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LADB Staff

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PRI Suffers Major Losses in Congressional, State Elections, Including Mexico City

by LADB Staff

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In landmark elections held on July 6, the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) suffered major setbacks in races for the Chamber of Deputies, the mayoral seat in Mexico City, and several gubernatorial posts. According to preliminary results released by the Instituto Federal Electoral (IFE), the PRI won only 38% of the popular vote in races for the Chamber of Deputies, forcing the governing party to share control of the lower house of Congress with the opposition Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD). To obtain control of the Chamber of Deputies, a party needs about 42.2% of the popular vote, which would give the victor 251 seats in the 500-member Chamber of Deputies.

The PRI actually won 162 of the 300 seats up in the direct election, compared with only 71 for the PRD, 66 for the PAN, and one the Partido del Trabajo (PT).

PRI fails to obtain absolute majority in Chamber of Deputies

Based on the percentage of votes, the PRI will be allocated 70 at-large seats in the new Congress, meaning that the ruling party will control 232 seats in the Chamber of Deputies. Meanwhile, the PRD will have 115 direct and at-large seats in the Chamber of Deputies, while the PAN will have a total of 133 representatives. The PT, which won a seat in direct elections in Durango, was allocated seven other at-large seats. Similarly, the Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) won enough of the popular vote, mostly in Mexico City, to receive eight at-large seats. Three other parties Partido Popular Socialista (PPS), Partido Democratico Mexicano (PDM), and Partido Cardenista (PC) failed to win the required 2% of the popular vote to gain allocation of at-large seats in the Chamber of Deputies.

The lack of absolute majority for the PRI in the Chamber of Deputies is expected to result in significant changes in the legislative process. The advent of a pluralistic legislature will likely make Congress more assertive in drafting legislation, rather than merely rubber-stamping initiatives proposed by the executive branch. In fact, prominent political analyst Miguel Angel Granados Chapa believes the PRD and PAN could at times form alliances. "The PRD and PAN disagree on only a few central points, while the two parties have many areas of agreement," said Granados Chapa. PAN and PRD leaders agree that the two parties are unlikely to form a permanent alliance because of differences in political philosophies. On the other hand, they raised the possibility of forming temporary coalitions on issues of concern to both parties. "We could now see the PAN and PRD working together to put an end to corruption and a lack of honesty in government," said PAN Gov. Vicente Fox Quesada of Guanajuato.

PRI also loses seats in Senate

The PRI also lost some ground in the Senate elections, although its absolute majority was not in danger because only 32 of the 128 seats were contested. Still, according to IFE results, the PRI

appears to have lost enough seats to lose its two-thirds majority in the Senate, which is required to ratify any changes to the Mexican Constitution. The PRI won 12 of the 32 open seats either through direct election or through the at-large allocation, but the party's total number in the Senate dropped to 76 seats, which is nine short of the 85 required for a two-thirds majority. Meanwhile, IFE results show nine Senate seats went to the PAN, giving that party a total of 33 seats, and eight went to the PRD, giving it 16 seats. The PVEM and PT also gained Senate representation for the first time in history, with the former winning two seats and the latter one.

PRD's Cardenas wins landslide in Mexico City

The PRD's most significant victory was in Mexico City, where former presidential candidate Cuauhtemoc Cardenas won the mayor's race by a landslide. Cardenas took almost 48% of the mayoral vote in Mexico City, nearly twice as much as the 25% support obtained by Alfredo del Mazo of the PRI. PAN candidate Carlos Castillo Peraza came in a distant third, obtaining only 17% of the vote. Significantly, PVEM candidate Jorge Gonzalez Torres received almost 7% of the vote in the capital, while the remainder of the ballots were divided among candidates from five other parties.

