

BORDER BRIEF

The 2004 Tijuana Mayoral Election

By Dr. David A. Shirk

2004 Election Overview

On August 1, 2004, the state of Baja California will elect five new mayors, sixteen state legislators, and dozens of city council members. At the vanguard of Mexico's democratic transition, Baja California has been controlled by the National Action Party (*Partido Acción Nacional*, PAN) since it defeated the Institutional Revolution Party (*Partido Revolucionario Institucional*, PRI) in the gubernatorial election of 1989. Fifteen years after that unprecedented upset, the PAN now governs Mexico at the national level, and controls several other state governments. Yet, nationally and in Baja California, the PRI appears to be making a comeback.

In Baja California, the race that has generated the most national and international media attention is the Tijuana mayoral campaign, in which the PRI has offered a strong contender in the state's largest and most economically productive city. While PAN mayoral candidate Jorge Ramos appears to hold the lead in Tijuana, PRI challenger Jorge Hank has made rapid advances and is well within range of victory. This report provides a general panorama of the 2004 elections, an overview of Baja California and the Tijuana mayoral race, and an assessment of what is at stake in this electoral cycle.

Mexico's National Context

Along with Baja California, there are elections in thirteen Mexican states this year, including three other border states (Chihuahua, Sinaloa, and Tamaulipas). Ten of these will have gubernatorial elections, making 2004 a very consequential electoral cycle as Mexico inches closer to the 2006 presidential elections. Indeed, last July, the PRI and the left-leaning Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) both made major gains in the Congress at the PAN's expense, and both have sustained significant momentum as they head toward the 2006 elections. The PAN, meanwhile, finds itself on the defensive against both parties. Indeed, the three most recent state and local elections were won by the PRI (Chihuahua, Durango) and the PRD (Zacatecas), which both maintained their hold on those states.

2004 Mexican Border State Elections

July 4, 2004:

Chihuahua: 1 governor, 22 deputies (direct election), 11 deputies (proportional representation), 67 municipal governments

August 1, 2004:

Baja California: 16 deputies (direct election), 9 deputies (proportional representation), 5 municipal governments

November 14, 2004:

Sinaloa: 1 governor, 24 deputies (direct election), 16 deputies (proportional representation), 18 municipal governments

Tamaulipas: 1 governor, 19 deputies (direct election), 13 deputies (proportional representation), 43 municipal governments

Mexican Federal Deputies, 1997-2003			
	1997-2000	2000-2003	2003-2004
PRI	239	210	224
PAN	125	207	151
PRD	122	52	95
PVEM	8	16	23
PT	6	8	7
PSN	--	3	--
PCD	--	2	--
PAS	--	2	--

Though the PRD’s mayor of Mexico City, Andres Manuel López Obrador (known in Mexico by his initials, AMLO), holds a consistent edge in the polls (despite several videotaped bribery scandals involving members of his administration), many believe the PRI to be in an even better position to win in 2006. The PRI still holds the largest share of seats in Congress (nearly as many as prior to Fox’s election) and controls the majority of Mexican state and municipal governments. The PRI may

also benefit from the growing power of its party president, former-Tabasco governor Roberto Madrazo, who has steadily rebuilt the PRI machine and who defeated AMLO in his 1994 gubernatorial bid (albeit in a much contested, fraud-ridden election).

