

Mexico's López Obrador Criticizes Electoral Body

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MEXICO CITY, July 27 -- Mexico's leftist presidential candidate said Thursday that the country's electoral agency has abandoned its autonomous role and become a tool of the ruling party, and he promised to send campaign advisers abroad to lobby foreign governments for support in his battle for the presidency.

Andrés Manuel López Obrador said in an interview that he has lost faith in the respected Federal Electoral Institute, or IFE, and doesn't want it overseeing the national recount he demands.

"You can't take IFE people seriously," he said. "They don't act according to the law."

An IFE spokesman declined to respond to López Obrador's accusations, but electoral officials and most international observers have said the election was largely fair.

The interview came as López Obrador's supporters released dozens of chickens outside the IFE building, then barged into a council meeting, dumped white carnations on the tables and remained peacefully watching the council go about its business.

An official count by IFE gave conservative Felipe Calderón an advantage of less than 0.6 percent in the July 2 elections. López Obrador is disputing the lead in Mexico's top electoral court, which has until Sept. 6 to declare a winner or annul the race.

Several foreign governments, including the United States, have congratulated Calderón on his apparent win. López Obrador said Thursday his advisers would visit countries to inform governments and groups about the fraud allegations. Adviser Manuel Camacho was in Washington this week.

"Sometimes foreign governments make bad decisions for lack of information," López Obrador said.

Calderón said Thursday that he supported IFE because it represented the only way to move beyond Mexico's fraud-ridden past. He criticized "pretentious people who try to substitute the will of Mexicans."

López Obrador has filed a nearly 900-page complaint demanding that the Federal Electoral Tribunal order a ballot-by-ballot recount of the election results.

Electoral officials and President Vicente Fox's National Action Party have argued that, under Mexican law, officials can recount results only if a party challenges them and the court finds evidence of irregularities. López Obrador's party has presented challenges for about 40 percent of the polling places.

But López Obrador insisted Thursday that the tribunal has the authority to order a full recount.