

Antecedents and Repercussion: The Jalisco Election

By Cesar Augusto Morones Servín and
Daniel Sandoval Izarrarás

The National Election

Polls conducted several months before the 1994 Mexican presidential election suggested that, if it were held at that moment, the National Action Party (PAN) candidate, Diego Fernandez de Cevallos, would be elected. Those polls revealed the vulnerability of the Revolutionary Institucional Party (PRI) and made clear that political "accidents" could affect the vote. The long dominant PRI had lost support. This loss was precipitated by the assassination of Luis Donaldo Colosio, the candidate hand-picked by Carlos Salinas to succeed him as president. It was further encouraged by a mediocre performance by Ernesto Zedillo Ponce de Leon—the eventual presidential candidate of the PRI—in the first televised debate in the history of Mexico. But when election day did come, the majority of voters again chose to award the PRI candidate the country's top office.

The PRI ran a persuasive campaign that focused on its 65 year history guiding the country without significant social unrest, and on its ability to handle the national economy. Also, people were put off by the unimpassioned campaign of the PAN candidate, and the populist style of the Revolutionary Democratic Party (PRD) bearer, Cuauhtémoc Cardenas.

Soon after the election, however, the reputation of the PRI was again jeopardized. The assassination of the party's General Secretary, Jose Francisco Ruiz Massieu, and the devaluation of the peso had a powerful impact on the public's perception of the PRI. In the first election following the PRI's presidential victory, a contest for the governorship of Jalisco held six months later, it became clear that these political events had damaged the PRI. Voters loudly voiced their dissatisfaction when they awarded the

governorship of the State of Jalisco to the PAN candidate, Alberto Cardenas Jimenez.

The Election in Jalisco

Jalisco, because of its economic activity and population, is considered one of the three most important states in Mexico. Its capital, Guadalajara, is not only the second most populous city in Mexico, but also is home to the Center for Opinion Studies (CEO), an independent research facility located at the University of Guadalajara.

In this contest, the PRI was forced, for the first time in more than 60 years, to yield control of a major political office in one of the country's key states.

Since 1992, CEO has been tracking political preferences through bi-monthly surveys. CEO surveys show that Jalisco is a state dominated by two parties, the PRI and the PAN. There are also other parties, most of them from the left, with the PRD being the most prominent of the remaining, but their following is small and dispersed. Historically, the PRI has had a firm grip on almost every political office in Jalisco. Gubernatorial, congressional and mayoral candidates running for office under the banner of the PRI have won elections by overwhelming majorities. But since 1988, a growing dissatisfaction with the economic situation in Mexico and anger against the political elites have led to the electoral prominence of the PAN.

The earliest signs of the PAN ascension in Jalisco are seen in the federal elections of 1988. The PAN won 8 out

of 20 chairs for the National Deputies Chamber—all of them in Guadalajara. In an election for governor later that year, the PRI seemed to recover its eminence behind the popular candidacy of Guillermo Cosio, a well-known and charismatic politician who won the election. But Cosio's term was ill-fated, mainly plagued by a faulty administration. In the local elections in 1992, the PAN won a number of important contests, most notably the mayor's office in Guzman City, the second most important city in the state. In the 1994 federal elections, the PRI won the senate race by a razor-thin margin, but lost 10 out of 20 seats for the Deputies Chamber, one of them outside Guadalajara. Of particular interest in this election were changes in voting patterns. As pre-election surveys had shown, the PAN candidates won by comfortable margins in the cities, but in addition the opposition party did surprisingly well in the rural areas and countryside where the PRI has long been dominant.

These developments suggested the possibility of profound change in the electoral preferences of Jalisco. For the first time in modern history there was a real possibility that the state's next governor could be from the PAN.

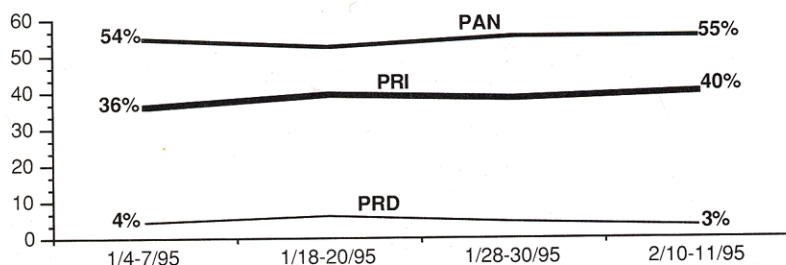
Pre-Election Polling

The PAN candidate, Alberto Cardenas, was the same person who had won the race for mayor in Guzman City two years earlier. The PRI candidate, Eugenio Ruiz Orozco, was the winner of the senate race in 1994.

