8-15-1989

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Brazil: Background Notes On Fernando Collor De Mello, Leading Presidential Candidate

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Category/Department: General
Published: Tuesday, August 15, 1989

As of July 31, 36 parties were fielding 27 presidential candidate for the Nov. 15 elections. Conservative Fernando Collor de Mello is currently leading in the polls, with up to 42% of respondents' support. Selected aspects of Collor's background and campaign themes are summarized below.

* Collor is a native of the northeastern state of Alagoas, Brazil's third smallest state. Scion of a wealthy family, he was raised in Rio de Janeiro.
* Collor's maternal grandfather, Lindolfo Collor, served as labor minister and was one of the chief ideologues for populist president Getulio Vargas. His father, Arnon Mello, was the heir of an Alagoan sugar cane baron.
* Collor was appointed mayor of Maceio, capital of Alagoas state, during the military regime. In 1982, he was elected to the federal Chamber of Deputies. In 1986, he was elected governor of Alagoas, on the ticket of his National Reconstruction Party.
* In 1984, when millions of Brazilians took to the streets to demand an end to military rule, Collor supported the presidential candidate running on the ticket of the Social Democratic Party, the military regime's party. Opposition challenger Tancredo Neves won in the electoral college vote only to die before taking office. Collor justified his decision on grounds of "party loyalty." * In contrast to his recent calls for slashed government budgets and work forces, as mayor he provided city jobs for 6,000 in a municipality of under 500,000 people. His term as deputy was marked largely by his absences. As governor, he tackled the state's sugar barons and eliminated many state jobs. Collor's reputation was made by attacking the "maharajas" an elite caste of state employees receiving large salaries. He held up their salaries, and dismissed many from their jobs. The affected persons went to courts, and Collor's austerity orders were reversed. However, his campaign was well-received by residents of Alagoas state, and throughout Brazil. Collor took his campaign and his complaints to the media. He used the umbrella of three small parties to convene a nationwide network of radio and television.
* Collor's campaign platform is at best sketchy. He has spoken in favor of reducing the size of government and the public deficit. To "facilitate" foreign debt reduction, he said he would withdraw government guarantees on Brazil's $112 billion debt, thereby "decentralizing" talks with creditors. Some economists argue that such a strategy would weaken Brazil's leverage, "atomizing" debt negotiation into myriad deals between individual debtor companies and lenders.

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