

Mexico Tribunal Rejects Demand for Vote Recount

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MEXICO CITY, Aug. 5 — A seven-member electoral tribunal on Saturday unanimously rejected a demand from the leftist candidate for president for a complete recount of votes, setting the stage for more protests by thousands of his supporters who have camped out in the capital, claiming the election last month was fraudulent.

Later in the day, the candidate, [Andrés Manuel López Obrador](#), a former Mexico City mayor who champions the cause of the poor, refused to accept the ruling at a raucous rally in the Zócalo, the city's historic central square. He called on his followers to continue a campaign of civil disobedience in support of a full recount. He gave no hint of what the next move in that campaign would be.

“We demand that the magistrates rectify their decision because they have the ability and the moral responsibility to do it,” he said, as a crowd of several thousand chanted “fraud, fraud.”

During a two-hour morning session, the judges ordered that the votes in the July 2 election be recounted in only 11,839 of the 130,000 polling places.

They rejected Mr. López Obrador's argument that there were enough human errors and, in some instances, enough evidence of fraud to warrant recounting all 41 million votes. They also noted that his Party of the Democratic Revolution had failed to challenge the results in 70 electoral districts, and that under the law, those results must stand.

Leonel Castillo, the chief judge of the electoral tribunal, defended the integrity of [Mexico's](#) electoral system in general, saying fraud was

nearly impossible because citizens chosen at random and trained to be poll workers were responsible for counting the vote on election night.

“Citizens provide the certainty of the computation process,” he said. “This is the method and the way that the law makes the elections certain.”

Other judges echoed his view, rejecting Mr. López Obrador’s contention that there was a plot among poll workers in some states to pad his opponent’s totals.

“The election method is ingenious,” Magistrate Mauro Miguel Reyes Zapata said.

Lorenzo Cordova, a law professor who specializes in election law, said that if the recount revealed signs of fraud, the court could order more ballot boxes opened. “It opens the door to the possibility of knowing if Mr. López Obrador’s accusations have merit or not,” he said.

Protesters camping out in the Zócalo clung to that hope.

“What is certain is that a lot more problems are going to emerge from the partial recount,” said Pedro Ramos, 42, a civil engineer from Culiacán, Sinaloa, one of about 100 from his state camping on cots.

Others said the ruling was no surprise, since they consider the panel to be part of a corrupt power structure bent on protecting the interests of President Vicente Fox’s party and its allies among business leaders.

“They are rats,” Gregorio Silva, 54, an unemployed sailor, said of the judges. “We’re going to keep up the pressure on this corrupt government. We’ll take the airports, the highways, where it hurts them most.”

Last month, an official tally handed a narrow victory to [Felipe Calderón](#), the conservative candidate from Mr. Fox’s governing

National Action Party. The count showed Mr. Calderón won by only 243,000 votes. Mr. López Obrador has argued that there were arithmetical errors in at least 72,000 polling places and evidence of fraud in about 600.

Over the last month, Mr. López Obrador has said repeatedly that he will accept nothing less than a recount of all the votes cast.

Outside the courthouse, about 200 protesters burst into shouts as news of the ruling spread, hurling insults about the judges and blocking the doors so no one could leave.

In recent days, political operatives connected to Mr. López Obrador have told of a move afoot to bribe the panel, though they offered no proof.

A spokesman for Mr. López Obrador, César Yañez, said the candidate was closeted with his closest advisers, hammering out a plan of action. His supporters have already blockaded the main artery of the capital, Avenida Reforma, for miles, tying up traffic and hurting businesses. In his speech, he said he would unveil the next stage of the protest Sunday.

The judges ruled there were arithmetic errors and other irregularities that warranted a recount of votes in about 10 percent of the polling places. Those polling places are located in 145 of the 300 electoral districts and 26 of the 32 states.

Chief Magistrate Castillo said Mr. López Obrador's lawyers had failed to provide enough evidence of irregularities to throw the entire count into doubt.

Instead, the panel voted to order electoral judges in those states to conduct the partial recount over five days starting Wednesday. After the recount, they will rule on whether to annul the results from those polling places and to accept the new totals. Next, the judges must

certify that the election was fair and name the new president-elect by Sept. 6.

For his part, Mr. Calderon, a 43-year-old former energy minister, remained silent Saturday. Lawyers for his party said the ruling seemed fair and hoped it would clear up doubts about the outcome.

But Mr. Lopez Obrador made it plain nothing short of a complete recount would dispel the doubts he and his supporters had about the election.

“They have the money and the power, but we have our principles and the backing of the people,” he told the crowd. “The people are our principle resource.”