

## HEMISPHERE FOCUS

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**The July 4, 2010, Mexican Gubernatorial Elections***By George W. Grayson***Summary**

- *Mexico's 12 gubernatorial elections this Sunday will test whether the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) can maintain the momentum that it has exhibited since finishing third in the 2006 presidential contest.*
- *Oaxaca is the most important election because an attractive candidate, backed by the National Action Party (PAN) and the bulk of the Left, is competing with the favorite of the incumbent PRI governor, who is using any and all means to retain control over this PRI bastion.*
- *Outgoing state executives are playing pivotal roles in these races, accentuating the flow of power from Mexico City to the states and manipulation of the state electoral institutes.*
- *These will be the first statewide electoral battles in which the drug cartels are resorting to blatant violence as apparently reflected in the June 28 assassination of the PRI candidate in Tamaulipas. This murder has the potential to change the dynamics of the 2012 contest for president inasmuch as citizens will likely favor candidates prepared to take on the increasingly brutal cartels.*

**Prospects for the PRI**

After the PRI lost all 31 states and the Federal District (DF) in the last presidential election, naysayers began to predict the demise of the party that had dominated the country's politics from 1929 to 2000 and forced the PRI to consider a new strategy.

Its three top figures and presidential aspirants—Mexico State governor Enrique Peña Nieto, Senator Manlio Fabio

Beltrones, and party president Beatriz Paredes Rangel—agreed to forgo internecine fighting in favor of rebuilding the party's machinery. They enlisted the PRI's 17 governors in this endeavor. A deep recession and narcotics-related violence undermined the PAN's standing. Meanwhile, the Peña Nieto-Beltrones-Paredes troika—enthusiastically joined by state executives—concentrated on recruiting winning candidates, raising campaign war chests, and downplaying intra-party and personal conflicts in favor of lofting the party's star.

The formula proved successful. The PRI garnered 45 percent of the ballots cast in the 20 states, embracing 63 percent of the national electorate, which held state and local elections in 2007 and 2008. Although it lost the Sonora state house (2009), it ousted panistas from the governorships of Yucatán (2007), Querétaro (2009), and San Luis Potosí (2009).

The PRI delivered a resounding blow to opponents in the mid-2009 Chamber of Deputies contests. It expanded its presence in the 500-member lower chamber from 106 to 237 seats, while the PAN's numbers plummeted from 206 to 143 seats. The leftist-nationalist Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), whose nominee Andrés Manuel López Obrador captured one-third of the 2006 presidential vote, saw its legislative bloc cut in half to 127 seats.

Of the 12 states selecting governors on July 4, polls show that the PRI has commanding leads in Durango, Hidalgo, Puebla, Quintana Roo, Tamaulipas, and Veracruz and is also ahead to a lesser extent in Hidalgo, Sinaloa, and Zacatecas. Rodolfo Torre Cantú, the revolutionary party's nominee in Tamaulipas, was a shoo-in before assassins killed him and seven of his aides outside Ciudad Victoria on June 28. It remains to be seen whether authorities will postpone the election in that state, which lies below Texas.

Tlaxcala could turn into a nightmare for PRI president Paredes, the boss of the small state. PAN standard bearer Adriana Dávila Fernández (26.3 percent) held a narrow lead over the PRI's Mariano González Zarur (25.6 percent),

according to a mid-May poll. Paredes would endure a setback if her party won 11 states, losing only her bailiwick.

If anti-PRI nominee Manuel “Malova” López Vazquez could boost his standing in Culiacán, the state capital, he would give the establishment candidate a run for his money in drug-infested Sinaloa. However, retiring governor Jesús Aguilar Padilla is pulling out all stops for his protégé Jesús Vizcarra Calderón, even though the latter has been photographed with a cartel capo.

Still, the most important battleground is Oaxaca.

### **Oaxaca Contest**

Oaxaca has long constituted a PRI stronghold. Over the years, its 2.6 million registered voters have provided robust support for the revolutionary party, which has never lost the governorship. Moreover, Governor Ulises Ruiz Ortiz has his eye set on succeeding Paredes as party president before entering the cabinet of the next chief executive. He may even harbor ambitions of reaching Los Pinos in 2018.

This is the only state where all the principal anti-PRI parties have lined up behind a single standard-bearer—Gabino Cué Monteagudo, nominee of the “United for Peace and Progress” coalition. He is campaigning dawn-to-dusk against the Ruiz’s choice, Eviel Pérez Magaña.

