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PRI Wins Big in Elections in Four States, Loses Gubernatorial Race in Tlaxcala

by LADB Staff

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The governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) won decisive victories in gubernatorial elections in Sinaloa, Puebla, and Tamaulipas states in October and November. The PRI also swept the state legislative and municipal races in Michoacan state, but lost the gubernatorial seat in Tlaxcala to a candidate representing a coalition of three opposition parties.

The Tamaulipas election was held Oct. 25, while the four other state races took place Nov. 8. Political observers said PRI victories in five states this year have left the party in a good position for the presidential election in 2000. In addition to Sinaloa, Puebla, and Tamaulipas, the PRI has won gubernatorial elections in Chihuahua, Veracruz, Oaxaca, and Durango this year. The governing party has lost gubernatorial races in Aguascalientes, Zacatecas, and Tlaxcala. "The PRI not only won seven gubernatorial races," said prominent columnist Sergio Sarmiento, "but these were seven of the most populous and strategically important states."

Coalition candidate elected as Tlaxcala governor

In Tlaxcala, coalition candidate Alfonso Sanchez Anaya scored a narrow victory over PRI candidate Joaquin Cisneros Fernandez. Sanchez Anaya received about 45.5% of the vote, compared with 42.9% for Cisneros Fernandez, according to the Comision Estatal Electoral (CEE) de Tlaxcala. Sanchez Anaya is the second recent PRI defector to win a gubernatorial race from the governing party. He represented a coalition formed by the Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD), Partido del Trabajo (PT), and Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM).

Earlier this year, former PRI member Ricardo Monreal won the gubernatorial race in Zacatecas state under the PRD banner (see SourceMex, 07/05/98). "In the states where there has been internal discord, the PRI has lost," political analyst Joel Estudillo told the Associated Press. "The results in Zacatecas and Tlaxcala reiterate the need for change within the PRI."

Political analysts said the loss in Tlaxcala was a small setback for the PRI, since the governing party had scored easy victories in all previous elections in that state. However, the election result was not a major surprise, since most public opinion polls taken in the weeks leading to the election had indicated a tight race. Still, despite the victory by Sanchez Anaya, the PRI again won control of the state legislature and took 44 of the 59 mayoral elections in Tlaxcala. While the opposition wrested one governorship from the PRI in the Nov. 8 elections, the PRD and the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) turned in disappointing performances in other races.

PRD, PAN lose big in Michoacan, Sinaloa, Puebla, Tamaulipas

In the southwestern state of Michoacan, where the PRD had begun to make some inroads, the PRI won all 18 directly elected seats in the state legislature. Another 12 seats will be distributed based

on the proportion of the vote received by each party. Results published by the state electoral agency (Instituto Electoral de Michoacan, IEM) gave the PRI 42% of all votes in the state, compared with 33% for the PRD and 22% for the PAN. The PRI also won 75 of the 113 mayoral races in Michoacan, including in major cities like Uruapan, Lazaro Cardenas, Patzcuaro, and the capital of Morelia. Lazaro Cardenas had been governed by the PRD, while a PAN mayor had presided over Morelia. Heavy abstentionism also aided the PRI victory in Michoacan. IEM figures showed only 42% of the eligible voters in Michoacan participated in this year's elections, compared with almost 50% in the past two races.

The PRI also scored a significant victory in the western state of Sinaloa, where some public-opinion polls had suggested that the PAN could win the gubernatorial race. In one poll, conducted in late October, PAN candidate Emilio Goicochea Luna was leading PRI rival Juan Millan Lizarraga by as much as three percentage points. The results showed a much different picture, with Millan taking 47% of the vote, compared with 32% for Goicochea Luna.

Political observers said Millan's convincing victory resulted from an intensive PRI campaign to promote voter participation among party faithful. The state electoral commission said an estimated 67% of the eligible voters in Sinaloa participated in the election. Millan, who has served in the PRI's national leadership and represented the PRI in the Chamber of Deputies, was regarded favorably for his attempts to bring reforms to the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM).

Heavy participation by PRI faithful also helped the party score decisive victories in the state legislature and in the mayoral races. The PRI took 21 of the 24 directly elected seats in the state legislature and 13 of the 18 mayoral contests, including the state capital of Culiacan. However, the PAN retained the mayoral seat in Mazatlan, the state's largest municipality. In the election in the central state of Puebla, PRI candidate Melquiades Morales took 54% of the vote, compared with 32% for Ana Teresa Aranda of the PAN and 10% for Ricardo Villa Escalera of the PRD.

The PRI also won decisively in the state legislative and mayoral races, including in the state capital of Puebla. Morales, who professed his independence from the PRI party machinery in Puebla, was not the first choice of outgoing governor Manuel Bartlett Diaz. But political analysts said the strong vote for the PRI will boost Bartlett's campaign to become the PRI candidate in the 2000 presidential election. In the election in the northern state of Tamaulipas in October, PRI candidate Tomas Yarrington won 53% of the vote, outdistancing his closest rival, Gustavo Cardenas of the PAN.

The PRI, which also swept municipal and state legislative elections in Tamaulipas, ousted the PAN from mayoral posts in two of the state's large metropolitan areas, Matamoros and Reynosa. As with most elections this year, the PAN and PRD criticized the PRI for resorting to old tactics to win voters in the October and November elections. "We are indignant at the corruption of the electoral process through vote buying and the illegal participation of state and city governments in diverting material, financial, and human help in favor of the PRI," the PAN said in a statement the day after the elections. For his part, PRI candidate Joaquin Cisneros announced plans to seek a recount in the Tlaxcala elections. "We did not lose," Cisneros told supporters. "We detected fraud and irregularities, which we must challenge." (Sources: Proceso, 10/18/98; San Antonio Express-News, 10/26/98; Spanish news service EFE, 10/25/98, 11/09/98; El Sol de Sinaloa, El Sol de Los

Mochis, El Sol de Puebla, 11/09/98; El Economista, 10/30/98, 11/10/98; La Jornada, 10/23/98, 10/26/98, 10/27/98, 11/09/98, 11/10/98; Associated Press, 10/25/98, 10/26/98, 11/08/98, 11/10/98; Reuters, 10/25/98, 11/09/98, 11/10/98; Novedades, 10/26/98, 10/27/98, 11/09/98, 11/10/98; Excelsior, 10/26/98, 10/27/98, 11/10/98; El Universal, 10/26/98, 11/09/98, 11/10/98; The News, El Sol de Morelia, La Voz de Michoacan, El Sol de Tlaxcala, 11/09/98, 11/10/98; El Diario de Yucatan, 11/10/98, 11/11/98)

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