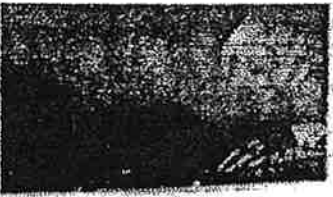


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25 Sections

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Medrano family linked to vote fraud

Phony ballots, misconduct uncovered in Oak Lawn precinct

First of two parts

By Mark Edgar

Staff Writer

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■ Medrano family profile. 25A

Illegal voting — rooted in forged registrations, phony absentee ballots, negligent election judges and "ghost votes" by people who have never lived in the precinct — flourishes in a Dallas neighborhood controlled by the politically potent Medrano family.

The bogus voters, violating Texas residency requirements and other state election laws, have been

solicited at times by former Dallas school board member Robert Medrano and other relatives in the heavily Democratic Precinct 3303 in Oak Lawn, said several voters in that precinct.

A canvass by *The Dallas Morning News* found that one of every four votes — 25 percent of the total — cast in Precinct 3303 in Medrano's last school board race were

fraudulent. Medrano lost the April 1987 runoff, but overwhelmingly carried his home precinct 169-54.

A review of registration and voting rolls for the March 8 Super Tuesday presidential primary in Texas revealed similar irregularities in Precinct 3303, but not on as wide a scale as in Medrano's failed re-election bid. About 1 in 10 votes in the primary in that precinct were illegal, according to *The News'*

investigation.

The pattern of vote fraud has for years gone unchecked and unreported by the precinct's election judges, who are either Medrano family members or have close personal or business ties to the family.

The Medranos directly involved in the elections declined to be interviewed or could not be reached for comment. The presiding election judge in the

precinct last year said he was not aware of any irregularities.

But according to former campaign opponents, Democratic Party activists and precinct residents, the systematic theft of votes has been an integral and accepted part of politics in Precinct 3303.

However, they said, no one has ever complained to election authorities for fear of alienating the Medrano family and the large

bloc of votes it commands — enough to swing tight races.

"It's common knowledge within both parties," said Frank Hernandez, a Dallas lawyer and former City Council candidate. But, he said, party officials have been "afraid to cross the Medranos. It was to their benefit. If they can get those votes, they get them. They don't care if it's an illegal vote. They want the votes."

Precinct 3303, a working-class slice of Oak Lawn between Maple

Please see VOTE on Page 24A.

11 A FRAUD IN PRECINCT 3303

Vote fraud uncovered in Oak Lawn precinct

Continued from Page 1A

Avenue and Harry Hines Boulevard has long been the political stronghold of retired union organizer Francisco "Pancho" Medrano, a Democratic Party stalwart.

His sons include Robert, the former school board trustee, and Ricardo, a one-time Dallas City Council member. Two other sons, Frank Jr. and Rolando, have been unsuccessful candidates for the City-Community and the Dallas County Community College District, respectively.

Medrano's daughter, Pauline, a marketing specialist for the Texas Department of Agriculture, is the Democratic chairwoman in Precinct 3303 and was that party's election judge on Super Tuesday.

She also served as Robert Medrano's campaign treasurer in his April 1987 school-board race. Mrs. Medrano's boyfriend, Ricardo S. Amalia, was presiding election judge in that precinct in the April election.

Amalia, a legal assistant in the law office of state Rep. Al Granoff, is registered at the same address in Precinct 3303 as Mrs. Medrano, according to Dallas County rolls. Property records show that in 1985, the couple bought a house in Oak Cliff, in a different voting precinct.

The News, which examined ballots by registered voters at several dozen homes in Precinct 3303, documented an entrenched and incestuous system of rigging and incursions including:

- False registrations: County registration records list voters at addresses at which they do not actually live. Virtually all the multiple registrations, some showing eight to 13 people in small one- and two-bedroom homes, are at houses owned by the Medranos.

- Another cluster of voters is registered at a vacant lot.
- Forged registration and absentee ballot applications: Mrs. Gonzalez said of the county's roster that it indicates she voted. "That's pretty stupid if they're doing something like that."

