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## Bipartisanship Imposed in Nicaragua

by LADB Staff

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Just weeks before the Nov. 7 municipal elections, polls anticipate the vote will once again be a duel between Nicaragua's two biggest political organizations, the Frente Sandinista para la Liberacion Nacional (FSLN) and the Partido Liberal Constitucionalista (PLC). The Sandinistas are euphoric and predict they will snatch from the PLC the 80 mayoralties in the latter's hands. In 2000, the FSLN obtained a victory in 52 of 152 mayor's offices, including 11 of 17 that head up departments.

The PLC, meanwhile, defends its position, asserting that its party is the most representative and democratic. Nevertheless, critics like Ana Quiroz, representative of the Federacion de Organismos No Gubernamentales de Nicaragua, which groups 350 organizations, said candidates' campaigns have centered on their image and not on programs for municipal government. She charged that they lack strategies to deal with specific issues like the problems of children and adolescents, the increase of citizen participation, and tourism as a form of municipal economic development. "These issues are big absences," Quiroz said. The results of the latest polls, although contradictory, agree that the municipal elections will be very close, especially in Managua.

A poll by CID Gallup in mid-August foresaw a victory in Managua for PLC candidate Pedro Joaquin Chamorro Barrios son of former President Violeta Chamorro (1990-1997) with 35%, followed closely by Sandinista candidate Dionisio Marengo, with 30%. Meanwhile, the candidate of the ruling Alianza por la Republica (APRE), Alejandro Fiallos, would obtain 11% and Eden Pastora of the Partido Liberal Independiente (PLI), 8%. Nine other candidates of smaller parties are also in the race for Managua mayor's office. Nevertheless, a poll carried out in late August by the National Engineering University and Canal 10 television showed Marengo would be the victor with 34.3% of the vote, the PLC would come in second with 30%, Fiallos would garner 5.8%, and Pastora, 4.2%. Pastora said publicly that he was satisfied with the polls because his party still has not begun its campaign and "to have 4% or 5% in a poll without campaigning is marvelous."

Some political analysts say the results of the municipal elections depending on the number of mayoralties it wins could signify the first step for the return of the FSLN to power in 2006. One of the factors identified in the Sandinistas' possible return is the weakening of the PLC the main rival of Sandinismo caused by the imprisonment of its leader, former President Arnoldo Aleman (1997-2002). This time, the FSLN's strategy to win the highest number of mayoralties is to present non-Sandinista candidates within the Convergencia Nacional, an alliance of center and rightist parties, in those municipalities in which the Sandinistas were defeated in 2000 and to maintain its own candidates in those places where it feels sure of victory.

Meanwhile, Chamorro Barrios said that these elections would be an exemplary process in which calm would reign. "The candidates are going to give a show of civic duty in Nicaragua, and they will set a very important electoral precedent for the 2006 elections, developing a clean, positive, inclusive and nonconfrontational campaign," he said. "The election will have to be won in the countryside and on the street."

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