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PAN Wins Guanajuato Gubernatorial Election, Falls Short in Yucatan

by LADB Staff

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On May 28, the opposition National Action Party (PAN) scored a convincing victory in gubernatorial elections in Guanajuato state, but apparently lost a tight race in Yucatan state, amid allegations of fraud and widespread electoral irregularities. In the Guanajuato election, PAN candidate Vicente Fox Quesada received more than 60% of the vote in the state, compared with only 30% for Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Ignacio Vazquez Torres. In fact, according to political observers, the election marks the largest defeat ever for the PRI in a state election. Earlier this year, Alberto Cardenas of the PAN was elected as governor of Jalisco state, taking about 54% of the vote (see SourceMex, 02/15/95). With the victory, Fox becomes the fourth member of the PAN to win a gubernatorial race in Mexico. In addition to Cardenas in Jalisco, the other PAN governors are Francisco Barrio Terrazas of Chihuahua and Ernesto Ruffo Appel of Baja California.

This was actually the second gubernatorial race for Fox Quesada, who lost a tight election in 1991, amid allegations that the PRI committed massive fraud to obtain victory. After organizing massive protests around the state, Fox eventually forced the PRI candidate to step down (see SourceMex, 10/16/91). However, instead of awarding a victory to Fox, the PRI and PAN reached an agreement to name PAN member Carlos Medina Plascencia as interim governor, a development that angered members of both parties. According to political analysts, in the latest election, Fox won widespread support in Guanajuato by building coalitions with other opposition parties. Preliminary electoral statistics indicate that Fox beat Vazquez in 32 of the 46 municipalities in Guanajuato and 17 out of the state's 18 electoral districts. Fox also won a majority in the four largest cities, taking the largest margin in Leon and Irapuato, but facing a tighter race in the state's capital city of Guanajuato.

In contrast to the Guanajuato election, the PAN failed to gain enough support in Yucatan to win the state's May 28 gubernatorial election. According to preliminary results, PRI candidate Victor Cervera Pacheco received slightly more than 49% of the vote, compared with about 44% for PAN candidate and former Merida mayor Luis Correa Mena. The Yucatan election was marred by accusations of widespread irregularities. For example, PAN officials and observers from citizen organization Alianza Civica accused Cervera's supporters of buying voter credentials and using bribery and threats to obtain votes for the PRI candidate.

PAN candidate Luis Correa Mena criticized President Ernesto Zedillo for prematurely offering congratulations to Cervera Pacheco. "I am beginning a battle for election cleanliness," Correa told hundreds of supporters in the central square of this elegant state capital Monday night. "We are going to begin a mobilization of people in all the state of Yucatan." The PAN's protest received strong support from the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), which said the election cannot be legal given the extent of irregularities. However, PRD director Porfirio Munoz Ledo urged the PAN not to accept a compromise "accommodation" with the PRI, but rather pursue a clearing up of the "fraudulent" election. On the other hand, Heriberto Galindo a spokesman for the PRI in Yucatan

said the PAN should play fair and recognize Cervera Pacheco's victory, just as the PRI "humbly" recognized Fox Quesada's victory in Guanajuato.

The results of the Yucatan election could have implications for President Ernesto Zedillo's efforts to push through political reforms that would go a long way toward mending the PRI's wounded credibility. Members of the PRD earlier this month withdrew from the political reform talks. The PAN, sensing the possibility of massive irregularities in the Yucatan election, threatened to also withdraw from the talks if the PRI won the election through fraudulent means. "The viability of a national political dialogue depends on the election results," PAN secretary-general Felipe Calderon told reporters the week before the election.

Still, political observers suggest the PAN, which has called in a group of legal experts to review the results, will have difficulty overturning the results of the election, since the few percentage points separating the two candidates actually amount to 25,000 votes. Another major obstacle is that claims of fraud are often difficult to prove. Additionally, notwithstanding the accusations of fraud, two independent organizations appear to back the PRI's claim of victory in Yucatan. For example, Ciencia Aplicada the company established by the employers confederation (Confederacion Patronal de Mexico, Coparmex) to monitor elections gave Cervera Pacheco 49.1% of the vote, compared with 44.9% for Correa Mena. Similarly, a count by Alianza Civica gave the PRI candidate 48.87% of the vote, compared with 45.34% for the PAN, with the rest going to minor parties. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 05/18/95; Notimex, 05/29/95; Reuter, 05/22/95, 05/30/95; La Jornada, Reforma, 05/29/95, 05/30/95; New York Times, 05/31/95)

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