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Carlos Navarro

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Disgruntled Voters Could Stay Away from Polls or Support Independent Candidates in June Elections

by *Carlos Navarro*

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One big concern about Mexico's upcoming election on June 7 is that a large percentage of the electorate might stay away from the polls because of extreme discontent with the political establishment ([SourceMex, Dec. 3, 2014](#), and [May 13, 2015](#)). An added factor in some states like Michoacán and Guerrero and more recently Jalisco is the sense of instability caused by confrontations among drug cartels and between the government and criminal organizations ([SourceMex, Feb. 11, 2015](#), and [May 13, 2015](#)).

Still, some public-opinion polls suggest that abstentionism might not be as high as some analysts anticipate. In one survey conducted by Gabinete de Comunicación Estratégica (GCE) in March and published in April, 74% of respondents said it was probable they would go to the polls while 22% were planning to abstain. The poll, which surveyed 600 people, indicated some concern from the voters that the elections might not be carried out normally. Some 44% of respondents raised concerns that the elections would not be normal.

Nearly 64% of the respondents said they thought there would be a high abstention rate, compared with 30% who thought there would be little abstention.

The Instituto Nacional Electoral (INE), the agency in charge of organizing the federal elections, is offering optimistic forecasts about voter participation on June 7. A major reason is because the institute decided to hold most of the vote in 17 states on the same day as the federal election. "My impression is that this election will not have the high rates of abstention that we have experienced with midterm elections in the past," said INE counselor Marco Antonio Baños Martínez. "The citizens are aware of the importance of casting their votes, regardless of the situations they are facing in their local areas.

Despite the optimism at the INE, Baños Martínez is well aware of the possibility that voter turnout might be lackluster, particularly with a "precarious situation" in states like Guerrero.

Baños Martínez urged the political parties to take steps to regain the confidence of the public. "The parties must modify the schemes of social representation and become institutions that truly take into account the social demands in our country," said the INE counselor.

The Mexican electorate has resorted to other means besides abstentionism to show discontent to the establishment. In 2009, citizens organized a campaign to cast blank ballots with the *voto en blanco* ([SourceMex, June 24, 2009](#)). In the 2013 election, some citizens expressed their discontent by registering pets as candidates in that year's federal election ([SourceMex, June 19, 2013](#)).

Some analysts believe the PRI is counting on a low voter turnout to win big on June 7. This would mean that most independent voters would stay home while the PRI hard-core supporters (*voto duro*) would cast a vote for the PRI. In Veracruz, for example, party leaders have calculated that a

60% abstention rate would mean that the PRI would only lose three electoral districts. The party would lose five districts with a 55% abstention and eight districts if half the voters participate in the vote.

Still, there is enough anger at the PRI and Peña Nieto in some areas that voters might just turn out to vote against the party, regardless of those metrics.

"Here in Veracruz, PRI leaders had boldly predicted before the campaigns began that the party would achieve an overwhelming victory, and at the worst they would lose three electoral districts," columnist Helí Herrera Hernández wrote in the Veracruz-based online political news site [alcalorpolitico.com](#) on May 18. "Today, 19 days before the vote, we can predict with reasonable certainty that the PRI will lose one of two districts in Veracruz City, as well as districts in Córdoba, Orizaba, Huatusco, Cosamaloapan, Coatzacoalcos, Papantla, and Tantoyuca."

Independent candidates offer viable alternative

Another alternative for disgruntled voters is to support an independent candidate, an option that became a reality when Congress approved electoral reforms in 2011, including a provision that allowed candidates to run for office without having to represent any political party ([SourceMex, May 4, 2011](#), and [Nov. 2, 2011](#)). A handful of independents ran in the 2013 election, including a nonaffiliated candidate who won the mayoral election in a small town in Zacatecas ([SourceMex, July 17, 2013](#)).

Several viable independent candidates tossed their hat into the ring in the 2015 election, including 17 who initially registered to run for governor in one of the nine gubernatorial races.

"The independent candidates come from diverse social sectors and do not feel any loyalty to any of the existing parties," columnist Miguel Barbosa wrote in the daily newspaper *Milenio*. "And we must accept that the parties and their candidates have given the electorate a reason to look elsewhere."

Other observers offered a similar point of view. "The existence of independent candidacies or politicians without party affiliation represents an advance," Jorge G. Castañeda, a former Cabinet member under ex-President Vicente Fox (2000-2006), wrote in *Milenio*. "This is a powerful wake-up call to the party leadership to enact internal democratic practices and to reform the practices that isolate them from the people."

"If the parties do not change and adapt to the demands of a society that is becoming more plural and diverse, the electorate is going to turn to those candidates who best meet their needs and who are honest and capable," noted Castañeda. "Or they could simply vote for the option that gives them something different from the traditional proposals."

While the voters might not necessarily turn to independents for change, some analysts believe that the incumbent party is in danger of being swept out of office in several gubernatorial elections. "Of the nine governor seats in play, the party in power appears to be losing in Nuevo León or is at risk of losing, which is the case in Baja California Sur, Michoacán, Guerrero, and Sonora," Herrera Hernández said in [alcalorpolitico.com](#). "We could also see change in San Luis Potosí and Querétaro."

