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LADB Staff

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Conservative Opposition Overwhelms Governing Party in Jalisco Elections

by LADB Staff

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On Feb. 12, the opposition National Action Party (PAN) won an overwhelming victory in gubernatorial and mayoral races in Jalisco state. According to exit polls and preliminary reports, the PAN obtained more than half of the votes cast in the race for the governor's seat and for mayoral posts in all the major cities of Jalisco, which include Guadalajara, Ciudad Guzman, Puerto Vallarta, Zapopan, Tlaquepaque, Tonal, Lagos de Moreno, and Tepatitlan. The most significant election was the race for the governor's seat, which was won by PAN candidate Alberto Cardenas Jimenez, a former mayor of Ciudad Guzman. Preliminary results showed that Cardenas Jimenez received an overwhelming 54% of the vote, compared with 37% for Eugenio Ruiz Orozco, a federal PRI senator from Jalisco. Ruiz Orozco appeared to concede victory to Cardenas very early. "I recognize that the results of the vote...are not favorable to us," said the PRI candidate. "We will accept the results."

As expected, Mexico's other major opposition party the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) received only a small percentage of the vote in the gubernatorial race, since that party has traditionally gained most of its support in southern Mexico. Preliminary statistics show that the PRD received only about 3.8% of the total votes cast in the governor's race. The election results indicate that Cardenas's decisive victory was based on a relatively heavy voter turnout. According to Felipe de Jesus Preciado Coronado, president of the Jalisco state electoral commission (CEE), roughly 75% of the registered voters in Jalisco or about 2 million citizens- participated in the election. The loss of Jalisco represented a major political blow to the PRI, since the state continues to rank among Mexico's largest economies. Still, a PAN victory had already been widely expected, assuming that the PRI did not commit fraud, as had allegedly been the case in several other recent state elections.

Political columnist Francisco Cardenas Cruz of the daily newspaper El Universal said the vote not only reflected strong support for the PAN, but also strong discontent with the recent policies of the PRI. "The citizens of that state cast a vote of 'punishment' against the PRI for the party's many actions over the years," said Cardenas Cruz. Among other things, PRI administrations are blamed for a series of explosions in the sewers of Guadalajara in April of 1992, which killed more than 200 people and leveled several city blocks (see SourceMex, 05/06/92). The PRI is also believed to be involved in a cover up of the assassination of Cardinal Juan Jesus Posadas in Guadalajara, a case which remains unresolved. Officially, the government said Posadas was caught in a cross-fire in a gun battle between drug traffickers. However, many believe PRI leaders have withheld the full details on the assassination, since the complete facts could allegedly compromise the party.

Finally, columnist Cruz points out that the recent devaluation of the peso had a strong influence on voter sentiment in the election. The public largely blames the peso debacle on both former President Carlos Salinas de Gortari's economic policies, and on inept handling of the situation by current President Ernesto Zedillo. Last year, the PRI also faced tight races in the Tabasco and Chiapas gubernatorial elections. In both those cases, the PRD claims the PRI won the races by committing

massive fraud. The PRD has also accused the PRI of committing fraud in recent municipal elections in Veracruz state (see SourceMex, 11/16/94 and 12/14/94).

The gubernatorial race in Yucatan state on May 28 will provide the next test of the Zedillo administration's commitment to fair and free elections and the government's willingness to work with opposition parties. The decision to hold a new election in Yucatan is the outcome of a compromise reached between PRI and the PAN. The PAN claimed massive fraud in a previous gubernatorial election in November 1993. In that election, official results gave the victory to PRI candidate Federico Granja Ricalde, even though PAN candidate Ana Rosa Payan had been favored to win the race (see SourceMex, 12/01/93). As was the case in the recent Jalisco race, the PAN is heavily favored to win the race in Yucatan in May. The PAN controls the governor's seat in three other states: Baja California, Chihuahua, and Guanajuato. (Sources: United Press International, 02/11/95; Reuter, 02/09/95, 02/13/95; Notimex, 02/12/95, 02/13/95; Spanish news service EFE, New York Times, 02/13/95; El Universal, Excelsior, Reforma, 02/14/95)

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