



## **Elections in Mexico, 2010: timid struggles for the political center**

Electoral alliances of competing political parties sometimes appear absurd or desperate. However, there is a history that helps explain, or should help explain, the persistence of alliance building in the elections of the transition period.

Some politicians put the making or the rejecting of alliances at the level of principle, but Mexican political history would suggest that alliances are very time-bound and respond to the particularities of a given state.

The PRI has historically used alliances (even created parties with which to ally) when they needed to shore up and provide an untainted partner in a state where the PRI had lost some of its credibility. However, the PRI has rarely been brought in as a junior partner in a coalition, as may be the current situation in Zacatecas with the PT (ironically, originally a PRI creation in neighboring Durango, 19 years ago).

The PAN has entered in alliances on occasion, at times somewhat cynically when needed another party as a junior partner, even the PRD. In the 2001 Yucatán elections they wanted to make sure they could replace the longstanding PRI government and allied with the PRD, whose vote had averaged only 3% there. The Yucatán coalition failed to jell in a governing alliance, nor was continued as an electoral alliance in the subsequent state election of 2007 where the PRI returned to power. Nonetheless, the PAN leader in the Senate is now talking about the PAN/PRD coalition as something which has come to stay, and will be more and more frequent.<sup>1</sup>

The PRD has used electoral alliances with varying success, sometimes with great benefit, as part of long term party building with an atomized, localized and fractious left. The current conservative national leadership sees alliances as synonymous with party building.

I would suggest that the fascination with alliances in this moment, especially with some sectors of the PAN and the PRD is the result of their assessment of limited party growth, in their social bases and the recent elections. Both the PAN and PRD appear to have a hit a wall, and in spite of record high expenditures for political advertising, their respective accomplishments in the Chamber of Deputies elections of July, 2009 were limited and disappointing.

There is a tendency among some in the PAN and PRD to think they can go no further in convincing new voters or in changing older voters, and so the easy way forward is to forge electoral alliances with a similarly troubled party, even if there is historic animosity and limited points of agreement.

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<sup>1</sup> Comments of Senator Gustavo Madero, *El Universal*, January 28, 2010.



The alliances can be seen as Mexico's version of the perennial debate of mass parties in an electoral democracy: do we go to the center as a party to get votes? or, do we make our profile clear and pull the center a bit towards our profile?<sup>2</sup>

In Mexico, there is no sign the PAN is moving to the center, but it may “seem” to move toward the center when it can ally with the PRD. On the other side of the alliance, there are those in the PRD who insist their future is tied to moving to the center, and an alliance with the PAN gives a kind of momentum to this proposition.

Much of the promotion of alliances is an effort to figure out a way to craft a majority. In nearly all electoral democracies there are periods where competing minorities struggle in frustration to forge majorities. There are times (sometimes extended) when no majority exists and a government makes do with pluralities, shifting vote alliances, may operates avoiding difficult decisions.

During a prolonged period of no reform or weak administration, when a new majority cannot yet be “forged”, there is the strong temptation to “force” a majority with technical and artificial reforms.<sup>3</sup>

Instead of forcing a majority there is the real need in a society like Mexico to forge a majority, the obligation of every serious political party contending for state power. This represents a long, hard slog through the electorate.

In the last analysis, there is no avoiding this direct process of vote development and party building, and once achieved it needs to be taken advantage of because it may not last long; in any event it needs to be nurtured so that a set of reforms/decisions can be made, and not just a single reform or one decision.

### *Examples of “State Particularities”*

In our preparation for analyzing the various state and local elections this year, we have prepared a data summary of each state, including information on the electoral calendar, projected alliances, and demographic data with a review of election results by party and alliance in the past couple of decades. We will continue to update this excel file each week as the electoral season progresses. See <http://www.mundgroup.com/files20100127.html>

(control plus click to activate link)

<sup>2</sup> This, of course, is the debate in the Democratic Party post-Mass, and actually in the US Republican Party on another set of terms.

<sup>3</sup> Some of the “alliance” proposals and some of the current “political reform” proposals seem to be in this direction.



*Zacatecas.* As the graphic illustrates, the PRI held its huge historic advantage through the early 1990s: the 93.9% in the governorship election of 1986 through its 70.1% victory in 1992. But, the sea change of the 1990s impacted Zacatecas and the PRD won in 1998 and 2004. The PRI has continued to drop, but has been replaced by the PT in alliance. The “state particularity” of Zacatecas this year is that the official PRD could drop below 30%, and the PT/PRI (containing significant groups of disaffected PRD) could win with over 40%.<sup>4</sup>

**Election Results, governorship elections in Zacatecas**

2004 4 de Julio					Nulos	Sin Registro
	14.6 %	33.4 %	<b>46.4 %</b>	2.8 %	2.9 %	0.0 %
	72,837	167,024	231,979	13,767	14,322	0

The PRI maintained its general 30% in the last elections only by being allied with the PT. The PRI alone now is likely to account for about 20%.

1998 1 de Enero						Nulos	Sin Registro
	13.2 %	38.5 %	<b>44.0 %</b>	4.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
	63,987	186,725	213,804	20,914	6	0	0

The PT began to emerge as a local northern based party.

1992 1 de Enero						Nulos	Sin Registro
	12.8 %	<b>70.1 %</b>	13.0 %	3.0 %	1.0 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
	41,496	226,811	42,057	9,716	3,260	0	0

The 1992 election was still dominated by the PRI, but the PAN and PRD had begun to profile.

1986 1 de Enero									Nulos	Sin Registro
	3.2 %	<b>93.9 %</b>	0.1 %	0.0 %	0.2 %	0.1 %	0.1 %	2.4 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
	11,962	348,223	215	32	697	314	502	8,868	0	0

The 93.9% is the last “near unanimous” expression of a state historically dominated by an overwhelming PRI, including during the PRI governorship of the father of current PRD Governor Amalia Garcia.

<sup>4</sup> Since this bulletin was published, it appears that the potential PT/PRI alliance has fallen apart, opening up more pressure on individual parties to develop their own base.



*Durango.* The PAN seems consistently stuck in the low 30% range in votes and the PRI consistently winning, generally with 50% plus votes. The PAN seems to have hit a ceiling, and it cannot get much above its third of the electorate. In this context, the 1998 election has captured the imagination of a coalition-in-the-making, consisting of the PAN, PRD, PT and Convergence. If an alliance is the sum of its parts, and 2010 is like 1998, then the oppositional group can win. But an alliance is rarely a sum; it is often a new thing, with unanticipated dynamics. This will be interesting to follow.

**Election Results, governorship outcomes in Durango**

2004 4 de Julio						Nulos	Sin Registro
	31.4 %	<b>52.6 %</b>	10.0 %	0.5 %	2.9 %	2.4 %	0.2 %
	155,666	260,546	49,430	2,386	14,350	12,092	896

1998 1 de Enero					Nulos	Sin Registro
	30.3 %	<b>39.9 %</b>	8.4 %	21.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
	135,914	178,753	37,831	95,522	0	0

1992 1 de Enero								Nulos	Sin Registro
	34.1 %	<b>52.8 %</b>	3.0 %	8.3 %	0.3 %	0.6 %	0.9 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
	109,856	169,897	9,773	26,669	951	1,863	2,740	0	0

1986 1 de Enero										Nulos	Sin Registro
	34.2 %	<b>59.8 %</b>	0.3 %	0.1 %	0.3 %	0.7 %	1.9 %	1.1 %	1.5 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
	90,622	158,305	784	379	818	1,932	5,152	2,812	3,933	0	0

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