

Mexico edges closer to getting a president

OUR OPINION: TIME FOR CHALLENGER TO HALT POLITICAL THEATER

Opinion
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For nearly two months, presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador has stubbornly refused to acknowledge the accumulating evidence of his defeat in Mexico's July 2 election. He has mounted a campaign of civil disobedience, tied up Mexico City in knots with political demonstrations and street closings and openly pressured electoral authorities to cave in to his demands.

This week, however, the Federal Electoral Tribunal declared that after a painstaking review of all the evidence presented by Mr. López Obrador, it would uphold the victory of Felipe Calderón of the National Action Party. Politically and legally, this pulls the rug out from under Mr. López Obrador. The electoral authorities have listened to every reasonable argument and specific challenge his lawyers have submitted and reviewed every bit of evidence. The finding: He doesn't have a case.

Petulant campaign

It's time for him to accept the obvious and abandon his petulant campaign because it offers no hope of advancing his cause. On the contrary, polls in the newspaper Reforma and elsewhere show that Mr. López Obrador's prolonged political tantrum has only lowered his standing in the eyes of the Mexican public. Only 30 percent of those polled say they would vote for him again if they had the chance, and only one in five Mexicans agrees with his campaign of civil resistance.

It has not helped Mr. López Obrador that his political rhetoric has become increasingly aggressive. He has threatened to declare himself president on Sept. 16, Mexican Independence Day, and said he would not allow "an illegal and illegitimate government to be installed in our country."

Declare president-elect

That's just sheer demagoguery. The danger is that Mr. López Obrador is painting himself into a corner from which he cannot emerge without having to either eat his words or push the government into a confrontation. Thus far, Mexico's civil society and its public institutions have shown themselves to be remarkably resilient, tolerating his antics and his defiance of authorities because it all makes for a jolly public spectacle. But there's a limit to everything, and it's time to say, Enough, already.

The next step in this drama is for the Electoral Tribunal to declare that Mexico has a president-elect. That will almost surely be Mr. Calderón, since he got the highest number of votes. By law, the panel must act no later than Sept. 6.

Mr. López Obrador would do himself, his followers and the people of Mexico a great favor by acknowledging the results and pledging to support the elected president. That way, he can still emerge from this with a viable political future. The other way, he can only lose yet again.