

Andrés Manuel López Obrador: Mexico's Corbyn cruises to presidency

Socialist vows to end corruption and poverty

Oscar Lopez, Mexico City

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The veteran left-winger Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador has been elected president of Mexico by the biggest landslide in 30 years.

Official projections suggest he secured 53 per cent of the vote, a resounding mandate for the brand of socialist nationalism, which has led to him being likened to Jeremy Corbyn, Bernie Sanders or even a left-wing Trump.

With his promises to defeat corruption and tackle inequality, Mr López Obrador, 64, has amassed a fervent following across the country in an election campaign characterised by violence.

Speaking at a press conference as tens of thousands of supporters gathered in Mexico City, Mr López Obrador promised an upheaval to match Mexico's independence, reformation and revolution. "This is a historic day and will be a memorable night," he said. "An important majority of citizens has decided to begin the fourth transformation of public life in Mexico."

The former mayor of Mexico City went into election day with a commanding lead over his rival Ricardo Anaya, of the conservative National Action Party (PAN), who won 23 per cent of the vote yesterday. José Antonio Meade, of President Peña Nieto's Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), secured 16 per cent, a record low for the party which ruled Mexico for 70 years until 2000. Both conceded defeat when exit polls were released.

President Trump offered his congratulations on Twitter. He wrote: "I look very much forward to working with him. There is much to be done that will benefit both the United States and Mexico!"

Many in Mexico have become fed up with the corruption and violence that have marred both major parties over the past 18 years and see Mr López Obrador's anti-establishment message as a path to change.

Paula Yusef, 33, one of thousands celebrating under the Angel of Independence statue in Mexico City, said: "We need a president who lives for the people."

The Morena party founded by Mr López Obrador in 2014 had its strongest ever results in the senate and chamber of deputies. "This election is a cataclysm," said Roberto Morris, a

professor of political communication at the Panamerican University in Mexico. “A brutal political realignment.”

As well as being the biggest election in Mexico’s history, this has been the country’s bloodiest, with more than 130 politicians killed since the campaign began. Early yesterday morning, a campaigner for the Workers’ Party, which is allied to Mr López Obrador’s Morena party, was shot and killed in Michoacán state, hours after three members of the Party of the Democratic Revolution (PRD) were gunned down in the State of Mexico.

Meanwhile, polling stations in three different states and the Iztapalapa neighbourhood of Mexico City reported that armed assailants stole, and in some cases burnt, hundreds of ballot papers.

“It’s symptomatic of Mexico’s deteriorating national security,” said Cassius Wilkinson, an analyst at the political consultancy firm Empra. “The political process is being eroded.”

But the violence hasn’t dampened voter enthusiasm, with electoral officials expecting turnout to be slightly higher than in the 2012 election.

At a special voting booth in southern Mexico City, for people not registered in the capital, electoral officials ran out of the 750 ballot papers they were legally allotted, prompting would-be voters to block one of the city’s main avenues in protest chanting, “We want to vote!”

Behind the story

When Andrés Manuel López Obrador becomes president of Mexico, the country’s difficult relations with the United States could take a turn for the worse.

The campaign has been dominated by domestic issues, mainly involving inequality, security and corruption, but the former mayor of Mexico City has been uncompromising in his descriptions of President Trump, whom he has called “an irresponsible bully”.

Immigration across the border into the US is a particular sore point. Mr López Obrador has promised to denounce Mr Trump’s planned border wall as a human rights violation before the UN.

The North American free trade agreement, which the US president has said is overly favourable to Mexico, also hangs in the balance.

Although talks to renegotiate it have stalled, Mr López Obrador, a fierce critic of Mexico’s free-market policies, has softened his stance on the agreement. At his final election rally, he promised to work on a new treaty that would take into account jobs, security and migration and also include Canada and Central America.

“We are bound to respect the relationship with the US and there will be a willingness for dialogue,” he told about 100,000 supporters at Azteca stadium, Mexico City. “At the right moment, we will propose a comprehensive deal to Donald Trump”.

He has said that he would appoint Jesús Seade, an Oxford-educated economist, to lead negotiations.

Whether there can be meaningful chemistry between two leaders with seemingly very different values and ideas of leadership is unclear.

Gustavo Mohar, a former official who managed Mexican relations with Congress at the embassy in Washington, said: "Finding a dialogue with that man [Mr Trump] is going to be the greatest diplomatic challenge for the next administration.

"Mr López Obrador has been an enigma. We don't know if he will become a president who is more pragmatic and less ideological. That is the great question that will hopefully be answered in the months to come."

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