Mrs. Gonzalez said she couldn't recall the last time she went to the polls. "I didn't even vote (in April)," she said. "I sure didn't and if I would of, I wouldn't have voted for him (Robert Medrano) anyway."

She said the house on Douglas Avenue is not large enough to accommodate the 13 people who are reflected on the precinct's voter list as living at that address.

Some of the illegal voters in Precinct 3303 acknowledged that they did not change their registration address when they moved, specifically, they said, so they could continue to cast ballots in that precinct.

Under Texas election law, residency generally is defined as "one's home and fixed place of habitation." A person cannot claim residency in a place if "he has come and for temporary purposes only and without the intention of making that place his home."

Voters who move, even within the same precinct, must notify election authorities within 90 days or face possible revocation of their registration, according to Bruce Sherbet, administrator of the county Elections Department.

Several "ghost voters" are registered at Robert Medrano's residence at 2335 Knight St. Seven people were registered at the 1,456-square-foot, one-bath house for the April 1987 election, including Paul and Minerva Sauseda, who said in an interview they have never lived there.

"No, we just kept on running over there to vote," said Mrs. Sauseda, who has lived for more than 10 years at Burbank Street, which is in a different precinct. The Sausedas' registrations on Knight Street are still current, and according to county records, both cast ballots in

Elections Department records. Two of those listed as having voted, Rose Marie Rodriguez and her brother, Francisco Rodriguez Jr., have never lived at that address, said Mrs. Rodriguez, who is Frank Medrano Jr.'s niece.

Mrs. Rodriguez, who has lived the past five years in Richardson, said she voted for Robert Medrano in a previous school election, but said she didn't vote last year. County records show, however, that absentee ballots were cast in her name and in her brother's name in both the regular election and runoff.

Mrs. Rodriguez said she and her brother, who lives in Balch Springs, registered to vote several years ago at the behest of Frank Medrano Jr., who told them to use the Douglas Avenue address on their applications.

She recalled that her uncle said "he wanted us to help his brother win the election. I thought it was a good idea then. I don't know how I feel now. I didn't even know I was still registered. And I didn't know people were still voting in my name."

Making a false statement on a registration application or inducing another person to do so is a misdemeanor under the Texas Election Code, punishable by a maximum of six months in county jail and/or a \$1,000 fine.

Several attempts by The News to reach Frank Medrano Jr. were unsuccessful. Mrs. Rodriguez was not the only Medrano niece registered at that house whose vote was cast without her knowledge.

County records show a vote was recorded in person in the name Dolores Gonzalez in the regular election April 4. But Ms. Gonzalez, contacted at her home in Oak Cliff, said she has never lived on Douglas Avenue and did not vote last year. She, too, identified Frank Medrano Jr. as her uncle.

"Somebody is using my name," Mrs. Gonzalez said of the county's roster that indicates she voted. "That's pretty stupid if they're doing something like that."

Mrs. Gonzalez said she couldn't recall the last time she went to the polls. "I didn't even vote (in April)," she said. "I sure didn't and if I would of, I wouldn't have voted for him (Robert Medrano) anyway."

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INELIGIBLE VOTERS, WRITTEN IN

Virginia Medrano and Guillermo Mota were allowed to vote in the April 1987 elections after being written in on the official voter list of Precinct 3303. But neither was a registered voter, according to Dallas County records.

OFFICIAL VOTER LIST - ELECTION COPY

PRECINCT NO. 3303	SEX	RESIDENCE ADDRESS	TOWN ZIP	DOB/AGE	VO
1277830	M	MCCREE CHARLOTTE DARLENE F 5529 MAPLE AVE #D	219	09-14-58	
1630630	F	MCCREE CHARLOTTE DARLENE F 5529 MAPLE AVE #D	219	03-28-60	
91822	M	HERBERT-LOIS M F 3615 OAKLAWN	219	09-16-03	
69194	F	HERBATHOR MONA R F 4525 SYLVESTER #133	219	06-01-54	
1630631	F	MEDRANO VIRGINIA F 2336 DOUGLAS	219	07-15-1911	
"W" = RETAINED VOTER CERTIFICATE XI					
MAYOR GUILLERMO MOTA 2302 VIGORDELON 370707					

Votes from a vacant lot

The lot at 4244 Sylvester St. lies vacant, covered in shaggy grass and weeds. But eight people on the county's election rolls in April 1987 claimed the lot as their home, and seven of them voted that month.

