

Mexican Ex-Leader's Statue, and Stature, Fall

Fox Is Criticized For Lavish Living

The Washington Post
October 20, 2007

BOCA DEL RIO, Mexico -- Former president [Vicente Fox](#) was immortalized in bronze in this seaside resort city -- for about seven hours.

That's how long it took a mob to form and rip a newly installed, six-foot statue of Fox from its pedestal, the latest indignity heaped upon an ex-president whose international profile is on the rise but who is battling troubles at home. While Fox has jetted across the United States promoting his new autobiography, which was written in English, his enemies in Mexico's Congress have formed a commission to investigate allegations that he lives lavishly in retirement because of favors received while in office.

The investigation threatens to tarnish Fox's legacy seven years after he captured the presidency, promising to cleanse [Mexico's](#) government of corruption that had festered during seven decades of one-party rule. The former president, who is widely credited with improving the transparency of Mexico's government, has vigorously denied allegations of wrongdoing and lashed out at his detractors, saying he is the victim of a political smear campaign.

On Tuesday, he stormed off the set during an interview with the Spanish-language network [Telemundo](#). The interviewer, Rubén Gonzalez Luengas, later said that Fox's refusal to answer questions about his luxury vehicles and expensive home renovations proved he is not the "apostle of democracy" he claims to be. He also said the ex-president had called him "a poor imbecile."

George W. Grayson, a Mexico expert at the College of William and Mary, said Fox's "quirky behavior" has made his successor, Felipe Calderon, appear mature and assertive in comparison.

"Fox's post-presidential shenanigans mirror his behavior in office; that is, he is egocentric, self-absorbed and embarked upon frivolous activities," Grayson said in an interview in [Mexico City](#).

Fox, who did not respond to interview requests, was highly popular when he left office in December. But the 10 months since have been marred by almost constant criticism, peaking in September when he and his wife, Marta Sahagun de Fox, posed for a splashy display piece in the Mexican celebrity magazine Quien. The magazine spread featured shots of the pool, artificial lake and elegant office at Fox's ranch house in [San Cristobal](#), north of Mexico City.

Since then, Lino Korrodi, former finance chairman of a group that supported Fox's campaigns, has said Fox lived modestly before becoming president and now flaunts "a

cynical and shameless wealth." A Mexican businessman, Luis Miguel Moreno Velez, has said that Sahagun de Fox asked him to buy a richly outfitted red Jeep for Fox while he was president.

The red Jeep has become the symbol of the scandal. Photos of Fox driving the Jeep, in his trademark cowboy hat and boots, appear nearly every day on television or the front pages of Mexican newspapers. Fox has said he is only borrowing the Jeep, a claim disputed by the businessman. Fox also has said that he does not own the Hummer he is frequently seen driving.

Juan Guerra, a member of Mexico's Congress and a frequent Fox critic, said in an interview that he and other lawmakers are preparing a 20-count complaint against the former president that will include allegations that he used his office to grant lucrative contracts to Sahagun de Fox's sons and paid for house renovations with ill-gotten money.

"We want everything documented and want the authorities to complete their public duty and sanction Fox," said Guerra, who is a member of the Democratic Revolutionary Party, which often clashes with Fox's National Action Party. "If Fox and Marta have to go to jail, so be it."

Manuel Espino, president of the National Action Party, has come to his defense, saying the ex-president and his wife are "honorable" people, but few other prominent politicians have spoken out in his favor.

The financial allegations come out of the capital, Mexico City, where smash-mouth politics is common. But the assault on Fox's statue was notable because it took place in Boca del Rio, a laid-back beach town six miles south of Veracruz on Mexico's east coast.

The statue of Fox was donated by artist Bernardo Lopez, who also has sculpted statues of [Pope John Paul II](#) and Hugo Sanchez, a prominent Mexican soccer coach and former star player. The statue was erected before dawn last Saturday on the beach boardwalk that runs along a street named for Fox.

By first light, a crowd formed. The gathering grew more heated, according to Alfredo Ferrari, former head of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, in the state of Veracruz, and the crowd surged over the statue, pulling it to the ground.

Boca del Rio Mayor Francisco Gutierrez de Velasco Urtaza said in an interview that the toppling of the statue was a "shameful act." He appeared at the scene and lofted the statue's severed right hand into the air, vowing it would be repaired and reinstalled.

Fox said Veracruz's governor, Fidel Herrera, bore responsibility, an accusation the governor, who is a member of the rival PRI, has denied. Ferrari, who says he does not condone the tearing down of the statue, nonetheless said it never should have been installed.

"The timing is bad," he said in an interview. "History hasn't made its judgment about Fox yet. It may be that he deserves five statues or thousands or none."

On Veracruz's boardwalk, known as "the malecon," shrimp fisherman Julio Rodriguez shook his head and said Fox was "a bad president, but it shows a lack of respect to tear down his statue."

A billboard with dozens of photos of Fox visiting the state of Veracruz has been erected next to the pedestal, with its twisted metal supports, that held Fox's statue. Barricades surround the pedestal and billboard. A police cruiser stands guard.