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## **Growing Crime Rate Becomes Key Issue in Tightening Race For Mexico City Mayor**

by LADB Staff

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According to recent public-opinion polls, Alfredo del Mazo of the governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) appears to have gained ground against rivals Cuauhtemoc Cardenas and Carlos Castillo Peraza in the upcoming election for mayor of Mexico City on July 6. Del Mazo has focused his campaign on the crime issue, which may have propelled the PRI candidate into a statistical dead heat with Cardenas and Castillo.

One public-opinion poll, conducted by Gabinete de Estudios de Opinion (GEO) in late March, showed 22% support for Del Mazo, followed by 21% for Cardenas of the Democratic Revolution Party (PRD) and 18% for Castillo of the National Action Party (PAN). The poll, commissioned by the daily newspapers El Economista of Mexico City and Diario de Monterrey, was based on a survey of 400 potential voters in the capital. An earlier poll conducted by GEO in early March showed Cardenas with 23.3% support, followed by only 14.8% for Del Mazo, and 12.5% for Castillo (see SourceMex, 03/19/97). On the other hand, a separate poll conducted by Centro de Estudios de Opinion (CEO) in mid-March showed Cardenas with a commanding lead of almost 35%, compared with 18% for Del Mazo and 16.3% for Castillo. The CEO is based at Universidad de Guadalajara.

Del Mazo who has focused to a greater extent on the crime issue than rivals Cardenas and Castillo appears to have struck a familiar chord with Mexico City residents. "We are going to rid the streets of crime and corruption," Del Mazo promised during a campaign stop in mid- April. Cardenas has also openly proposed solutions to the crime wave in the capital, but only as part of his overall campaign, which has also focused on unemployment and on the environment. Among other things, Cardenas has proposed redeploying police officers to high-crime areas around the city. A recent study released by the public-safety committee of the Mexico City legislative assembly (ALDF) shows the number of holdups reported on the streets of Mexico City has increased by 300% since 1989, while automobile thefts have increased by 200%.

### ***Use of military personnel in police force stirs controversy***

Because of the increased crime rate, President Ernesto Zedillo's administration which still controls most decisions in Mexico City has appointed army Gen. Enrique Salgado Cordero to head the police force in the Mexican capital. In turn, Salgado's appointment to the post has attracted protests from members of opposition parties. For example, ALDF member Arturo Saenz of the Green Party (PVEM) suggested that the involvement of the military would make little difference in the fight against crime as long as the underlying social and economic causes were not addressed.

Others view the military involvement as a political maneuver on the part of the PRI to improve its standing ahead of the upcoming mayoral and ALDF elections. "The government is placing soldiers in the most populated districts where the opposition parties have a chance of winning the July elections," said federal Deputy Leticia Calzada of the PRD. PRI members have denied this criticism.

"Training members of the Army to return order to the capital should not be viewed as synonymous to advocating excessive use of force in keeping the peace," said ALDF legislator Luviano Delgado of the PRI. In an interview with the daily newspaper Novedades, Del Mazo emphasized his support for the use of military personnel to combat crime in the city. On the other hand, he left open the possibility that, if elected mayor, he would appoint the "best qualified person" to head the police department, whether a civilian or a military officer.

Still, according to the weekly news magazine Proceso, the assignment of military police to civilian law-enforcement tasks has created a number of other problems. The main problem, according to the magazine, is that these officers have not been properly trained to operate in civilian areas. "In just one month, the military police officers assigned to the Iztapalapa section of the city have crashed 26 patrol cars and run over three persons," said Proceso, citing statistics compiled by the ALDF. (Sources: El Universal, 03/20/97; El Economista, 03/31/97; Proceso, 04/06/97; La Jornada, 04/01/97, 04/08/97; Novedades, 03/20/97, 04/08/97, 04/14/97; Excelsior, 04/02/97, 04/14/97; The News, 02/11/97, 04/10/97, 04/15/97)

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