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Major Parties Nominate Candidates for Mexico City Mayoral Election in July

by LADB Staff

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In early March, the opposition National Action Party (PAN) and the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) each nominated former party leaders to represent their organizations in the first-ever mayoral election in Mexico City, scheduled for July 6 of this year. In obtaining their party's nominations, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the PRD and Carlos Castillo Peraza of the PAN won their respective contests by almost 3-1 margins over their opponents. Cardenas a former Michoacan state governor and presidential candidate handily defeated former federal senator Porfirio Munoz Ledo. Cardenas took almost 70% of the votes cast by 90,000 PRD members at 400 polling places throughout Mexico City.

Castillo, a former PAN president, won the nomination over Jose Francisco Paoli Bolio, a member of the Mexico City legislature (Asamblea Legislativa del Distrito Federal, ALDF). Castillo received 74.5% of the support from 1,600 voting party delegates. Cardenas and Castillo Peraza will face Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) candidate Alfredo del Mazo in the election. Del Mazo, a former Mexico state governor, easily won the PRI nomination in February, defeating Mexico City attorney general Jose Antonio Gonzalez Fernandez and ALDF president Manuel Jimenez Guzman (see SourceMex, 02/19/97).

The campaign for the PRD nomination was sometimes bitter despite occasional statements by both candidates that they desired party unity. Cardenas and Munoz Ledo, both of whom have served as a party president, are among the founders of the PRD. The concern about divisions was magnified by Munoz Ledo's absence from Cardenas's victory speech late on March 2. PRD president Manuel Lopez Obrador said he expected Munoz Ledo to eventually endorse Cardenas. PAN candidate Castillo Peraza lacks name recognition The PAN contest was less acrimonious, with Paoli immediately endorsing Castillo Peraza. However, both PAN candidates were considered rather weak, as evidenced in recent public opinion surveys.

Despite earlier polls showing support for the PAN as a party, candidate Castillo Peraza appears to have very little support among potential voters in Mexico City. In fact, a survey conducted by Gabinete de Estudios de Opinion showed Castillo with only 12% support from respondents. The survey, commissioned by the daily business newspaper El Economista, showed that 19.8% of respondents supported Del Mazo, while 19.3% backed Cardenas. Roughly 7.3% of respondents favored Munoz Ledo and 4.3% threw their support to Paoli.

In contrast, an earlier survey conducted by the Centro de Estudios de Opinion asked prospective voters in Mexico City to name which party they would support. Roughly 42% of the respondents said they would support the PAN, while 23.5% said they would cast their votes for the PRI, and 17.5% for the PRD. The three major parties are also expected to reach agreement on organizing debates among Castillo, Del Mazo, and Cardenas, although none had been scheduled as of early

March. Cardenas and Del Mazo have already gained major endorsements from influential groups. The Mexico City chapter of the debtors right organization Asamblea Nacional de Deudores de la Banca, commonly known as El Barzon, announced plans to vote for the PRD candidate. In fact, El Barzon made an early endorsement during the PRD primary, choosing Cardenas over Munoz Ledo. PRD candidate Cardenas needs vote from independents The weekly magazine Proceso suggests that the PRD must gain strong support from a large percentage of independent voters, since only about 13% of the registered voters in the capital claim PRD affiliation. "The winner of this election must gain 36% to 38% of the vote," said Proceso.

Cardenas could win over a large percentage of independent voters as he did in the 1988 election. Officially, PRI candidate Carlos Salinas de Gortari won a plurality of the votes cast at the national level. However, in that election Cardenas obtained 32% of the popular vote nationwide, including a large percentage in Mexico City. On the other hand, the PRD candidate received only 17% of the popular vote in the 1994 presidential elections.

Meanwhile, Del Mazo enjoys support among groups that have traditionally backed the PRI machinery, including the influential workers confederation (Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico, CTM). Strong participation from voters affiliated with the CTM and other groups could make a major difference in the final outcome of the election, especially if independent voters stay home.

Local elections also scheduled in nine other states

While the upcoming races for Mexico City mayor, for the capital city's legislature, and for the federal Chamber of Deputies are expected to gain most of the attention of the national media, gubernatorial and/or local elections have also been scheduled in nine other states this year. On March 16, voters in Morelos state will be electing representatives to the state legislature and mayors in 33 communities.

On July 6, voters in Nuevo Leon, Campeche, San Luis Potosi, Sonora, Queretaro, and Colima states will also be electing governors and state and local legislators. Finally, elections have been scheduled for mayoral seats and state legislatures in Veracruz, Jalisco, and Tabasco states during November. (Sources: Proceso, 03/02/97; La Jornada, Los Angeles Times, El Economista, El Universal, 03/03/97; Novedades, Excelsior, 03/03/97, 03/05/97; The News, 02/27/97, 03/03-05/97)

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