

7-19-2017

Another Mexican Governor Under Investigation for Corruption

Carlos Navarro

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

Recommended Citation

Navarro, Carlos. "Another Mexican Governor Under Investigation for Corruption." (2017). <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/6363>

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.

Another Mexican Governor Under Investigation for Corruption

by Carlos Navarro

Category/Department: Mexico

Published: 2017-07-19

Corruption in Mexico's statehouses continues to dominate the headlines in Mexico, with the latest allegations coming against outgoing Nayarit Gov. Roberto Sandoval Castañeda. In early July, the attorney general's office (Procuraduría General de la República, PGR) confirmed that Sandoval, a member of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), is under investigation on charges that he used his office to enhance his personal wealth.

The PGR's unit in charge of investigating federal crimes (Subprocuraduría Especializada en Investigación de Delitos Federales, SEIDF) initiated the investigation based on a complaint filed by a group of environmentalists, artists, and writers. Two opposition politicians joined in the action: federal Deputy Guadalupe Acosta Naranjo of the center-left Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), and Leopoldo Domínguez González, a former mayor of Nayarit's capital city, Tepic. Domínguez González is affiliated with the conservative Partido Acción Nacional (PAN).

A luxury ranch and nine purebred horses

According to the complaint, Sandoval Castañeda's declaration of assets at the start of his administration only included one large property: a modest home in the city of Guadalajara, which is in the neighboring state of Jalisco. Shortly after taking office, Sandoval Castañeda began to flaunt his wealth on social media, including his ownership of a 17-hectare ranch, El Ensueño, in the coastal municipality of San Blas.

He later boasted about the nine purebred horses that he acquired from a Spanish seller in 2013 for more than 1 million pesos (US\$57,000). In one video, filmed in 2012, the governor is seen parading on one of his horses through the property. The camera captured dozens of horses, stables, and an artificial lake on the ranch. In statements to the press, the governor said he saved for five years to purchase the property in 2012, which was the second year of his six-year tenure as governor. "My family and I bought this land more than five years ago," Sandoval Castañeda said, contradicting the declaration of assets that he made upon taking office.

Critics said the governor had not earned enough during his five-year career as a public servant to be able to afford a property as luxurious as El Ensueño.

"We calculated his earnings as a state legislator, three years as mayor, and one year as governor, and his earnings totaled approximately 4.7 million pesos (US\$268,000). Even without spending any of those earnings on daily expenses, those earnings would have not been sufficient for him to afford to make this purchase," said Rodrigo González Barrios, a spokesperson for the group that filed the April complaint.

According to González Barrios, his group consulted with experts in the field of real estate, architecture, and veterinary medicine, and with others who offered feedback on the value of the properties seen on the video.

While Sandoval has yet to offer an adequate explanation for the source of his wealth, he denied allegations that he had embezzled public resources. As proof, he mentioned that the public debt for Nayarit when he leaves office later this year would only amount to 4.7 billion pesos (US\$268 million), less than half of the debt of 10 billion pesos (US\$571 million) that he inherited from his predecessor, Ney González.

Several governors who became subjects of investigations of illegal enrichment and/or embezzlement left their states with high debts upon completing their terms. They include Armando Reynoso Femat of Aguascalientes, Rodrigo Medina de la Cruz of Nuevo León, César Duarte Jáquez of Chihuahua, Humberto Moreira of Coahuila, Javier Duarte de Ochoa of Veracruz, Guillermo Padrés Elías of Sonora, and Roberto Borge of Quintana Roo ([SourceMex, Aug. 17, 2016](#), and [Oct. 12, 2016](#)).

Irregular expenditures

Even with Sandoval's contention that he did not divert public funds toward his ranch and other properties, a report from an auditing unit linked to the federal Congress (Auditoría Superior de la Federación, ASF) uncovered irregular spending patterns in the public accounts for the Nayarit government between 2011 and 2015. The irregular expenditures, totaling almost 2.3 billion pesos (US \$131 million), were found primarily in the areas of health, security, and public works. They included the opening of unauthorized accounts to receive federal funds, underspending of authorized federal allocations, and a lack of financial reports for some expenditures.

Electoral reversals

Some analysts suggested the mood of the voters was affected by charges of corruption against Sandoval and the arrest of the state's attorney general, Edgar Veytia, on drug trafficking charges.

