

# MEXICAN ELECTIONS

## Mexico's ruling party braces for tough test

Continued from Page 1A. unprecedented electoral gains. The conservative PAN has grown significantly in the past two years, as voters hard-hit by the country's deep economic problems look for political alternatives. The PRI can no longer maintain a monopoly on political control in Mexico, say PAN members.

"Mexico is like a man still wearing the pants he wore as a 3-year-old boy. The boy kept growing and growing, and now the clothes no longer fit," said the PAN's Francisco Barrio Terrazas, mayor of Ciudad Juarez, the largest city in Mexico headed by the opposition party.

Meanwhile, anxious PRI leaders warn voters against the temptation to political experimentation with a group largely untested in its leadership. "We shouldn't attempt to do things we've never tried because of a 2-year-old (economic) crisis. This could endanger our sovereignty," said Felix Valdes.

The PAN's challenge to the PRI has been gaining strength for several years, as the PAN has won more local offices and broadened its base of support.

Once considered the party of the upper class, the PAN recently has drawn more support from middle- and working-class Mexicans frustrated by the continuing economic crisis. It has become particularly strong in northern Mexico, where residents are more conservative and enjoy a higher standard of living than in the rest of the country.

In 1983, the PAN won an unprecedented mayoral and state legislative elections, all in the north. Now, all eyes are looking toward the July 7 elections.

"There is no question that this is a historically important election," said Donald Wyman of the Center for United States-Mexican Studies at the University of California, San Diego. "Whether this whole thing becomes a serious crisis really depends on the many things — the outcome of the election, the reaction of the opposition, and most importantly, the reaction of the administration."

As in the past, the PRI should win easily in most of the races. But tough contests are ahead in the northern border states — particularly in the governor's races in the states of Sonora and Nuevo Leon — as well as in some congressional districts.

The greatest attention has focused on the contest between the PAN's Rosas and the PRI's Felix Valdes for governor of Sonora. The PRI has never lost a governorship, and never before has an opposition party had such a good chance of winning one, analysts say.

The national PRI spokesman, Juan Saldana Rosell, says bluntly that "there doesn't exist any possibility that they (PAN) could win a governorship." But others disagree. "In a decade of observing the country, it is certainly the first time



An Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) rally in Cadereyta, Nuevo Leon.

The Dallas Morning News: Juan Garcia

I have seen an opposition party have a real chance to win a gubernatorial election," Sinkin said.

"Sonora is really a problem for the PRI," he said. "They face a tremendous dilemma. They have to make a choice between allowing an opposition party into the governorship and outright stealing the election."

The possibility of election fraud makes the race all the more dramatic. There is a long tradition of voter fraud in Mexico. And no one doubts that the PRI has the power to steal the election — either by chicanery at the ballot boxes or simply by ignoring the outcome and declaring itself the winner.

But Mexican President Miguel de la Madrid has sweetened his economic austerity program with a pledge to provide a "moral renovation" of the corruption-ridden government. And that pledge extends to the electoral process.

"Mexico has always been called a 'controlled democracy' or a 'guided democracy,'" said Sinkin. "De la Madrid has called for the creation of a 'democracy without adjectives.'"

To that end, in hopes of winning elections honestly, the PRI has fielded the highest-quality candidates in many years and is campaigning with unprecedented vigor, analysts said.

Jorge Trevino Martinez, the PRI candidate in a close race for governor of Nuevo Leon, said, "We have the majority, and we'll prove it in July — and we'll do everything cleanly!"

De la Madrid said in a speech earlier this month: "We do not need frauds or compromises to present electoral triumphs to ourselves and the Mexican people. The PRI has everything it needs to achieve a legitimate, clean victory in the coming elections."

The election fraud problem became even thornier for the PRI in recent months as traditionally peaceful PAN supporters staged violent demonstrations in Piedras Negras and other northern cities to protest alleged fraud in December municipal elections. Analysts said the demonstrations were calculated to attract U.S. media attention to the coming elections and to signal the PRI that the days of politics-as-usual are over.

"The PAN appears reluctant to play by the rules of the game that once ruled Mexican politics," said Wyman of the Center for United States-Mexican Studies. "The rules by which PAN played in the past were to participate in elections, to stage weak protests over the outcome and then to go on being the loyal opposition. The incidents in northern Mexico suggest it is unwilling to be a quiescent opposition any longer."

More violence is almost inevitable, analysts said, if PAN supporters perceive fraud in the summer elections. "I think it is a powder keg right now," said Estevan T. Flores, director of Mexican studies at Southern Methodist University.

