June 25, 2012

## Mexico's July 1 Gubernatorial Races and Their Impact on the Presidential Contest
George W. Grayson

Eyes are on Mexico's July 1 presidential showdown in which Enrique Peña Nieto (EPN) of the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) holds a robust lead despite a short-lived surge in May by Andrés Manuel López Obrador (known as AMLO) backed by the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD), the Workers' Party (PT), and Citizens' Movement (MC)—with Josefina Vázquez Mota of the National Action Party (PAN) running a close third. Gabriel Quadri de la Torre, candidate of the SNTE teachers' union's New Alliance Party (PANAL) trailed the pack. As the battle for Los Pinos presidential residence enters its final days, contests in the Federal District and six states offer insights into:

- The "Peña Nieto effect" (the likelihood of his win sweeping other PRI candidates to victory);

- The likelihood that the PAN will lose not only the presidential showdown, but state houses in its Jalisco and Morelos strongholds;

- The potential for a long-shot leftist candidate to stage upsets in Morelos and Tabasco; and

- The growing *#YoSoy132* student protest movement, christened the "Mexican Spring."

### Public Opinion

A survey published on June 20 by the respected *Reforma* newspaper showed Peña Nieto (42 percent) decisively beating López Obrador (30 percent), followed by the PAN's Josefina Vázquez Mota (24 percent) with PANAL's Quadri de la Torre (4 percent) bringing up the rear.

### Gubernatorial Races

Key races in the Federal District, Chiapas, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Morelos, Tabasco, and Yucatán illustrate anti-PAN sentiment and will help Peña Nieto and his party's nominees at all levels.

- In the Federal District (DF), Mayor Marcel Ebrard now stands to be replaced by fellow *PRDista* and former DF attorney general Miguel Ángel Mancera. An early June *El Universal* poll indicated that Mancera at 69 percent would trounce Paredes at 16 percent—with Isabel

Miranda de Wallace, a social reformer who established the nongovernmental organization *Halt Kidnappings* after the 2005 abduction and death of her son, at 14 percent, and PANAL's nominee far behind (1 percent).

- In Chiapas, a coalition-backed governor is likely to turn over the reins of the southern state to an Ecologist Green Party (PVEM) member. A late May Buendía & Laredo poll showed Manuel Velasco Coello of the PRI/PVEM/PANAL coalition (see glossary) at 47 percent compared with 17 percent for PRDista María Elena Orantes. Former Tapachula mayor Emmanuel Nivón González of the PAN registered only 9 percent support.

- The PAN has maintained its lead in Guanajuato, PANista Miguel Márquez Márquez polled 50.3 percent in a late May sounding of voters' preferences by *El Universal*. The PRI's Juan Ignacio "Juani" Torres Landa, a former mayor, federal deputy, and two-time losing gubernatorial aspirant (42.2 percent) will need extraordinarily long Peña Nieto coattails to triumph in this conservative PAN bastion.

- Yet another PAN-led state, Jalisco, is destined for a turnover. A late May *El Universal* survey put PRI/PVEM standard-bearer Jorge Aristóteles Sandoval in first place at 45 percent, followed by MC/PT/MORENA candidate Enrique Alfara Ramírez at 30 percent, with PANista Fernando Guzmán Pérez Peláez trailing at 17 percent.

- A second PAN governorship will fall in Morelos with PRDista Graco Ramírez Garrido Abreu and José Amado Orihuela Trejo (PRI/ PVEM/ PANAL) running neck and neck at 39.7 and 38.2 percent respectively, according to a mid-May *El Universal* report. AMLO, who dislikes seasoned politician Ramírez, could direct his Morena zealots to back Orihuela. Rising violence and allegations of misgovernance against incumbent Marco Antonio Adame Castillo have hurt chances for PAN standard-bearer Adrián Rivera Pérez.

- In PRI-led Tabasco, the divided Institutional Revolutionary Party seems poised to hold on with PRI/PVEM/PANAL coalition candidate Jesús Ali de la

Torre leading the PRD/ PT/MC's savvy contender Arturo Núñez Jiménez by 41 to 30 percent in a May Mitofsky poll.

- Finally in Yucatán, PRI/PVEM candidate Rolando Zapata Bello (65.4 percent), a protégé of outgoing PRI governor Ivonne Ortega Pacheco, is headed for a landslide over PANista Joaquín Díaz Mena and PRDista Erick Villanueva Mukal, according to *El Universal*.

