



# Chiapas Update



Information and Analysis from the Chiapas Support Committee

August 2006

## No Clear Winner in Mexico's Presidential Election; Fraud Alleged

by: Mary Ann Tenuto-Sanchez

[Note to our readers: On Saturday, August 5, Mexico's electoral body, the TEPJF, rejected the demand for a vote by vote recount. Instead, the TEPJF ordered a partial recount of votes at 11,839 of the country's almost 130,500 polling stations (9%). It appears that López Obrador's followers will continue their protests and demands for a vote by vote recount.]



More than 2 million people congregated in the Zocalo. Photo: Marco Pelaez

The official results had yet to be announced and comparisons were already being made between George Bush's two election campaigns and the 2006 presidential campaign of Felipe Calderón in Mexico. Of concern were the scare tactics used by the Calderón campaign. The "vote of fear," as some analysts refer to it, is not a coincidence; not in the United States and not in Mexico. It is a right-wing campaign strategy to win elections. It is politely referred to as "negative campaigning" in the U.S. In Mexico, they called it a "dirty campaign."

TV spots suggesting that it's dangerous to vote for John Kerry because he won't be tough enough on terrorism have the same effect as the spots suggesting that it's dangerous to vote for AMLO because of his alleged connection to Hugo Chávez (president of Venezuela). A spot by the Calderón campaign appeared to show Chávez passing out weapons to senior citizens in Venezuela. The spot suggested that AMLO would do the same thing if elected president of Mexico.

AMLO is Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the presidential candidate of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD, its initials in Spanish). López Obrador supposedly lost the July 2 presidential election by less than one-half of a percentage point to Calderón, who hired conservative Fox News analyst and U.S. political consultant Dick Morris to manage his campaign. Some of Calderón's other campaign ads fueled fears of losing homes, cars, jobs and refrigerators, not to mention the welfare handouts from the PAN government of Vicente Fox, if López Obrador were elected.

We have only to look at the intent of the political class in its violent attack on San Salvador Atenco. The brutal state repression there was intended to deliver the message that the country needs a heavy hand to deal with violence. The Calderón campaign showed spots with AMLO's photo amidst the violence in Atenco and elsewhere, calling him a "danger to the nation." Other comparisons to recent U.S. elections keep jumping out at us as we read blow-by-blow descriptions of the election.

At 11:00 PM on July 2, the Federal Electoral Institute (IFE, its initials in Spanish) was supposed to announce the results of the

day's voting. Instead, it announced that the results were too close to call and that in order to determine a winner it would have to examine the official tally sheets from each voting district in the country. The count would be conducted on Wednesday, July 5. However, the IFE also created the Program of Preliminary Results (PREP, for its initials in Spanish), which announced that Felipe Calderón was winning by 400,000 votes. It was later shown that the votes from 16,000 polling places were omitted from this count and ballots cast for López Obrador were allegedly found in a garbage dump. The IFE and the PREP were clearly sending a double message.

When "all" the tally sheets were counted on Wednesday, July 5, Felipe Calderón was declared the winner by roughly 250,000 votes. López Obrador's coalition, "For the Good of All," has challenged the election and is seeking a vote-by-vote recount. Over 500,000 supporters joined López Obrador in Mexico City's Zócalo on Saturday, July 8, to back up this demand. Although there were no hanging chads in Mexico, this might remind some of us of the extremely close Florida vote in 2000 or, as Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. recently pointed out, the manipulation of Ohio votes in 2004.

Subcomandante Marcos, aka Delegate Zero of the Zapatistas' Other Campaign, called the election fraudulent and supported the demand for a vote-by-vote recount. That is, indeed, the issue: whether or not a ballot-by-ballot recount will be ordered. Without all the votes being openly counted, a large percentage of the

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# Marcos: San Salvador Atenco's Political Prisoners the Priority

by: Mary Ann Tenuto Sanchez

The conflict began on a Wednesday, this past May 3, when flower vendors from San Salvador Atenco attempted to sell their wares in the nearby community of Texcoco at the site of a planned Wal-Mart megamall. Police brutally displaced the vendors, beating and arresting many people in the process. In response, the Atenco-based Peoples Front in Defense of Land (FPDT, its initials in Spanish) mobilized protests, which were also repressed with more police violence. Police killed a 14-year-old boy, and at least 50 or more were injured, some of them critically. Eleven police were detained by Atenco residents, who demanded an end to the repression and the release of those arrested in exchange for the release of the detained police. Instead of negotiating an exchange, the Federal Preventative Police (antiriot police) entered Atenco during the early morning hours of Thursday, May 4, declared a state of siege, and began a house-to-house search for the captured police, severely beating and arresting Atenco residents and anyone else who happened to be around.

