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PRI Sweeps Coahuila Elections; Victory Marred by Internal Strife

by LADB Staff
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On Sept. 25, the former governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) scored a sweeping victory in the gubernatorial and municipal elections in Coahuila state, but its strong performance masked the party's internal problems at the national level.

PRI candidate Humberto Moreira Valdes took 60% of the vote for governor, trouncing rival Jorge Zermeno Infante of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN), who obtained only 35% of the vote. The remaining 5% was divided between the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) and the Unidad Democratica de Coahuila (UDC). The result was largely anticipated, with most polls taken before the election indicating a probable landslide victory for the PRI (see SourceMex, 2005-08-24).

The PRI also dominated the municipal and the state legislative elections. In results published by the Instituto Electoral y de Participacion Ciudadana de Coahuila (IEPC), the PRI won 29 of the 38 mayoral races, including elections in the state capital of Saltillo, the US-Mexico border community of Piedras Negras, and the industrial city of Monclova. The PAN was the victor in Torreon and the industrial hub of Ramos Arizpe.

The PRI also won 16 of the 20 directly elected seats in the Coahuila state legislature, with the remaining four going to the PAN.

PRI confident about upcoming elections

The PRI national leadership council (Consejo Ejecutivo Nacional, CEN) was quick to tout the Coahuila results as a precursor of the party's performance in upcoming state elections. Voters in Guerrero state will be selecting new state legislators and mayors on Oct. 2, while mayoral races are scheduled in Hidalgo state on Nov. 13. The PRI is expected to face a tough election in Guerrero, having lost the gubernatorial race to the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) earlier this year (see SourceMex, 2005-02-16).

Several polls have the PRD retaining control of the statehouse and the mayoral seats in the largest cities, including Acapulco, Iguala, Zihuatanejo, Taxco, and Chilpancingo. Still, the PRI expects to perform well in both the Guerrero and Hidalgo races. "We are a party with our sights on the future," said PRI president Mariano Palacios Alcocer. Palacios, recently selected by the CEN to replace Roberto Madrazo as party president, has found himself at the center of a major controversy. He was selected for the post after party leaders opted to bypass party secretary-general Elba Esther Gordillo Morales (see SourceMex, 2005-09-07).

Palacios, who served as party president in 1997-1999, was selected to help the party regain the presidency in 2006. Court says PRI internal election legal Gordillo filed a complaint before Mexico's...
top electoral court (Tribunal Electoral del Poder Judicial de la Federacion, TEPJF), but lost her appeal on two counts.

In mid-September, the TEPJF decided that the PRI followed proper procedures in selecting Palacios as its new president. In a separate decision, the court ruled that the PRI had not violated any electoral laws in bypassing Gordillo in favor of Palacios.

Gordillo, who would have been allowed to remain as secretary-general, resigned from that post shortly after the TEPJF decision but opted to remain a PRI member. In announcing her resignation, Gordillo accused Madrazo of anti-democratic tendencies. "He is taking Mexico backwards," said Gordillo.

Madrazo denied he had any role in Gordillo's removal. "All I did was resign as the president of the party," he said. "The rest was a decision made by the party's political advisory board." Gordillo has not said whether she will eventually leave the PRI, although she is being courted by the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN) and other parties.

Madrazo, in the meantime, may be facing a more competitive primary than he anticipated. A public-opinion poll in early September by the daily newspaper Reforma showed Madrazo with 45% support, compared with 44% for his rival Arturo Montiel.

The poll was conducted via telephone, which means that most respondents were in urban areas, where Montiel is likely to receive the bulk of his support. The PRI has not set a date for its primary, which is anticipated for sometime in October or November. (Sources: Notimex, 09/14/05, 09/15/05; El Financiero, 09/15/05; Associated Press, 09/16/05; La Cronica de Hoy, 09/15/05, 09/26/05; Agencia de noticias Proceso, 09/15/05, 09/19/05, 09/26/05; Spanish news service EFE, 09/19/05, 09/25/05, 09/26/05; The Herald-Mexico City, 09/15/05, 09/16/05, 09/19/05, 09/26/05, 09/27/05; La Crisis, La Jornada, 09/15/05, 09/20/05, 09/26/05, 09/27/05; El Universal, 09/20/05, 09/26/05, 09/27/05; The Dallas Morning News, 09/27/05)

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