

Tension still high after vote protest

A day after one of the largest protests in Mexico's history, there's no sign of compromise in the disputed presidential election.

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MEXICO CITY - Compromise seemed more elusive than ever in Mexico's bitter presidential election dispute on Monday, one day after leftist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador mounted the one of largest protests in Mexican history.

Analysts said the demonstration, during which more than one million people jammed this city's main square and the surrounding streets, didn't change anything. The dispute still must be resolved by the Federal Electoral Tribunal.

But the rally sparked an unusually indignant response from the July 2 election's apparent winner, conservative Felipe Calderón, and many of the capital's commentators, promising more acrimony in the weeks ahead.

Cesar Nava, a Calderón spokesman, said that the election would be decided "by votes, not by marches," and that the National Action Party, or PAN, wouldn't succumb to the "blackmail" of street protests.

'YELLOW BEAST'

One Mexico City newspaper, Milenio, dubbed the demonstration "the great yellow beast," referring to the swarms of yellow-clad López Obrador supporters -- many of them elderly and poor -- who believe the election was stolen.

"OK, so you've put a million people in the streets?" said Mexican political observer Jorge Chabat. "So what's the conclusion? Nothing."

But John Ackerman, a law professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, said the outpouring of support for López Obrador raises the stakes for the election judges, who have the power to annul the election or order a recount.

"It's a clear demonstration that it's not going to be easy to sweep the apparent irregularities under the rug," Ackerman said. "They're going to have to take this seriously. They can't be a rubber stamp."

Many legal observers say there's nothing in Mexican law to prevent a total recount in the election, which Calderón won by a margin of less than 1 percent out of 41 million ballots.

But Pamela Starr, a Latin America analyst for the Eurasia Group in Washington, said the court is unlikely to go that far, noting that in the past, "it has expressly limited itself to reviewing only those ballot packets that have been specifically challenged."

SEEKING A RECOUNT

López Obrador, the former mayor of Mexico City, has said he'd abide by the court's decision. But he's also said his street mobilizations will continue unless there's a recount.

No one knows how far López Obrador is willing to go to test the nation's fragile election institutions, which were created only a decade ago in a wave of political reform.

The central argument of López Obrador's Party of the Democratic Revolution, or PRD, is that a recount would best serve the interests of political stability. His opponents argue that democracy depends on adhering strictly to the rule of law, whether or not that leads to a reopening of the ballot boxes.

What remains to be seen is whether Mexicans can keep faith in their new electoral system in the face of López Obrador's sweeping challenge.