



## **Trump-AMLO: clash of populists, or chance for a fresh start?**

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Like Donald Trump before him, Mexico's new leftist leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador swept to victory with a promise to shake up corrupt elites and put his country's interests first.

So are the neighbors headed for a clash of the populists, or a new start in relations?

The politician known as "AMLO" won more than 53 percent of the votes in Sunday's poll, a major upset to the establishment that raises a question mark over Mexico's relations with its powerful northern neighbor, its main trading partner.

Despite Trump's hard line on migrants, his threats to build a wall on the border and shake up trade, and in spite of AMLO promising to "put Trump in his place," both leaders appeared determined to get off to a good start in a phone conversation held immediately after the Mexican's landslide.

Trump's National Security Advisor, the hawkish John Bolton, said the US president will "look forward" to what he predicted would be a productive meeting with AMLO.

"Having the two leaders get together may produce some surprising results," Bolton said.

Beyond the optimistic rhetoric, analysts suggest there are number of potential points of conflict ahead, even if AMLO moderates his approach upon taking office.

- More Lula than Chavez -

AMLO, the 64-year-old former mayor of Mexico City, won the presidency on his third attempt with a promise of "radical change," but his administration is expected to dial things down now he is finally in power.

"AMLO will govern more like fellow leftist Lula da Silva in Brazil than (the late Hugo) Chavez in Venezuela," said analyst Mark Rosenberg of the GeoQuant consultants.

Jason Marczak, Latin America director at the Atlantic Council, was more emphatic: "AMLO is not Chavez."

"Will AMLO seek to implement social reforms in a pragmatic way like Lula did?" he asked.

"Yes, in that respect I think he will follow that path. AMLO, like Lula, is also seen by his followers like a savior with superhuman status.

"But the economic context in which AMLO arrives to power is very different from the one Lula inherited."

Lopez Obrador won largely because Mexicans are fed up with corruption, impunity and violence, and not because of the US leader's angry outbursts at everything south of the Rio Grande, added Marczak.

"Washington can and should seize upon this moment to recalibrate relations with Mexico, to not just maintain, but deepen the cooperation that benefits both our countries."

- Kindred spirit? -

Despite sharp differences in their backgrounds, the Mexican leftist has much in common with the showy 72-year old New York real estate magnate.

"Both men are nationalists who see themselves as redeemers who have to take on a 'corrupt' and inefficient establishment and have an agenda of putting their country first," said Juan Carlos Hidalgo of the Cato Institute, who argued Trump could see AMLO as a "kindred spirit."

But, he warned, it could also go the other way. "They are populists, and populists need enemies to survive politically," he said, and AMLO could find that external enemy in Trump.

Michael Shifter, head of the Inter-American Dialogue center, argued the most sensitive and volatile issues are likely to be NAFTA, security cooperation and immigration.

The North American Free Trade Agreement, signed in 1994 and regulating commerce between the United States, Canada and Mexico, has been a particular target for Trump's ire since he launched his campaign in 2015.

Trump ordered fresh negotiations to open last August to re-examine the complex trade deal, but Rosenberg said that protectionist urges on both sides will be complicate efforts to renew the pact.

Hidalgo said it was "likely that AMLO's campaign promises to seek self-sufficiency in food production will be the biggest stumbling block in the renegotiation."

"We can predict AMLO bringing the same brash approach to trade talks as his American counterpart," said Marczak. "As a result, trade talks are expected to become more difficult as the NAFTA partners seek to find a new compromise."