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PAN, PRD Leaders Launch Discussions on Common Front for 2018 Mexican Elections

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The leaders of most opposition parties in Mexico are working to forge a broad coalition to challenge the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) in the 2018 presidential and congressional elections. The concept has received the support of at least one PRI member, former party leader Manlio Fabio Beltrones, who has said that Mexico's political system must broaden its scope to regain relevance among voters. Conversely, one prominent opposition figure, Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the Movimiento Regeneración Nacional (Morena), has shot down the idea. López Obrador is leading the very early public opinion polls, partly on the premise that his strong personality is necessary to counter the bullying tactics that US President Donald Trump has employed against Mexico ([SourceMex, Feb. 22, 2017](#), and [Aug. 9, 2017](#)).

The move by the conservative and center-left opposition parties to form coalitions has worked in several state elections. By forging an alliance in the gubernatorial elections in 2010, the Partido de la Revolución Democrática (PRD), the Partido Acción Nacional (PAN), and several small parties defeated the PRI in the states of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Sinaloa ([SourceMex, Jan. 27, 2010](#), and [July 7, 2010](#)).

The PRD joined forces with the PAN in the 2013 gubernatorial race in Baja California to elect Francisco Vega by a narrow margin over the PRI candidate ([SourceMex, July 10, 2013](#)). In an ironic twist, a PRD-PAN coalition lost a mayoral election to an independent candidate in the community of General Enrique Estrada in Zacatecas state that same year ([SourceMex, July 17, 2013](#)).

The PAN-PRD alliance resurfaced in the 2016 and 2017 gubernatorial races, winning elections over the PRI in Tamaulipas, Durango, Quintana Roo, Veracruz, and Nayarit ([SourceMex, June 15, 2016](#), and [June 14, 2017](#)).

The success of the alliances in many recent elections led to the proposal to seek a single candidate for the 2018 presidential race, even though the only thing that unites the right and the left is a common desire to defeat the PRI.

A difficult endeavor

Several initial discussions took place on the proposed alliance, dubbed the Frente Amplio Democrático (FAD), during the first weekend in August. One meeting was led by Mexico City Gov. Miguel Ángel Mancera and former party presidents Gustavo Madero of the PAN and Beltrones of the PRI. Other participants in the discussions at different sites included PRD president Alejandra Barrales; two PRD governors, Arturo Núñez of Tabasco and Graco Ramírez of Morelos; and three PAN governors, Carlos Joaquín González of Quintana Roo, Javier Corral of Chihuahua, and José Rosas Aispuro of Durango. Several advocates of political reform also participated, including Emilio Álvarez Icaza, Enrique Krauze, and José Woldenberg.

A prominent PAN member who was missing from the discussions was Margarita Zavala, a former federal deputy and first lady, who is the candidate from the center-right party with the most support

in recent public opinion polls. "She is the one candidate who would be the best positioned to lead the PAN and the coalition," columnist Héctor Escalante wrote in the online news site Publimetro.

Writing in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*, columnist Yuriria Sierra was skeptical of the plan. "The curious thing is that even though all the participants in the dialogues talked about governability, which is an important concept, they did not offer proposals on how they would achieve this," she said.

A coalition between the center-left and conservative parties must overcome many obstacles, starting with the creation of a common platform on which all participants could run, including smaller parties like *Movimiento Ciudadano* (MC).

"An effective political front implies not only an alliance of two or more parties behind a single candidate," columnist María Amparo Casar wrote in *Excélsior*. "There is the obligation and responsibility of drafting a method to select an acceptable candidate supported by all members, a commitment to create structures in favor of that candidate, a shared political blueprint and platform, and a cabinet or governing team that everyone supports. All of this requires discipline, control, and some type of 'personal sacrifice,' attributes that are not abundant in Mexican politics."

Casar, a researcher and anti-corruption crusader, attributed the recent coalition-building trend in Mexico to the absence of a runoff election, which forces political parties to come together in a single contest. Both the PRI and the PAN have recently participated in alliances with like-minded parties. The *Partido Verde Ecológico de México* (PVEM) has been the strongest ally for the PRI in recent gubernatorial elections.

