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Carlos Navarro

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## Gubernatorial Elections in June include Troubled States of Guerrero and Michoacán

by Carlos Navarro

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Michoacán and Guerrero, two of the country's most turbulent and unstable states, are scheduled to elect new governors on June 7, joining seven other states that will also elect new chief executives. Both states are led by interim governors who were appointed to replace controversial leaders who resigned under pressure ([SourceMex, July 2, 2014](#), and [Oct. 29, 2014](#)). Under normal circumstances, neither state would have held a gubernatorial election in 2015.

Federal authorities—particularly the newly created Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE)—are going to keep a close eye on the elections to prevent criminal organizations from having an undue influence on the results of the June 7 vote. This is a tall order in the states where criminal organizations have become entrenched.

"Michoacán and Guerrero are the clearest examples of the impact of violence and the infiltration of organized crime in the administrations of ex-governors Fausto Vallejo and Ángel Aguirre Rivero, both of whom are accused of receiving money and support from drug-trafficking organizations to win their respective elections," columnist José Gil Olmos wrote in the weekly news magazine *Proceso*.

### *Voters to elect federal Congress*

The INE, created to provide greater transparency in the voting process ([SourceMex, Dec. 11, 2013](#), and [April 9, 2014](#)), will preside over its first national election. This election could be a massive undertaking, with voters in every district of the country selecting 500 new members of the Chamber of Deputies—300 through direct elections. In addition to Guerrero and Michoacán, voters in Baja California Sur, Campeche, Colima, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí, and Sonora will elect new governors. All nine states that have gubernatorial elections will also hold state legislative and mayoral elections. Voters in the states of Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Tabasco, and Yucatán will also cast ballots for members of the state legislature and mayors on June 7. Chiapas is scheduled to hold state legislative and mayoral elections on July 19.

"We are going to have 16 concurrent elections," said INE president Lorenzo Córdova, pointing out that the number of registered voters in Mexico has reached a historic high of 83.3 million.

### *Authorities worried about low turnout*

A huge challenge will be for the INE to encourage those voters to participate in the election during a year when voters greatly mistrust the political parties ([SourceMex, Dec. 3, 2014](#)). A recent poll by GEA-ISA asked respondents whether they intended to vote in the coming elections, and only 31% replied in the affirmative. This means that, if elections were held at the time that the poll was taken at the end of December, the abstention rate would be the highest ever for Mexico in modern times.

A major reason for potentially low voter turnout is the growing unpopularity of President Enrique Peña Nieto and his governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) amid perceptions that the

party is either collaborating with the major drug organizations that are fomenting extreme violence in Mexico or looking the other way in the face of violence. At least three polls taken in December and January indicated a high disapproval rate for the president, at 52% (GEA-ISA), 64% (BGC-Ulises Beltrán), and 58% (Parametría). Vocal demonstrations around the country in recent weeks have been directed primarily at the Peña Nieto government, but there is also deep distrust for the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD) whose political leaders have also been complicit with criminal organizations, particularly in Guerrero ([SourceMex, Oct. 29, 2014](#)).

"What worries us the most ... is the growing distance between the political and the public," said GEA-ISA executive Guillermo Valdés. "The most serious [phenomenon] is that people are losing sight of democracy as the institutional vehicle for changing things. People are distancing themselves from politics, from institutional channels, which should be the way to solving these crises."

Córdova voiced those sentiments in a television interview hosted by respected journalist Carmen Aristegui. "Our greatest challenge will be to convince citizens that the elections are a mechanism—not the only one, but an important one—to express their dissatisfaction, their support or rejection of recent governments, of public policies, the political parties, and the state of affairs in our country," the INE president said.

The potential for a weak voter turnout has also raised concerns for some political leaders, who agree that low participation could benefit the PRI. "The mafia in power would be happy if you did not participate," Andrés Manuel López Obrador, leader of the center-left Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), recently told participants at a rally.

Some observers point out that the political establishment is doing the very things that will keep voters away from the polls. "The systemic crisis that our model of political parties is experiencing is reflected in the phrase 'they are all the same.' This is a 'poisoned apple' that accompanies all the electoral campaigns, which are filled with mudslinging, disqualifications, insults," columnist Francisco Guerrero Aguirre wrote in the daily newspaper *Excelsior*. "This is not going to get the voters to the polls."

