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Erika Harding

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Paraguay: Overview Of Presidential Race

by Erika Harding

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As the May 9 presidential elections approach, the top three candidates are caught in a tight race. But as the ruling Colorado Party's chances for victory fade, rumors abound over the possibility that the ruling party or the military may intervene in the electoral process. To calm the country's political waters, President Andres Rodriguez has made repeated public statements assuring that the elections will be free and fair and that his administration will respect the outcome. There are nine candidates officially registered in the presidential race: Juan Carlos Wasmosy of the Republican National Association, (Asociacion Nacional Republicana, ANR known as the Colorado Party); Guillermo Caballero Vargas of the National Encounter independent movement (Encuentro Nacional); Domingo Laino, representing the Authentic Radical Liberal Party (Partido Liberal Radical Autentico, PLRA); Gustavo Bader, representing the Socialist National Party (Partido Nacional Socialista); Abraham Zapag of the Liberal Party (Partido Liberal, PL); Eduardo Arce of the Workers Party (Partido de los Trabajadores, PT); and three other candidates representing independent groups, Leandro Prieto, Ricardo Canese, and Joel Atilio Casal. According to a new public opinion poll conducted in Asuncion and published on March 26 by the independent weekly news magazine La Opinion, 31% of those interviewed say they will vote for Caballero Vargas. Domingo Laino was the runner up with 29%, followed by Juan Wasmosy, the candidate of the ruling Colorado party, with 22%. Vargas's lead is surprise to most political analysts, since he is a relative newcomer in politics and little-known among the electorate. Vargas is a businessperson whose platform has been described as "social democratic and christian." He has garnered the support of a large portion of the business community, as well as the Catholic Church. Vargas is the only candidate who has chosen a woman, Maria Victoria Brusquetti, as his running mate. Brusquetti is a long-time organizer from the Catholic grass-roots movement. Wasmosy is a conservative businessperson whose candidacy is backed by the President and the military. Wasmosy's main campaign slogan has been "neither savage capitalism nor decadent populism," and he has indicated his intention to "govern with the military, not against it." In contrast, Laino a center-left candidate who advocates agrarian reform has been the declared enemy of the Colorado party and the military since early in the dictatorship of deposed president Alfredo Stroessner. (Sources: Spanish news service EFE, 03/25/93; Agence France- Presse, 03/24-26/93)

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