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PAN Retains Gubernatorial Seat in Baja California

by LADB Staff

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In the Aug. 6 state elections in Baja California, the National Action Party (PAN) won an overwhelming victory at the polls, allowing the party to retain the governor's seat. PAN also won a majority of the state's legislative posts, and gained the mayoral seats in the cities of Tijuana and Mexicali. The PAN has won three of the four gubernatorial seats contested so far this year. In early 1995, PAN candidates won races in Jalisco and Guanajuato (see SourceMex, 02/15/95 and 05/31/95). A third election in Yucatan state was won by the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), but the race was close enough for the PAN to claim fraud (see SourceMex, 05/31/95). Outgoing Baja California governor Ernesto Ruffo Appel, who won the seat in 1989, was the first member of the PAN to beat the PRI in a gubernatorial race. In 1992, the PAN also won the gubernatorial race in Chihuahua state.

In the Baja California gubernatorial election, which many political analysts considered a referendum on Ruffo Appel's performance in office, PAN candidate Sen. Hector Teran Teran won the election with about 51% of the vote, compared with about 43% for Francisco Perez Tejada of the PRI. The remainder of the vote was divided among the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD), the Green Party (PVEM), the Labor Party (PT), and the Cardenista National Revolutionary Front (PFCRN). In the municipal elections, PAN candidates were elected as mayors in the state's two largest cities: Tijuana and Mexicali, while the PRI won the mayoral elections in Ensenada and Tecate. In fact, the PAN won its third consecutive mayoral race in Tijuana. Finally, according to electoral authorities, the PAN won 13 of the 25 state legislative seats, compared with 11 for the PRI and one for the PRD.

According to political analysts and party officials, roughly 70% to 75% of the registered voters in Baja California state cast their vote on Aug. 6 despite extremely hot temperatures and long lines at the polls on election day. The analysts said another remarkable aspect about the Baja California elections was the lack of post-electoral conflict among the various parties. They said this was due in part to a "civility agreement" reached before the election by the executive committees of the PRI and PAN to hold a peaceful and transparent vote. Authorities in Aguascalientes, Oaxaca, Zacatecas, and Veracruz also reported relatively peaceful elections in municipal or state races on Aug. 6. Unlike the vote in Baja California, however, the elections in the four states stood out for their high rate of abstentionism.

According to election authorities, fewer than half of the registered voters cast their votes in the four states. In fact, according to one estimate, only about 20% of the eligible voters in Veracruz state cast their ballots for state legislative posts. Last November, roughly 50% of the eligible voters participated in municipal elections in Veracruz state (see SourceMex, 11/16/94). The high abstentionism in Veracruz and Oaxaca was blamed in part on heavy rain. However, Raul Portillo of the citizen organization Alianza Civica Veracruzana (ACV) suggested that good weather would not have increased participation to any great extent. "The high abstentionism reflected the lack of confidence by citizens in the electoral process, which has a strong history of fraud," said Portillo.

The lack of citizen participation appears to have generally favored the PRI in three of the four states. In Veracruz, the governing party apparently won all but one of the legislative races. The PAN won the seat representing the city of Veracruz, while the PRD which ran strongly in the November mayoral elections failed to gain any seats. A similar situation was reported in Oaxaca, where the PRI apparently won most of the 25 legislative seats. The only close race was between a PRI and PRD candidate for the seat representing the region of Putla de Guerrero. The PRI also won most of the municipal elections in Zacatecas state, although the PAN did take some seats in the state. According to state electoral authorities, 38 of 56 mayoral posts were won by the PRI, 11 by the PAN, two by the PRD, and one by the PT.

In Aguascalientes, the PAN scored a significant victory by winning the mayoral post in the capital city of Aguascalientes by an overwhelming margin of 63%, compared with only about 37% for the PRI. The PAN also won races in three other cities in Aguascalientes state, while the PRI gained seven mayoral posts. In addition, the PRI and the PAN each won nine legislative seats, creating the potential for a deadlock in the state legislature. (Sources: Inter Press Service, 08/01/95; Excelsior, 08/05/95; Agence France-Presse, Deutsche Press Agentur, El Financiero International, Reforma, Reuter, 08/07/95; Associated Press, La Jornada, Reforma, 08/07/95, 08/08/95)

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