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## Report On Panamanian Opposition

*by Deborah Tyroler*

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Panama's political opposition believes that Gen. Manuel Antonio Noriega can survive the collapse of the national economy. According to some economists, since the crisis began about 18 months ago the Panamanian economy has contracted by 40%. As reported by the New York Times, a poll taken in mid- November indicated that two out of three voters blame Noriega for the crisis, thereby contradicting the view that the general has gained popularity by portraying himself as a nationalist hero resisting US imperialism. Only 8% of the respondents said the US or the opposition was mainly responsible for the crisis. A total of 54% of the respondents said they would not vote for Noriega if he ran in the presidential elections scheduled for May, the highest negative rating of any of 25 potential candidates. Some opposition parties have agreed to unite in the presidential elections and are attempting to decide upon a single candidate. Meanwhile, the opposition is divided, with several parties arguing that their leader become the presidential candidate. In a series of recent meetings, other parties have been arguing against participating in the elections, saying that it is impossible to campaign unless freedom of the press and other liberties are observed. (Basic data from New York Times, 01/16/89)

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