Although important in 2010, Oaxaca furnishes a laboratory for the future. A PAN-Left triumph in this PRI bastion would prompt PAN president César Nava Vázquez and PRD leader Jesús Ortega Martínez to work toward a similar pact in Mexico State in 2011. That is when citizens select the replacement for Peña Nieto, who has emerged as the leading contender for the presidency. Setbacks in Oaxaca and Mexico State could hobble the candidacy of Peña Nieto, who—with his fiancée, actress Angélica Rivera—has been barnstorming with the low-keyed PRI contender.

Surveys show that Cué and Pérez Magaña are neck-in-neck in Oaxaca. Demonstrations with the potential for violence and protracted court challenges will in all likelihood follow the announcement of a preliminary winner.

### **Role of Governors**

Since the ascent of the PAN to the presidency, state governors have stepped up efforts to use a wide array of resources at their disposal in an attempt to ensure the election of hand-picked successors. To assist their understudies, state executives have actively applied pressure on their appointees who compose the state electoral institutes that register voters, certify candidacies, count ballots, and render preliminary tallies. Some incumbent governors have attempted to blatantly manipulated these bodies—created to

advance democracy in state and local elections—to loft the fortunes of their preferred candidates.

The PAN’s National Executive Committee (CEN) would not allow Aguascalientes’ divisive governor, Armando Reynoso Femat, to name his successor. Reynoso responded by alleging influence-peddling charges against Martín Orozco Sandoval, the CEN’s choice. He also prevailed upon the Aguascalientes’ electoral institute to void Orozco’s candidacy—an action that was ultimately reversed by the Federal Electoral Tribunal.

Charges that Eviel Pérez surpassed legal spending limits fell on deaf ears within the Ruiz-controlled Oaxaca Electoral Institute. The power of incumbent governors over these electoral mechanisms could turn out to be important in Oaxaca and, if the outcomes are in question, possibly in Chihuahua, Puebla, and Sinaloa.

The electoral institutes also determine the number of candidate debates. Outgoing state leaders have sacrificed loyalty for competence in selecting their dauphins. Thus, a wheeler-dealer like the PRI’s Veracruz strongman, Fidel Herrera Beltrán, does not want to expose his protégé to multiple joint appearances with his vastly more articulate PAN opponent.

To its credit, the Instituto Electoral de Quintana Roo voided the gubernatorial candidacy of Gregorio Sánchez Martínez, Cancún’s populist mayor and nominee of the PRD, Convergencia, and PT, who was imprisoned on charges of money laundering and other involvement with the Beltrán Leyva criminal syndicate and Los Zetas.

### **Narco-Politics**

In the past, drug cartels focused their attention, wealth, and personnel on contenders for mayorships, particularly in municipalities where the capos imported, grew, stored, manufactured, and trafficked drugs. With the growth of the narcotics industry and the configuration of new and longer supply lines, the narcos are taking a greater interest in state campaigns. Xóchitl Gálvez Ruiz, an anti-PRI, pro-reform candidate in Hidalgo—a center of activities by the vicious paramilitary Zetas—complains of threats to her entourage.

A protected witness avers that in the last contest in Michoacán, a criminal organization contributed \$155,000 (2 million pesos) to favored mayoral candidates who, if elected, receive a second stipend of \$15,000 (200,000 pesos) per month. The same anonymous source swore that current PRD governor Leonel Godoy Rangel, elected in November 2007, raked in \$300,000 from each leader of La Familia Michoacana, a crime syndicate based in his home state of Michoacán—a charge he vehemently denies.

To mitigate the involvement of drug lords in selecting candidates, the PAN's CEN chose the gubernatorial contender for Tamaulipas as well as a number of its mayoral and state legislative candidates in Sinaloa, home to the Sinaloa Cartel. Three events—the murder of PAN's mayoral candidate José Mario Guajardo Varela (May 13) in Valle Hermoso, Tamaulipas, the mysterious disappearance of former PAN presidential nominee and millionaire lawyer Diego Fernández de Cevallos (May 14), and the murder of Torre Cantú (June 28)—will focus even more attention on the crime syndicates in days before the balloting.

The cartels' goal is to generate an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear. In this way, they discourage citizens from registering to vote, dampen participation on election day, and, in so doing, undermine the prestige and authority of the state.

## Conclusion

The July 4 balloting may not be a presidential contest, but the results will be significant for the nation's future. They will indicate if the PRI is on track to recapture the presidency, which the party considered its birthright until 2000. The Oaxaca face-off will test whether the PAN can successfully run in tandem with the Left. The outcome in all dozen elections will demonstrate the degree to which power has migrated from the capital to the states. And the drug cartels will trumpet a low turnout as a sign that they are gaining strength amid declining public support for Calderón's crusade against their organizations. The upshot of escalating violence may spark the emergence of one or more presidential candidates with strong law-and-order profiles.

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