Cardenas's victory also helped the PRD obtain an overwhelming majority in the Mexico City legislature (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF). The PRD took 38 of the 40 seats open for direct election, compared with two for the PAN and none for the PRI. Based on popular vote, 11 at-large seats will be allocated to the PRI, 10 to the PAN, and five to the PVEM. As a result, the PRI which has controlled the ALDF since its inception in 1991 will now become the principal minority party in the Mexico City legislature. Cardenas's huge victory was not surprising, since the PRD candidate has led public opinion polls in the weeks leading up to the election. The same polls showed voter support for Cardenas's campaign promises to place a high priority on housing, educational reforms, and public security.

The PRD candidate, who will not take office until December, has also pledged to reduce the value-added tax and suspend and review privatization plans for public-works projects around the city. Cardenas's impressive victory in Mexico City could foreshadow a run for the presidency in the year 2000. So far, the mayor-elect has attempted to downplay a possible presidential bid in the next election, but has boldly projected a "PRD victory in the year 2000." Cardenas is expected to face strong competition from Guanajuato Gov. Fox Quesada, who is said to be seeking the PAN nomination for the presidency.

Meanwhile, some PRI members blamed party president Humberto Roque Villanueva for the party's relatively poor performance in the elections. Among other things, PRI cadre called for the resignation of all members of the PRI's executive committee. According to political analyst Juan Antonio Reboulen Bernal, the PRI must make major structural changes or continue to lose ground to the opposition. "The most significant message (of the elections) is the extraordinary opportunity given to the PRI to renew itself and not fail the people who voted for it," Reboulen said in an interview with the Mexico City daily newspaper *The News*.

PAN wins gubernatorial races in Queretaro & Nuevo Leon

The PRI losses in Mexico City and in the Chamber of Deputies overshadowed other significant elections around the country. One of the most surprising defeats for the governing party was in Queretaro, where former PRI leader and senator Fernando Ortiz Arana was soundly defeated by

Ignacio Loyola Vera of the PAN. According to statistics released by state electoral authorities, Loyola Vera received almost 45% of the vote, compared with less than 38% for Ortiz Arana. The relatively large margin of Loyola's victory was unexpected, since polls earlier this year had shown Ortiz Arana with wide leads over his rivals. More recent polls had shown the PAN candidate with a slight lead over Ortiz Arana (see SourceMex, 07/02/97).

Similarly, the governing party also suffered a major defeat in the gubernatorial election in Nuevo Leon state, where PAN candidate Fernando Canales Clariond took almost 49% of the vote, compared with about 39% for Natividad Gonzalez Paras of the PRI. Outgoing PRI Gov. Benjamin Clariond Reyes said many voters may have cast their ballots against the PRI because of a scandal involving former governor Socrates Rizzo. According to press reports, Rizzo has been accused of embezzling large amounts of money from the state treasury and maintaining ties with prominent drug traffickers. In a situation similar to Mexico City, Canales will be able to govern with a legislature dominated by members of his own party. According to state electoral authorities, the PAN won a large majority of the seats in the state legislature, which was previously controlled by the PRI. In fact, IFE statistics show that the PRI lost its full majority status in legislatures in at least seven states. The PAN gained full control of the legislatures of Guanajuato and Nuevo Leon, and retained a majority in Chihuahua and Jalisco.

In Sonora and Queretaro, the PAN, PRD and other opposition parties have enough seats to surpass the PRI. In Mexico state, the PRD won 16 seats in the state legislature, compared with 15 for the PRI and five for the PAN. The PRD victories in Mexico state were attributed in part to the party's strong showing in Mexico City. Similarly, the PAN now governs 14 state capitals after winning several mayoral elections on July 6. Significantly, the PRD won the mayoral race in the city of Colima, which is the capital of the state with the same name.

Opposition parties question PRI victories in four states

Meanwhile, the PRI won victories in gubernatorial races in Campeche, Colima, Sonora, and San Luis Potosi states. In Colima and Sonora, the PRI's margin of victory was much smaller than originally expected. In all four elections, however, opposition parties said there was enough evidence of fraud on the part of local PRI leaders to call into question the final results. In Sonora, the PAN and the PRD refused to recognize official IFE results, which awarded the victory to PRI candidate Armando Lopez Nogales. Instead, opposition candidates Enrique Salgado Bojorquez of the PAN and Jesus Zambrano Grijalva of the PRD pledged to tour the state to publicly present evidence of fraudulent actions committed by the PRI.

