

Mexico political future still uncertain

The Miami Herald
Sep. 05, 2006

MEXICO CITY - Protesters still occupy Mexico City streets. The country is still divided along class lines. Two candidates each still claim to be the next president.

A ruling by the Federal Electoral Tribunal on Tuesday ended two months of uncertainty over the winner of the July 2 elections but did little to clear up Mexico's political future.

In a way, it couldn't have. Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, the leftist who claims fraud robbed him of victory, had already said the court was corrupt and vowed to run his own government from the streets.

The key question is how many supporters Lopez Obrador has left, and how far they are willing to go to defend his cause.

Certainly, his numbers are dwindling. While more than 14.6 million Mexicans voted for the leftist candidate, only a few thousand man the protest camps that line Mexico City's main Zocalo plaza and its elegant Reforma avenue. Many of the protest tents erected two months ago remain empty.

Many of Lopez Obrador's supporters were turned off when protesters barged in on a Mass being celebrated at Mexico City's Cathedral. Others felt he went too far when lawmakers from his party seized Congress and kept President Vicente Fox from delivering his annual state-of-the-nation address.

The camps themselves, which have snarled traffic and cost businesses an estimated \$370 million in lost revenues, have alienated other supporters. In a recent poll by the newspaper Reforma, 75 percent opposed the protest camps.

And despite Lopez Obrador's claims that the tribunal is crooked, only 8 percent of respondents said they have no confidence in the court. Another 35 percent said they had some confidence, while a full 57 percent said they have a lot of confidence in the electoral tribunal.

Pollsters interviewed 1,515 registered voters nationwide on Aug. 18-20 and reported a margin of error of 2.5 percentage points.

The departure Tuesday of the Convergencia party from the electoral alliance that nominated Lopez Obrador highlighted his dwindling support. The party, one of three in Lopez Obrador's alliance, said "it is time to rethink strategies."

Those who do support Lopez Obrador are increasingly radical. They vow to prevent Calderon from taking office Dec. 1 and to keep him from governing if he manages to be sworn in anyway.

In the end, Calderon's success will be measured in large part on his ability to neutralize the specter of violence.

When the court announced its decision on Tuesday, some Lopez Obrador supporters advocated taking up arms. Lopez Obrador and his aides have urged their supporters to remain peaceful, and so far that call has been heeded.

But with the rest of the country ready to move on, the movement could be forced to turn to more radical actions to hold the nation's attention.

