva Izquierda appear to embrace Encinas' candidacy, especially in the absence of a candidate who can unite the PAN and the PRD. "We will unite as a party to choose the best person to represent us in the upcoming election. We believe that Alejandro Encinas might be our candidate, but we're not sure yet," said Sen. Carlos Navarrete Ruiz.

The PAN decided to go ahead and select its representative in the gubernatorial race rather than wait for a consensus candidate to be selected. On March 29, the day after the consultation, the party announced that Luis Felipe Bravo Mena would be the PAN candidate, after potential rivals Ulises Ramírez and José Luis Durán withdrew their candidacies.

Bravo Mena, a former national party president, expressed a desire to lead the PAN-PRD coalition, but this is extremely unlikely because he does not have much support in the center-left party, which in the end could go with Encinas. This would mean that, despite a strong vote by citizens in favor of a coalition, the PAN and PRD could participate in the race with separate candidates, a scenario that would be widely favorable to the PRI.

For now, party officials in México state continue to believe that a joint campaign will still come together for the July 3 election. "[The selection of Bravo Mena] does not cancel the possibility of a coalition with the PRD," said PAN state president Luis Sánchez Jiménez.

-- End --