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## Full vote recount rejected by Mexico federal court

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MEXICO CITY - Mexico's Federal Electoral Court on Saturday refused to order a full recount of the disputed presidential election, defying thousands of leftist protesters who have seized the center of the capital and stoking fears of further unrest.

Leftist candidate Andrés Manuel López Obrador rejected the ruling, repeated his allegations of widespread voter fraud, and called for continued "civil resistance," raising speculation that his supporters might intensify their protests by blocking highways and airports. Such blockades are a frequent form of protest in other parts of Mexico, but they could be especially damaging here in the country's financial heart.

"They are forcing us to take drastic measures . . . measures that will put our own lives in danger," said Emilio Serrano, a congressman who led protests outside the courthouse. "We're not afraid of the president, the military or the federal police."

Protesters have shut down eight miles of Mexico City's central Reforma Avenue, snarling traffic through the world's second-most-populated city for the last week.

They also briefly interrupted traffic on the bridge to Laredo, Texas, and sealed off the Mexican stock exchange for a few hours.

Riot police were sent Friday to guard the Mexico City airport and state-run oil facilities.

López Obrador called for a rally today in Mexico City's main Zócalo plaza to announce his next move. He rejected the court's ruling and said the protests would continue.

"We are going to continue with our movement of peaceful civil resistance," he told protesters. "We are not going to leave . . . because we have to make democracy count and defend the votes."

The U.S. Embassy warned Americans to stay away from the protest camps, which effectively meant avoiding all of Mexico City's main tourist attractions.

"Even demonstrations intended to be peaceful can turn confrontational and escalate into violence," the embassy said in a written statement.

A banner strung from a pedestrian bridge near the electoral court threatened violence. Addressing the court by its Spanish acronym, it said: "TEPJF, it's up to you to keep Mexico from being bathed in blood."

There have been no reports of unrest in Sonora, the Mexican state bordering

Arizona, Sonora and the rest of northern Mexico voted overwhelmingly for conservative candidate Felipe Calderón.

As protesters booed outside the Federal Electoral Court in southern Mexico City, the seven electoral justices unanimously rejected López Obrador's demand for a full recount. The ruling cannot be appealed.

However, they did order recounts of 11,839 polling stations where there was evidence of errors or wrongdoing. That's just 9 percent of the 130,477 polling stations nationwide.

The votes will be counted by electoral officials supervised by regional electoral judges and party representatives.

López Obrador lost the July 2 election to Calderón by just 243,934 votes, or 0.58 percent. It was the closest election in Mexican history.

The votes have been counted twice, so the limited recount ordered by the court on Saturday was unlikely to affect the outcome.

On voting day, each ballot was counted individually by citizens who were picked for poll duty through a lottery system. The votes were recorded on a tally sheet signed by party representatives.

On July 5, the tally sheets were reviewed and counted at Federal Electoral Institute offices. In polling stations where there was evidence of problems, the ballots were counted again individually.

Independent observers have said the vote was mostly fraud-free. But López Obrador claims the Federal Electoral Institute rigged the count to ensure Calderón's victory.

Calderón's allies said they expected the recounts to confirm his victory. The court has until Sept. 6 to certify an official winner.

"We're confident that this new count will confirm the transparency of the count performed by citizens who participated on election day," said Germán Martínez, the representative for Calderón's National Action Party in the Federal Electoral Institute.

By releasing its verdict on a Saturday, the court appeared to be giving investors time to absorb the news before the stock market opens on Monday.

Mexican markets have been fairly stable throughout the election uncertainty, but more intense unrest could hurt the economy.

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