Meanwhile, the PAN seems ill poised to win the 2006 presidential elections. The party rose to prominence through the success of local and state candidates advocating transparency, good government, and “change” in the 1980s and 1990s, and built a solid reputation for relatively honest administration and the delivery of public works and services. However, once in power at the national level, PAN President Vicente Fox found himself hindered by a hostile Congress and internal divisions in his own party. Failing to meet the high expectations Fox set for himself has detracted from the important advances made during his administration: reducing tensions over indigenous rights, disrupting major narco-trafficking organizations, and curbing the abuse of executive power. Hence, despite the many accomplishments of the PAN over the last two decades at the national and sub-national level, voters have begun to ask the PAN “what have you done for me lately?” Internally, the PAN remains traumatized by Vicente Fox’s candidate-centered campaign in 2000 and his distant relationship with the party during his term. These concerns will make it difficult for Fox protégé and Mexican Interior Minister Santiago Creel to get the PAN nomination; the other Fox protégé, his wife Marta Sahagún, dropped from the running after public criticism about her ambitions. Instead, the PAN is likely to run a less pragmatic candidate who better represents the party’s platform and ideals; unfortunately for the PAN, no such candidate is likely to win in 2006 because the “true-blue” PAN nominees (Felipe Calderón, Carlos Medina) have limited popular appeal outside the party.

In short, much is at stake in the larger context of the 2004 state and local elections. Each contest is a leg in the longer and more consequential the race the presidency in 2006. With the PAN running behind in that race, the gains made by the PRI and the PRD at the state and local level will fuel their momentum as they set their sights on the presidential finish line. In Baja California, the state first and longest governed by the party, the PAN must demonstrate its track record and ability to endure; if it falters in the high profile Tijuana race, it will be a major setback in the contest for Mexico’s presidency in 2006.

Baja California and the Tijuana Mayoral Race

Baja California is home to approximately 2.7 million people, of which nearly half live in the city of Tijuana; like other arid border states, most of Baja California’s population is concentrated in urban

areas. The state is known for its tourism, agriculture, and assembly plant industries (particularly in electronics). This year the state will elect five mayors and sixteen state legislators (as well as nine legislators allocated by proportional representation of each party’s share of the vote). There are no incumbents in the upcoming election since Mexico does not allow immediate re-election for legislative or local office (presidents and governors are strictly prohibited from re-election). High levels of abstentionism could again be a problem this year, since most of the state’s voters did not even show up at the polls in the state elections of 2001 or the federal mid-term elections of 2003 (with only 33% and 32% turnout respectively). This means that a sudden surge in turnout in any given race could dramatically change expected outcomes.

Baja California has been dominated by the PAN since 1989, when it became the first state to have a governor from outside the ruling party since it was founded 60 years prior. Currently, the PAN holds the governorship, thirteen state legislative seats, and four municipal governments

Party Representation in Baja California State and Local Government, 2001-2003			
	State Legislators (Directly Elected)	State Legislators (Proportional Representation)	Mayors
PRI	3	7	1
PAN	13	--	4
PRD	--	2	--
Total:	25	9	5

(Ensenada Mexicali, Rosarito, and Tijuana). The PRI is the second largest party in the state, with ten state legislative seats and one municipal government (Tecate). The left-leaning Party of the Democratic Revolution (*Partido de la Revolución Democrática*, PRD) holds the remaining two state legislative seats and has no mayors; in Baja California, the PRD has been virtually non-existent since it was founded in 1989.

Tijuana Mayoral Candidates:

- **Jorge Ramos**, *Partido Acción Nacional* (PAN). Ramos is from a long-time PAN family, and has represented the party on Tijuana’s city council.
- **Jorge Hank**, *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI). Hank is one of two sons of the powerful PRI politician Jorge Hank González and has no prior elected experience.
- **Martha P. Ramírez**, *Partido de la Revolución Democrática* (PRD): Ramírez relatively unknown PRD candidate with no previous experience in elected office.
- **Bibian Doris Carmona**, *Partido Convergencia*: Carmona is a lawyer with no prior elected experience.

This year, pundits are beginning to wonder if the PAN can maintain its advantage in key races around the state. Internal divisions within the PAN in Baja California have developed between the highly organized network of Governor Eugenio Elorduy and those who fall outside his circle. Hoping to take advantage of these divisions and possible PAN-fatigue, the PRI has formed a statewide, multi-party alliance for the 2004 Baja California local elections for mayors and state legislators. That alliance includes the Mexican Ecological Green Party (*Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano*, PVEM) and the Labor Party (*Partido de Trabajo*, PT). The national leadership of the PRI has taken a special interest in Baja California, and the Tijuana race in particular.

