

MEXICAN  
**Messiah**

*Andrés Manuel López Obrador*



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TABLE 2. 1988 Presidential (July 6) and Gubernatorial (November 9) Results in Tabasco

PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE	NUMBER OF VOTES RECEIVED	%	GUBERNATORIAL CANDIDATE	NUMBER OF VOTES RECEIVED	%
Carlos Salinas de Gortari (PRI)	199,860	74.23	Salvador Neme Castillo (PRI)	205,515	77.94
Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas (FDN)	53,275	19.79	Andrés Manuel López Obrador (FDN)	55,874	21.19
Manuel Clouthier (PAN)	14,329	5.32			
Minor Party Candidates	1,715	0.64	Miguel Augusto Castillo Pérez (Mexican Democratic Party—PDM); Rosario Ibarra (Workers' Revolutionary Party—PRT)	2,309	.88
Number of Registered Voters	634,687		Number of Registered Voters	679,110	
Valid Votes	269,179	42.41	Valid Votes	263,698	38.83
Nullified Votes	71	.03	Nullified Votes	22,644	3.33
Abstentions	365,437	57.58	Abstentions	392,768	57.84

SOURCE: López Obrador, *Tabasco, víctima del fraude electoral*, 109, 137; and Federal Electoral Institute, www.ife.org.mx.

In some areas, totals exceeded the number of registered voters. In addition to stuffed ballot boxes and the illegal voiding of ballots, sharp differences appeared between the FDN tally in the presidential race and in the gubernatorial contest.

All told, the FDN reported “irregularities” in sixty-seven of the state’s 1,062 voting places. The FDN lodged sixteen written complaints with the State Electoral Commission, which was headed by Government Secretary Mayans Canabal. The commission determined that seventeen of the complaints were unjustified—rejecting one more complaint than was submitted.<sup>43</sup>

Some observers allege that López Obrador and Madrazo exaggerated the FDN threat, the former because he sought to play the valiant martyr struggling against oppressive forces, the latter because he wanted to accentuate his prowess as party leader. Sixteen years later, Camacho remained one of the few people convinced that without the national PRI’s involvement, the party could have lost the contest.<sup>44</sup>

#### *Maneuvers by Camacho Solís*

After the election, the PRI sought to calm the roiled Tabascan waters. Camacho contacted FDN senator Roberto Robles Garnica, a Cárdenas confidant, to arrange a meeting with López Obrador. The losing candidate took the high road. He rejected the overture on the grounds that state electoral authorities had already received official complaints of the fraud perpetrated in the election. For him, the people’s will was not “negotiable.”<sup>45</sup>

PFCRN leader Rafael Aguilar Talamantes proved to be less high-minded. Muñoz Ledo nicknamed his small party the “railroad” because its initials were similar to those of Mexico’s Ferrocarriles Nacionales de México, another agency owned lock, stock, and barrel by the government. Aguilar Talamantes had attracted attention by staging a hunger strike in the national Congress on November 17. He decried both the electoral fraud and the “aggression” visited on his party’s militants and elected officials. While all of the opposition verbally backed Aguilar Talamantes’s maneuver, only deputies from the PARM and the Democratic Current fasted during the twenty-four-hour protest.<sup>46</sup> Among their demands were the removal of Government Secretary Mayans Canabal and the mayor and police chief of Cárdenas. Camacho rewarded Aguilar Talamantes for recognizing the legitimacy of the results by firing the Cárdenas police chief, giving the PFCRN two state legislative seats, and providing his party with typewriters and furniture.<sup>47</sup> Aguilar Talamantes was true to his creed: “It’s much better to make a detour than drive around in circles.”<sup>48</sup> A facile writer, López Obrador chronicled the real and perceived abuses of the 1988 election in a book entitled *Tabasco, víctima del fraude electoral*.

*López Obrador Takes on the Romans*

#### PARTY BUILDING IN TABASCO

In contrast to Cárdenas’s indifference to institutions, López Obrador commenced the construction in Tabasco of the newly founded PRD, which provided a vehicle for Cárdenas’s followers to continue their political struggle against the PRI. Before López Obrador entered the fray, the Left simply did not count in the state. Central to el Peje’s strategy was the fashioning of a parallel government. The PRI old guard conducted business in the governor’s palace, the Quinta Grijalva, the Congress, the party’s back room, business headquarters, private clubs, and other conventional sites. In contrast, López Obrador sought out people in the streets, municipal squares, and union halls, on communal farms, and in other venues. He attracted them with his relentless attacks on the pollution—both political and ecological—that enveloped Tabasco. He and fellow *perredista* professionals traveled throughout the state to help Indians and other poor people with their problems.

