

Lopez Obrador courts Mexico poor for vote

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MEXICO CITY - Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is a shopkeeper's son and a leftist who promises "the poor come first," but seeks to distance himself from the growing tide of leftist leaders in Latin America.

To win Mexico's presidency, Lopez Obrador will have to convince voters that he won't scare off investors or strain Mexico's new economic stability with spend-and-borrow policies.

Mexicans, who are tired of politicians who get rich in office, like his frugal style. A widower and father of three, he lives in a modest Mexico City apartment and rides in a compact car, albeit with a driver.

Born on Nov. 13, 1953, in the Gulf coast state of Tabasco, Lopez Obrador earned a political science degree at Mexico's National Autonomous University, and worked on development projects for Tabasco's impoverished Chontal Indians, sometimes living among them.

He left the long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party in 1988 to join the leftist Democratic Revolution Party, made a failed run for the Tabasco governorship, and took up street politics, joining in brief seizures of government-owned oil wells to demand payment for spill damages in 1996.

As mayor of Mexico City, he spent freely on ambitious freeways for the capital and a \$65 monthly stipend for every resident over age 70. The city's debt rose but its congestion persisted.

Facing an impeachment effort last year that would have knocked him out of the presidential race, Lopez Obrador mobilized mass demonstrations and prevailed. After five years as mayor, he quit in July 2005 to run for president.

Lopez Obrador bristles at criticism and can sound truculent, but offers moderate foreign and economic policies.