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Dispute Over Michoacan State Municipal Elections

by Carlos Navarro

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The Dec. 6 municipal elections in Michoacan state were just as controversial as many political observers had anticipated. While the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) apparently won a large number of the 113 mayoral posts contested, the actual number was in dispute. On Dec. 11, official results from the state's electoral commission indicated the PRI won 61 mayoral elections, the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) 24 posts, the National Action Party (PAN) two seats and the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (Partido Autentico de la Revolucion Mexicana, PARM) one post. No election results had been reported for another 25 municipalities as of that date, and opposition parties continued to protest the official returns already released. The PRD, the main opposition party in the state, claimed to have won at least 35 of the 113 mayoral contests and were contesting another 17 seats. On Dec. 9, PRD officials appealed to federal Interior Secretary (Gobernacion) Fernando Gutierrez Barrios to investigate alleged electoral irregularities on the part of the PRI. The PRD and other opposition parties accused the PRI of buying votes with government funds, some of which allegedly were channeled from the government's National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL), which funds public works projects. In fact, PAN officials claim to have a videotape of PRI officials openly buying votes. The PAN was also said to have obtained the check and bank account numbers for payment made to voters. Other alleged electoral irregularities committed by the PRI were voter intimidation and "carousel" voting, in which groups of people were reportedly transported from one polling place to another and casting votes. But Michoacan state PRI legislator German Ireta Alas accused the PRD of trying to diminish the results of the election by again claiming fraud. The PRI also charged the PRD with burning ballots from several polling places unfavorable to the PRD. The only factor where all parties were in agreement was that voter turnout in Michoacan was very low. However, the PRI and the opposition parties accused each other of fostering voter apathy. The PRI said the PRD's constant claims of fraud in recent elections turned off many voters. PRD leader Cuauhtemoc Cardenas told the government news agency Notimex that the low voter turnout allowed the PRI to commit electoral fraud. Cardenas was referred specifically to results from the state capital of Morelia, where the PRD claims 200 polling places either had insufficient ballots or recorded more voters than were registered. Some instances of violence were reported as a result of the election controversy. On the Dec. 9, in the city of Lazaro Cardenas, 26 people were injured following confrontations between PRI and the PRD supporters. Within the next few days, violent confrontations were also reported in the towns of Apatzingan and Nueva Italia. In the town of Turiacato, a PRD member was murdered after leaving a vote-counting session of the municipal electoral committee. (Sources: Mexico City News, 12/07/92, 12/08/92; Notimex, 12/08/92; Uno Mas Uno, 12/07/92-12/09/92; El Universal, 12/07/92, 12/08/92, 12/10/92; La Jornada, 12/07-09/92, 12/11/92; El Financiero, 12/07-09/92, 12/11/92, 12/12/92).

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