The initial PAN victories provided people with some hope that more changes can be made," he said. "When the changes aren't forthcoming because of fraud, you have a natural powder keg."

Observers in Mexico and the United States are quick to say that the conflict between the PAN and the PRI does not threaten either the PRI's 56-year grip on politics or the country's stability. Nor, they say, does it have the potential to spark widespread violence; the PRI has successfully repressed all outbreaks of violence in the past.

Mexico is celebrating the 75th anniversary of the Mexican Revolution this year, and memories of the bloody conflict are still vivid. "That is why no one is proposing violence as a solution today," said Pablo Emi-



The Dallas Morning News: Juan Garcia

Escamillo de la Rosas Lopez holds up a sign bearing the acronym for an oil workers' union at a rally for Jorge Trevino Martinez, a candidate for governor of the state of Nuevo Leon in Mexico.

And some PAN members are breaking with the party's tradition to openly support the use of violence. "I sanction it. If someone steals my vote, I have the moral right to defend it," said Eugenio Elorduy, a PAN official who ran for mayor of Mexicali last year and believed his victory was stolen.

Susan Kaufman Purcell, director of the Latin American Program at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

The PRI national spokesman, Saldana, acknowledges the importance of the July 7 elections, which come midway through de la Madrid's six-

than the long-term problem of allowing the PAN to control Sonora for six years," said Sinkin, an associate professor of Latin American history at the University of Texas.

"In Mexico, the system operates through the governors. The president and the Cabinet make decisions, and those decisions are implemented through the governors. There is no tradition for the government to work through an opposition governor," Sinkin said.

Not everyone thinks the PRI will use fraud. Jorge Bustamante, director of the Center for Border Studies of Northern Mexico in Tijuana, said he believes the PRI has made a genuine commitment to abide by the popular vote. And he cites previous PAN victories as evidence.

"I'm not suggesting by any means that there hasn't been any fraud in Mexico," he said. "But what I see is a new trend. The trend is toward more clear respect for the results of elections. I'm sure PRI has regretted the outcome of some elections, but I think they respect the facts of life. Logic says this trend will continue."

Most analysts agree that the political impact of the July elections will be greatest if the PAN wins a governorship. "If the president decides that he is willing to let one of these states go to the opposition, then political history will have been made in Mexico," said Lorenzo Meyer, a political scientist at El Colegio de Mexico. "If otherwise, as I suspect, the results favor the government, then it will be just one more election among so many others."

Even if the PAN does not win a gubernatorial race, however, the election could have an impact on the government if election fraud is suspected, analysts said.

"If the PAN actually wins and the government does not recognize the victory, a new kind of political crisis could develop," said Rolando Cordera, a leader of one of Mexico's leftist parties and a professor of political economics at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. "There could be a de-legitimization of elections in general. There could be a general loss of confidence in the system."

Meyer said: "In the long run, the opposition is going to be more determined and have a more negative attitude toward the system. They will lose even further, if that's possible, any illusions about the electoral process."

Peter H. Smith, a professor of political science at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, said it is important not to overestimate the importance of the PAN's growth.

"It is an interesting shift, but it doesn't herald a massive transformation in the political system. Even if the PAN were to do very well, including winning the governorship of Sonora, that doesn't make it a national threat to PRI. That doesn't create a two-party system. I think the bigger question is not whether the PAN wins, but how the PRI responds," he said.

Even the PAN does not envision its growth ever evolving into a two-party system. "We're not striving to create such a system," but rather to become a viable opposition party, said PAN President Madero.

Bustamante said he believes the greatest impact of the '85 elections will not be measured in the fortunes of either political party but in terms of renewed voter interest and a new accountability in the Mexican government. "That is the main impact of these elections — public administration being more accountable to the people. That is irreversible," he said.

And indeed, across Mexico, in peasant villages and sprawling cities, political campaigns carry a new urgency, a heightened sense of drama.

In northern Sonora, the PRI's Felix Valdes meets with farmers and reminds them that their lush vine-

**1985 ELECTIONS IN MEXICO**

- MARCH 17:**  
 ■ State legislators and municipal officers in Morelos
- JULY 7:**  
 ■ Federal Chamber of Deputies, whole country  
 ■ Governors in Campeche, Colima, Guanajuato, Nuevo Leon, Queretaro, San Luis Potosi, Sonora  
 ■ State legislators in Chiapas, Coahuila, Colima, Guanajuato, Nuevo Leon, Queretaro, Sonora  
 ■ Municipal officers in Sonora, Queretaro
- OCTOBER 6:**