Like the state government, the city of Tijuana has been governed continuously by the PAN since 1989. A veritable dynasty of five PAN mayors has made Tijuana one of only three major cities where the party can claim such a streak; the cities of León (Guanajuato) and Mérida (Yucatán) are the two others that have been governed consecutively by the PAN since the late 1980s. Still one of Mexico’s fastest growing

cities and the largest in the state of Baja California, Tijuana's citizens have consistently placed PAN candidates in office despite many unresolved problems related to population growth, poverty, and narco-crime. Generally competent PAN administrations and some significant accomplishments in public works and housing have kept Baja Californians basically satisfied, or at least has not angry enough to vote them out of office. Most important, until recently there was no strong competition for the PAN in most of Baja California due to the collapse of the PRI machine.

Hence, the 2004 Tijuana mayoral race seems like the PAN's to lose. **PAN mayoral candidate Jorge Ramos** is a young, soft-spoken scion of a long-time PAN family, and previously served on the Tijuana city council. Though relatively untested, Mr. Ramos holds a comfortable lead in the polls; four weeks before the election Ramos held an eight-point lead with 42% support in a *Frontera* newspaper poll. Moreover, Mr. Ramos has received ample support from the PAN's national leadership, which has taken a growing interest in this race. Finally, Mr. Ramos faces a PRI candidate who the local press consistently excoriates for alleged links to Mexican organized crime and the assassination of a Tijuana journalist in 1988.

Therein lies the rub. **PRI mayoral candidate Jorge Hank** is not a contender to be taken lightly. He gained eight points over the course of the first month of the campaign to gain 34% support in the *Frontera* poll; this may place him within a reasonable striking distance to win. One of Mexico's richest men and the owner of Tijuana's racetrack, his well-heeled campaign has barraged the city of Tijuana with banners, bumperstickers and brigades of supporters. His campaign also benefits from highly competent managers and consultants, as well as special attention from PRI president Roberto Madrazo. To his credit, Mr. Hank also fared well in public debates, making Mr. Ramos appear nervous in contrast. Mr. Hank has also cannily focused on themes that Tijuana voters care about deeply, such as improved economic opportunities and increased public safety. Indeed, the slogan of the statewide PRI-PVEM-PT alliance –*La Alianza Para Vivir Seguros* (The Alliance to Live in Security)– and Mr. Hank's own slogan –*Para Que Estés Bien y Seguro* (For Your Well Being and Security)– both emphasize personal safety and economic security.



Public security is a particularly timely theme in the wake of recent violence and resulting public outrage in Mexico. On June 22nd, Francisco Ortiz, the editor of the Tijuana newspaper *Zeta*, was tragically murdered while investigating the murder of another *Zeta* editor, Hector "El Gato" Felix, sixteen years earlier. On June 27th, the Ortiz murder, as well as a series of kidnappings and generally high levels of crime, was followed by massive civic protests throughout Mexico to demand greater public safety. Ironically, despite the Hank campaign's emphasis on that very theme, the candidate is plagued by a number of serious allegations about his credibility. First, Mr. Hank has long been accused by *Zeta* of being the intellectual author of the Felix murder (two individuals employed at Mr. Hank's race track were convicted of the crime). Second, the assassination of Ortiz has brought renewed suspicions and allegations against Mr. Hank; the PAN and the PRD have requested that the PRI candidate be investigated for possible links to the Ortiz killing. Finally, the most severe allegations against Mr. Hank suggest links to narco-traffickers; a leaked and highly controversial 1999 U.S. government report alleged that he had ties to the Arrellano Felix cartel. As yet, none of

these allegations has resulted in formal charges against Mr. Hank, and the PRI candidate emphatically denies all charges made against him and his employees.

