News



Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, presidential candidate of the MORENA party, poses for a selfie with a young woman March 18 at Lazaro Cardenas monument in Mexico City. (CNS/Ginnette Riquelme, Reuters)



David Agren

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Mexico City — March 22, 2018
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Mexico's most recent viral political video begins with a "good girl" dressed in white, praying during Mass. The young woman has her doubts and dismays over her father's disapproval. She subsequently takes Communion, and starts dancing suggestively — with the priest joining in — and proclaiming her choice in the upcoming election.

"Although I'm a good girl, I'm going to vote for you-know-who," she sings in a reggaeton song, presumably referring to presidential election poll-leader Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador.

"Listen to me please. Let's change the fate of our country," the song continued. "Father I don't want to offend you ... but the issue today is getting rid of the PRI," a reference to the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party, which is lagging in the polls for the July 1 presidential election.

Presidential campaigns in Mexico kick off March 30 amid voter anger over violence and corruption scandals and a deep sense of disenchantment with the outcomes of the country's transition to democratic rule.

The "Good Girl" video purported to be a school project and claimed to highlight the "contemporary problems of Mexico," though it focused heavily on the frivolities of Mexico's upper crust, including rich kids — often the products of elitist Catholic schools — flaunting their wealth and privilege.

But it also conveyed a sense that some in the upper crust might be ready to recognize the unsustainability of a country where roughly half the population lives in poverty, and opportunities for social advancement are scant.

Mostly, though, it playfully promoted Lopez Obrador and disdained the parties that have governed Mexico for the past dozen years.

Some observers suggested it set out to mock conservative Catholic society. And the video certainly scandalized conservative Catholics, who called it profane.

Some even demanded the electoral authorities punish Lopez Obrador, a left-wing populist, whose proximity to power unsettles many on the Catholic right. As mayor of Mexico City, Lopez Obrador forged a strong friendship with Cardinal Norberto Rivera Carrera, then-archbishop of Mexico City, according to the cardinal's former spokesman, Fr. Hugo Valdemar Romero.

Lopez Obrador also refrained from advancing contentious social issues such as decriminalization of abortion and same-sex marriages, both of which were championed by his successor.

Valdemar expressed disapproval with the video, however, saying, "Profaning a church is using it for a purpose for which it was not meant. In this case there's dancing, there's a political rally: that profanes a church."

Some Catholics showed support for the video, including activist Fr. Alejandro Solalinde, who has endorsed Lopez Obrador. He tweeted, "Very cool Alumdena Ortiz Monasterio, the official Jesus and the Pharisees of today are scandalized! But the real Jesus is dying of laughter! And following the rhythm of brave and creative young people like you.

"With youth and women like you, we will change Mexico!" he continued.

Many Mexicans also laughed along with the video and highlighted lyrics such as, "Your vote is like your virginity. Don't give it to those who defend impunity."

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The origins of the video remain uncertain. The video was supposedly the work of a student at the Jesuit-run ITESO university in Guadalajara.

MORENA, the political party founded and controlled by Lopez Obrador, denied having a hand in making the video. ITESO issued a statement March 20 disavowing any involvement and saying no student appearing in the video attended the school.

The Archdiocese of Mexico City said via its newspaper, Desde la Fe, that the video's production crew paid a parish committee 15,000 pesos to film inside. No one noticed anything amiss during the filming, though the publication noted the production crew asked the church be "cleared" for a two-hour period.

Some observers saw the video as successfully raising uncomfortable issues such as class. "Good girls" — "Niñas bien" in Spanish and a reference to young women from polite society — are stereotypically not expected to express support for populists such as Lopez Obrador.

It also spoke to possible shifts in Mexico's electoral landscape. Polls show Lopez Obrador, who has moderated his discourse, leading by double digits. The newspaper Reforma published a survey putting support for Lopez Obrador from university-educated voters at 43 percent — even though he first ran for the presidency in 2006 on a promise to put "the poor first."

"Andres Manuel now has some of his biggest audiences in private universities," said Ilan Semo, historian at the Jesuit-run Iberoamerican University in Mexico City.

The video's church setting captured a continuing trend for politicians to seek the approval of prelates and use religious symbols, in a country where an anti-clerical ethos previously dominated. Lopez Obrador's own party name, MORENA, references the national patroness Our Lady of Guadalupe, and he formally launched his presidential run Dec. 12, her feast day.

Mexican politicians are using religious symbols in campaigns more than ever before to present themselves as ethical and to identify with the people.

Valdemar said the church is prohibited from picking sides in politics, but pointed out that politicians seek prelates' approval in electoral periods.

"They approach us out of convenience and not due to a genuine interest," he said.