

Unchallenged Salinas wins Mexico's elections—by hook and by crook

by Carlos Cota Meza

Mexico's mid-term elections on Aug. 18, in which the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) received official returns of over 60% through "cybernetic fraud" and other hanky-panky, were effectively used to launder the image of the government of President Carlos Salinas de Gortari. They were also intended to serve as a supposedly incontestable chorus in favor of Salinas's policy—the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the National Solidarity Program. These two pillars of presidential policy became the sole platform of all PRI candidates, and thus it is said, including by the PRI itself, that the elections were won by President Salinas.

The elections renewed six governorships, all state legislatures, and the two houses of Congress. Salinas needed victories there to serve as a kind of referendum in favor of his government, whose economic policies are driving Mexicans deeper and deeper into poverty. The legitimacy of Salinas's Harvard-trained administration has been in question ever since the July 6, 1988 presidential election, in which Salinas claimed victory after the computer system "broke down," even as the votes mounted for a victory by opposition candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas.

Let us take a closer look at how the Salinas government managed to fabricate its image of a political steam-roller, for it is certain that Salinas managed to confirm his "legitimacy" *without a serious challenge from any rival*. Cárdenas was not a candidate for any post, and the presidency was not at stake.

Administrative fascism

The 1990 General Population Census, carried out by the national statistical institute, managed to statistically eliminate some 4 million Mexicans by unaccountably leaving the total population figure at around 81 million, despite earlier accepted projections of 85 million. At the same time, in order to validate the demographic dogma that "the population pyramid has inverted," and that the population of minors is no longer the traditional 50% of total, but now something between 38 and 39%, the government had to acknowledge that there are 45.5 million voting-age Mexicans.

Then along came the new Federal Code of Institutions and Electoral Procedures, approved by the PRI and the Na-

tional Action Party (PAN) in the congressional session just ended. The code established new electoral structures, beginning with the formulation of a new census which found that there are 39 million "politically active" Mexicans requiring new voting credentials.

Ostensibly due to lack of time, the Salinas government lamented that it had distributed credentials to only 36 million of these 39 million voters. However, unofficial estimates are that no more than 29 million voters actually received their credentials, leaving 10 million Mexicans effectively disenfranchised through a classic maneuver of administrative fascism.

Vote fraud

With these figures in hand, the operation which has come to be known as "cybernetic fraud" was launched.

The new voter credentials were produced by the multinational company Eastman Kodak, which not only printed them but, according to evidence in the hands of the opposition parties, also applied the same selective methods used by consulting firms to "streamline" personnel and operations in multinationals around the world. Curiously enough, the credentials that did not get distributed in time were those of Mexicans who had voted *against* the PRI and its presidential candidate, Salinas, in 1988.

Then, the multinational company Gallup took a poll on "pre-election preferences." The results, in round numbers, were that 60% preferred the PRI and President Salinas; 20% preferred the PAN; 10% preferred Cárdenas's PRD; and the remaining 10% went to other registered parties.

Responsibility for the official vote count on Aug. 18 was given by the Federal Election Institute and the Department of Government to yet another multinational company, IBM, which installed "a modern and complex system of computers" which produced similar results—not surprisingly—to Gallup's forecast.

The final official tally as of midnight Aug. 24 was 14,117,571 votes for the PRI, equivalent to 61.4% of the total 22,964,538 votes cast. The PAN, the only other party which won posts by majority instead of proportional representation, obtained 4,071,031 votes, representing 17.7%; the PRD took 1,898,208 votes, representing 8.26%. The rest

went to a smattering of other parties. Exit polls conducted by the opposition at more than 3,000 polling stations around the country yielded a PRI vote of 44.6%; a PAN vote of 22.1%; and a PRD vote of 19.3%.

The official figure of 61.4% which went to the PRI (always under 65%, since more than 65% would deny the PRI the right to proportional representation under the law) has to come from an easily manipulable figure. Preferably, the majority percentage would be a figure equal to or slightly less than the votes obtained by Salinas in 1988.

Of course, in addition to the more "modern" technetronic methods of fraud, the old tried-and-true methods were employed as well. Ballot boxes were robbed, polls were moved at the last minute, ballot-stuffing was commonplace, etc.