All public-opinion surveys indicate that the PRI, the self-styled "revolutionary party," will retake Los Pinos, strengthen its formidable machinery, and elect governors in Jalisco and Chiapas, now in opposition hands. The PRI could benefit from an anticipated low turnout, stemming from the public's disenchantment with politics, fear of narco-violence, and a pervasive expectation of a Peña Nieto victory. Other factors could influence the outcome.

The PRI's superior structure is crucial inasmuch as a soaring number of citizens do not identify with any party and, when interviewed, indicate a readiness to split their tickets. Defections are another factor. Indeed, former PAN president Vicente Fox Quesada has endorsed Peña Nieto—a mixed blessing for this contender with movie star looks. PANAL abandoned the alliance promoting Peña Nieto to field its own candidate. On June 22, however, a colleague of Elba Esther "La Maestra" Gordillo, boss of PANAL and the SNTE's teachers' union, scheduled a meeting with the PRI nominee. This overture signaled "La Maestra's possible intention to ingratiate herself with the winner.

Replicating what seems to be a winning formula, the PRI is bringing young gubernatorial candidates into the fold as "Peña Nieto look-alikes"—that is, individuals such as Yucatán's Rolando Zapata Bello, a presentable 44-year-old who projects the image of the "new PRI" but is the dauphin of traditional party loyalists.

Like the PAN, the PRI is concentrating on big city mayoral races in states where it could lose governor's races. A case in point is the PRI's lavish support for Bárbara Botello in León. She represents a "safety net" and, if successful, could exert influence in Guanajuato's politics and even emerge as a future contender for governor or federal positions.

As in 2000 when *PANista* candidates benefited from Fox's decisive victory, PRI contenders hope to gain from Peña Nieto's popularity. The tightening of the race in May energized the PRI camp, and a robust performance will help the party's candidates nationwide. As usual, the three leftist parties—PRD, PT, and MC—managed to agree on a single candidate only in the Federal District, Morelos, and Tabasco. Still, Mexico's Left will pile up a landslide in the DF and be competitive in Tabasco or Morelos. Winning even one of those states plus Mexico City would make it the biggest winner after the PRI on July 1.

That leaves the PAN poised for a stinging setback. Campaign mismanagement and missteps have plagued Vázquez Mota's presidential bid from the start. In the Federal District, Miranda de Wallace, who is not a PAN member, is predicted to lose badly, suggesting that social reformers seldom excel in elective politics. Meanwhile, the opposition is on track to snag the Jalisco and Morelos governorships. If 2000 marked the rise of the National Action Party, 2012 may constitute its fall. Healing operations will be protracted and difficult.

Finally, could the *#YoSoy132* youth movement evolve into a Mexican version of the Arab Spring? Its effervescence erupted in a May 11 session at the elite Ibero-American University when jeers and heckling forced Peña Nieto to exit the school's auditorium. The movement spread to the prestigious Monterrey Technological Institute of Superior Studies (ITESM) and other campuses, and 98 student groups met at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) in early June. The group, which has declared itself "autonomous, independent of parties, and anti-neoliberal," embraces some supporters of AMLO. Most recently it held an unprecedented outdoor presidential debate in Coyoacán where the only no-show was Enrique Peña Nieto.

Unlike their Middle East counterparts, these youthful protesters have not suffered repression at the hands of the regime. Leadership disputes and fragmentation are inevitable. One astute analyst stated that: "The activists began in a 'post-modern' form…and evolved into a traditional 'movement.'" They have urged the media to "democratize," "inform the people," and not "manipulate" them. With a few exceptions, they are seeking to change the political scene from within, rather than employ social media to alert the international community to the country's boss-ridden government in which outsiders have little or no influence over incumbent officeholders. Although 8.5 million young people are eligible to vote, it is doubtful many will cast ballots in view of Peña Nieto's strong performance and their disdain for the PRI regime.

A more likely wildcard is presented by Mexico's drug gangs. PRD president Jesús Zambrano has warned that Los Zetas, the Knights Templar, and possibly, other criminal organizations will commit atrocities in the days before the election to enhance their "cartel cred" as brutal crime syndicates. After all, Los Zetas killed the PRI's gubernatorial candidate in Tamaulipas two years ago, and approximately 30 mayors, many along drug-trafficking routes, have perished. Most contenders have squads of bodyguards, and officials in Michoacán warn of possible violence in Cherán, Tancítaro, Apatizgán, and 17 other municipalities plagued by the Knights Templar.

