

## Expatriates join Nogales voters to cast ballots

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NOGALES, Sonora — Schools, storefronts, house porches, vacant lots and even a car wash became makeshift polling places Sunday as throngs of Mexicans turned out to vote for a new president.



Voters wait in a line that stretched nearly four hours long near the

Mariposa port of entry as throngs of voters turned out to choose Mexico's next president.

In this border city of about 350,000, some people waited up to four hours to cast a ballot for the successor of outgoing President Vicente Fox, whose historic rise to the nation's presidency six years ago ended the 71-year rule of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI.

Mexican law restricts Fox, a member of the conservative National Action Party, or PAN, to a single term in office.

Election Day was the culmination of a fierce, close campaign between Felipe Calderón, the candidate of Fox's party, and Andrés Manuel López Obrador of the leftist Democratic Revolution Party. The PRI's Roberto Madrazo ran third in the polls.

The election was the talk of Nogales, but some tourists were surprised to learn that alcohol was off-limits.

"I was looking forward to a really good Mexican margarita," said Maria Perkins of Chandler, who sat at a courtyard café with her husband, Joel, and friends Liz and John Slowik. Instead, she and the others sipped Mexican sodas.

On local radio, between live election reports, Nogales residents called in to gripe about late start times at some polls, long lines and disorganized workers.

In this city 65 miles south of Tucson, the loyalties of local residents and Mexicans living in Arizona who traveled here to vote were divided among the top three presidential contenders.

Tucsonans Alfonso López and his wife, Claudia, said their native country would be better off in the hands of López Obrador. The accountants voted for him at a packed *casilla especial*, a special polling place set up in a tent just south of the Mariposa Port of Entry for those without a Nogales address.

"He is the candidate of the people," said López, who was born in the United States and has dual citizenship. His Mexican-born wife is a U.S. permanent legal resident. Although she voted for Fox in the last presidential election, Claudia López said his party's candidate "did not convince me. And I vote for the candidate, not the party."

Unlike the hundreds of people lined up to vote, the Lópezes did not have to wait — one of the perks of Claudia López's eight-month pregnancy.

Others stood in a slow-moving line that snaked around a

vacant lot, as a hot, humid afternoon turned breezy and cloudy. The crowd grew as a light drizzle prompted several people to snap open umbrellas, but by then, Enrique Hurtado Lara and his wife, Maria Dolores, had cast their ballots and were headed back home to Phoenix.

Hurtado Lara, 45, said he would have voted by mail as Mexico's expatriates were eligible to do for the first time, but he heard about it too late to request an absentee ballot. So he made the trip south to the border, where he and his wife and their two children, Rosalva, 9, and Angelica, 2, waited patiently in line for about four hours. The couple said their vote went to Calderón.

Hurtado Lara said he was disappointed that just 40,000 out of roughly 4 million Mexicans eligible to vote abroad had registered to vote, but added that the number probably will increase in future elections. "It's a good opportunity for those of us who no longer live here to help make change in Mexico," he said. "We send money to our families here and regularly contribute to the economy that way, so we should have the right to vote."

The factory worker said he still believes in Fox's party, despite widespread criticism for unfulfilled promises.

"What a lot of people don't understand is that his hands were tied, that he couldn't get many programs approved because his party wasn't the majority," said Hurtado Lara, who grew up in the state of Jalisco and left at 17 to work illegally north of the border.

Years later, Hurtado Lara said, he obtained legal status.

"If the PAN loses, Mexico will take a step backward," he said. "I hope my compatriots will give the party at least three terms to make some real change."

Plenty of people who are living in the United States illegally arrived in Nogales to vote — including 18 of Imelda González's siblings, cousins, nephews and nieces. Half of them voted for Calderón, the other half for Madrazo, said González, who was an observer at a small polling place near the city's main commercial corridor known as Avenida Obregón.

René Romo de Vivar, a Nogales dentist, said he voted for Madrazo, the PRI candidate because one of his proposals is to create more jobs. The lack of jobs is what drives Mexicans to slip across the border, he said, and "perhaps more people will stay and work here instead of migrating to the United States."

He also lamented that the number of votes from those living outside Mexico had not been higher, given the added

cost for the country.

The Federal Election Institute reported that as of June 28, about 30,000 votes from Mexicans abroad had been received, most from the United States.

"Maybe in the next election," Romo de Vivar said. "People have to be educated."

Nogales resident José Gabriel Flores Valenzuela, 43, said he voted for the PAN candidate because he is the most qualified to build on his predecessor's progress in improving the country. Returning the nation's top post to the PRI or giving it to the PRD would be a mistake, he said. "Calderón is our only hope," the security guard said in the early afternoon.

Esmeralda López Hernández, who also lives in Nogales, concurred with Flores Valenzuela's vote. A PAN victory would benefit the poor if the party continues at the country's helm, she said.

For example, the secretary noted, single mothers now have access to medical benefits that they lacked before the Fox administration.

"The PRI ruined the country in all those years," said López Hernández, 28. "You can't fix it all in just six years." Next to López Hernández, her husband, Alejandro Romero, 31, nodded his head in agreement as he

watched over their son,  
Eduardo, 2.

Long before voters knew who the next Mexican president would be, food vendor Hilda Coronado already was a winner. Situated next to the busy casilla especial near the Mariposa crossing, her food booth offered tacos, quesadillas and an array of drinks to hungry, thirsty would-be voters.

"We've sold a lot, a lot of food," she said. "More than twice as much as we usually do."

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A child holds on as his father votes in a street booth Sunday in Nogales, Sonora. Makeshift polling places dotted the city.

**Chris Coduto / Arizona Daily Star**