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## THIEU SAYS VOTING SHOWS DEMOCRACY

But There Is Skepticism on the Sweeping Results

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Oct. 4—President Nguyen Van Thieu said today that his victory in the one-man presidential election yesterday was a clear example of democracy in action.

However, official figures reporting massive support for the President even in areas of known opposition strength were greeted with skepticism, not only by Mr. Thieu's opponents but by diplomats and observers and, privately, by some American officials. Government spokesmen insisted that the announced results—91.5 per cent for Mr. Thieu—were accurate.

In a statement Mr. Thieu praised the "political consciousness of the people," thank them for the largest reported voter turnout in recent Vietnamese history and applauded their decision to fulfill "their civil rights in a free and democratic nation." He added that the communists had failed completely, in plans prepared a year ago, to disrupt the election.

Shortly after his statement the military command announced the heaviest series of Communist attacks in 18 months—92 shellings of and ground attacks on Government positions from dawn yesterday until dawn today. Casualties were said to have been light.

The intensified enemy activity fell short of keeping Vietnamese from voting, judging from the returns, which showed that 87.7 per cent of the more than seven million eligible voters went to the polls—a greater turnout than in the lower house election in August, the Senate race last year and the 11-candidate presidential contest four years ago.

### Confusing on Unknown

Mr. Thieu, as the only candidate—it is believed that he had hoped for one opponent but was upset by the prospect of two—regarded a vote for him as a vote of confidence. The other choice, confusing to many voters and unknown to others, was to render the ballot invalid by mutilating it or throwing it away before the voting envelope was dropped into the ballot box.

According to the official returns, 353,000, or 5.5 per cent of the 6,311,853 voters chose to cast invalid ballots. Officials said they are looking into what had happened to the 3 per cent of the vote unaccounted for.

"With all those high percentages, about the only thing you can be sure of is the number of eligible voters," a diplomat commented. "The high turnout and confidence votes in some rural areas may have been close to accurate, but those for such anti-Thieu places as Saigon, Hue and Danang are fantastic."

By claiming public support of over 90 per cent, some observers said, Mr. Thieu hopes to offset the widely held view that victory in an unopposed election has undermined his legitimacy for the next four years. He also hopes to demonstrate the failure of opposition attempts to persuade anti-Government voters to boycott the election.

Those who accepted the Government figures as accurate or nearly accurate noted that the returns were less a reflection of public sentiment on the President than a demonstration of the efficiency of his administrative and military apparatus and the fear of it.

The procedures for voting against Mr. Thieu were not widely publicized, and in many rural areas pressure was clearly exerted by the President's appointed officials to get out the vote.

President Thieu has said he is more popular in the countryside than in the slum-ridden cities. This is generally believed to be true, so there is less inclination to question the accuracy of the reports from many of the provinces.

But the province chiefs, who are beholden to Mr. Thieu, often distinguish themselves by overzealousness, and as full colonels they await his post-election decision on promotions.

### A Vanishing Opposition

In at least two provinces where the opposition had displayed power, Bac Lieu and Vinhbinh, the returns showed confidence votes of 99 per cent and 96 per cent respectively. Last week the Supreme Court called for the ouster of the chiefs there because they had interfered with court inquiries into rigging of the lower house election.

The announced returns for Saigon, where the opposition has been active, were particularly surprising: a confidence vote of 83 per cent and a turnout of 76.5, as against 59 per cent in the hotly contested house election.

Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky, who withdrew from the presidential race with charges of rigging, reacted to the returns in a statement on behalf of the newly formed Peoples Force Against Dictatorship. The group accused Mr. Thieu of "treading underfoot all the righteous aspirations of the people" and called the results "prefabricated by Mr. Thieu himself and for himself."

There was no comment from Gen. Duong Van Minh, the other potential challenger, who had also pulled out. Neither the general nor Mr. Ky, whose term as Vice President expires Oct. 31, went to the polls.