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## **PRI Wins Election in Mexico State, Loses to Coalition Candidate in Nayarit**

by LADB Staff

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On July 4, the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) scored a narrow victory in the gubernatorial election in populous Mexico state but lost the race in the western state of Nayarit to an opposition candidate. PRI candidate Arturo Montiel Rojas, who made the fight against crime the cornerstone of his campaign, took 41% of the total vote in Mexico state. Jose Luis Duran Reveles of the conservative Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) came in second with 34% of the vote, followed by Higinio Martinez Miranda of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) with 21% of the ballots.

Both major opposition parties ran in coalition with another minor party. The Partido Verde Ecologista Mexicano (PVEM) aligned itself with the PAN, while the Partido del Trabajo (PT) formed a coalition with the PRD. The PRI victory in Mexico state was expected to give the governing party a boost before the 2000 presidential election.

Mexico state, with a population of 11.7 million, has one of the largest blocs of registered voters. ]Still, both the PRI and the opposition parties had difficulty motivating voters to participate in the election. The Instituto Electoral del Estado de Mexico (IEEM) said that fewer than half the state's 7.1 million registered voters cast a ballot. IEEM officials blamed the relatively low voter turnout partly on poor weather on election day.

### ***PRI accused of massive vote-buying in Mexico state***

Montiel's victory was also stained by charges of irregularities and vote fraud. PAN and PRD observers said the PRI resorted to its common practice of bribing voters with food, building materials, and other gifts in exchange for their support. In one precinct, the PRI organized a rodeo in an empty lot adjacent to a polling station. As part of the festivities, voters were offered a free beer before they cast their ballots. "Mexico is still in the hands of powerful groups, and we can't do anything about it," said Edgar Felix, a spokesman for the Duran campaign. "We are still subjected to vote-buying, a practice that has become a national and international embarrassment."

Technically, the practice of bribing voters is not illegal under Mexico's federal electoral code. "Our problem is that vote-buying and coercion are gray areas in the legislation," said Emilio Zebadua, a member of the Consejo Federal Electoral (CFE), which will oversee the presidential contest. But some analysts believe vote-buying can be curbed if authorities find an effective way to enforce campaign-spending limits. Unofficial data compiled by the PAN found that the PRI spent more than 180 million pesos (US\$19.1 million) in its campaign, which surpassed the campaign-spending limit of 100 million pesos (US\$10.6 million) established by the IEEM.

The PAN-PVEM and PRD-PT coalitions said they would challenge the results of the election. However, opposition leaders acknowledged it would be difficult to find sufficient proof of fraud to

overturn the results of the election. Political columnist Jose de Jesus Garcia of the daily newspaper *Excelsior* said the margin of the PRI victory in the latest election was small compared with the 63% support the party received in the 1993 gubernatorial election. "The party's support declined by more than 20 percentage points during the course of just one six-year term," said Garcia.

The PRI lost in some of the state's largest cities, including the state capital of Toluca and the Mexico City suburbs of Naucalpan, Tlalnepantla, Cuautitlan, Netzahualcoytl, and Texcoco. The ruling party compensated for these losses by scoring victories in 98 smaller towns. But Garcia said the biggest loser in the election appeared to be the PRD, which garnered only 21% support. As recently as the 1997 elections for the federal Chamber of Deputies, PRD candidates in Mexico state received 37% of the total vote, which was equal to the PRI support that year. Opposition parties won sufficient votes in those elections to wrest control of the Chamber of Deputies from the PRI (see *SourceMex*, 1997-07-09).

Other observers said the PRD's poor showing in Mexico state could be a blow to Mexico City Mayor Cuauhtemoc Cardenas, who is heavily favored to win the party's nomination for the presidential election. Some analysts said Cardenas' perceived poor performance as mayor of Mexico City may have influenced voters in some suburbs of the capital. Indeed, Cardenas has failed to gain the level of popularity that nearly brought him victory in the 1988 presidential election and allowed him to gain the Mexico City mayoral seat by a landslide.

A public-opinion poll conducted by Indermec Louis Harris in June found that fewer than 15% of the respondents listed Cardenas as their choice for president, a percentage equal to PRI candidates Roberto Madrazo Pintado and Francisco Labastida Ochoa. PAN candidate Vicente Fox was the choice of 23% of the survey participants.