The political reforms that led to the creation of the INE also ushered in another important change: the possibility for independent citizens to run for office without affiliating with a political party. The large number of Mexicans who took advantage of this option in gubernatorial races alone is quite impressive. According to CNNMéxico, a total of 17 independent gubernatorial candidates will be on the ballot on June 7. A single independent candidate registered in the states of Campeche, Guerrero, and Sonora, while the rest of the states will have two or three unaffiliated candidates on the ballot.

### *Elections to test strength of PRI, leftist parties*

The elections are also expected to offer other snapshots of the political landscape in Mexico. In addition to turnout, observers will watch how the growing dissatisfaction with Peña Nieto will affect the fortunes of the PRI, which holds the governor's seat in seven of the nine contested states. Some strategists believe the PRI is counting on a strong turnout by the 26% to 31% of the national electorate who are considered solid voters for the party.

The PRI could face a strong test in Nuevo León, where the PAN could make inroads both in the gubernatorial race and the mayoral election in Monterrey. The PAN is also hoping to regain the gubernatorial seats in Querétaro and San Luis Potosí, which it lost to the PRI six years ago. The PAN is not necessarily seen as an attractive option to the PRI in most areas, and low voter participation

could hurt the conservative party, which holds the gubernatorial seats in Sonora and Baja California Sur. While the center-left parties, especially Morena, are not expected to be major players in most of the gubernatorial races, their strength could be tested in the state legislative and mayoral elections in many states around the country.

The election will also measure whether Morena has made inroads against a more established PRD for the hearts and minds of center-left and some independent voters. Morena is fielding candidates in almost all major elections and could potentially inflict major political damage on the PRD. "If López Obrador's party obtains a higher percentage of the vote than the PRD, there will surely be an exodus in the left toward Morena," columnist Leo Zuckermann wrote in the daily newspaper *Excelsior*. "This would consolidate the Tabasco politician as the indisputable leader of the left and put him in a good position for the 2018 elections.

### *Will Guerrero, Michoacán actually hold elections?*

The other major deterrent to the vote in some parts of Mexico, particularly Michoacán and Guerrero, is the potential for violence and intimidation. Other states that have recently experienced high levels of violence, such as Tamaulipas and Veracruz, are not holding gubernatorial or other statewide and local elections, but violence could affect turnout for the federal congressional races.

The resignation of Gov. Vallejo in Michoacán in July of last year was only the latest in a series of political crises that have afflicted the state, particularly the region known as Tierra Caliente, in the past several years. The problems are associated with the inability of elected leaders to shake the influence of La Familia de Michoacán and Caballeros Templarios (Knights Templar) cartels. The cartels have intimidated entire communities ([SourceMex, May 29, 2013](#)) and greatly corrupted officials ([SourceMex, May 27, 2009](#), and [Aug. 19, 2009](#)) and candidates ([SourceMex, Nov. 16, 2011](#)).

Vallejo was forced to resign when photographs were released on social media of his son openly consorting with Caballeros Templarios leader Servando Gómez Martínez, also known as La Tuta ([SourceMex, July 2, 2014](#)).

In the wake of Vallejo's resignation, federal and state authorities filled the leadership void in Michoacán with the appointment of interim leaders. The state legislature selected Salvador Jara to fill the executive post until new elections could be held in 2015, while President Enrique Peña Nieto's administration appointed Alfredo Castillo Cervantes as special commissioner to oversee peace efforts in Michoacán.

Castillo's tenure lasted less than a year. In late January, the administration announced that the commissioner was leaving the post and the duties of oversight of Michoacán would be decentralized. Gen. Felipe Gurrola Martínez, whose command also includes Guanajuato and Querétaro, would oversee all federal anti-crime efforts in Michoacán.

Castillo's performance in the job was mixed, with the special commissioner able to promote stability in his first few months in the post. However, violent and often fatal confrontations between citizen vigilante groups and the criminal organizations erupted in Tierra Caliente in December and January. At least 25 people were killed during the period in violent confrontations in the community of La Ruana and the city of Apatzingán.

