

# Pressure tactics a threat to free elections

## OUR OPINION: PRESIDENTIAL CHALLENGER SHOULD CALL OFF RECKLESS GAMBIT

EDITORIAL  
The Miami Herald  
Aug. 06, 2006

If Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador were as good at attracting votes as he is at making political mischief, he would have won last month's presidential election by a mile. Instead, Mr. López Obrador lost by a hair's-breadth to Felipe Calderón, principally because he ran an erratic campaign and displayed a streak of demagoguery that raised doubts about his suitability for the job of president. In the five weeks since the July 2 election, he has proven those doubts well-founded, trying to win by force that which he could not win at the polls.

Mr. López Obrador has staged mass demonstrations in the center of Mexico City to claim that he was the victim of electoral fraud. At the same time, he has filed a legal complaint with the nation's highest electoral tribunal, known by the acronym TRIFE, outlining his objections in detail. Fair enough.

Yet he also has done his best to poison the well of public opinion by insisting that only a full recount of all 41 million ballots will satisfy his followers. He has not, however, made a case for widespread fraud, hoping that random miscounts in scattered precincts will undermine the legitimacy of an electoral process that outside observers have deemed fair and transparent.

Worse, he has suggested that any decision by the TRIFE that does not hand him victory is unacceptable. In other words, he has defined fairness in purely personal terms -- if I win, that's fair; if I don't, I was robbed. He has even declared himself president, which no doubt came as a surprise to outgoing President Vicente Fox, whose term has four months to go.

Mr. López Obrador's latest stunt is reckless. For the last week, he has closed down Mexico City's main traffic artery, Avenida de la Reforma, with a five-mile-long sit-in by thousands of supporters. He is relying on the muscle of political crony Alejandro Encinas, mayor of Mexico City, for protection. This has tied the city in knots, raised the political temperature to the boiling point and created misery for millions of commuters in one of the largest metropolitan areas in the world.

Remarkably, the people of Mexico City have taken this huge imposition in stride, but it is anyone's guess how long that will continue. President Fox says the federal government will stay out of it, but clearly tempers are becoming frayed and the nation's democratic institutions are being tested as never before.

Members of the TRIFE, who must render a decision no later than Sept. 6, were appointed by consensus of all the political parties. Their integrity never has been questioned. They have been willing on other occasions to declare elections null and void when evidence of fraud was clear. There is no need, thus, to bring mob pressure to bear. By doing so, Mr. López Obrador threatens the impartiality of the only agency that can make him a legitimate victor.

Mr. López Obrador may retain the loyal support of hard-core followers, but he is losing respect nationwide. With the street closure in Mexico City, he has overplayed his hand. It's time to call it off before the situation gets out of control. If Mr. López Obrador wanted to show that he has the power to threaten the nation's political well-being, he has proven his case beyond a doubt. What he has not shown, however, is a willingness to accept the result of a fair election. In a democracy, that's what counts.

*Editor's Note: This editorial has been corrected. An earlier version mistakenly referred to Francisco Calderón, instead of Felipe Calderón.*

