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Competitive Gubernatorial Election Expected in México State on June 4

by Carlos Navarro

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The upcoming gubernatorial race in México state could serve as a bellwether event for the 2018 presidential election. Analysts believe the June 4 election will measure the mood of voters, determining how much support the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) has lost in this stronghold state and whether the upstart Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), founded by center-left figure Andrés Manuel López Obrador, has gained sufficient ground to become a factor in the presidential race.

Gubernatorial elections are also scheduled in Coahuila and Nayarit, and analysts will be watching those races for trends as well. However, the México state race is considered the most important of the three because of the state's large population, its proximity to Mexico City, and its political significance to the PRI. The PRI is represented by Alfredo del Mazo Maza, a member of a political dynasty. The PRI candidate is the son of former México Gov. Alfredo del Mazo González (1981-1986) and the grandson of Alfredo del Mazo Vélez (1945-1951). Additionally, he is a cousin to President Enrique Peña Nieto, who served as governor of México state between 2005 and 2011.

The biggest threat to Del Mazo comes from Morena candidate Delfina Gómez Álvarez, a teacher and school administrator who has managed to gain a reputation as an outsider despite her close connections to López Obrador.

"Practically all the polls published until now show a technical tie between two candidates [Del Mazo and Gómez Álvarez]," columnist Jesús Cantú wrote in Proceso.com.

"There is justified concern within the PRI," agreed columnist Francisco Garfias of the daily newspaper Excélsior. "There was less than a point difference between the two candidates in a recent poll. The PRI member received about 25.34% of the vote, while the representative of Morena has 24.56% support."

Cantú noted that the polls coincide in four other areas as well. "The percentage of the citizens who would vote for Del Mazo has stabilized," he wrote. "There is a slight increase in preferences for Delfina. There seems to be rejection of Josefina Vázquez Mota of the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN) as an alternative. And there is a slight increase in sympathy for Juan Zepeda [of the Partido de la Revolución Democrática, (PRD)]."

PAN, PRD voters could be in play

These tendencies, said Cantú, could make the voto útil (tactical vote) a very important factor in the elections. For example, PAN voters who would normally support Vázquez Mota might have to decide whether they dislike the possibility of a PRI or Morena governor more, and vote for the less undesirable option. Similarly, center-left voters, particularly those who back the PRD, might have to decide whether to vote for Zepeda or instead support Gómez Álvarez. Some analysts suggest that PAN voters might support the PRD rather than Morena or the PRI. The PRD and PAN have joined

formal and informal coalitions in several elections since 2010, winning governor seats in Oaxaca, Puebla, Sinaloa, Baja California Sur, Guerrero, Durango, Veracruz, and Quintana Roo ([SourceMex](#), [July 7, 2010](#), [Feb. 9, 2011](#), [June 15, 2016](#)).

Some observers note that the Peña Nieto administration is working behind the scenes to boost the PRD's Zepeda by urging PAN voters to support him. "From the presidential palace of Los Pinos, a desperate plea has gone out to the PAN: That Josefina decline and turn her support over to the PRD in order to keep center-left voters from going to Morena," columnist Juan de Dios Andrade wrote in the online news site E-consulta. If the PRI and PAN were to reach a behind-the-scenes agreement, the PAN leadership could persuade Vázquez Mota to drop out and endorse Zepeda. In exchange, the PRI would do its best to ensure that the PAN wins Coahuila and Nayarit. This kind of behind-the-scenes wheeling and dealing has been rumored in Mexico ever since the PAN first won the governorship of Baja California in 1989, giving the conservative party its first governorship.

Similarly, López Obrador issued an ultimatum to the PRD and center-left parties Movimiento Ciudadano (MC) and Partido del Trabajo (PT) to align themselves with Morena candidates in the México, Coahuila, and Nayarit elections or lose any chance of forming a coalition of center-left parties in the 2018 presidential election.

"We would never accept an ultimatum of this sort," said Enrique Vargas Anaya, secretary general of the PRD in Mexico City. "We would rather participate in the elections on our own rather than accept an ultimatum where we are forced to accept the will of another party."

Analysts believe that many voters in México state remain undecided and won't make a decision until the day of the election. "In much the same manner as the presidential elections in 2000 and 2006, when voters cast their votes for the candidates that had the better possibility of winning, we can anticipate that the voto útil will be factor in the gubernatorial election in México state," Cantú wrote. "Other factors that could affect a decision are the favorable and negative perceptions of the candidates, the exchanges between the two front runners, and the tendency not to vote for a particular candidate under any circumstances."

According to Cantú, a poll conducted by the daily newspaper Reforma indicates that Gómez Álvarez has the highest percentage of favorable opinion among voters, compared with Alfredo del Mazo, who is viewed in an unfavorable light by a large share of the electorate.

