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GUATEMALA: Election Maneuvering

The draft electoral law proposed by the government is being criticized by most of the 37 political groups hoping to contest the elections for the constituent assembly next July. [REDACTED] says the parties want the assembly to have broad legislative powers and to elect a provisional president. They are demanding that candidates be permitted to run on a national at-large basis. The rightist National Liberation Movement—the country's strongest party—is threatening to boycott the election unless revisions are made. [REDACTED]

Comment: Head of State Mejia appears willing to revise the law, and he may agree to some at-large candidacies. Few of the parties have strong organizations outside of Guatemala City, and they probably fear that Indian leaders and other rural delegates could dominate the assembly if the proposed proportional representation system is used. Mejia is unlikely, however, to allow the assembly to name a provisional president. This would return the government to civilian hands before the military is ready to do so and damage the prospects of the new groups by denying them time to get organized. [REDACTED]