

Secret

68



DIRECTORATE OF
INTELLIGENCE

Intelligence Memorandum

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN EL SALVADOR

Secret

23

15 February 1967
No. 0793/67

MORI

WARNING

This document contains information affecting the national defense of the United States, within the meaning of Title 18, sections 793 and 794, of the US Code, as amended. Its transmission or revelation of its contents to or receipt by an unauthorized person is prohibited by law.

GROUP 1
EXCLUDED FROM AUTOMATIC
DOWNGRADING AND
DECLASSIFICATION

SECRET

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
Directorate of Intelligence
15 February 1967

INTELLIGENCE MEMORANDUM

The Presidential Election in El Salvador

Summary

The presidential election to be held in El Salvador on 5 March is expected to be a fair one, and the candidate of the governing party, Colonel Fidel Sanchez Hernandez, is expected to win. Colonel Sanchez has pledged his administration to continue the present government's reform program within the framework of a free enterprise system.

Sanchez is opposed by only one strong party, the Christian Democrats, who do not expect to win this election and are saving their most popular candidate for 1972. There are two small parties, one of which, the Renovating Action Party, has Communist support.

Despite pre-election nerves and occasional coup rumors, there are good reasons at this time to believe that the campaign will be relatively peaceful and that the transfer of power from President Rivera to a freely elected successor will take place in July as scheduled.

NOTE: Prepared by the Office of Current Intelligence.

SECRET

SECRET

Background

1. Traditionally governed by a wealthy oligarchy and the military, El Salvador has had only limited experience with democratic processes. Before 1962, when President Rivera was elected, governmental changes were either forced by revolution or resulted from elections that were orderly formalities but presented the public with no real alternative to the government slate.

2. Rivera has tried with considerable success to develop respect for democratic institutions by establishing the opposition's confidence in the honesty and freedom of elections. Opposition parties have publicly acknowledged the fairness of elections during Rivera's administration. One major step, which gave the opposition some hope for electoral success, was the initiation in 1963 of a system of proportional representation for filling legislative seats. This has resulted in substantial minority participation in the government and, for the most part, constructive and responsible representation by the opposition deputies.

3. If a smooth transition can be made from Rivera to a successor equally committed to reform and electoral honesty, the country will have taken another important step in the development of representative democracy. On the other hand, a coup or significant violence around election time could nullify much of the progress of the past four years.

The Electoral System

4. The 1962 constitution provides for a presidential term of five years and a unicameral legislature renewable in its entirety every two years. Elections for legislative and municipal offices were held in March 1966 and will be held again in March 1968. President Rivera's successor will be chosen this March and will take office in July. Rivera is not permitted by the constitution to seek immediate re-election.

5. The president and vice president are elected by a majority of the votes. If none of the party slates for president and vice president obtains a majority, the Legislative Assembly must make the final choice between the two leading slates.

SECRET

SECRET

6. All Salvadoran citizens 18 years of age and over have the right and duty to vote. Prior registration is the only other requirement. The entire electoral process from the registration of voters to the announcement of results is under the control of a three-man Central Electoral Council chosen by the Legislative Assembly. The electoral law provides adequate safeguards against multiple voting and other electoral abuses.

7. There are no large blocs of Salvadorans to whom suffrage is denied; on the contrary, those who do not register and vote are subject to fines ranging from 2 to 100 colones (US \$0.80 to \$40.00) depending on their economic status. This requirement is seldom enforced, however, and actual voting records indicate considerable public apathy. There was a four-percent increase in voter participation in 1966 over that of 1964, and most observers believe that this reflects increased confidence in the honesty of the electoral machinery. During the current campaign, the Central Electoral Council is making a special effort to register eligible voters and to persuade them to use their vote in March.

The Candidates and Parties

8. The National Conciliation Party (PCN), the governing party since 1962, has nominated Colonel Fidel Sanchez Hernandez for president and Dr. Humberto Guillermo Cuestas for vice president. Col. Sanchez is widely respected within his own party, the largest in El Salvador, as well as by many members of the opposition. His good reputation in opposition circles stems from his service as minister of interior, under Rivera, during which time he was given most of the credit for carrying out the President's policy of honest elections. He demonstrated his anti-Communist sympathies when he successfully opposed the hiring of Soviet professors by the National University in 1964 and defeated the university rector in public debate on the issue. Sanchez is identified with the progressive elements in the PCN and has promised to continue the reforms begun by Rivera. While not necessarily subservient to US views, Sanchez has shown admiration and respect for the US and has worked well with members of the embassy staff.

SECRET

SECRET

9. The PCN was formed in 1961 as the political vehicle for Rivera's election to the presidency. Most of its leaders are government officials and military officers close to Rivera, but its membership is drawn from all social and economic classes. The PCN has strong support in rural areas, to some extent because rural workers have traditionally been pressured by large landowners into supporting the official party. This traditional rural support has been strengthened by the PCN's efforts to raise the living standard of the peasants. The party also has considerable support from the urban labor movement. In the two most recent legislative elections (1964 and 1966), the PCN polled 59 and 53.7 percent, respectively, of the votes cast.

