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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE
28 November 1955

TO: Deputy Director (Intelligence)

SUBJECT: Guatemalan Congressional Elections of 18 December 1955

1. Offices to be filled: Deputies to the entire Congress of the Republic, a unicameral national legislature. The 66 deputies are to be elected for four-year terms.

Municipal councils are also to be elected in Guatemala's 322 municipalities.

2. Parties or factions participating:

- a. National Democratic Movement (MDN): The "official" party, formed by supporters of President Castillo Armas and subsidized by the government. Best organized political group. Essentially a middle-of-the-road party, it contains many influential men and government officials. Greatest weakness is that its members include many strong personalities of varying political viewpoints and it is thus subject to splintering.
- b. National Democratic Association (ANDE): Reconstituted anticlerical Liberal Party which ruled Guatemala between 1871 and 1944. Considers itself a moderate group, however, and grants that the pre-1944 dictatorships were "excessive." Differs from the MDN mainly on the latter's willingness to compromise on the controversial issue of church-state relations. A few important government officials are members.
- c. Party of Anti-Communist Unification (PUA): Leading opposition party during the pro-Communist Arbenz regime, now the party of the extreme right. Tenuously united with the Independent Anti-Communist Party of the West (PIACO) which is strong in Quezaltenango, Guatemala's second largest city.
- d. Social Christian Party (PSC): Formed mainly to oppose the anticlerical sentiments which have been

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dominant in Guatemalan political life since the revolution of 1870. Enjoys strong backing from the Roman Catholic Church. Contains an unlikely combination of partisans, ranging from leftist labor elements to pre-1870 reactionaries.

- e. Social Democratic Party (PSD): Reconstituted moderate party of the same name which was active 1944-45. Pledges to support the goals and principles of the popular democratic revolution of 1944. Anti-Communist.
3. Outstanding personality: Col. Carlos Castillo Armas, president of the republic. Leader of the anti-Communist revolution of June 1954, his term runs until March 1960. He backs the MDN, and the MDN as well as all other political parties claim to support him. No political party has dared openly to attack him.
4. Present party strength: President Castillo's MDN is strongest. It got a head start in building up its organization and in forming new affiliates throughout the country. ANDE is probably next strongest. The PUA, still traveling on its reputation as the leading opposition party during the Arbenz era, has adopted a negative approach to the country's problems and probably is weaker than ever before. The PSC is potentially strong among partisans of the Catholic Church, but the majority of politically active Guatemalans, though Catholic, hold anticlerical sentiments.
5. Principal issues: The fundamental issue is support or rejection of the Castillo administration's basically middle-of-the-road policies. Castillo's compromise stand on the divisive issue of church-state relations has antagonized die-hard anticlericals (represented by ANDE) as well as some strong partisans of the church (PSC and some members of the PUA). His decision to maintain the basic social gains which emanated from the 1944 revolution, such as social security, labor's right to bargain collectively, and a modified agrarian reform program, has antagonized extreme conservatives (PUA and some members of PSC) while leftist and pro-Communist elements remain hostile. Castillo's friendship for the United States and charges that the United States backed Castillo's anti-Communist revolution of 1954 may be injected into the campaign by leftist-nationalist

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elements supported by underground Communists. Secondary issues, such as alleged corruption in government and the regime's alleged lack of respect for democratic processes, will be tactically important for the opposition.

6. Principal factors influencing the outcome: Government support for the MDN and the continued wide popularity of President Castillo would probably be sufficient in themselves to assure the MDN of victory. The government's sudden scheduling of the election and simultaneous lifting of the 15-month-long ban on all political parties only a month before the election gives the "nonofficial" parties little chance to organize their campaigns. The government's plan to delay promulgation of the new constitution until after the election means that balloting will take place without the guarantee of freedom of assembly and speech. The government, furthermore, will have the power to manipulate the results of the election.

The electoral law, which is to govern only this election, contains several provisions which hamper the "nonofficial" parties. For instance, illiterates, who represent over half the registered voters, are to be denied the secret ballot. This enables the government to recruit and vote groups of Indians en masse, a practice frequently employed by past regimes. The action is contrary to the draft constitution which guarantees the secret ballot to all voters.

7. Background: The Castillo regime has ruled without a constitution and without a congress since it came to power in mid-1954. In a nationwide referendum in October 1954, Castillo received the approval of over 99 percent of those voting. A constituent assembly, elected at the same time, inaugurated Castillo president for a term to last until March 1960. The assembly has now nearly completed a constitution which will probably be promulgated with the installation of congress in March 1956.
8. Informed opinion on outcome: The MDN, with government support, is expected to win a working majority in the congress. It is not a cohesive political party, however, and party discipline among MDN deputies will probably be weak.
9. Significance for US security interests: Although the Castillo regime will not stand or fall on the results of the election, the balloting will be akin to a vote of

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confidence in the moderate course which the government has followed since it came to power.

The conviction that the United States was responsible for the successful anti-Communist revolution of June 1954 which brought Castillo to power is widespread in Latin America and to some extent in other parts of the free world. The United States is thus committed, in these eyes, to a continuing responsibility for the development of democratic and stable government under Castillo. High United States officials have frequently praised Castillo as the leader of the "only people to emerge from behind the iron curtain." The United States has programmed a total of \$24,500,000 in assistance of various types to the Castillo government for the 1955-56 fiscal year, thus making Guatemala the recipient of more direct US aid, exclusive of loans, this year than has been programmed for any other Latin American country.

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