

## AS MEXICO VOTE DISPUTE WINDS DOWN, OBRADOR GEARS UP

**Defeated leftist presidential candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador is creating a 'parallel government.'**

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**MEXICO CITY** – Having lost his bid for Mexico's presidency after the top electoral court threw out fraud allegations and a recount revealed a final margin of just half a percentage point, Andrés Manuel López Obrador is now calling for the creation of a "new republic" that addresses the stubborn gap between rich and poor.

The highly contested July 2 election and its aftermath revealed deep divisions in the country, fueling tensions with no apparent reconciliation in sight.



**Andrés Manuel López Obrador**  
HENRY ROMERO/REUTERS

Yet if suspicion and rancor have marked this historic moment, just six years after Mexico emerged from beneath seven decades of authoritarian rule, violence has not.

"Of course, Mexico is at a crossroads," says John Ackerman, a law professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico. "But modern Mexico is showing us we can have intense political conflict without violence."

Mr. Obrador says he wants his supporters to work peacefully on his behalf, but the reach, and impact, of his movement is still unclear.

"It's a very delicate moment. It still has a lot of uncertainties, because you can never know the possibilities of one charismatic leader leading the masses," says Enrique Krauze, a writer and historian in Mexico. "You don't need huge majorities to create really serious social strife."

For more than a month, Obrador and his followers occupied Mexico City's major thoroughfares to force a recount of all ballots. The protest, which strangled traffic and eroded public support, ended this weekend with a huge convention in Mexico City's main square Saturday. But Obrador, who quipped upon hearing of his loss, "to hell with the institutions," has not backed down, saying he refuses to ever recognize the victor, Felipe Calderón, as the country's leader.

"[Obrador] is my president," says Victoria Brocca, a writer in Mexico City who jumped excitedly at Saturday's convention, which drew tens of thousands of supporters, when hands shot up in the air to show support for the creation of Obrador's "parallel government." Obrador will name a cabinet and be "inaugurated" Nov. 20, just days before Mr. Calderón takes office Dec. 1.

The prospect of a parallel government will test Calderón. The candidate, from outgoing President Vicente Fox's ruling National Action Party (PAN), received much of the vote from the industrial, richer north, which has benefited from Mr. Fox's free-trade policies. Most voters in the rural south and in Mexico City voted for Obrador.

Despite the electoral court's finding that the election was fair, polls show that at least a third of voters believe that Calderón won by fraud. The words "usurper," "illegitimate," and "fraud" lace conversations among supporters of Obrador's Democratic Revolution Party (PRD).

"Calderón will never be my president," says Mario Ramírez, who spent many nights in the past month sleeping along Reforma Avenue and says he would be willing to protest for the next six years.

Calderón faces opposition within the political establishment, too. Last week, three PRD governors refused to pose with the president-elect for a snapshot taken at a governor's conference. Earlier this month, PRD legislators blocked a podium where Fox was to give his final state-of-the-union address, forcing the president to retreat and give the speech on television later that night.

Some have dismissed Obrador's tactics, saying his actions have alienated many moderates and hurt his chances for a future presidential bid. Still, his movement could become more powerful depending on other factors, including economic performance.

"If oil prices go down, or a semi-catastrophe happens, this appeal from the left in hard times is likely to be much more potent," says Federico Estévez, a political scientist at the Autonomous Technological Institute of Mexico.

For now, many are happy that the protesters have taken down their tents and headed home, and proud that they did so without violence. Sebastián Díaz, a taxi driver, says happily, "Isn't it great that it's over? And the best part is that they left of their own volition, without force."