The election results were, of course, carefully crafted to conform to Salinas's imperative of recovering his "governability" mandate, meaning the two-thirds control of the Chamber of Deputies which would permit a reform of the Constitution *without* the kinds of alliances to which the PRI was driven during Salinas's first three years in office. Exemplary was the pact with the PAN to push through reprivatization of the banks, and approval of new electoral and other laws fundamental to the "Salinas model."

Thus, the PRI and Salinas won the Aug. 18 elections through outrageous abuse of the powers of state, imposing an "electoral apartheid" against the majority of Mexican citizens. Opposition figure Cárdenas charged, "We have suffered a second coup d'état, three years later."

With an absolute majority in the Chamber of Deputies of PRI legislators ready and willing to do whatever Salinas de Gortari orders, Mexico's President is ready to rule over the second half of his six-year term in office. Reform of the Foreign Investment Law and approval of a new Federal Labor Law, both with an eye to Mexico's annexation by the United States under NAFTA, have been made ready.

With the PRI's ready and willing majority, federal budgets will no longer be debated, nor will government be forced to offer embarrassed defenses of its policy of dismantling the state sector of the economy and of paying the foreign debt with the people's hunger. Indeed, with the PRI's ready and willing majority, it is rumored that a possible reform of the Constitution will permit presidential reelection, retroactive, naturally, to the Salinas government.

Limits to tyranny

Governments must face the necessity of reproducing themselves, or of being annihilated by their incapacity to do so. Limits to such self-reproduction can be seen in the collapse of economic programs they implement, or in outbreaks of social discontent—or both.

In 1988, the opposition vote was 49.2% distributed between two options apart from the PRI, one headed by Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and the other by Manuel J. Clouthier, the PAN's presidential candidate, who died shortly afterward in

a car accident.

The cause of this anti-PRI vote was undeniable. Unemployment had grown as never before in the history of modern Mexico; the "informal" economy was devouring women and children in search of basic sustenance; wages had fallen to less than half of their 1980 value; agricultural production was a disaster; budget cutbacks plunged 40% of Mexicans into poverty; more than 50% of the federal budget was being allocated to payment of the debt.

But these conditions still exist, and it is highly unlikely that Mexicans have suddenly changed their minds in favor of the PRI. On the contrary, in some states of the republic where local representatives were chosen, the likely true direction of the 1994 general elections was revealed.

For example, in San Luis Potosí, the winner of the gubernatorial election was Salvador Nava, backed by a coalition of the PAN, PRD, and the Mexican Democratic Party (PDM). Nonetheless, PRI candidate Fausto Zapata was formally declared the winner. Through the offices of the federal Attorney General, the government had negotiated with the Nava movement to prevent an explosion of generalized violence.

In Guanajuato, PAN gubernatorial candidate Vicente Fox also won, but victory was given to PRI candidate Ramón Aguirre. The electoral environment there is very tense, although it is rumored that the national leadership of the PAN traded the gubernatorial candidacy for the senatorial post of Baja California, where the PAN governs. In Sonora, the PRI gubernatorial candidate won by a landslide, but street disturbances occurred in the cities of Guaymas, Puerto Peñasco, and San Luis Río Colorado, where the PAN candidates to their respective mayoral posts claimed victory and charged fraud.

In Campeche, the gubernatorial candidate for the Authentic Party of the Mexican Revolution (PARM) insisted that there were sufficient anomalies in the election to warrant their annulment. In Michoacán, Cárdenas's stronghold, the PRI claimed victory despite its devastating defeat in 1988, which left it without congressmen or senators. The most recent assassination of an opposition figure in that state took place Aug. 25, when the PRD mayor of Vista Hermoso was shot to death.

In Hidalgo, discontent is growing, and not for electoral reasons. The negligence of both the federal and local governments in combatting the spreading cholera epidemic there has the population on the verge of revolution. In Tamaulipas, not only the opposition parties but various economic layers are demanding the elimination of local government due to its incapacity, or refusal, to fight the drug trade plaguing the region.

These are a few of the elements which will pave the way during the next three years to general elections in which the presidency of the republic will be up for grabs. The PRI government's "steam-roller" victory of Aug. 18 will, by then, be a distant memory.