"It appeared that the federal intervention in Michoacán, with a commissioner who was considered the true power in the state, had succeeded in turning around the problem of insecurity in Tierra

Caliente," Zuckermann wrote in early January. "Nevertheless, the panorama became more complicated because of bloody shootouts in La Ruana and Apatzingán."

"It is true that Michoacán is much more than these two municipalities, but if the violent struggle between the self-defense groups and the criminal organizations is not resolved, this could result in a more complicated scenario that could spill over to the electoral campaigns for governor, mayors, and state legislatures," added Zuckermann.

Still, a fairly good review came from Jara. "We haven't resolved everything, there is much to be done," said the interim governor. "But I believe [Castillo] fulfilled his duties in a broad manner."

The violence and instability has not been a deterrent for the major parties to field gubernatorial candidates in Michoacán for the June 7 election. Some familiar faces have thrown their hat into the ring, including former Sen. Luisa María Calderón of the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), Sen. Silvano Aureoles of the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), Sen. José Ascensión Orihuela of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), and former Atoyac de Álvarez mayor María de la Luz Nuñez of Morena. In addition, economist Francisco Gerardo Becerra Ávalos and business owner Manuel Guillén Monzón are running as independents. Luisa María Calderón is the sister of ex-President Felipe Calderón.

The situation is more chaotic in Guerrero, where some public servants who were elected to municipal posts have not been allowed to govern, particularly in the smaller communities. "The power is in the hands of others, including criminal organizations, dissident teachers, and revolutionary groups," said Zuckermann.

The dissident teachers union, the Coordinadora Estatal de Trabajadores de la Educación de Guerrero (CETEG), has taken a leadership role along with a coalition known as the Comité de Lucha de Ayotzinapa in the ongoing protests over the disappearance and subsequent murder of the 43 students from a teachers college (Escuela Normal Rural de Ayotzinapa Raúl Isidro Burgos) in Guerrero state. CETEG is also continuing the protests of the education reforms implemented in 2013, which imposed a stricter set of rules for teacher certification ([SourceMex, April 17, 2013](#)).

CETEG and the Ayotzinapa committee have announced that they will not allow the elections to go forward until the government provides satisfactory answers on the disappearance of the students from the Isidro Burgos School. Earlier this year, the Procuraduría General de la República (PGR) issued a report confirming for the first time that the students were dead. Attorney General Jesús Murillo Karam said information obtained from a recently arrested leader of the drug cartel Guerreros Unidos indicated that the students were killed and burned at the garbage dump in the town of Cocula, adjacent to Iguala ([SourceMex, Jan. 28, 2015](#)).

CETEG also insists that the political climate is too unstable to allow elections to move forward. Some political observers disagree with this assessment. "If any state deserves to gain a new set of leaders through the vote, it is Guerrero. But CETEG and the Comité de lucha de Ayotzinapa are trying to prevent the elections," wrote syndicated columnist Sergio Sarmiento.

However, the protestors are contributing to the climate of instability by engaging in acts of civil disobedience, including a blockade of the Acapulco international airport and a takeover and destruction of computer equipment at the INE offices in the state capital of Chilpancingo.

"The claim that the conditions do not exist for Guerrero to hold an election is foolish because the groups that hold that point of view are the ones organizing the activities that caused the problems," said Sarmiento.

Even with the chaos, several potential gubernatorial candidates have emerged in Guerrero. In early February, the PRI announced that federal Deputy Hector Astudillo would represent the party in the June 7 gubernatorial election, while four candidates—Sen. Sofío Ramírez Hernández, Sen. Víctor Aguirre Alcaide, Deputy Sebastián de la Rosa Peláez, and Guerrero state social development secretary Beatriz Mojica Morgan—were seeking the PRD nomination as of mid-February. Pablo Amílcar Sandoval Ballesteros, a former member of the PRD leadership, will be representing Morena in the election, while ex-Acapulco mayor Luis Walton will carry the banner for Movimiento Ciudadano (MC). The PAN has not released an official list of candidates for the Guerrero races, but state legislator Jorge Camacho Peñaloza is the likely gubernatorial candidate for the conservative party. Entrepreneur Jorge Rosas Ávila is running as an independent.

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