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Polls Show PRD Candidate Cardenas Far Ahead in Mexico City Mayoral Race

by LADB Staff

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With less than one month left before the mayoral election in Mexico City, Cuauhtemoc Cardenas of the center-left Partido de la Revolucion Democratica (PRD) continues to maintain a comfortable margin over his two major rivals. The mayoral election is one of several key races scheduled for July 6, including all seats in the Chamber of Deputies, 32 seats in the Senate, and several governorships.

According to almost all public-opinion polls conducted in late May, Cardenas is far ahead of rivals Alfredo del Mazo of the governing Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) and Carlos Castillo Peraza of the center-right Partido Accion Nacional (PAN). The polls showed Cardenas with a support range of 33% to 37%, while support for del Mazo and Castillo consistently ranged from 15% to 20%.

Strong debate for Cardenas

Political observers agree that Cardenas helped his candidacy with a relatively solid performance in his one-on-one debate with del Mazo on May 25, even though political analysts criticized both candidates for launching personal attacks instead of debating the issues. Apparently, Cardenas's strategy was to attack the PRI's history of corruption and its failure to create prosperity during its 68 years in power, while del Mazo accused his rival of promoting violence and confrontation.

Results of at least six polls published the day after the debate showed respondents gave Cardenas a much higher rating than del Mazo following the debate. The polls were conducted by telephone by Louis Harris/Indemerc, Mori de Mexico, and Centro de Estudios de Opinion (CEO). Meanwhile, del Mazo's performance exposed some divisions within the PRI. For example, the party's outspoken secretary general, Juan Millan who represents labor in the PRI suggested that del Mazo would have difficulty overtaking Cardenas, given the short time left in the campaign. Millan was immediately scolded by Fidel Velazquez, leader of the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM), for publicly expressing a lack of confidence in del Mazo's candidacy.

Notwithstanding Cardenas's apparent gains, the decision by debate organizers to exclude the PAN's Castillo from the event drew broad criticism. "The event had little impact on the opinions of the voters, who were hoping for a debate among the top three political forces in the country," said columnist Jose de Jesus Garcia. Cardenas was particularly adamant about excluding Castillo when the debate was being organized in early May. He said it was not the PRD's intention to prevent Castillo from presenting his stance on the issues, but rather to organize a debate between the front-runners (see SourceMex, 05/14/97). After the event, Cardenas said he would be willing to debate Castillo separately, but only if he presented "proposals that were different than those offered by del Mazo."

Castillo's low standing in recent polls has led to rumors that the candidate will be replaced by former PAN presidential hopeful Diego Fernandez de Cevallos. However, PAN leaders have denied these rumors and have vowed to press ahead with Castillo's candidacy. PAN said to focus on congressional & gubernatorial races. Still, some analysts suggest the PAN may be unofficially conceding the Mexico City race to Cardenas and focusing instead on winning a majority in the Chamber of Deputies and Senate, and on winning the gubernatorial races in Nuevo Leon, San Luis Potosi, and Colima states. "The reconstitution of the Chamber of Deputies is an integral step that should take place to balance power and to pave the way for a new stage of transparency, responsibility, and lawfulness," said PAN president Felipe Calderon.

PAN lags in gubernatorial races

The PAN's chances to beat the PRI in key gubernatorial races appears remote. Public-opinion polls show PRI candidates could beat PAN rivals in Queretaro, Sonora, and San Luis Potosi states. In addition, the PRI also appears poised to beat the PRD in the gubernatorial race in Campeche state. According to PAN leaders, the party has a strong chance to win the gubernatorial contests in Colima and Nuevo Leon states. Still, the PAN appears to have lost momentum in Nuevo Leon, where its candidate, Fernando Canales Clariond, previously held a substantial advantage over Natividad Gonzalez Paras of the PRI. According to the daily newspaper Excelsior, the voter tendencies in three cities Monterrey, Guadalupe, and San Nicolas de los Garza could determine the outcome of the Nuevo Leon race. Those three cities hold an estimated 61% of the population. The gubernatorial races in San Luis Potosi and Colima states also feature a close contest between PAN and PRI candidates. In San Luis Potosi, the race is between Fernando Silva Nieto of the PRI and Marcelo de los Santos of the PAN.

According to a public-opinion polls conducted in early April, at that time Silva of the PRI was leading de los Santos of the PAN by 57.3% to 31.9% in San Luis Potosi. Still, PAN officials are confident of overtaking the PRI in this race. In Colima, Enrique Michel of the PAN and Fernando Moreno Pena of the PRI are considered the front-runners. Polls suggest Moreno will beat Michel in this race. The chances of the PAN beating the PRI are slimmer in the gubernatorial race in Queretaro, where the governing party is represented by popular Sen. Fernando Ortiz Arana.

In Sonora, the PRI has spent as much as 70 million pesos (US\$8.84 million) to retain the seat currently held by Manlio Fabio Beltrones. According to recent press reports, Beltrones is said to have close connections with drug traffickers. The allegations against Beltrones, however, appear to have little effect on PRI candidate Armando Lopez Nogales. According to public-opinion polls, Lopez a close ally of Beltrones could get 40% of the vote. The rest of the vote is divided among the PAN, the PRD, and other parties.

The PAN, which has traditionally been strong in northern states, will have difficulty overcoming Lopez in Sonora because of internal divisions. According to the weekly news magazine Proceso, the national PAN leadership in January informally announced its support for Salgado Bojorquez instead of popular party leader Adalberto Rosas. After Bojorquez was chosen, Rosas refused to withdraw his candidacy, forcing the PAN to suspend a Sonora state party convention.

In Campeche, internal divisions are also threatening the chances for an opposition party to beat the PRI. The PRD chose PRI defector and former senator Layda Sansores to represent the party

in the gubernatorial race. In selecting Sansores, however, the party bypassed long- time PRD member Guillermo Ortegon del Rio. Del Rio and his followers spent several weeks organizing public protests in the glare of the national media spotlight, forcing party leaders to revoke del Rio's membership. This, in turn, angered many PRD loyalists in Campeche, who have threatened not to vote for Sansores in July. According to polls conducted in the past several months, PRI candidate Jose Antonio Gonzales Curi has received consistent support of close to 50%, while Sansores has been unable to surpass 38%. [Note: Peso-dollar conversions in this article are based on the Interbank rate in effect on June 4, reported at 7.91 pesos per US\$1.00] (Sources: The News, 05/20/97, 05/21/97; Reuter, 04/29/97, 05/22/97; Associated Press, 05/27/97; El Universal, 05/23/97, 05/28/97; Novedades, 05/20/97, 05/23/97, 05/28/97, 05/29/97; Excelsior, 05/23/97, 05/27-29/97; The News, 05/28/97, 05/29/97; Proceso, 05/18/97, 06/01/97; El Nacional, 06/02/97; La Jornada, 05/20/97 05/23/97, 06/03/97; El Sur de Campeche, 06/04/97)

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