The elections were almost four months after the house at 4244 Sylvester St. had been torn down. Before it was demolished in mid-December 1986, its owner, Armando H. Rodriguez, said he lived alone in the one-bedroom home. Three of the registered voters, he said, are his children, but they hadn't lived in the house for several years.



The four other people registered at the address, all of whom own absentee ballots in the regular and runoff elections, have never lived there, Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez, who owns an apartment in a different Oak Lawn precinct, said he voted last April in Precinct 3303, but said he didn't know he had to re-register after moving.

Two of those registered at the lot, Paul and Minnie Sauseda, apparently don't exist despite absentee votes cast in their names in the regular and runoff elections. Their names are similar to Paul and Minerva Sauseda, registered at 2335 Knight St., who both voted in person in the runoff.

Mrs. Sauseda said she could not explain the near-identical registrations on Sylvester Street.

The Sausedas on Sylvester Street did not give their dates of birth, Social Security numbers or phone numbers on their registration applications. The Texas Department of Public Safety had no listing for data on licenses in these names at that address, either, but did show the Sausedas as living on Knight Street.

"It's worth coincidental," said Sherbet, of the Elections Department. "In some Medrano-owned homes, the entire roster of registered voters appears bogus."

A 243 Knight St. owned by Medrano Properties Ltd., Elena Cantu said she and her husband and three children have lived at the two-bedroom home three years. But she said she has never heard of the three voters registered there — Lorenzo de Anda Jr., Oralia T. Garcia and Juan Vasquez.

"Maybe they lived here before but when we moved in, the house was empty," said Mrs. Cantu.

Medrano Properties is a limited partnership headed by Pancho Medrano. The partnership includes all of Medrano's children except Robert, according to state records.

Pancho Medrano's home at 2946 Douglas Ave. is listed as the address for 11 registered voters, including Ricardo S. Amalia, the precinct's election judge in the April election. Medrano could not be reached for comment. But in a 1989 *D Magazine* article he acknowledged that multiple registrations exist in his home precinct.

His explanation, according to the story, "is that all of the people who are registered to vote at his address are 'family,' cousins or in-laws who use the Medrano houses as their legal addresses."

"They don't vote more than once," he told the magazine.

Phony ballots

Veronica Lee Scallion, a 28-year-old Dallas Area Rapid Transit employee, said she has never lived in Precinct 3303. She first registered in 1983 in Precinct 3325 at her mother's home on Harding Street in South Dallas, she said.

But one month before the April 1987 elections in Dallas, her registration was changed without her knowledge to Precinct 3303, she said in an interview.

And, according to the county rolls, votes were recorded in person in her name in both the regular and runoff elections. Ms. Scallion said she didn't cast those votes.

"I've never lived there. I didn't even know I was at that address," Mrs. Scallion said. "I don't think it's right."

An apparent forgery of Ms. Scallion's signature was used on a fraudulent voter registration application that included other written responses that didn't match her initial 1983 registration.

Six voters are registered at the same house, 2331 Douglas Ave., which, according to county records, is owned by Pauline Medrano and her brother Rolando. Rolando said that Ms. Scallion used to live there but that he couldn't remember when.

Maria Jesa Garcia, 75, was another whose name was used to cast a phony ballot at that address.

Mrs. Garcia, who lives in another precinct on Polk Street in Oak Cliff, said she moved from 2331 Douglas Ave. four years ago. But county records list her as a registered voter in Precinct 3303, where a vote was recorded in her name in the runoff.

"I didn't vote last year because I was very sick" and was unable to leave her house, she said. "It's been a long time since I voted."

Also registered at that house is Lorna Gay Miller, one of four election judges who supervised the polls at Precinct 3303 last year.

