

Mexico's President Defends Vote Tally Electing His Ally

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MEXICO CITY, Aug. 14 — With the country locked in a battle over the results of last month's elections, President Vicente Fox for the first time defended the vote that narrowly favored his party's candidate as clean and fair, rejecting allegations of widespread irregularities.

"The process has been transparent in the eyes of the world," the president said Sunday evening in an interview at his residence inside Los Pinos, the presidential compound. "It was watched by the media. There were observers. The entire world was watching the electoral process. There is nothing hidden."

On Monday, [Felipe Calderón](#), the candidate of Mr. Fox's conservative National Action Party, once again declared victory, while supporters of the leftist candidate, [Andrés Manuel López Obrador](#), scuffled with police officers outside [Mexico's](#) legislature. Mr. López Obrador has vowed to carry on his campaign of civil disobedience to press for a full recount of the July 2 ballot.

Mr. Fox predicted in the interview that Mexico's electoral institutions, which he described as "the most modern, well-structured, efficient electoral systems in the world," would bring the crisis to a peaceful end.

"This is a country of institutions," he said. "I am sure that this test, this real test of the democratic system, will be passed and resolved according to the law and democratic principles."

A partial recount ordered by a special electoral tribunal has yet to be made public, but on Monday, Mr. Calderón, who has stayed out of the limelight in recent weeks, expressed confidence that the results would confirm his victory. He called the allegations by Mr. López Obrador of missing ballots and stuffed ballot boxes "a big lie." He said the election had been free of serious problems.

"The only thing we have here is a candidate that lost the election and won't recognize his defeat," Mr. Calderón said, surrounded by bodyguards at an opulent house he has rented as his transition headquarters.

Mr. López Obrador, a former Mexico City mayor who champions the cause of the poor, has conducted protests since the election, demanding a recount of all 41 million ballots. Thousands

of his supporters have shut down the capital's central avenue, Paseo de la Reforma, for miles and occupied its historic square, the Plaza de la Constitución.

On Monday, about 20 lawmakers from Mr. López Obrador's party clashed with federal police officers when they tried to block an entrance to the building that houses Mexico's lower house of deputies, the Palacio Legislativo de San Lázaro.

Several lawmakers were bruised and cut as the police used batons, tear gas and riot shields to move them, said one of the lawmakers, Elías Miguel Moreno Brizuela. A spokesman for the police declined to comment on the incident.

But the clash may be a harbinger of things to come. Mr. López Obrador says he will not abide by the decision of the special electoral tribunal charged with ratifying the results if it declares Mr. Calderón, a conservative backed by business leaders, the winner. He has threatened to keep up protests for years, if necessary, saying his movement is to "defend democracy" and "purify public life."

An official tally last month indicated that Mr. Calderon won the election by just 243,000 votes. Mr. López Obrador, who leads the Party of the Democratic Revolution, charged that the contests were rigged against him. In response to his legal challenge, the electoral tribunal ordered a partial recount of ballots in some 12,000 polling places.

Although the seven-member court has yet to release results of that recount, Mr. Calderón and his aides say their figures show it will not change the outcome.

Mr. López Obrador's lawyers are seeking to annul the results in about 7,000 polling places where, they argue, there were either ballots missing or more ballots cast than had been delivered to poll workers.

Mr. López Obrador has 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 has also threatened to disrupt the traditional Independence Day celebration on Sept. 15 and has said he will convene a "national democratic convention" the next day, which is when the Mexican armed forces hold their annual parade. The prospect of protesters supporting a recount facing off with soldiers has raised fears of violence.

On Sunday, Mr. Fox refused to give an opinion about the demonstrations led by Mr. López Obrador, which have snarled traffic across Mexico City for two weeks. But he made it clear he believed that disputes over the presidency should be fought in the courts, not the streets.

The president said he was required by law to stay out of the fray until Sept. 6, when the Federal Electoral Tribunal must rule on all complaints and declare the next president. After that, Mr. Fox said, he would take the steps necessary to uphold the tribunal's decision and make sure the new president is able to take office.

When asked whether he expected trouble, Mr. Fox said, "I cannot anticipate events. But when the events occur, I will assume my responsibility."

Asked about Mr. López Obrador's threats, Mr. Fox said Independence Day "is a Mexican celebration, not a government celebration."

"He must assume his responsibility," Mr. Fox said. "If he is going to deny Mexicans the use of Reforma, if he is going to deny them independence celebrations and the military parade, then history and the Mexican people will be the judge."