### *Former PRI member wins Nayarit election*

In Nayarit state, Antonio Echeverria Dominguez representing a broad coalition of opposition parties scored an upset victory over PRI candidate Jose Lucas Vallarta Robles. While many public-opinion polls taken before the election showed support for the two candidates was fairly even, Echeverria won the race by almost 10 percentage points. The election was also seen as a referendum on outgoing PRI Gov. Rigoberto Ochoa Zaragoza, a member of the old guard who made many enemies while in office. "Surely, my performance as governor was not satisfactory," Ochoa acknowledged in a radio interview.

With Echeverria's victory in Nayarit, opposition parties now control gubernatorial seats in 10 of Mexico's 31 states, plus Mexico City. Like many coalition candidates who have won gubernatorial elections over the past year, Echeverria is a former member of the governing party. Govs. Ricardo Monreal of Zacatecas, Leonel Cota Montano of Baja California Sur, and Alfonso Sanchez Anaya of Tlaxcala all won elections within the past year after abandoning the PRI to represent a coalition of opposition parties (see *SourceMex*, 1998-07-08, 1998-11-11, 1999-02-10).

The PAN had declined to enter coalitions in the Zacatecas, Baja California, and Tlaxcala elections, choosing instead to run its own candidate. However, in Nayarit the center-right party joined the PRD, the PT, and the Partido de la Revolucion Socialista (PRS) to form the *Alianza del Cambio*.

Echeverria, a businessman whose views are more closely aligned with the PAN, worked well with the PRD and PT during the campaign, and vowed to remain independent for the time being. Echeverria's popularity helped the alliance win 13 of the 18 directly elected seats in the state legislature. Another 12 seats will be distributed among the coalition, the PRI, and the Partido Popular Socialista (PPS) based on percentage of the vote received.

Preliminary statistics showed the PRI received most of its support in the rural areas of the state, while the coalition scored larger victories in the cities. This trend was reflected in the results of the mayoral races, with the PRI winning elections in eleven smaller communities and the alliance scoring victories in Tepic and medium-sized cities like San Blas and Tuxpan. In his victory speech, Echeverria called on the major opposition parties to work together at the national level to defeat the PRI in the 2000 presidential election.

Vicente Licona, a pollster for Indermec Louis Harris, said the PRD, PAN, and minor parties stand a good chance of winning the 2000 presidential election if they join forces. "An alliance would roll over the PRI in 2000," said Licona. Licona and other analysts noted that a PAN-PRD coalition would have received about 55% of the vote in the Mexico state election, which would have been sufficient to defeat the PRI. But the likelihood of an alliance at the national level is remote because of the wide disparity in the political philosophies of the two parties. In addition, front runners Vicente Fox of the PAN and Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the PRD both have strong presidential aspirations and are unlikely to cede to the other.

### *PAN-PRD alliance probable in Chiapas election in 2000*

The PAN and PRD are likely to form an alliance in the gubernatorial elections in Chiapas state in 2000. The two parties, along with the PT and PVEM, have thrown their support behind Sen. Pablo Salazar Mendiguchia. Salazar resigned from the PRI in May of this year, accusing Gov. Roberto Albores Guillen of preventing a democratic selection of the governing party's gubernatorial candidate for 2000.

Salazar is also a former member of the legislature's Chiapas peace commission (Comision de Concordia y Pacificacion, COCOPA). He left the commission in February of this year, partly in frustration at the refusal of President Ernesto Zedillo's administration to recognize the San Andres accord, which special negotiator Manuel Camacho Solis reached with the Ejercito Zapatista de Liberacion Nacional (EZLN) in February 1996 (see SourceMex, 1996-02-21). "I tell you, the PRI didn't leave us any other choice. When we tried to modernize the political practices of the PRI, we got a diatribe and insults," said Salazar. "When we put forward a peace alternative for Chiapas, they treated us like rebels. When we opposed the way they governed...they tried to lynch us in public opinion." [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on July 7, reported at 9.40 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: Proceso, 02/14/99; El Diario de Yucatan, 05/11/99; El Sol de Toluca, 06/28/99; The News, 05/10/99, 07/01/99, 07/02/99; Reuters, 06/30/99, 07/01/99, 07/04/99, 07/05/99; El Economista, 07/01/99, 07/05/99; Associated Press, San Antonio Express-News, 07/05/99; La Jornada, 05/11/99, 07/05/99, 07/06/99; El Meridiano-Tepic, Nayarit, 06/28/99, 07/01/99, 07/02/99, 07/05/99, 07/06/99; The New York Times, Notimex, Excelsior, Novedades, 07/05/99, 07/06/99; The Dallas Morning News, Los Angeles Times, Spanish news service EFE, 07/06/99; El Universal, 06/28/99, 06/29/99, 07/05-07/99]

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