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## Poll Results Mixed For Mexico's PRI

*After Nearly a Decade on Sidelines, Party Does Well in State Elections*



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MEXICO CITY—Mexico's former ruling party won a majority of states up for grabs in weekend elections, but its losses in three bastions left analysts questioning the party's momentum as it hopes to retake the presidency in 2012.

The Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, which governed Mexico for 71 years until 2000, won nine of 12 states that elected new governors on Sunday, according to preliminary results. It picked up three states where it had been out of power for 12 years. The party also won in big border cities including Tijuana and Ciudad Juarez.

But it lost three big states where it had governed for generations: Sinaloa, Oaxaca and Puebla. In each case, the PRI lost to candidates fielded by an alliance between the conservative National Action Party, or PAN, and the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution.

The PRI has been on a roll in the past two years, capitalizing on a weak economy and rising drug-related violence to become the front-runner to retake the presidency in 2012 elections. The PAN and PRD felt they had no choice but to put aside recent grievances and linked up forces to stop the PRI from winning all 12 gubernatorial races.

The election showed the PRI's resurgence could have its limits. "Those are three big states. It hurts," said Daniel Lund, a pollster with the Mexico City-based The Mund Group.

The PRI suffered from an image of corruption and strong-arm rule in two of the key states, Oaxaca and Puebla. In Oaxaca, it was hurt by opposition from a powerful teachers union. In 2006, after the last governor's race, PRI Gov. Ulises Ruiz was accused of human-rights abuses in cracking down on a teacher protest. The PRI never mended relations.



Analysts say the governor also made few strides in changing living standards of the state, among Mexico's poorest, which became a major campaign issue for alliance candidate Gabino Cué. Mr. Cué won with 50% of the vote to the PRI's 42%, preliminary results showed.



In Puebla, PRI Gov. Mario Marín's government had faced a 2006 scandal in which he allegedly ordered state police to harass a well-known journalist for accusing a local businessman of involvement in a child-prostitution ring. While Mr. Marín survived the blowup, a powerful teachers' union there broke tradition this year and sided with PAN-PRD candidate Rafael Moreno Valle, who went on to win the election, 52% to the PRI's 42%.

In Sinaloa, PRI candidate Jesus Vizcarra faced allegations he was tied to drug organizations after pictures surfaced of him with one of the heads of the state's notorious Sinaloa drug cartel. High voter turnout—nearly 12 percentage points above the 2004 election—indicated voters may have set out to punish Mr. Vizcarra, fearing the and alleged corruption in the PRI, analysts say.

Sinaloa "always threatened to slip out of the PRI's hands" because the PAN has a stronger base there than in other parts of the country, said Mr. Lund, the pollster. Mr. Vizcarra lost to PAN-PRD candidate Mario López Valdez by six percentage points.

While political alliances between opposing parties tend to be fragile, analysts say Mexico may explore them in years ahead given their success this weekend. The parties are "certain to explore similar alliances for...gubernatorial showdowns in Nayarit, Guerrero, and Mexico State," says George W. Grayson, an expert on Mexican politics and drug trafficking, at the College of William and Mary.

The final stretch of the race was marred by some high-profile attacks which authorities attributed to organized crime. On June 28, hit men opened fire on the car of Rodolfo Torre, the PRI candidate in northern Tamaulipas state, killing the politician, members of his staff and bodyguards. On Wednesday, a severed head was found in front of the home of Hector Murguia, the PRI candidate for mayor of Ciudad Juarez who declared victory Sunday.

Violence on that scale didn't resurface on Sunday. Jorge Chabat, a drugs expert at Mexico City think-tank Center for Research and Teaching in Economics, said he doesn't think the drug gangs have an interest in disrupting elections on a large scale. Still, low voter turnout in Tamaulipas indicated the attacks did have a chilling effect on voters, Mr. Chabat said. "I don't think that was the purpose of the attack," he added.



"I think the purpose was simply to remove someone who wasn't favorable to their interests." The PRI still dominated , as the slain candidate's brother, Egidio Torre, ran in his place and won 62% of the vote.