The bloody results of the police terror on May 4 were 275 people held in a jail or a hospital or missing (Enlace Zapatista report, May 5). This included women and children of different ages. At least five were chained to hospital beds as prisoners.

An autopsy revealed that the 14-year-old boy was shot by the police. Another young man lingered for a month in a coma after police cracked his head open. He died a month later. Many of the leaders of the FPDT were arrested when police searched their homes without warrants, directed by a masked informant. Townspeople recognized the informant's voice as he directed police. Three of the top leaders of the FPDT are in a maximum security prison, charged with kidnapping (of police).

Five foreign citizens were deported from Mexico, at least three of them women. They told stories of police sexual abuse and rape of the women detainees. More than twenty women have now filed complaints with Mexico's National Human Rights Commission. Their complaints tell horror stories of rape, sodomy and beatings by police.

The May 11 edition of La Jornada reported that 172 people were formally charged and will stand trial. However, the judge threw out the original charge of conspiracy, a very serious charge, which would have prevented them from being released on bond. Now, 144 people have been charged with attacks on roads, a lesser offense for which they were able to get bail.

Charges against another 17 were completely dismissed. However, 27 remain in prison, charged with kidnapping for the detention of police on May 3, including the FPDT leaders Ignacio del Valle, Hector Galindo and Felipe Alvarez.

## "Pay-Back"

It appears that the police were just waiting for the right excuse and an okay from above to smash San Salvador Atenco, in particular the FPDT. Its recent history provides a clue to the motive for the excessive police violence against a campesino (peasant farmer) population. On October 21, 2001, the community learned that 70 percent of its land had been expropriated by the federal government of Vicente Fox Quesada in order to build a new international airport complex in Texcoco. In response, the community formed the FPDT to oppose the Fox administration's plan to build



the airport on their communally owned lands. After a year of vigorous protests, remembered around the world for the sound of their machetes clanging together in Mexico City's Zócalo, the government canceled its plans, much to the dismay of anxious investors. The community has remained highly organized ever since. Atenco is famous for its militant, machete-wielding protesters, who now participate in popular mobilizations across central Mexico, including those protesting a Wal-Mart store near the

archaeological site of Teotihuacán (close to Atenco). Members of the FPDT accompanied the Zapatista's Other Campaign during its travels through the state of Mexico and also in Mexico City on May 1, providing security for Subcomandante Marcos.

Those who had planned to invest in the multiple properties belonging to the airport complex were extremely upset by the government's decision to cancel the airport and the expropriation of land once claimed by eminent domain. This was supposed to be a multibillion dollar project and a key piece of infrastructure needed to support expanded "free trade." The Fox government was severely criticized as being "weak." The impression that most Mexicans and internationals had was that Atenco's residents had forced the federal government to back down. Many analysts think that the excessive police brutality in May was "pay-back" for the 2002 victory, the FPDT's continued militance and its important role in the Other Campaign. With the hindsight of the recent presidential election in Mexico, one also wonders if the repression against Atenco is a sign of what's to come should the conservative PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón, be confirmed as president-elect.

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There was also violent repression on June 14 in the state of Oaxaca against striking teachers and on July 13 in the state of Yucatán against indigenous people belonging to the National Indigenous Congress who were peacefully protesting plans for an airport.

**Zapatista Red Alert: Marcos Says More Commandanders Coming**

San Salvador Atenco is an autonomous (self-governing) community to the east of Mexico City and is adhered to the Other Campaign. On April 26, just one week before the police rampage, Subcomandante Marcos entered Atenco on horseback as part of the Other Campaign's tour. He received a tumultuous welcome as residents pledged to assist the Other Campaign with the strength of their numbers.

Upon learning of the police terrorism, the Zapatistas suspended the Other Campaign's schedule of events, declared a Red Alert throughout Chiapas communities, and called on adherents of the Other Campaign to mobilize in support of Atenco residents and political prisoners. This means that the published schedule for the Other Campaign has been superseded by the emergency in Atenco. Subcomandante Marcos said he will remain in Mexico City until all the Atenco prisoners are released. In other words, the Zapatistas take the attack on Atenco as a direct attack against the Other Campaign!

Marcos explained the Red Alert, now in its third month, in an Atenco assembly documented by La Jornada. First, the Red Alert places the Zapatista insurgent Army in a defensive mode, ready to fight in the event of attack. Secondly, he explained that it closed the communities to the outside and that there were no contacts with the outside. This means that the Good Government Juntas and the Autonomous Councils are not attending to or meeting with those outside Zapatista communities. They continue to meet to address matters internal to the communities or counties. Health care and education continue to function, but not the cooperatives of artisans (weaving, embroidery, etc) that cater to visitors. (see [www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/28/018n1pol.php](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/28/018n1pol.php)) Chiapas Update has learned through our contacts in Chiapas that some of the peace camps are still receiving international observers.

