

Leftist's Blockade Divides Mexico City, and His Supporters

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MEXICO CITY, Aug. 4 — All week, the leftist candidate for president, [Andrés Manuel López Obrador](#), and his allies in the city government shut down the main avenue running through downtown to demand a recount in last month's election.

On Friday, with tensions steadily rising, the Federal Electoral Tribunal announced that it would issue its decision on Saturday morning on whether a recount was necessary.

The country has anxiously awaited that moment since Mr. López Obrador refused to accept the results of the July 2 election, saying he wanted nothing short of a complete recount.

Now, there is widespread speculation that if the court refuses his demand, the blockades, sit-ins and marches he has led over the last month could become more belligerent, and even violent.

Mr. López Obrador has consistently said his followers will only engage in peaceful acts of civil disobedience, but he has also carefully avoided saying what steps he will take if the court rules against him.

An official tally a month ago showed [Felipe Calderón](#), a conservative candidate from President Vicente Fox's National Action Party, had won the election by a mere 243,000 votes, or less than 1 percent. But the tribunal, a special seven-member court, must still ratify the results, settle challenges and designate the president-elect.

At issue is the validity of 41 million votes. Mr. López Obrador claims there were arithmetical errors in at least 72,000 of the 130,000 polling places.

He has also accused poll workers in northern states, where the president's party is strong, of committing fraud to pad Mr. Calderón's total and diminish Mr. López Obrador's vote in at least 616 polling places.

For his part, Mr. Calderón has adopted the stance of a law-and-order candidate, who insists that the votes were counted legally the night of the election by poll workers chosen at random, and that there is no need for a recount, though he has promised to abide by whatever the court decides.

Mr. López Obrador, 52, the former Mexico City mayor, has mobilized hundreds of thousands of protesters, shutting down Reforma Avenue and other streets leading to the capital's historic central square, or Zócalo.

The blockade looks more like a fair than a protest. City workers and party members have erected enormous circus-like tents the length of the avenue. There are stages where musicians entertain the protesters, and a photo exhibit of Mr. López Obrador's life. A volleyball net had been set up, as well as a mini soccer field.

But the protest has cost Mr. López Obrador many allies, among them the leftist writer Carlos Monsivais, who believe that causing traffic jams throughout a city that voted overwhelmingly for him is going too far.

Business owners in the city center have also complained they are being hurt and have demanded the city government dislodge the protesters, to no avail. Hotel owners say their occupancy rate has dropped 50 percent this week. Restaurateurs and retailers are also hurting. The blockade is causing losses of \$22 million a day, estimates the Mexico City Chamber of Commerce.

Mr. López Obrador has ignored the complaints.

He told a crowd of thousands at the Zócalo on Friday night that judges had the opportunity to make history, and he urged them to grant his request for a total recount. The peace of the country depended on their decision, he said.

“It’s not much to ask from the tribunal that there be transparency,” he said. “It’s not an exaggeration that the destiny of public life in Mexico is in their hands.”