INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

LATIN ELITES DISSATISFIED WITH ECONOMY, POLL FINDS

It's not just the masses of Latin America that are dissatisfied and itching for change today.

A new survey of opinion leaders in six Latin nations found a majority give current economic conditions a poor rating, say their judicial systems don't provide adequate protection for private property and think their nations should unite more to boost their global clout.

Utica, N.Y.-based pollsters Zogby International Inc. conducted the survey with the University of Miami School of Business, in what is expected to be a twice-a-year look at opinions among Latin leaders.

The "Latin American Elite Poll" interviewed 420 executives in business, government, media, academia, labor and other fields in Mexico, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Colombia and Chile during September and October. Results had a 5 percentage-point margin of error.

In unveiling the outcome, Zogby International chief John Zogby said he was surprised the poll found 51 percent of Mexicans think the North American Free Trade Agreement has hurt Mexico's economy. That compares with 34 percent who said NAFTA helped and 15 percent who said it had little effect.

Zogby attributed the negative sentiment partly to the U.S.-economic downturn that has hurt Mexican sales to the United States as well as unfulfilled expectations about far-closer U.S.-Mexico ties under the Bush administration.

The poll also found Mexico's President Vicente Fox commanded the most positive image among Latin American presidents, surpassing Brazil's Fernando Henrique Cardoso, who ranked as "the runaway favorite" in similar surveys two years ago, Zogby said.

Among other survey results:

- Overall, 71 percent of respondents described economic conditions in their country as "poor" because of "no economic growth," "high unemployment" and "no economic plan," among many factors.
- Fifty-seven percent expect their country's economy to "improve somewhat" within the next two years, with those in Argentina, Brazil and Mexico most optimistic.
- The survey results carry weight in South Florida, because the area is the hub for international business with the Latin American region.
- With Latin economies forecast to shrink on average this year, voters in the region are seeking change. A left-leaning labor leader is poised to be elected Brazil's president Sunday.

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EVENTS

Robert A. Mundell, 1999 Nobel laureate in economics and professor at Columbia University, will be the keynote speaker at "The Role of Multilateral Institutions in the International Monetary System," a conference sponsored by The Journal of Policy Reform and the University of Miami's School of Business Administration Thursday to Saturday at the DoubleTree Hotel in Coconut Grove.

For information, call Denise Eutsey at 305-284-5540.

UPDATES

- Florida International University is sponsoring a contest for university students in Florida, the Caribbean and Latin America to write plans for an international business.
- FIU's College of Business Administration and its College of Engineering are organizing the Howard J. Leonhardt New Venture Challenge, hoping to "encourage the formation of interdisciplinary student teams comprised of engineering, computer science and business students," said Joyce J. Elam, the business school's dean.
- The contest is open to undergraduate and graduate students at accredited colleges or universities in Florida, the Caribbean or Latin America. Completed applications are due no later than Nov. 22. Business plans and submission forms are due by Jan. 24.

For information, call 305-348-4227 or check FIU's Web site at www.fiu.edu/~nvc.

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