

10-9-1996

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### Recommended Citation

LADB Staff. "PRI Wins Most Elections in Guerrero State, but Loses Key Posts to Opposition." (1996).  
<https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/sourcemex/3644>

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## **PRI Wins Most Elections in Guerrero State, but Loses Key Posts to Opposition**

*by LADB Staff*

*Category/Department: Mexico*

*Published: 1996-10-09*

In elections in Guerrero state in early October, the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) won the majority of the mayoral and state legislative contests, but it still lost a number of key contests to the opposition Democratic Revolution Party (PRD). Statistics published by the state electoral council (Consejo Estatal Electoral, CEE) two days after the election indicated that PRI candidates won 52 of the 76 mayoral races and 25 of the 28 contests for direct seats to the state legislature. In contrast, the CEE said the PRD won at least 17 mayoral contests, which is almost three times the number of municipal posts the party held before the election. The PRD also won three elections for direct seats to the state legislature.

The PRI's reduced influence in Guerrero was evident in the sharp decline in the number of voters who cast their ballots for the governing party. According to the daily newspaper *La Jornada*, about 218,000 voters in Guerrero cast ballots for the PRI this year, compared with almost 282,000 in the municipal and state elections held in 1993. In contrast, both the PRD and the opposition National Action Party (PAN) received slightly more votes than in 1993, even though the increased number of votes did not translate into electoral victories for the PAN. Both the IFE and party officials confirmed a very low voter turnout in this year's election, which was attributed, in part, to bad weather on election day.

According to CEE estimates, only 30% to 40% of registered voters in Guerrero showed up at the polls, with the greatest rate of absenteeism evident in rural areas. PRI officials said they were not discouraged by the low voter turnout in Guerrero, but rather pointed to the lack of violent incidents in the elections. Many recent state elections have been marred by confrontations between parties or between factions of one party. "These elections were peaceful, transparent, and legal," said Interior Secretary Emilio Chuayffet in an interview following testimony to the Mexican Senate.

A major factor behind the peaceful elections was an unofficial cease-fire between the Popular Revolutionary Army (EPR) and the federal government. There was strong concern that the EPR, which has launched a series of attacks in Guerrero and other states since June, would cause major disruptions to the election. However, in late September, EPR leaders called a unilateral cease-fire for Sept. 25-Oct. 27 to promote a peaceful environment during the elections. There was also concern that the presence of federal army units, which had been sent to Guerrero to fight the EPR, would hinder the elections. Authorities addressed this concern by confining soldiers to their barracks in the days leading up the Oct. 6 election.

Meanwhile, despite Chuayffet's assertion that the elections were "transparent," the PRD filed several complaints regarding campaign irregularities. In fact, PRD leaders announced plans to challenge the results of seven of the municipal elections and two of the state legislative posts. According to PRD president Andres Lopez Obrador, massive irregularities were reported at

voting booths in Acapulco, Ciudad Altamirano, and other cities, which tended to benefit the PRI. Additionally, a few days before the election PRD and PAN officials accused local PRI officials in Guerrero of resorting to its "old vices," by offering bribes and other favors to citizens in exchange for their vote.

A CEE report on possible voting irregularities failed to mention allegations by the PRD, PAN, and the Revolutionary Workers Party (PRT) that election authorities had illegally removed hundreds of names from voter rolls in six communities in Guerrero. The CEE report, issued before the election, also failed to mention complaints that election authorities failed to install 161 voting booths. Still, despite the PRD's insistence that the PRI committed fraud in some local elections, Lopez Obrador promised that the results would be challenged in a peaceful manner. "We are not going to resort in any way to confrontation," he said. In an interview with the daily newspaper *La Jornada*, Lopez Obrador said the strong showing in Guerrero represented a significant turnaround for the party, which had performed poorly in recent state elections. "The PRD has become a political force," said Lopez Obrador, who attributed the strong performance in Guerrero to the new leadership in the party. Lopez Obrador also pointed out that the PAN did not fare as well as expected in Guerrero.

The PAN, which has not had a traditional base of support in that state, claimed victory in only one election: the race for mayor of Taxco. Even then, the PAN candidate was elected by a slim margin of 56 votes. The PAN's relatively poor showing was significant, since party officials had boldly predicted victories in Acapulco and possibly in the state capital of Chilpancingo. In both cases, the PAN candidate finished third behind the PRI and the PRD. Meantime, the PRD's victories were mostly in small communities, although the party also won handily in the city of Iguala. In addition to Acapulco, the PRI claimed victory in the resort city of Zihuatanejo and in Chilpancingo.

The PRI's relatively poor showing was a concern to some party members. Shortly after the election, PRI Gov. Angel Aguirre Rivero announced the firing or reassignment of several state PRI officials and cabinet members. Among the casualties were party secretary general Nabor Ojeda Delgado and government secretary Fermin Alvarado Arroyo, who were blamed for the party's poorer-than-expected performance. Sources close to Gov. Aguirre said the state executive was extremely angry at Guerrero state PRI president Rene Juarez for allowing local officials to select "inadequate" candidates for the elections.

Separately, the daily newspaper *La Jornada* reported that the PRI state executive committee was planning a major reorganization in the state, including the replacement of local party leaders in at least 43 towns and cities in Guerrero. For his part, PRI president Santiago Onate Laborde attempted to downplay the PRI's poorer-than-expected performance in the Guerrero elections. According to Onate, the PRI still managed to obtain 52% of the total vote cast on election day, compared with 36% for the PRD, 9% for the PAN, and 3% for other parties. "No one can say our party was defeated if we obtained 52% of the vote," Onate said in a meeting with fellow PRI members a few days after the election. Furthermore, Onate predicted that the governing party will perform well in upcoming local elections in the states of Mexico, Coahuila, and Hidalgo on Nov. 10. (Sources: Agence France-Presse, 10/02/96, 10/06/96; *The News*, 10/03/96; 10/04/96, 10/07/96, 10/08/96; *El Universal*, 10/03/96, 10/07/96, 10/08/96; *La Jornada*, 10/03/96, 10/07-09/96; *Novedades*, 10/07-09/96; *El Economista*, 10/08/96; *Excelsior*, 10/08/96, 10/09/96)

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