Could Nuevo León elect independent governor?

A handful of independent candidates who tossed their hat into the ring in February have since dropped out, but one man has risen to the top of the polls in the race to become chief executive of Nuevo León state. In one poll, unaffiliated candidate Jaime Rodríguez Calderón, commonly known by his nickname of El Bronco, was ahead with 29% of voter preferences, compared with 27% for Ivonne Álvarez García of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and 22% for Felipe de Jesús Cantú of the center-right Partido Acción Nacional (PAN). The poll, conducted between April 24 and May 5, surveyed 3,100 voters in Nuevo León.

Rodríguez Calderón, a former member of the PRI, appears to be siphoning votes from both the PRI and the PAN. The PAN had hoped to benefit from the national discontent against the PRI, but many voters see the independent candidate as a more viable alternative than the conservative party. To illustrate how seriously the PAN views Rodríguez Calderón, the party—led by ex-President Felipe Calderón—has resorted to the same tactics it used against center-left candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador in the 2006 election. In that election, the PAN labeled López Obrador as "a threat" to Mexico ([SourceMex, May 3, 2006](#)), raising doubts in the minds of enough voters to give Calderón the victory by an extremely narrow margin ([SourceMex, July 12, 2006](#)).

"Once again, former President Felipe Calderón Hinojosa is attempting to use the 'vote of fear' by labeling Jaime Rodríguez Calderón as a 'danger' for the neighboring state," even comparing him to the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez," columnist Alejandro Govea Torre wrote in the Tamaulipas-based daily newspaper La Región.

Despite the attacks from the PAN and some members of the PRI, Rodríguez Calderón seems to be holding his own. "Without the support of a party, a bold attitude, very few radio spots, and a clever campaign on social media, Rodríguez is one of the most compelling stories of the 2015 elections, whether he wins or loses," columnist Leo Zuckermann wrote in the daily newspaper Excelsior. Rodríguez Calderón's toughest task might be to convince members of the PRI, independent voters, and disgruntled PAN members to cast their vote for him instead of Álvarez García, who would become the first woman to hold the governorship of Nuevo León.

The PRI leadership in the state appears to be divided, and there is talk that a faction of the party opposes Álvarez García because of the premise that a woman governor would not be able to stand up to criminal organizations that operate in the state. "A group of PRI members helped launch Jaime Rodríguez as an independent candidate because they cannot stand the idea that a woman would govern the state," syndicated columnist Marco A. Vázquez wrote in a piece published by InfoNorte.net

Álvarez García is one of two PRI women candidates seeking the governor's seat in a northern state. In Sonora, Claudia Pavlovich is representing a coalition comprising the PRI, the Partido Verde Ecologista de México (PVEM), and Partido Nueva Alianza (PANAL) in an effort to unseat the PAN from the governor's seat. Her rivals are Javier Gándara of the PAN and center-left candidates Javier Lamarque Cano of Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena) and Carlos Navarro López of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD).

Sen. Ana Gabriela Guevara, a renowned athlete who represented Mexico in the 2000 Olympics in Sydney, Australia, caused some controversy when she openly endorsed Pavlovich as the best option

to unseat the PAN. Guevara has been affiliated with the Movimiento Ciudadano (MC), a party that has worked very closely with Morena. Guevara's endorsement elicited criticism from Morena leader López Obrador, who in a message on Twitter said it was "regrettable" that Guevara would campaign for the PRI candidate. "They are all corrupt, the members of the PRIAN," said the Morena leader, in reference to the two parties.

Analysts also see strong possibilities for independents in a handful of mayoral elections, including Lorenia Canavati in the Monterrey suburb of San Pedro Garza García and Alfonso Martínez Alcázar in Morelia, the capital of Michoacán state.

Canavati, who is running a competitive campaign against Bernardo Bichara Assad of the PRI and Mauricio Fernández Garza of the PAN, said the two main parties have failed to meet the needs of the citizens. "We are running the race because [the PRI and the PAN] have left much to be desired," said Canavati. "We are participating in this election to create change."

In Morelia, Martínez Alcázar threw his hat in the ring as an independent, citing his displeasure with the internal politics of the PAN. The independent candidate, who is also running a competitive race, is facing a crowded field that includes Jaime Darío Oseguera Méndez of the PRI, Ignacio Alvarado Laris of the PAN, Raúl Morón Orozco of the PRD, Alfredo Ramírez Bedolla of Morena, and three other candidates. No public-opinion polls have been conducted on the Morelia race, but Martínez Alcázar and Darío Oseguera each posted internal surveys that indicate they are leading the race.

There are also 22 candidates seeking election to the federal Chamber of Deputies as independents, many of whom are former members of the PAN. The list includes Manuel Clouthier Carrillo in Sinaloa and Eduardo de la Torre Jaramillo in Veracruz. Clouthier said the established political parties are attempting to discredit the independent candidates. "The politicians and the political establishment, in particular the governing PRI, are waging a dirty war, telling voters that everyone is the same and that independents will not be able to govern," said Clouthier, whose father, Manuel Clouthier del Rincón, was the PAN candidate in the 1988 presidential election.

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