

# Low voter turnout in Mexican state elections

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On Sunday, Mexican voters turned out to vote for governors and state legislatures in 12 states—the northern states of Chihuahua, Durango, Sinaloa, Zacatecas and Aguascalientes; Tamaulipas and Veracruz along the Gulf of Mexico; the central states of Tlaxcala, Hidalgo, and Puebla; and Oaxaca, Chiapas and Quintana Roo in the south. Elections did not take place in the other 18 states or the Mexican capital.

Ballots were also cast for municipal officials.

The corporatist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI,) which ruled Mexico without interruption between 1929 and 2000, led a coalition consisting of the Greens and the New Alliance Party, the latter being the political tool of the teachers union SNTE.

The ostensibly “left” nationalist Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) ran in its customary alliance with two minor petty-bourgeois formations—Concordancia and the Party of Labor (PT). However, in five states—Durango, Sinaloa, Oaxaca, Hidalgo and Puebla—the PRD joined the conservative ruling party, the National Action Party (PAN), in a so-called “pragmatic coalition.”

That such an unprincipled alliance was forged between the PRD and the PAN reveals both the opportunism of the PRD and the political weakness of President Felipe Calderón and the PAN. In last year’s federal elections, the PRI obtained an absolute majority in the lower house of Congress, with 237 representatives to 143 for PAN and 71 for the PRD, virtually reducing Calderón to “lame-duck” status.

With only 36 percent of eligible voters participating, the PAN-PRD ended with a net gain of one governorship, winning three as compared to nine for the PRI. After Sunday’s vote, the PRI will control 19 of the 32 states overall.

Calderón and the PAN took over in 2006 in a neck-and-neck election with Lopez Obrador of the PRD. Obrador then accused Calderón of electoral fraud and

many in the PRD continue to believe that the PAN stole the election.

Calderón inaugurated neo-liberal economic policies with the promise to create jobs and usher in prosperity for the Mexican people. Except for the financial elites, the reality is that living standards have gone backwards.

A report from the Monterrey Technological Institute is an indictment of bourgeois rule in Mexico. Forty-seven million of Mexico’s 108 million inhabitants exist below the poverty line, 23 million of them living in extreme poverty as a result of three decades of economic stagnation in Mexico’s rural sector.

Except for Oaxaca, where voters rejected the hated governor, Ulises Ruiz of the PRI, and opted for the PAN-PRD candidate, the election results left the relationship of forces relatively intact between the PRI and the PAN.

Ulises Ruiz had been the object of a popular rebellion in 2006, in which tens of thousands of workers and peasants demanded his removal from office. During more than three months, protesters occupied the center of the city of Oaxaca and organized strikes and mass demonstrations, while Ruiz clung on to office.

The PAN-PRD ran candidates in four other states, with mixed results. The alliance won small majorities in Sinaloa and Puebla, but it lost to the PRI in Hidalgo and Durango.

The elections took place under military alert over possible drug war violence. The death toll for the day was 7. Thirty-nine others were arrested for carrying incendiary devices. Four of the dead were found hanging from a bridge in Chihuahua State.

Drug violence is said to be out of control in states that border the US. In Tamaulipas, where the PRI candidate for governor had been assassinated a week earlier, an occupying army of 9,000 state troopers and an undisclosed number of federal troops oversaw the voting.



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