

Mexican Leftist Remains Defiant as Recount Ends

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MEXICO CITY, Aug. 13 — As the courts completed a partial recount of votes in last month's presidential election, the beleaguered leftist candidate vowed Sunday to keep up a campaign of civil disobedience against the government for years, if necessary, to protest what he sees as a fraudulent election.

Speaking at a rally in the capital's central square, the candidate, [Andrés Manuel López Obrador](#), a former Mexico City mayor who champions the cause of the poor, declared, "The object of our movement is to save democracy and make the Constitution mean something."

"We are prepared to resist for whatever time is necessary, even for years, if the circumstances merit it," he added. "Here and now begins a new chapter in the life of [Mexico](#). The simulated republic is finished."

Last month, the official tally by the Federal Electoral Commission showed that [Felipe Calderón](#), the conservative candidate, from President Vicente Fox's National Action Party, had won a narrow victory — 243,000 votes of 41 million cast.

But Mr. López Obrador insisted there had been fraud and demanded a full recount. In response, a special electoral tribunal responsible for ratifying the results and resolving challenges ordered a partial recount of about 12,000 polling places. The seven-member court must rule on the challenges and designate a new president by Sept. 6. The partial recount was to be finished by midnight Sunday.

Mr. López Obrador's aides contended Sunday that evidence had surfaced during the partial recount that ballots were missing in some polling places while extra ballots had turned up in others. They cited the irregularities as evidence that ballot boxes had been stuffed in some precincts and that marked ballots had been disposed of in others.

Mr. López Obrador said he would ask the electoral tribunal on Monday to annul the vote in 7,000 polling places where his representatives maintain that irregularities took place. His aides contend that throwing out the results from those polling places would give Mr. López Obrador the victory.

Lawyers for Mr. Calderón's party, however, dispute the claim of missing ballots in any polling places. Nor do they agree that more ballots were cast than had been delivered in some precincts. They accuse Mr. López Obrador and others in the Party of the Democratic Revolution of lying to convince their supporters that there was fraud.

"We can say with absolute certainty there are no missing ballots, nor were there any fraudulent practices," said César Nava, a lawyer for Mr. Calderón's party. "The P.R.D. lies."

The question of whether Mr. López Obrador's charges of fraud were believable or merely a political smokescreen has dominated debates here from the dinner table to the airwaves and opinion pages, with no end in sight.

He has broadened his initial accusations of irregularities in the voting and now asserts that there was a broad conspiracy to rob him of victory by the current president's party, the long-dominant Institutional Revolutionary Party and business leaders and members of the electoral institute. On Saturday, for instance, he said, "It is not acceptable for a group of privileged people to decide the future of the nation."

Mr. Calderón, meanwhile, has kept a relatively low profile, speaking to various business associations and civic groups about his plan to revitalize the economy. His aides, denying that his party stuffed ballot boxes or committed other types of fraud, have maintained that the election was clean and fair. Mr. Calderón has also promised to abide by the court's decision.

Some voters who supported Mr. López Obrador say they have become disenchanted as he has tried to discredit the electoral institute and the tribunal, which they regard as critical to Mexico's fledgling democracy. Some say that his increasingly revolutionary stance, along with what seems to be his inability to believe that he may have lost, confirms Mr. Calderón's accusation that Mr. López Obrador is, at heart, a leftist autocrat in the making.

But other voters here say that his demand for a recount makes sense, given Mexico's long history of fraudulent elections, and would dispel any doubts about the legitimacy of the next president.

Protesters supporting a recount have closed down the capital's central artery, Paseo de Reforma, for three weeks, taken over toll booths on highways to deny the government revenue, and blockaded banks and the entrance to the stock exchange.

On Sunday, Mr. López Obrador made it clear the protests would continue if the court designates Mr. Calderón president-elect. He announced plans to disrupt Mr. Fox's annual state of the union message to Congress on Sept. 1 and to try to stop the court from giving Mr. Calderón the official document making him president on Sept. 6. He also threatened to hijack the traditional independence day celebration on Sept. 15 and said he would convene a "national democratic convention" the next day to decide "the role of civil disobedience in Mexico's public life over the next years."

Lawyers for Mr. López Obrador's party were still trying to find a way to reverse the official tally in court.

The lead lawyer, Horacio Duarte, said that in about 3,000 polling places examined during the partial recount there were nearly 46,000 more ballots cast for president than had been delivered to poll workers before the election. In another 4,300 polling places, he said, 80,000 ballots delivered to the polls were unaccounted for or missing.

"This proves to us that they are not arithmetic inconsistencies, that there was fraud, that they were manipulated to benefit the candidate of the right," he said.