Pro-PRD lawyers helped low-income citizens apply for state and federal health, social, and educational programs for which they were eligible. In addition, the attorneys aided them in obtaining titles to the property on which they lived. Lic. Payambé López Falconi, a notary public, provided legal services. Architect Armando Padilla Herrera designed low-cost houses for squatters who had “invaded” vacant properties with the PRD’s support. In Villahermosa (Medellín y Pigua neighborhoods), thirty-two lots were turned over to families in 1991; in Teapa (Vicente Guerrero Lerma),

colleagues included Dr. Laurell, who was in charge of most programs for senior citizens.

#### *Administration and Finance Cabinet*

As its name indicates, the Administration and Finance Cabinet had administrative and budgetary responsibilities. The powerful Romero Oropeza presided over this body, which included Finance Secretary Saltiel, Comptroller Luján, and Treasurer Rosado.

#### TRUSTS

Under López Obrador, the city established several public-private trusts, known as *fideicomisos*. The most important of these concentrated on the historic zone and was headed by Ana Lilia Zepeda, who was well versed in politics as a former federal deputy and the ex-wife of President Echeverría's son. Her task was to raise public and private funds to restore the Historic Center. As mentioned earlier, Secretary Sheinbaum had responsibility for the Chapultepec trust, whose work concentrated on the area around the Chapultepec Palace, the Anthropology Museum, and the corridor that joins several of Mexico's largest hotels—the Nikko, the Marriott, and the Chapultepec Presidente. The Trust for the Improvement of Rapid Highways focused on the second tiers. Although formally headed by Rodríguez Rey Morán, the overall supervisor was the ubiquitous Sheinbaum.

#### AMLO'S MANAGEMENT STYLE

An unyielding taskmaster, López Obrador demanded that his subordinates achieve their objectives on time. He summed up his style in the aphorism "Friends are for playing dominoes."<sup>13</sup> He reiterated his philosophy in March 2004, after two members of the city government were accused of corruption. Friends and family did not matter, he said, because "I came here to serve and I am not going to betray the confidence that the people have placed in me."<sup>14</sup>

Like the Christian messiah, López Obrador chose trusted individuals as apostles, the majority of whom came from Tabasco. He recruited converts from the PRI to spread his popular, anti-neoliberal gospel, and Magdalenas who faithfully, unquestioningly, and effectively undertook tasks essential to running city government. Although four cabinets loomed large on his government's organizational chart, el Peje often departed from the structure to make decisions personally or give special assignments to his closest allies. He emphasized that neither family ties nor friendships would interfere with his sacred mission to vanquish oppressive neoliberalism.

## CHALLENGING THE PHARISEES, SADDUCEES, AND SCRIBES

Jesus took issue with the excessively literal manner in which the Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes interpreted the Torah. He ultimately censured the clergy and made a physical assault on the temple. He did not provoke an uprising against the priestly caste, but he did chastise them. Matthew reports Christ as saying, "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For ye shut up the kingdom of heaven against men: for ye neither go in yourselves, neither suffer ye them that are entering to go in" (Matt. 23:13).<sup>1</sup>

In a similar vein, López Obrador pays lip service to operating within his nation's legal system, but he harbors contempt for the nation's judiciary and legislative bodies. His defiance of the law yielded dividends in Tabasco, where laying siege to oil wells enabled him to exact a danegeld from Pemex and use these resources to attract even more followers to his cause. He justified these acts because corruption suffused the PRI government, which catered to the elite at the expense of the poor.

In addition, he led marches to Mexico City, where his followers camped in the Zócalo or other public venues, a prelude to the encampments that he established after the July 2006 election. Demonstrators demanded "indemnities" for the supposed losses they had sustained in Tabasco. Mayor Camacho and other officials gave el Peje substantial sums to vacate the public spaces and return home. The documents that revealed the PRI's outrageously high expenditures in the 1994 elections accentuated the Tabascan's scorn for a venal regime. He expressed his disdain for democracy when he refused to support the Cofipe electoral reform.