"The Reforma poll asks respondents to name their second option," Cantú wrote. "Many of those who indicated their top choice is Josefina Vázquez Mota or Juan Zepeda selected Delfina Gómez as their second choice."

Other analysts suggested that the PRI's difficult circumstances have caused party officials to resort to their old tricks of bribing voters. "In the end, it appears ... that the mechanism to persuade voters has not changed: backpacks, cement, metal sheets [for construction], food, purses, and scholarships," columnist Ivonne Melgar wrote in *Excélsior*.

Veracruz corruption charges extend to México state

A subplot behind the elections is the political tug of war in Veracruz state between López Obrador and PAN Gov. Miguel Ángel Yunes Linares over an alleged connection of the Morena leader to former Gov. Javier Duarte, who is accused of corruption.

López Obrador has also sparred with the PAN and the PRI over an alleged case of entrapment, in which a federal legislator from his party was filmed accepting a bribe, in the form of a donation to López Obrador's campaign.

López Obrador argues that both cases involve an effort by the two establishment political parties to smear his name in the months leading to the 2018 presidential election and to affect the results of the México state election. Very early polls suggest that López Obrador could win the presidency ([SourceMex, Feb. 22, 2017](#)), in part because he is seen as the best option to stand up to US President Donald Trump, who has angered most Mexicans with his anti-immigrant rhetoric and his statements showing disrespect for Mexico ([SourceMex, Jan. 11, 2017](#), [Jan. 18, 2017](#), [Feb. 15, 2017](#)).

Yunes Linares, who took office on Dec. 1, 2016, has spent the first months of his administration cleaning up the mess that Duarte left in Veracruz. Duarte is accused of embezzling public funds and increasing his personal wealth at the expense of public services ([SourceMex, March 1, 2017](#), and [April 5, 2017](#)). He fled Mexico shortly before the end of his term and was subsequently arrested in Guatemala ([SourceMex, April 19, 2017](#)).

Yunes Linares said federal investigations as well as his own investigation into Duarte's affairs revealed a trail of money donated by the former governor to Morena campaigns.

López Obrador denied having received any campaign donations from Duarte. In a video released in late April following Duarte's arrest in Guatemala, López Obrador said the attempt to connect him to Duarte is a "desperate effort" by the PRI and the PAN to regain their political footing.

López Obrador frequently refers to the PRI and the PAN as one political entity, which he calls the PRIAN.

"The PRIAN is in free fall, and Morena is growing at a fast pace," López Obrador said in a video. "That is why they made the decision to detain Duarte in order to taint Morena. Miguel Ángel Yunes Linares, who is also corrupt, alleged that we are protecting Duarte because he gave money to Morena and to me personally. That is not true."

A few days after Duarte's arrest, Veracruz state legislator Eva Cadena Sandoval of Morena was caught on tape accepting a payment of 500,000 pesos (US\$26,800) allegedly intended for Morena's presidential campaign and for her own election as mayor of Las Choapas in Veracruz state. Two other videos, filtered to the daily newspaper *El Universal*, surfaced later, showing Cadena accepting other bribes in pesos and US dollars. In the third video, Cadena appears to accept a bribe of 1 million pesos (US\$54,000) in exchange for promoting favorable legislation in the Veracruz legislature.

All videos show that Cadena did not resist the bribery attempt in any way. After the first video, she acknowledged the decision as a "mistake," but also suggested she was caught in a "very cowardly" scheme to smear Lopez Obrador.

In a statement, the PRI countered, "What is shown on the video is extremely serious evidence of the corruption that hurts all Mexicans; it constitutes clear and solid evidence that López Obrador is corrupt."

López Obrador responded by accusing the PRI and the PAN of attempting to muddy his reputation and that of Morena through an entrapment scheme planned by former Presidents Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994) of the PRI, and Vicente Fox (2000-2006) and Felipe Calderón (2006-2012).

“They can steal the presidency from me, like they’ve already done, they can take away all my triumphs, but they can’t take my dignity, my honesty,” López Obrador said.

Some political observers suggested that López Obrador, who declares at every opportunity that he is a politician who is free from corruption, should refrain from defending Cadena so vigorously.

“The honesty of the leader is not sufficient,” Alberto Núñez Esteva of the citizens group Sociedad en Movimiento, said in a guest column in the daily newspaper El Financiero. “The leader must impose his values to his entire team and demand compliance with these values. Otherwise, he risks damage to his reputation.”

The electoral crimes unit of the prosecutor’s office (Fiscalía Especializada para la Atención de Delitos Electorales, FEPADE) has asked the federal Chamber of Deputies to remove Cadena’s legislative immunity, known as fuero, so that she can be prosecuted.

Cadena is accused of violating Article 15 of the General Law of Electoral Crimes, which states that individuals who receive campaign donations as political favors will be punished.

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