Mrs. Miller said she has lived on Douglas Avenue about four years, but she declined to discuss the election.

"I don't know anything about anybody" else who lives at the house, she said.

Please see ILLUSAL on Page 28A.

The Dallas Morning News

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2 with Medrano ties left off list

Democrats omit 2 who served in past from election judge slate

By Carol Trujillo
Staff writer

The Dallas County Democratic Party has recommended against reappointing two election judges in Precinct 3303, home base of the politically active Medrano family and focus of a criminal investigation into voter fraud.

Ricardo Amalla and his girlfriend, Pauline Medrano, were omitted from a list of candidates for election judges that has been submitted to the Dallas County Elections Department, Democratic Party executive director Richard Cox said Thursday.

"I hope this will remove any doubt in people's minds" about the integrity of future elections in the heavily Democratic precinct, Cox said.

Dallas County commissioners are expected to approve the list of 500 Democratic and Republican candidates for election judges and alternates on Monday, said Ida

Adams, who oversees county election judges and absentee ballots.

The election judges will supervise voting in precincts in the November presidential election.

Ms. Medrano, longtime chairwoman of the precinct her family has dominated politically for decades, could not be reached Thursday for comment.

But Amalla, who served as election judge in Precinct 3303 in 1982, 1983 and 1987, said: "I wasn't disappointed. It didn't bother me a bit. It ... (gives) me a day to work."

The Dallas Morning News in May documented allegations of widespread vote fraud in the Oak Lawn precinct. Based on interviews with voters and an examination of voter rolls, *The News* found that about 25 percent of the votes cast in Precinct 3303 in a runoff election involving Robert Medrano were fraudulent. Medrano lost that 1987 bid for reelection to the Dallas school board.

As a result of *The News'* findings, the Dallas County district attorney's office is conducting a criminal investigation. The county Elections Department also is reviewing voter registrations and developing reforms that will penalize dishonest election judges and improve voter registration and absentee ballot procedures.

To replace Ms. Medrano and Amalla, the Democratic party recommended Joe Colunga, a longtime resident of the precinct. The Dallas County Republican Party recommended Gregory Craig as an alternate election judge in the precinct.

Though she was not recommended as a precinct judge, Ms. Medrano will continue to serve as precinct chairwoman, which is an elected position, Cox said.

"The only way you can remove someone as a precinct chair is if that person comes out in public support of a Republican candidate," Cox said. "It's frustrating."

Medranos oversaw balloting 3 served as clerks amid fraud probe

By Mark Edgar

Staff writer of *The Dallas Morning News*

Only months after Dallas County launched a vote fraud investigation against the politically powerful Medrano clan, a Democratic election judge picked three members of that family to help preside at the polls in the Medranos' home precinct in November, records show.

The Election Day clerks named by first-time judge Joe D. Colunga included Virginia Medrano Coronado, who apparently voted illegally in the Texas presidential primary in March despite a revoked registration. *The Dallas Morning News* has found.

In addition, both the Democratic and Republican judges in the Medranos' Oak Lawn precinct ignored the county Election Board's request for affidavits showing that they checked precinct registration lists for irregularities, election officials said Thursday.

Officials said they had received no indication of abuses in that precinct during the most recent elections.

Colunga, a neighbor and longtime acquaintance of the Medranos, said in an interview that he was not aware of the allegations of previous voting abuses in Precinct 3303 that are being investigated by the Dallas County district attorney.

Tom James, county Republican chairman and an Election Board member, said the use of Medrano relatives as election clerks last month raises questions about whether Precinct 3303 officials are serious about following the county's lead in trying to clean up alleged voting abuses.

"It indicates a total insensitivity to the

Targets of vote-fraud probe oversaw election

Continued from Page 33A.

public demand for an end to voter fraud in all our elections," James said. "If anything, the judges should go to extra lengths to avoid the appearance of impropriety."

Dallas County Democratic chairman Sandy Kress, who also serves on the Election Board, agreed that Colunga should have picked a "more diverse" group of clerks. Kress called Mrs. Coronado's selection a "mistake."