It is not clear how any of these issues will ultimately play out in the mayoral race. Though he has very high name recognition among Tijuana's citizens, Mr. Hank also faces a noticeably hostile press. He has generated significant controversy due to recent public statements about women (which Mr. Hank described as his "favorite animal") and references about "huevos" in one campaign spot. Yet many Tijuana voters seem undaunted (and perhaps even intrigued) by Mr. Hank's reputation, and may be willing to give Mr. Hank the benefit of the doubt; indeed, some PAN party members have actually left the party to work for Mr. Hank's campaign. Meanwhile, even with national-level support, the PAN candidate lacks the name recognition and finances to compete with the PRI's multi-millionaire candidate. In short, from the PAN's perspective, this race is much closer than it should be. From the voter's perspective, this is certainly the most interesting Tijuana election in recent memory.

What Is At Stake?

Whichever party wins the Tijuana mayorship, so goes the city council; due to the electoral formula used for distributing seats on the city council, the mayor's party automatically takes the majority. Moreover, if Mr. Hank wins, his coattails may extend well beyond the municipality, benefiting his associates in the neighboring cities of Tecate, Rosarito, and Ensenada. In contrast, the PAN candidates in each of the state's municipalities are essentially on their own, lacking a standard-bearer of Mr. Hank's magnitude. The PAN's national leadership has begun to focus more intensely on Baja California in an effort to protect its narrowing lead.

A continuation of PAN rule in Tijuana would provide some vindication of the party's administration of the city thus far, though the more narrow his victory the greater the pressure on Mr. Ramos vindicate his triumph during his term. Meanwhile, Mr. Hank has promised to deliver a great deal in his three year term: more paved roads, greater public safety, stronger economic growth, and a quality of life on par with Tijuana's gleaming sister-city San Diego. However, Mr. Hank's critics (notably the newspaper *Zeta*) fear that his administration would only result in a reversion to the old ways of the PRI, bringing corruption, graft, organized crime, and electoral chicanery. Whatever happens, should he win in Tijuana this year it will almost certainly result a Mr. Hank gubernatorial bid in 2007.

The Tijuana mayoral race is made all the more interesting because, as is the case every twelve years, this year both San Diego and Tijuana have a simultaneous election cycle for mayors and city council members. Given the continuity of PAN governance in Tijuana, an upset in its mayoral race could be significant for the relationship between the two sister cities. Thus, from a bi-national perspective, the potential implications for trans-border cooperation could be significant in the San Diego-Tijuana region. Indeed, a PRI victory could prove most awkward for U.S. officials across the border, who might find Mr. Hank's dubious reputation discomfiting.

Lastly, in terms of the larger national context in Mexico, it is worth noting that the sudden resurgence of the PRI in Tijuana also appears to be part of a concerted attack on the urban strongholds of the PAN, again with an eye to the 2006 presidential election. Indeed, some experts have compared the Tijuana election to the mayoral contest in Mérida-Yucatán earlier this year; there

the PRI's national leadership enlisted former-Yucatán Governor Victor Cervera as its candidate in an unsuccessful attempt to oust the PAN. However, unlike the case of Mérida, where Cervera was unable to draw on his largely rural base, Mr. Hank appears to have connected to urban voters. If the PRI can duplicate Mr. Hank's success in coming elections it will trim the PAN's voter base significantly.

Conclusions

The mayoral race in Tijuana is one of dozens of battlegrounds where the PAN must defend its record against perceptions of inattentiveness and stagnation. Moreover, the high profile of Mr. Hank's mayoral candidacy will bring substantial national and international attention to the Tijuana race as pundits and voters try to decipher the likely outcome of Mexico's impending 2006 presidential election. While the PAN seems to have the advantage in the Tijuana race, the fact that the PRI has gained so much public support with such a controversial candidate suggests that, even if it wins, the PAN will need to seriously redouble its efforts.

With the PRI assailing the gates of Tijuana and the PAN's other urban strongholds, President Fox's party will clearly be on the defensive in the 2006 presidential elections. Should the outcome in Tijuana be negative for the PAN it could prove to be an important step toward the PRI's restoration at the national level.

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