Antonio Echevarría García, who represented a coalition headed by the PAN, won the election handily over Manuel Cota of the PRI ([SourceMex, June 14, 2017](#)). In addition to losing the governor's seat, the PRI also lost its majority in the state legislature.

"The Nayarit elections took place a few weeks after the organization Mexicanos contra la Corrupción revealed the existence of a suspected corruption ring, led by Roberto Sandoval of the PRI, by which officials from his administration benefited from public works," said the online political news site Animal Político. "You can add the March 27 arrest of Nayarit state attorney general Edgar Veytia, who was detained in San Diego, California, following a charge presented by a US federal court in New York on charges of conspiracy to produce and distribute heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamines."

According to the online news site Primer Plano, Veytia was close to leaders of the Beltrán Leyva drug trafficking organization, including Alfredo Beltrán Guzmán and Juan Francisco Patrón Sánchez.

In addition to his alleged drug-trafficking activities, Veytia was known as the "iron prosecutor" because of the ruthless and often illegal actions he took while in office, including kidnapping, extortion, and seizure of property.

"Edgar Veytia sowed terror in Nayarit via the state police, including a unit that operated with covered faces," Primer Plano said.

While there is no direct evidence that Sandoval was directly involved in Veytia's operations, the governor may be complicit for allowing such activities to occur under his watch. "The career of the ex-prosecutor was developed alongside that of Gov. Sandoval," Primer Plano said.

For his part, Sandoval blamed the election results on a poor campaign effort on the part of Cota, the PRI gubernatorial candidate.

Federal legislators agreed that no action should be taken against Sandoval pending the results of the SEIDF investigation, although they asked authorities to keep close tabs on the outgoing governor to prevent him from fleeing the country before the end of his term in September. Other former governors under scrutiny—Duarte de Ochoa, Duarte Jáquez, and Borge—left the country while investigations were being conducted on their activities ([SourceMex, April 5, 2017](#), [April 19, 2017](#), [June 21, 2017](#)).

Federal Deputy Maricela Contreras Julián of the PRD and Sen. María del Pilar Ortega Martínez of the PAN urged authorities to "take all the measures necessary" to prevent Sandoval from leaving the country in case the investigation uncovers sufficient evidence to charge him.

Sen. Diva Gastélum Bajo of the PRI noted that Peña Nieto has demonstrated a clear commitment to go after governors who engaged in acts of malfeasance while in office. "All of those who were sought [on charges of corruption] have been found, sometimes in other countries," said Gastélum Bajo, pointing to the extradition requests for Duarte de Ochoa, Borge, and Tomás Yarrington of Tamaulipas. "The administration and the PRI have demonstrated that no one is above the law."

Ex-governor of Veracruz extradited to Mexico

Duarte de Ochoa, who fled Mexico shortly before the end of his term ([SourceMex, March 1, 2017](#)), later surfaced in Guatemala and was detained at the request of Mexican authorities ([SourceMex, April 19, 2017](#)). After fighting extradition to Mexico for several weeks, he finally relented and agreed to be sent back to Mexico for trial, arriving on Mexican soil in mid-July. He was placed in the Reclusorio Norte prison, pending a decision on where he will be held in the long term.

Duarte de Ochoa said he had agreed to return to Mexico to prove that he was innocent of the charges levied against him, including allegations that he misappropriated large sums of public funds between 2012 and 2015, using the money to buy real estate in Mexico and abroad. "I didn't commit these crimes and my desire is to prove that," he said.

The PGR, however, says it has sufficient evidence against Duarte de Ochoa to bring charges of money laundering and organized crime against him. Those charges could carry a sentence of 30 years. In addition to federal charges, Duarte de Ochoa would have to face trial in Veracruz state.

Alberto Elías Beltrán, the PGR's deputy attorney general for international affairs, said authorities have identified several properties in other countries that Duarte allegedly acquired with embezzled funds. "Through treaties with those countries, we have secured some of those assets," he said.

According to Elías Beltrán, authorities continue to look into the role that Duarte de Ochoa's wife, Karime Macías, played in the former governor's illicit activities. "For now, we have not received an arrest order," he said.

Macías is said to have traveled to Paris after her husband was detained in Guatemala in April.

-- End --