While much of the country was preoccupied with the recent presidential election, members of the Other Campaign organized benefits, marches and a sit-in outside the prison where most of Atenco's political prisoners are housed. Marcos emphasized in his post-election interview with La Jornada (see [www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/07/018n1pol.php](http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2006/07/07/018n1pol.php)) that the Other Campaign's priority is to free the political prisoners. Lt. Colonel Moisés has been urging members of the International Campaign and International Civil Society to organize demonstrations in support of freeing the political prisoners.

At the July 23 assembly in Atenco, Marcos surprised the crowd by announcing that some of the EZLN's commanders would be visiting Atenco to help in the struggle to free the 30 prisoners. He did not say exactly which commanders would visit or when they might arrive. This raises some interesting questions for the Other Campaign and for the International Campaign. How long will Marcos and the commanders be in Mexico City? How long will the Red Alert continue? Where will the next Intergalactic Gathering be held?

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT:**

[www.jornada.unam.mx](http://www.jornada.unam.mx)    [chiapas.indymedia.org](http://chiapas.indymedia.org)  
[www.RadioZapatista.org](http://www.RadioZapatista.org)  
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population will believe that Calderón became president through fraud and his authority to govern will be seriously questioned. Indeed, many commentators in Mexico believe that this is a severe test of Mexico's democratic institutions.

Marcos compared the announcement that Calderón won the election to the Fox administration's failed attempt to take away López Obrador's eligibility to run for president. Although the Other Campaign has a non-electoral agenda and does not consider itself a friend of the PRD or of López Obrador, Marcos and the Zapatistas supported his right to run for office as a matter of democratic principle, just like they are now supporting a ballot-by-ballot open recount.

A total of 365 challenges to the election have been filed with the Judicial Power's Federal Electoral Tribunal (TEPJF, its initials in Spanish), 225 of those by Lopez Obrador's coalition. The TEPJF has until August to decide whether it will order a ballot-by-ballot recount based on the evidence presented in these cases. Among the evidence are videos which allegedly show ballot boxes being stuffed. Allegations of vote shaving (removing the names of PRD voters from the official precinct lists) are also included. Does this remind anyone of Florida 2000?

The TEPJF is a group of seven appointed lawyers who make up an independent commission which is not part of the government. After reviewing the challenges and the evidence presented, that tribunal has four options: 1) affirm Calderón as president-elect; 2) order a ballot-by-ballot recount; 3) order a recount of a selected sample of the contested precincts; or, 4) annul the election and appoint an interim president to prepare a new election. This latter option is considered extreme and unlikely. It could arise if a recount uncovers such massive fraud that the entire election would have to be annulled.

With Mexico's democracy thought to be at stake, López Obrador urged his supporters from all over the country to defend their vote by traveling to Mexico City for the largest mobilization in history on July 16. And they did! On July 16, Mexico City's famous Zócalo and its surrounding streets were packed with more than one million López Obrador supporters. That's right! Over one million people turned out and vowed to continue the fight for a ballot-by-ballot recount. AMLO called them out again and on July 30 they doubled that number in the same Zócalo! On Sunday, July 30, more than 2 million people filled the center of Mexico City! AMLO called on them to watch the local places where the ballots are stored. Such a defense of the vote is very, very different from what we experience here in the United States. It is where the similarities between a U.S. election and a Mexican election end. No candidate has called on U.S. voters to get out in the streets and defend their democratic right to a fair vote count.

Given the extent of the evidence presented by López Obrador's lawyers against the conduct of the Federal Electoral Institute, it would seem difficult for the TEPJF to simply affirm the initial declaration of Calderón as the winner. However, the ballot-by-ballot recount is strongly opposed by an influential mix of Calderón's supporters, including not only members of the PAN federal government, but businesspeople, clergy, and the major media outlets. One wonders what they are afraid of: Do they think a ballot-by-ballot recount will be unfavorable to their conservative candidate? As the noted writer and historian Carlos Montemayor said, the right needs to learn how to win, that is, with the transparency needed for the voters to trust in the results.

**CHIAPAS UPDATE**

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## Who We Are

The Chiapas Support Committee is a grass roots non-profit organization. We have a sisterhood relationship with the Autonomous Zapatista Municipality (County) of San Manuel, located in the canyons (cañadas) of Ocosingo, Chiapas.

We work together with San Manuel's elected authorities to construct a sustainable economic base capable of developing and independently supporting autonomous government.

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