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Mexico's bishops congratulated Claudia Sheinbaum, who overwhelmingly won Mexico's presidential election to become the country's first female president — a historic accomplishment overshadowed by the killing of candidates and questions over the future of the country's democratic institutions.

In a June 3 statement, the Mexican bishops' conference described the previous day's voting as "a great citizen celebration, despite the obstacles and problems that arose during the electoral process, especially due to criminal violence and interference with legality by some authorities."

"We must feel satisfied with the duty fulfilled and with a commitment ahead to care for and improve our democratic institutions," the statement said.

Sheinbaum, 61, claimed between 58.3% and 60.7% of the vote, the National Electoral Institute's president said, besting opposition coalition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez by over 30 points. Sheinbaum's ruling Morena party and its allies took majorities in both houses of Congress — with the final vote count possibly providing enough seats to pass constitutional amendments without the support of the opposition. Jorge Álvarez Máynez of the Citizen Movement party received 10% support.

The bishops alluded to the prospect of supermajorities in Congress by pledging "a commitment ahead to care for and improve our democratic institutions." Supermajorities would allow outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador to introduce planned constitutional changes such as putting Supreme Court justices to a popular vote.

Sheinbaum claimed more than 33 million votes in what was the country's largest ever elections, which filled more than 20,000 public positions at all levels of government. The elections also were the most violent in Mexico's history with over 30 candidates and potential candidates killed in attacks often blamed on drug

cartels, which have increasingly moved into the political realm.

The president-designateelect campaigned on the premise that Mexico was becoming less violent. She even told the authors of a church plan for peace that their diagnosis was "pessimistic," but continued dialoguing with the plan's authors.

After claiming victory June 2, she told supporters, "We will guarantee freedom of expression, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, of concentration and mobilization. We are democrats and by conviction we would never create an authoritarian or repressive government.

"We will also respect political, social, cultural and religious diversity. Gender and sexual diversity. We will always continue to fight against any form of discrimination," she added.

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Sheinbaum, who will begin her six-year presidential term Oct. 1, described her win as historic. She becomes Mexico's first female president and the country's first Jewish head of state, though she identifies as nonreligious.

Mexico's bishops welcomed a woman reaching "the highest office in the country," saying in their statement, "We raise our prayers so that, with the responsibility and wisdom that the position demands, and always seeking the common good, she can lead Mexico towards better horizons, where the Republic is strengthened, the rule of law is fully exercised, democracy allows political transition without violence, the development and justice of the entire nation is achieved more effectively and, above all, we begin a period of social reconciliation in the entire country. We sincerely hope that you prioritize dialogue with everyone."

A climate scientist by training and former Mexico City mayor, Sheinbaum ran as the protégé of López Obrador — commonly called AMLO — promising to continue his populist agenda of providing cash stipends to seniors and single mothers, state intervention in the economy and a less confrontational approach to crime fighting. She presented few original proposals and often repeated López Obrador's comments while campaigning, leaving questions on how she would govern. Questions also arise

how her predecessor — who plans on retiring — will attempt to interfere in her administration.

"All of Claudia Sheinbaum's campaign was carried out to position her as the continuer of AMLO's project," said Bárbara González, a political analyst in the city of Monterrey.

"Expectations are that the differences, if there are any, will become evident when she is in the chair and there is a real transfer of power," she told OSV News.

In interviews, Sheinbaum supporters spoke of the outgoing president and his popularity more than the election winner.

Josue Sandoval, 32, sells López Obrador souvenirs such as plushies, hats and mugs in central Mexico City. He recently added Sheinbaum merchandise but the López Obrador items outsell hers five to one, he says. "People love the current president," he told OSV News.

Sandoval says that his mother receives a stipend of 6,000 pesos ($340) every two months, which helps make ends meet.

"The other presidents did not want to do this. No. They never paid attention to the people," he said.

Priests see similar appreciation for the cash stipends, along with measures such as raising the minimum wage by more than 100% over the past five years.

"The programs really proved popular here," said Jesuit Father Pedro Arriaga, who ministers in rural Chiapas, Mexico's poorest state. Chiapas has been rife with drug cartel violence, but people don't blame the president, Arriaga said. They simply explain: Thanks to López Obrador we're receiving this benefit. And that's where the president's popularity lies."