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Proposal for Three Major Parties to Run Single Candidate in Michoacán November Gubernatorial Election

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On the surface, it seemed like a ridiculous and bizarre idea: the three major political parties joining forces in an unprecedented move to back a single candidate in a gubernatorial race. But the idea actually did surface as part of a six-point plan put forth in a meeting in Mexico City attended by Michoacán Gov. Leonel Godoy, the national leaders of the country's three largest parties, and representatives of a Michoacán-based foundation. The three party leaders—Gustavo Madero of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), Jesús Zambrano of the Partido de Revolución Democrática (PRD), and Humberto Moreira of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)—did not immediately dismiss the idea of having a common candidate for the Nov. 13 election, saying it was worth further study as a way to counter the influence of the drug trade in Michoacán, namely La Familia cartel. Zambrano later discarded the notion of a single candidate but left the door open to further dialogue

It is extremely unlikely that the three parties will agree to such a plan, but analysts said the very mention of such a proposal was a very interesting development in a political environment that has been extremely polarized. Many other potential obstacles could derail the proposal, including the animosity that could arise from the gubernatorial elections in México, Nayarit, and Coahuila states on July 3.

The PRI is angered by the efforts of the other two parties to win at all costs by setting aside their political philosophies and running behind a common candidate. A coalition led by the PAN and PRD managed to defeat the PRI in elections in Puebla, Oaxaca, and Sinaloa states in July 2010 ([SourceMex, July 7, 2010](#)).

The PAN and PRD proposed an alliance against the PRI in the México state elections, which voters approved in a referendum. But the coalition did not become a reality because of the failure of the PAN and a center-left coalition to agree on a candidate to lead the alliance ([SourceMex, March 30, 2011](#)).

Alliance would counter influence of drug cartels in state

The idea to forge an alliance arose from the need to form a common front against La Familia cartel, which is said to have corrupted many political leaders, police chiefs, and other important officials through threats and/or offers of benefits in exchange for their cooperation. In 2008, federal authorities arrested several mayors and other public officials in Michoacán state on charges of cooperating with drug traffickers ([SourceMex, May 27, 2009](#)) and ([Aug. 19, 2009](#)). However, all but one of the suspects were released after a federal judge ruled that the government lacked sufficient evidence to hold them ([SourceMex, Sept. 29, 2010](#)).

"As is the case in some northern states, violence is a common occurrence [in Michoacán]," columnist Yuriria Sierra wrote in the daily newspaper. "La Familia has not given up its efforts to gain full control of the state. We have seen how municipalities like Cherén, Lázaro Cárdenas, Nueva Italia,

and others are involved in two separate fights: one against criminal organizations and the other against federal government.

The federal government's decision to charge the mayors and other public officials caused some political rifts between the federal government and the opposition parties, even though the detained officials belonged to all three major parties. The PRD was especially critical of the move, known as the , charging the Calderón government with using the detentions to gain political points.

Jorge Fernández Menéndez, also a columnist for , agrees that a political alliance would have never crossed anyone's mind had it not been for the common adversary, the drug cartels. The problem is not only La Familia, he said, but also its struggle against other drug-trafficking organizations seeking to move into its territory. "[The alliance] is possible for several reasons," said Fernández. "Today, there are eight communities in the mountains of Michoacán that are swept by the fight among cartels, and its residents are often forced to flee to nearby Apatzingán."

Fernández Menéndez says several factors make the proposal viable, particularly that no credible candidate has emerged from any of the parties. The two candidates who have announced their intentions to seek the post, federal Deputy Alfredo Anaya of the PRI and Luisa María Calderón of the PAN (sister of President Felipe Calderón), do not have the full support of their parties. And Gov. Godoy, who is caught in the middle of a feud between two factions of the PRD, is not in a position to recommend a candidate. "In that context, it doesn't seem so far-fetched to have a unity candidate who could lead a transition and restore a sense of security while the various parties rebuild their local leaderships," said Fernández Menéndez.

Godoy and members of the Fundación Michoacana para el Desarrollo, which are strongly behind the idea of a common candidate, said the proposal is not as much about electoral politics as finding a way to build a common vision. Three of the wealthiest men in the state—Alonso Gómez Sáenz, Francisco Medina Chávez, and Enrique Ramírez Magaña—appear to be the moving force behind the proposal, said the daily newspaper , based in the city of Morelia.