Yet, in most of the country, cartel brutality depends less on the electoral calendar than on the settling of scores between/among cartels. That is, the Cadereyta, Nuevo León, bloodbath (49 to 60 bodies found on May 13, 2012) was Los

Zetas' response either to the Lake Chapala, Jalisco, killings (20 dismembered bodies found on May 9, 2012) or the Nuevo Laredo executions (23 dead on April 23, 2012). If correct, this tit-for-tat process has its own dynamic separate from date(s) on which elections take place. The terrible element is the number of innocents killed and the mounting body count, which has surpassed 43,000 since Felipe Calderón swore the presidential oath on December 1, 2006.

## Conclusion

Several of Mexico's presidential contenders, especially Peña Nieto, come to the end of the 2012 campaign trail with ill-defined platforms. Few offered bold proposals to eliminate state and family monopolies, curb the SNTE's hammerlock on public education, revamp the state oil company (Pemex), or make root-and-branch changes to noncompetitive labor practices.

Rising voices such as *#YoSoy132* have forced some clarifications, but observers will await the selection of the next cabinet for insights into what lies ahead. López Obrador, who claimed to have undergone an ideological makeover since refusing to recognize Calderón's victory six years ago, served up detailed objectives. Although labeled a "leftist" by observers, AMLO, who entered politics as a *PRIista*, continues to articulate the views of the traditional "revolutionary party"; namely, a robust welfare state, pharaonic public works projects without cost-benefit analyses, and strict national controls over the oil industry, even as the country faces the prospect of becoming an importer within 10 years.

Across the board, most gubernatorial candidates have focused their careers not in Mexico City but in the states they hope to serve—an indication of a decentralizing trend in which state executives have become the nation's new viceroys. Competitors have stressed local issues such as the opening of a new oil refinery in Guanajuato. The common denominator throughout the country is narco-violence—with a farrago of proposals on how to combat it.

In the final analysis, a cynical electorate that feels impotent to affect incumbents' behavior, seeks executives, legislators, and mayors who will govern honestly, fight corruption, create jobs, improve schools and health care, and enhance security in their homes, schools, streets, and workplaces. Will the newly elected officeholders meet this challenge or conduct business as usual?

## Glossary

**Knights Templar:** A Michoacán-centered cartel whose leaders torture and decapitate victims supposedly because they are doing the "Lord's work."

**Los Zetas:** Brutal paramilitaries who began as bodyguards for the capo of the Matamoros-based Gulf Cartel, but later began acting on their own.

**MC:** Citizens Movement (formerly Convergencia): small leftist party.

**MORENA:** National Renovation Movement: An eclectic group of López Obrador diehards.

**PANAL:** New Alliance Party (Partido Nueva Alianza): a party formed in 2005 and dominated by the notoriously controversial Elba Esther "La Maestra" Gordillo, the powerful head of 1.2-million member National Education Workers' Union (SNTE).

**PRD:** Democratic Revolutionary Party: largest force on the Left, but riven by half a dozen competing currents, of which the moderate "Chuchos" is the largest.

**PSM:** Mexican Socialist Party: a small leftist party that lost its registration in 1982.

**PST:** Socialist Workers Party: a moderate leftist party created in 1975 that is now defunct.

**PT:** Workers' Party: a small opportunistic party originally created by the PRI to divide the Left.

**PVEM:** The Mexican Green Ecological Party, which is really an opportunistic small business presided over by Jorge Emilio González and his family.

**#YoSoy132:** Twitter hash tag for "I am number 132"—a protest movement led by middle-class students; aimed at the media networks Televisa, TV Azteca, and candidate Peña Nieto; elements of the group reportedly back AMLO.

*George Grayson, Class of 1938 Professor of Government Emeritus at the College of William & Mary, is a senior associate at CSIS and an associate scholar at the Foreign Policy Research Institute. His latest book (coauthored with Samuel Logan) focuses on the cartel, Los Zetas:* The Executioner's Men: Los Zetas, Rogue Soldiers, Criminal Entrepreneurs, and the Shadow State They Created *(Transaction Press, 2012).*