Pre-election polls done by CEO showed an electorate angry over what it perceived to be a lack of credibility at all levels of government. Our polls continued to show a public critical of the PRI, particularly after the scandal associated with the Ruiz Massieu assassination and

Figure 1 It's Time for a Change

Question: If the state elections were held today, for which party would you vote?



Actual Election Results

PAN	52.7%
PRI	37.1
PRD	4.0

Note: Only the top three parties have been shown. Those responding undecided, refused, and don't know have been calculated out.
Source: Survey by the Center for Opinion Studies, latest that of February 10-11, 1995.

the devaluation of the peso. Collectively, these events resulted in a strong lead for the PAN in voter preferences for governor.

Research organizations backed by the PRI harshly criticized our survey methods. They questioned the intent of our research and tried to diminish the impact of our findings by publishing "surveys" with results very different from ours. However, ten days before the vote, a local newspaper, *Siglo 21*, published the results of a poll by Indemerc-Louis Harris. The same day CEO made public the results of its third state survey. The findings of each were nearly identical!

After this, the PRI increased its criticisms against pre-election surveys, declaring that the only valid poll was the election itself. But the findings were not so easily dismissed and there was emerging sentiment among the electorate that the PRI could actually lose the election. This was important because it challenged the conventional wisdom that the PRI could not be defeated in races for major political offices.

Election Day Polling

The CEO conducted an election day "quick count" by collecting vote totals from over 1,000 of the 5,700 voting stations. Quick counts by five independent organizations (including CEO) revealed that the governorship would go to the PAN candidate, Alberto Cardenas, by a margin of 54.2% (PAN) to 36.7% (PRI). Three days later, the State Electoral Commission confirmed the quick count results. Notably, our organization also did an exit poll which corroborated our pre-election survey findings.

Voting was marked by the absence of social unrest. And in spite of the "upset," there were no disturbances to speak of after the election. Turnout was substantial: upwards of 70% of those eligible to vote, did.

It has been generally accepted by politicians and pundits in Mexico that the quick counts had a beneficial influence in this election, and that they prevented attempts to manipulate the election results. Opinion polls in Mexico—both pre- and post-election—demonstrated, as they had in the previous year's presidential contest, their usefulness as a safeguard for democracy and for ensuring clean elections.

National Perspective

The February 12 gubernatorial election in Jalisco must be considered a watershed event in the history of politics in Mexico. In this contest, the PRI was forced, for the first time in more than 60 years, to yield control of a major political office in one of the country's key states. The party was dealt another powerful blow less than one month after the election in Jalisco when Raul Salinas, the brother of former President Carlos Salinas, was implicated in the assassination of the PRI General Secretary Ruiz Massieu. The arrest of Raul Salinas sent shock waves through the electorate and broke a long-standing tradition in Mexico of quiet and dignified retirement for departing presidents by calling into question the honesty and integrity of Carlos Salinas and his administration.

The arrest of Raul Salinas and a renewed investigation into the murder of Colosio have improved the personal

image of Mexico's President Ernesto Zedillo. At the same time, public confidence in the office of the presidency and in the PRI as a whole has deteriorated. Carlos Salinas has historically enjoyed high approval ratings, but the devaluation of the peso—which has been attributed to economic conditions left by him—and the Colosio and Ruiz Massieu affairs have seriously damaged his level of popularity. The public has become concerned with the tremendous power and impunity granted its presidents and many are calling for an end to what they consider to be the unbridled authority of the office.

It remains to be seen whether these events, and the related deterioration of the image of the PRI, will influence voters in the elections for governor in the states of Guanajuato and Yucatan, scheduled for May of this year.

The decision for voters will no doubt hinge on the unfavorable image of the PRI, as set against the performance of the PAN's elected officials in addressing major problems such as poverty and corruption in the four states they now govern. Again, well designed and carefully conducted surveys will play a major role in ensuring clean elections with results considered valid both inside and outside Mexico. Regardless of the results, holding democratic elections that are free from corruption will likely reflect positively on President Zedillo and his party.



Cesar Augusto Morones Servín is general director and Daniel Sandoval Izarrarás is chief of the computer department, Center for Opinion Studies