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Mexico: Fraud Charges In State Elections

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On July 3, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) claimed victory in July 2 elections in four of five states. According to the PRI, its candidates won in 10 of 18 legislative districts in Michoacan state, captured a landslide in Chihuahua and Zacatecas states and held strong leads in the Chihuahua mayoral races in Ciudad Juarez and the city of Chihuahua. Returns were not yet available in Campeche state. Opposition parties declared that the PRI inflated voter registration lists, sent groups of voters to cast ballots in several polling places, and committed other types of fraud. Congressperson Norberto Corrella of the National Action Party (PAN), told reporters on July 3 he spent all night recovering stolen ballot boxes and filing complaints with the district attorney's office in Mexicali, capital of Baja California state. Promises by Salinas and Chihuahua Gov. Fernando Baeza of clean elections "were just words," said Jesus Hernandez, a PAN spokesman in Ciudad Juarez. "These elections were dirty." Meanwhile, opposition party officials contacted by AP in several states indicated that overall, the irregularities were less widespread and serious than in the past. PAN spokesperson in Chihuahua state, Pedro Cesar Acosta, said, "Incidents of direct violence were fewer, but the institutional violence that is hidden by false documents is intact."

Electoral results in Michoacan, where the abstention rate was estimated at 80%, showed the PRI and opposition candidates running a close race. Michoacan is the power base of Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, leader of the Democratic Revolutionary Party (PRD), and presidential candidate in July 1988. In a speech on July 3 in the state capital of Morelia, Cardenas declared the PRD had won 10 of the state's 18 electoral districts. In Michoacan, Jose Guadarrama, a member of the PRI national committee, accused Cardenas of campaigning at polling places in the state. According to AFP, in Chihuahua, the PAN appeared to be running close races with PRI candidates. PRI candidates seemed guaranteed victory in Campeche and Zacatecas states, traditional bastions of PRI support. With 10% percent of the vote counted in the Baja California governor's race, "the victory of Margarita Ortega is clean and unchallengeable," said Eduardo Manuel Martinez Palomera, a PRI district committee president. Meanwhile, Ernesto Ruffo, the PAN candidate, said a count of 25% of the vote by his party showed him winning. Ruffo's win would mean the first loss by the PRI in a governor's election in its 60-year history. The State Electoral Commission said official results from the election, in which voters also cast ballots for four mayors and 19 state deputies, would not be released until July 9. Unofficial sources indicated that over 50% of the state's 880,000 registered voters abstained. (Basic data from Notimex, AP, AFP, 07/03/89)

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