10. The Christian Democratic Party (PDC) began in 1959 as a movement patterned after Christian Democratic parties in other countries, especially Chile, and was granted legal status in 1961. Ideologically the PDC is left of center but definitely anti-Communist; it believes the state is an instrument for the common good and must take an active role in social and economic fields. The PDC, however, rejects the socialist state as totalitarian.

11. The main points of difference between the PDC and the PCN concern the concept of private property and the rights of labor. The PDC, while supporting private enterprise, believes that profits should correspond to the risks and productive work involved and maintains that private property must be employed for the benefit of all. The PDC upholds the right of labor, including agrarian labor, to organize and strike; the PCN, on the other hand, has not pushed the idea of organizing farm labor.

12. In foreign policy, the PDC has been accused of being anti-US but most of its criticism has been directed against actions and policies that it sees as interference in the internal affairs of another country.

13. The PDC has nominated its secretary general, a capable lawyer named Abraham Rodriguez, as its presidential candidate and Mario Pacheco, an engineer, for vice president. Dr. Rodriguez is a moderate with

SECRET

SECRET

a good reputation in intellectual circles, but he is not widely known on a national scale. He is believed to have been selected as a sacrifice, since the PDC does not believe itself strong enough yet to win a presidential election and is saving its most popular candidate, the mayor of San Salvador, Jose Napoleon Duarte, for the 1972 election. The PDC polled 25.9 percent of the total vote in 1964 and increased its percentage to 31.2 percent in 1966.

14. The oldest political party in El Salvador, the Renovating Action Party (PAR), was formed in 1946. It was fairly strong in its early years because it represented opposition to military government, but its strength has declined significantly. The PAR polled 15.1 percent of the votes in 1964 and dropped to 6.8 percent in 1966. Weakened by internal dissension, it has accepted Communist support in a desperate attempt to remain alive. Much of its decline from 1964 to 1966 was due to public disgust with the obstructionist tactics of PAR legislative deputies who stood out sharply and unfavorably in comparison with the generally constructive opposition of the Christian Democratic deputies.

15. The PAR is supporting the leftist former rector of the National University, Dr. Fabio Castillo Figueroa, for president and Jesus Gochez Castro, a lawyer with a history of Communist association, for vice president. Castillo has no chance of winning the election.

16. Nevertheless, rightist military officers and civilians have been pressing Rivera to have the Central Electoral Council outlaw the PAR, claiming evidence that it presents a real threat. The attorney general has petitioned the council to declare the PAR illegal, pointing to its agrarian reform program as proof of its Communist ideology. Rivera, Col. Sanchez, and Minister of Interior Arias all oppose such a move on the grounds that it would be better if the PAR were defeated fairly at the polls. The legal red tape involved does not permit a decision to be made before 2 or 3 March. With elections scheduled for 5 March, it is very likely that no action will be taken until after the elections.

SECRET

SECRET

17. The Salvadoran Popular Party, a nondescript but generally rightist aggregation including dissatisfied former PAR members, was organized just prior to the 1966 elections. It has some support around Santa Ana, the country's second largest city, but until recent weeks it lacked funds to do much campaigning and organizing. It received only 2.4 percent of the votes in 1966, but may do better this year by attracting some of the dissatisfied conservatives from the PCN. Its presidential candidate is retired major Alvaro Ernesto Martinez.

18. The Communist Party of El Salvador is illegal, and none of its front groups has been able to obtain legal recognition. Infiltration of the PAR has given the Communists a forum during this election, but it has weakened the PAR by frightening away its more moderate members.

Outlook

19. The electoral campaign will probably be relatively peaceful and the opposition has been given a fair chance to campaign. None of the PCN precandidates who lost out to Sanchez appears capable at present of perpetrating a successful coup, although two disgruntled military officers have been involved in plotting. Sanchez stands a very good chance of winning and, since he is acceptable to most of the military and the oligarchy, an orderly transfer of power seems assured. The greatest dangers to constitutional order would seem to be a pre-election coup attempt by one of several military malcontents or an unexpected PDC victory which the military and oligarchy might not accept.

SECRET

Page Denied

SECRET

15 February 1967

Talking Paper for the Memo, The Presidential Election
in El Salvador

This memorandum is an attempt to place in perspective the various political forces currently at work in El Salvador including rumors of unrest and possible instability. It discusses briefly the historical base on which the present government rests, the important features of the electoral system, the orientation of the four parties contesting the election, and the outlook for a fair election and an orderly transfer of power.

President Rivera's government has done much to establish respect for democratic institutions and has used Alliance for Progress assistance effectively. If it is followed by another government equally committed to these goals, it can provide a continued example of progress in an area known for its instability. If a coup should take place, however, El Salvador will lose much of the ground already gained.

Routine internal and external dissemination is suggested. The Director need not take time for it. In light of the proposed Summit Meeting it might be worth giving sub-cabinet dissem. This is an OCI memo and has not been coordinated outside this office.

SECRET

Approved For Release 2007/03/14 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001600010004

25X1

Page Denied

25X1

25X1

Approved For Release 2007/03/14 : CIA-RDP79T00826A001600010068-4