In contrast, the coalitions among parties with different agendas have not lasted.

"The alliances in our country often end the day after the election," said Casar, citing especially the PAN-PRD alliances for the gubernatorial elections in Puebla, Sinaloa, and Oaxaca in 2010. "They have never agreed on programs and shared commitments."

A major challenge for the FAD would be the choice of candidates, particularly for the presidency, and disagreement on this front could become a deal breaker. Several names have been floated, including Mancera, PRD Gov. Silvano Aureoles of Michoacán, and former PAN Gov. Rafael Moreno Valle of Puebla. The coalition would also select candidates for the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate as well as the governor's seat for Mexico City (CDMX).

Many observers say the obstacles to creating the FAD are insurmountable. "There are very few people who believe that the Frente Amplio Democrático will become a reality," columnist Jorge Fernández Menéndez wrote in the daily newspaper *Excélsior*. "Among the biggest obstacles is finding a presidential candidate who will represent every member of the coalition."

According to Fernández Menéndez, recent polls suggest that Zavala has an ample advantage over all other candidates except López Obrador.

"Would PRD members support Margarita [Zavala] or PAN loyalists back Mancera?" Fernández Menéndez asked. "Several polls suggest that 60% of respondents would not vote for the Frente."

Columnist José Cárdenas concurred in a piece published in the daily newspaper *El Universal*. "A huge obstacle is not only that the PAN, PRD, MC, civil society, and independent candidates must

reach a compromise to select a candidate for the presidency, the governorship of Mexico City, and the various seats in Congress," he wrote. "They also must reach agreement on new guidelines to implement a rule of law that functions to combat corruption, organized crime, injustice, poverty, and inequality."

PRI leader participates in talks

This is not the first time that a common candidacy among the major parties has been suggested. A proposal surfaced in 2011 for the PAN, PRD and PRI to run a single candidate in the Michoacán gubernatorial elections ([SourceMex, June 1, 2011](#)), but the plan was never seriously considered.

The participation of Beltrones in the discussions is interesting, since the PRI leader would basically be challenging his own party. Beltrones said he had joined the discussion because he is worried about the increasingly fragmented political landscape in Mexico and about the corrupt system that has prevailed in Mexico for generations. "Let's set aside governments that are defined by patronage, quotas, and especially apprenticeships," said Beltrones. "One does not come to a political office to learn.

Beltrones was an early candidate for the PRI presidential nomination in 2012, but he eventually dropped his bid, leaving Enrique Peña Nieto as the sole candidate for the PRI ([SourceMex, Dec. 7, 2011](#)). He said he wants to introduce rules to make coalition governments possible before Mexico elects a new president in 2018.

"I am not concerned whether the PRI or the PAN or Andrés Manuel [López Obrador] wins the election," Beltrones said. "I am interested in creating a system that promotes governability."

PRD fragmented

Another potential problem is the lack of unanimous support from important members of the PRD, many of whom argue that the best solution is for the party to support a candidate on the left. Two former presidents of the PRD, Pablo Gómez and Leonel Godoy, as well as Carlos Sotelo, a member of the party's executive committee, have said they plan to throw their support to López Obrador, whose party, Morena, became an official party in 2014 ([SourceMex, July 30, 2014](#)). López Obrador ran in two previous presidential elections under the banner of the PRD but also as representative of a broad left coalition.

Gómez, Godoy, and Sotelo suggested the FAD is not as much an effort to counter the PRI as it is a campaign against López Obrador.

"Many members of the executive committee and of state and municipal committees have thrown their support behind López Obrador," Godoy said in a radio interview.

PRD Deputy Guadalupe Acosta Naranjo, who supports the FAD, responded to the three leaders by pointing to recent comments by López Obrador against the PRD. In the days leading to the gubernatorial election in México state, López Obrador issued an ultimatum to the PRD to support his candidate or forget entering into any sort of alliance with his party ([SourceMex, May 24, 2017](#)).

"I respect the freedom of those who want to throw their support behind someone who does not support them," Acosta Naranjo said.

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