

## **AMLO: Mexico's president-elect is an enigma**

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Univision, 2 JUL 2018

**Andrés Manuel López Obrador, known universally as AMLO, was elected as the next president of Mexico on Sunday with 53% of the vote, the widest margin in the country's recent history. His followers hail him as an agent of change who will root out corruption, but critics see him as yet another Latin American populist with few concrete proposals.**



MEXICO CITY.- At his closing campaign rally at the Azteca Stadium, his supporters welcomed him with an enthusiastic soccer wave, acclaiming him as “Presidente” under a rain of confetti.

Instead of acknowledging the festive crowd with a politicians’ usual beaming face and celebratory arms in the air, he walked slowly to the podium and paused to open the folder with the speech he would read next: "We reached the end of the 2018 campaign. There is a contagious and vibrant joy here today, because the mood of society reflected in the polls, indicates we are going to win the elections on Sunday," he said in a ceremonious tone, without letting any of the crowd excitement get to him during the hour-long speech.

It’s not charisma that makes the stadium roar for Andrés Manuel López Obrador, AMLO for short, but rather his persistence. After all, he been here before, in what is his third consecutive presidential campaign in a dozen years. The favorite the last two times only to lose on election day, Sunday's landslide result was never in doubt as he led the race comfortably from start to finish, winning with 53% of the vote, according to official results.

**U.S. President Donald Trump** was quick to tweet his congratulations Sunday night, but relations López Obrador is expected to adopt a more nationalistic tone with his northern neighbor than current president Enrique Peña Nieto, who is considered too pusillanimous in his handling of U.S. relations.

His followers paint him as an honest man; the quality they believe Mexico needs to clean house and root out a corrupt political system dominated by two parties, the PRI (1929-2000, 2012-2018) and the PAN (2000-2012). But his critics warn he is a dangerous messiah, poised to upset the fragile balance of power in a country plagued by drug gangs and organized crime that has caused 234,000 deaths in the last decade.

#### "Fourth transformation"

López Obrador, 64, defines his mission as leading a "fourth transformation" in Mexico's republican history, following independence in 1810, a reformation in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and a decade-long armed revolution (1910-20).

Since his first campaign, López Obrador has sold the idea that in Mexico it is necessary to make a "revolution of consciences" to banish a political "mafia" from power that turned the government into a "factory of the rich."

He repeats over and over that the savings from achieving that goal, ending corruption, will pay for fixing the cascade of other serious problems facing the country: jarring social inequality, criminal violence, poverty and Mexico's relationship with its neighbors.

What made his third campaign more successful experts say was a greater outreach to win over important new allies outside his traditional left-wing orbit, some controversial and others unexpected. That includes evangelicals from the Social Encounter Party (PES) - which together with the Labor Party and the **National Regeneration Movement** (MORENA) make up his broader coalition in 2018 under the slogan: "Together we will make history."

Among those key to his 2018 campaign are figures such as businessman **Alfonso Romo**, his current coordinator of the so-called "Nation Project" and his liaison with the private sector which in the past backed the conservative PAN party, bitterly opposed to all that López Obrador stood for.

"I fought Andrés Manuel without knowing him ... and then I met him and met his economic program and I got to know his social agenda," Romo told Univision News in an interview in March.

Romo's calculations are the pill that has brought tranquility - or resignation - among the business class to a future under López Obrador. That same spirit has already reached the Bank of Mexico: one day before the end of the campaign, Banxico's

Director of Operations, Javier Cortina, affirmed that the markets already took for granted AMLO's triumph. As a result, neither the Mexican peso nor the markets are expected to be shaken by his victory.

### The hand that rocks the campaign

Since he was elected to head the local government of Mexico City in 2000, López Obrador has been an agenda setter, using a sometimes bizarre strategy of surprises, and long silences.

This was the case Jan 15, when he announced that **Tatiana Clouthier** would be his campaign manager. The daughter of the emblematic Manuel J. Clouthier - presidential candidate of the PAN in 1988, who died in 1989 - has become one of his key weapons, so much so that some observers say, if he wins he owes it to her.

That day, López Obrador invited Clouthier and Romo to a private meeting, where, with no prior discussion, he announced that she would be his campaign chief.

Clouthier's surprise could be seen in videos. The 53-year-old had to improvise a speech, though that was no problem for her. A veteran political analyst, TV viewers are familiar with her intellect: she is quick on the draw and skilled at destroying her rivals with irony and humor.

When the event ended, Lopez Obrador approached Clouthier and paid tribute to her: "You gave the candidate's speech and mine was that of the campaign chief."

### "The movement is me"

The stern nature of López Obrador is well documented in the press, as well as his paranoia about being closely monitored by the government and its spies. In 2008, sometime after he lost his first election, López Obrador had a rough meeting with leaders of the PRD and Movimiento Ciudadano (formerly known as Convergencia). The shouting and exchange of words could be heard coming from the office of López Obrador, in the Roma neighborhood on the capital.

"The movement is me!" Lopez Obrador snapped at one point.

Everything was overheard by journalists outside. A day later, when the newspapers published the details, Lopez Obrador said that the information had been leaked by the Center for National Security and Research (CISEN), the Mexican government's top intelligence agency, instead of admitting that his lack of prudence had made the details of the discussion public.

That attitude - reluctance to accept his own mistakes and, on the contrary, to accuse what he calls "the mafia of power," has dogged López Obrador for years.


## From "chachalaca" to "canallín"

When he claimed electoral fraud in 2006 after losing the presidential elections to the then PAN candidate, Felipe Calderón, he refused to accept the official results, attributing his defeat to an insult he tossed at the then president, Vicente Fox: "Shut up, chachalaca," a reference to a tropical bird with an annoying twitter.

The attack backfired badly and he sank in the polls afterwards. That, and other insults launched by López Obrador from the stump were used by the PAN campaign to accuse him of being intolerant and authoritarian, comparing him in every propaganda spot with Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez.

During the second presidential debate in 2018, held in Tijuana, AMLO again gave vent to his temper, in response to an attack from Ricardo Anaya, the PAN candidate running second in the polls. "Anaya is a demagogue, a little wig", "Ricky Riquín Canallín", (roughly meaning 'Richie Rich the Scoundrel) an attempted reference to unsubstantiated allegations of improper financial dealings by Anaya.

The phrase soon became a fodder for memes, though this time it did not hurt him. Besides this one outburst, López Obrador has tried to convince doubters that he is not out for revenge against his old political enemies. He has made an effort to contain those emotions, seemingly sacrificing even the satisfaction of knowing he was the favorite.

 AMLO en salsas, peluches y veladoras: las tres campañas de López Obrador en objetos

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