On November 20, 2004, López Obrador began to travel throughout the country to unveil his *proyecto alternativo de nación*, the first iteration of his Eleven Commandments. All told, he presented his anti-neoliberal manifesto—dedicated to “all who have not lost hope”—in more than a dozen cities. During his literary and political excursion, he covered 4,299 kilometers and spoke before 20,700 people.<sup>1</sup> By June 1, 2005, the first rendition of his political creed had sold 37,000 copies, netting the author 476,599 pesos for his campaign.<sup>2</sup> To demonstrate that he was not using the income for creature comforts, el Pejelagarto released his income and expenditures for 2003 and 2004 (see Table 21).

In addition to propounding his doctrine, the mayor used these sessions to restore his image, which had been tarnished by various scandals, as well as his caustic remarks about the “Citizens March Against Crime” that brought some quarter-million, largely middle-class, people into the streets of Mexico City in late June 2004.

The book events gave him a chance to schmooze with local leaders, explore electoral alliances, and win converts to his cause. Among those who assisted in these activities were political confidants Manuel Camacho and Ricardo Monreal, economist Rogelio Ramírez de la O, Pérez Gay, adviser Ignacio Marván, former culture secretary Semo, communications director Yáñez, and private secretary Alejandro Esquer.

CITIZENS NETWORKS

Meanwhile, the mayor’s brother, Pío López Obrador, and the PRD’s secretary of labor and social movements, José Antonio Rueda, began organizing “citizen committees” distinct from the party. By September 2004 they had spawned such groups in a dozen states, mostly in the southern and central parts of the country.<sup>3</sup>

On December 5, 2004, López Obrador proclaimed that he was seeking to win 60 percent of the Mexicans. To achieve this goal, he announced the formation of “Citizens Networks” to broaden his

TABLE 21. López Obrador’s Income and Expenses, 2003–2004

CATEGORY	2003 (PESOS)	2004 (PESOS)
Income	1,295,358	1,435,502
Expenditures on clothing	100,000	110,000
Expenditure on shoes	25,000	25,000
Expenditure on recreation	241,000	300,000
Expenditure on a housekeeper	72,000	65,000

SOURCE: Manuel Durán, “Obtiene \$476 mil AMLO por su libro,” *Reforma*, June 1, 2005, <http://www.reforma.com.mx/>.

political base. On its Web site, this “citizens’ movement” stressed its commitment to “the full exercise of liberties, economic growth, greater justice, and strengthening our national identity.”<sup>4</sup> He named as organizers five PRI converts and one independent. Each coordinator was responsible for creating and overseeing the networks in one of the nation’s five political zones:

- Deputy Socorro Díaz Palacios (Baja California, Baja California Sur, Colima, Guanajuato, Jalisco, Nayarit, Sinaloa, and Sonora);
- Deputy Manuel Camacho Solís (Aguascalientes, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Durango, Nuevo León, Querétaro, San Luis Potosí);
- Former Zacatecas governor Ricardo Monreal Ávila (Guerrero, México State, Michoacan, and Zacatecas);
- Senator César Raúl Ojeda Zubieta, candidate for governor of Tabasco (Campeche, Chiapas, Oaxaca, Quintana Roo, Veracruz, Yucatán, and Tabasco); and
- Deputy José Agustín Ortiz Pinchetti, a successful attorney who had been López Obrador’s first secretary of government (D.F., Hidalgo, Morelos, Puebla, and Tlaxcala)

Federico Arreola Castillo, the erstwhile executive vice president for publishing at the Multimedios/Milenio conglomerate, served as the organization’s technical secretary. Among his responsibilities was raising and managing funds for the network, each of whose local committees was expected to be self-supporting. Although the organizational chart was flexible, to say the least, there were—below the coordinators and Arreola—national subcoordinators for each of the electoral zones and national delegates to each state’s networks.

In late March 2005 Camacho claimed that the networks had formed 970 local committees—a figure that would soar to four thousand.<sup>5</sup> The networks appeared similar to the Friends of Fox, which had played a crucial role in Fox’s victory. They had a malleable structure that could respond quickly to the needs of the leadership; were focused on a single individual; could raise money for their candidate; attracted independents who normally spurned partisan activities, as well as PRI activists disenchanted with Madrazo; depicted differences with their political foes in black-and-white terms; complemented the relatively weak PRD machinery just as the Friends of Fox complemented the PAN; and discouraged citizens adversely affected by neoliberalism from wasting their votes on other candidates—a variation on Fox’s “valid vote” strategy to dissuade citizens from backing Cárdenas in 2000.<sup>6</sup>