In addition to suggesting a single candidate, the foundation offered five other recommendations, which were presented to Godoy and the three national party leaders. The suggestions were:

- 1) Ensure clean and credible elections on Nov. 13;
- 2) Develop a common agenda so that, independent of the actual election results, the plan could easily be implemented;
- 3) Put the Fundación Michoacana para el Desarrollo in charge of developing a common agenda after consultations with various sectors and parties;
- 4) Call on the presidents of the PAN, PRD, and PRI to meet to discuss a common national agenda;
- 5) Encourage Gov. Godoy to call together the state party leaders to discuss a common agenda for the state.

Party rivalries, Constitution would block plan

But some observers point to the irony that a joint candidate was strongly endorsed by the PRD governor who suffered the most political harm from the arrests in May 2009. Furthermore, the six-point plan supported by Gov. Godoy and the Fundación Michoacana para el Desarrollo was announced exactly two years after the detentions. "The anniversary of the was overshadowed by the press announcement about the high-level meeting in Mexico City," columnist Jorge Ruiz Saavedra wrote in the Michoacán-based news service *Quadratín*.

Ruiz Saavedra is skeptical that the proposal to run a joint candidate can come to fruition. "Beyond the media noise about such a proposal, one cannot see any way in which the famous single candidacy can become a reality."

PRD secretary Dolores Padierna points out a very obvious pitfall of this proposal, citing potential violations of Article 39 of the Mexican Constitution. By agreeing to an alliance, the three major parties would in effect be imposing the next governor of Michoacán. "Only the people have the power to elect their government," said Padierna.

Padierna pointed to another major obstacle. "The PRD has an alternative agenda, opposed completely to what the PRI and PAN represent," she said.

Zambrano said he supported the discussions that took place but said he was extremely skeptical of the proposal for a single candidate. "[The participants] said they were willing to examine the possibility of a common candidacy, but it is clear that such a proposal is not viable," said the PRD president. "It is completely discarded in the PRD."

The PAN and the PRI, while not fully endorsing the suggestion of a common candidate, appeared to be open to discussing the move.

"This appears to me to be a plan unique to Michoacán," said David PENCHYNA, an ex-federal legislator and spokesperson for the PRI executive committee (Comité Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN). "What is most important is not the common candidate but the need to enter into a civil dialogue and a discussion of a common agenda for Michoacán. If we can come together here, that would send a strong signal to the rest of the country."

Madero pointed out that the proposal came from unions, academics, students, and the business community, which all provided input to the Fundación Michoacana para el Desarrollo. "I hope that we take these proposals from civil society seriously," said the PAN president. "Our alliance is with the citizens of the state."

State PRD president Víctor Báez Ceja said his party and center-left allies Partido del Trabajo (PT) and Partido Convergencia por la Democracia (PCD) see only one way for the alliance to become a reality. "If the PRI and PAN want to support a candidate from the left, they are welcome to join us," said Báez Ceja.

The proposal led to some off-the-wall suggestions in the press. Marco Flota, a columnist for the newspaper group Periódicos Zócalo, suggested that only one Michoacán native can cross all three party lines: popular singer Juan Gabriel. In his tongue-in-cheek column, Flota said the singer has written songs that all three parties can identify with. He said the PRI would support Juan Gabriel because he wrote the jingle for the campaign of ex-presidential candidate Francisco Labastida in the 2000 election. The PAN could make use of a line from his song "No tengo dinero ni nada que dar" (I have no money and nothing to give) to describe Luis Felipe Bravo Mena, the party's gubernatorial candidate in México state. And the PRD would support Juan Gabriel because the singer and ex-presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador are the only ones singing the song "¡Arriba Juárez!"

"One can see no alternative but Juan Gabriel," suggested Flota.

And columnist Yuriria Sierra suggested a three-party coalition would have to be called "Alianza TutiFruti," replacing the "Alianza Thalía," a nickname that emerged after the PRD and PAN joined forces in the 2010 elections. That nickname, in reference to the song "Amarillo Azul" released by the popular singer Thalía, describes the primary colors identified with the two parties, yellow for the PRD and blue for the PAN.

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