"Colunga could have used better judgment. No question about it," Kress said.

The Democratic Party named Colunga election judge in Precinct 3303 this fall, replacing party activist Pauline Medrano.

The change came after *The Dallas Morning News* found a pattern of vote fraud in Precinct 3303 that had gone unreported by its election judges, who either were Medrano family members or had close personal or business ties to the family.

About 25 percent of the votes cast in that precinct in Robert Medrano's school board runoff election in April 1987 were fraudulent, based on interviews with voters and reviews of public documents used to establish residency.

Medrano, a school board member since 1974 who lives in the precinct, lost the non-partisan runoff to Rene Castilla.

Medrano is Pauline Medrano's brother.

A review by *The News* of the state's March 8 presidential primary found that about one in 10 votes in the precinct were illegal.

Some of the bogus voters had been solicited by Medrano and other relatives who live in the neighborhood, said several voters in the precinct.

Precinct 3303 is bounded by the Dallas North Tollway, Maple Avenue, Inwood Road and Harry Hines

Boulevard.

Colunga said that one of the Medranos — he couldn't remember who — approached him about being an election judge for the Nov. 8 election. Colunga then picked three Medrano family members to assist him because, he said, they were familiar with election procedures.

His clerks, who did not need to be approved by the county party, were former City Council member Richard Medrano, Angela Medrano and Mrs. Coronado.

They are members of the politically active family headed by patriarch Francisco "Pancho" Medrano, a former union organizer and longtime Democratic Party stalwart.

The election judge and clerks supervise the polls, and their duties include challenging apparently illegitimate voters.

The News reported in May that the precinct's previous election judges improperly allowed Mrs. Coronado to vote in the municipal elections in April 1987 and the presidential primary in March even though the county revoked her registration in March 1986.

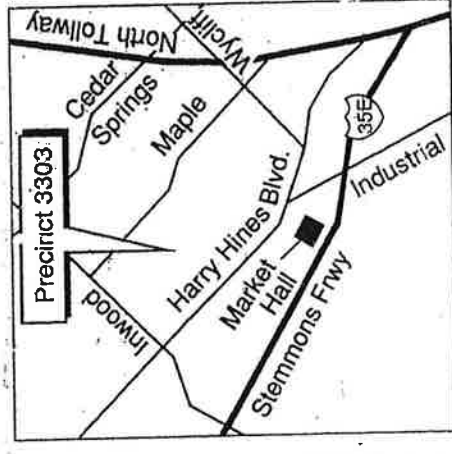
County records show that she registered in June before being picked by Colunga.

Mrs. Coronado could not be reached for comment.

Richard and Angela Medrano did not return phone calls seeking

Kress said he knew of no reason that those two individuals should not be allowed to work the election. "I don't know that all the relations, everybody affiliated with or related to the people who were involved in the process in the past ought to be automatically excluded. I don't know that that's completely fair," he said.

After *The News'* reports, the district attorney's office targeted several suspicious voters in Precinct



The Dallas Morning News

3303, and the Election Board adopted a series of reforms. The board is composed of James, Kress, Sheriff Jim Bowles, County Judge Lee Jackson and Elections Administrator Bruce Sherbet.

A key measure included a declaration that all precinct officials sign an affidavit stating that they scoured their county-supplied registration lists for bogus voters.

Neither Colunga nor the Republican election judge, Gregory Craig, returned the affidavits, according to county Election Department records.

Craig said he resigned as judge when he moved from the heavily Democratic precinct in early October.

County records show that no Republican judged worked that precinct in the November election.

Colunga said in the interview that he returned the affidavit to the county, but said he couldn't remember when he sent it and couldn't remember what he found in his review of the precinct voter rolls.

Colunga, who had never served as an election judge, said he was not aware of possible irregularities in Precinct 3303 being checked by the county, and he said the Medranos did not tell him.

"I didn't follow it that closely," he said.

Asked whether he would have appointed Medranos as his clerks if he had known of vote fraud allegations against the family, Colunga said, "Well, I don't know, probably not."

Please see TARGETS on Page 34A.