These similarities aside, the networks differed from the Friends of Fox in several ways. Their leaders were politicians, not businessmen. These coordinators were searching for candidates who could run for Congress and state and local positions to amplify the turnout for López Obrador and lend credibility in his campaign. Had he captured the presidency, el Peje would have required as much

TABLE 26. AMLO's Post-July 2 Activities and Announcements

DATE	ACTIVITY	MAJOR PRONOUNCEMENT/EVENT
July 3	Press conference	AMLO produced data showing "inconsistencies" in vote tallying and asked for a meticulous recount.
July 5	Press conference	AMLO, with "Por el bien de todos" spokeswoman Claudia Sheinbaum, announced that there were 13,432 voting inconsistencies.
July 8	Informative assembly in the Zócalo involving 500,000 supporters (by AMLO's figures)	AMLO told his supporters that he would prove the election flawed and illegal, and that it violated Article 41 of the Constitution.
July 10	Press conference	Asked the Electoral Court for a vote-by-vote recount and presented evidence of "electoral crimes."
July 13	Press conference	Stated that the IFE was breaking the law and blamed businesses for funding 995 million pesos' worth of PAN attack ads.
July 16	Informative assembly in the Zócalo with more than 1.5 million supporters (by AMLO's figures)	Informed his followers that, if the authorities failed to heed his demands, "Mexico would have neither financial, economic, nor political stability."
July 30	Informative assembly in the Zócalo with more than 3 million supporters (by AMLO's figures)	Told supporters he was certain he would become president. Urged his backers to reject the electoral fraud and participate in peaceful resistance.
August 1	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Called on the judges of the Federal Electoral Tribunal to make the right decision and said he would not negotiate with the opposition. He also announced that the camps on Reforma and Juárez would keep functioning.
August 5	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Bashed the decision of the TEPJF not to order a vote-by-vote recount. He reiterated to his supporters that their protesting and efforts were worthwhile.

applying for social programs, helped squatters seize land and construct homes, and provided legal, medical, dental, and veterinarian services free of charge. Although the venture is a work in progress, the National Democratic Convention (CND) convened by López Obrador in mid-September had a broader purpose than delivering services.

Some members of his movement compared it to the 1911 Plan of Ayala, which articulated agrarian revolutionary Emiliano Zapata's cry for "Land, Justice, and Law!" This declaration of principles rejected the presidency of Francisco I. Madero, called for free elections once there was political stability, named Pascual Orozco the

TABLE 26 (cont'd). AMLO's Post-July 2 Activities and Announcements

DATE	ACTIVITY	MAJOR PRONOUNCEMENT/EVENT
August 6	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Declared that if the PAN wanted to negotiate, they would first have to respect the will of the people. Quoted Benito Juárez: "The king's power is weak when he opposes the people's will."
August 10	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Declared that "los mapaches" were succeeding in corrupting the recount.
August 13	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Announced that he would "save democracy" by not permitting the "imposition of a spurious president." Announced that the National Democratic Convention would be convened on September 16. Also declared that he was willing to fight for years to achieve justice.
August 14–26	Daily rallies in the Zócalo	
August 27	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Announced the formation of a legitimate national government and the continuation of civil resistance.
August 28–September 5	Daily rallies in the Zócalo	
September 6	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Announced that 210,000 citizens had registered for the National Democratic Convention.
September 10	Informative assembly in the Zócalo	Announced that more than 500,000 citizens had registered for the National Democratic Convention. Announced that the convention would take place after the <i>desfile</i> .
September 11–15	Daily rallies in the Zócalo	
September 16	National Democratic Convention in the Zócalo	More than 1 million delegates attended the convention (by AMLO's numbers). AMLO given title of "Legitimate President of Mexico"—to be inaugurated on November 20. Called for establishment of a parallel government.

SOURCE: Joseph H. Jenkins prepared this table on the basis of information provided on López Obrador's Web site, <http://www.lopezobrador.org.mx>.

legitimate head of the revolution, demanded land reform, and confirmed the agrarian character of the upheaval. An amendment to the scheme placed Zapata at the head of the revolution and called for the establishment of a government loyal to the short-lived Plan of Ayala.

The legitimacy of the convention, el Peje claimed, derived from Article 39 of the 1917 Constitution, which states: "The national sovereignty resides essentially and originally in the people. All public power originates in the people and is instituted for their benefit. The people at all times have the inalienable right to alter or modify their form of government."