The PAN also demanded a review of results in the Colima gubernatorial race, where PRI candidate Fernando Moreno Pena won the election by only two percentage points. PAN officials said they have evidence that the PRI violated electoral statutes in at least 40% of the polling stations around the state. The most visible protest occurred in Campeche, where PRD candidate Layda Sansores briefly took over the IFE office to complain about massive fraud committed by the PRI. According to state electoral officials, PRI candidate Antonio Gonzalez Curi won the election with almost 50% of the vote.

However, the PRD and other opposition parties, along with several observer groups, have called for the results to be annulled because of massive fraud by the PRI. Sansores and PAN candidate

Miguel Angel Montejo said they will continue to organize acts of civil disobedience until electoral authorities agree to review the results of the election. One observer group, Asamblea Democratica por el Sufragio Efectivo (ADESE), said the PRI committed such fraudulent acts as bribing and coercing voters and installing precinct observers without accreditation. The charges of fraud and irregularities were not limited to the gubernatorial races. As of July 8, the IFE's special electoral-complaints unit (Fiscalia Especial para Atencion de Delitos Electorales) had received 69 complaints of voting irregularities throughout Mexico. Independent observers generally pleased with elections

Still, authorities said the number of complaints was relatively small given the national scope of the election. In fact, most independent observers and political analysts gave the elections relatively high marks because of government efforts to promote and facilitate voter participation. In reports released immediately after the election, several groups including Alianza Civica, the Comision Mexicana de Derechos Humanos, and the Movimiento por la Certidumbre applauded the "democratic advances" in the Mexican electoral process. Nevertheless, they said there were still too many cases in which local party officials, particularly PRI members, attempted to bribe or coerce voters to support a particular candidate.

Some groups said the presence of the army in Chiapas, particularly near areas occupied by the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN), served to discourage voter participation. According to some estimates, only 20% of registered voters went to the polls near Ocosingo, Chiapas. On the other hand, voter participation was relatively high in key races won by the opposition. For example, a total of 80% of registered voters in Nuevo Leon state went to the polls on July 6. In Mexico City, authorities estimated voter participation at about 70%. For his part, President Ernesto Zedillo is credited with promoting the first-ever democratic elections in Mexico. "There is no doubt that there was historic pressure to implement greater democracy in our country," said prominent political columnist Sergio Sarmiento. "However, it is also true that Zedillo was the president who accepted that such a process was inevitable and took the definitive step."

The positive nature of the elections was also reflected in the financial markets, particularly the surge in the stock exchange (Bolsa de Valores Mexicana, BVM). The BVM's main index (Indice Nacional de Precios y Cotizaciones, INPC) rose by almost 177 points during the two business days that followed the elections. "Investors were more focused on the success of the elections rather than the performance of the candidates," said Robert Koenigsberger, a trader at Lehman Brothers Asset Trading Inc. Some economic experts suggested that the principal impact of the elections will be continued economic stability for the rest of 1997. "We are anticipating a GDP growth of 5% in the second half of the year," said Raymundo Winkler, director of the Centro de Estudios Economicos del Sector Privado (CEESP). Winkler projected annual inflation at 16% for 1997, which is close to the government's target of 15%. [Sources: El Nacional, 07/07/97; El Economista, El Imparcial (Hermosillo), 07/07/97, 07/08/97; Siglo 21 (Guadalajara), El Sol de San Luis (San Luis Potosi), 07/08/97; El Diario de Queretaro, El Diario de Monterrey, El Diario de Yucatan, 07/08/97; La Jornada, Excelsior, Novedades, El Universal, The News, 07/07-09/97, El Sur de Campeche, 07/08/97, 07/09/97]

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