

## Mexican Court Declares Calderón President-Elect

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MEXICO CITY, Sept. 5 -- Felipe Calderón, a former energy minister and onetime long-shot candidate, was unanimously declared president-elect of Mexico on Tuesday in a court decision that capped a two-month legal battle but did not end the nation's political crisis.

Calderón's opponent, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, refused to recognize the decision. During a fiery address before thousands of supporters in Mexico City's downtown square, the Zocalo, he mocked Calderón as an "illegitimate president" and pledged to create an "alternate government" to "refound the Republic and reestablish constitutional order" before the Dec. 1 presidential inauguration.

Speaking moments later, Calderón called for conciliation, saying, "Mexicans can think differently, but we are not enemies." He declared that "the electoral process is over and the hour has arrived for unity." The dueling speeches were tracked minutely by Mexicans both puzzled and fascinated by the prospect of two men simultaneously claiming to lead the nation.

"We are entering into uncharted territory," said Rafael Fernández de Castro, a political analyst in Mexico City. "Calderón is going to have to demonstrate what he's made of."

The special court, known as the Federal Electoral Judicial Tribunal, rejected López Obrador's request to annul the election. Instead, the court's seven magistrates certified a razor-thin margin of 233,831 votes for Calderón, about half a percent of the 41 million votes cast. The final tally is the result of a legal process that included the annulment of tens of thousands of votes and a recount of ballots cast in 9 percent of polling places.

"Let's hope that we close this electoral process by forgetting our confrontations," Leonel Castillo, the tribunal's chief magistrate, said moments before declaring "the citizen Felipe Calderón Hinojosa" president-elect of Mexico.

After the announcement, Calderón appeared briefly outside his office with his wife, former congresswoman Margarita Zavala, and said: "I feel very good."

When Calderón, 44, ascends to Mexico's highest office, he will likely be confronted by a large, hostile bloc of opposition lawmakers from López Obrador's Democratic Revolutionary Party, or PRD, as well as two smaller parties that backed López Obrador's candidacy. The PRD secured its largest congressional gains ever in the July 2 elections and now controls more than a quarter of the seats, a bloc sufficient to stop or slow down Calderón's initiatives.

Calderón, of the National Action Party, or PAN, cannot wait for inauguration day to begin wooing those opposition lawmakers, as well as the more than 25 million Mexicans who did not vote for him, said political analyst Jorge Montaña, a former Mexican ambassador to the United States and the United Nations.

"He is going to have to demonstrate that he has a plan that includes some of what López Obrador has been talking about," Montaña said.

López Obrador, a former Mexico City mayor, had promised to increase pensions for the elderly and create jobs with massive government construction projects. His supporters have blocked main thoroughfares in the capital and camped in the city's downtown square in protest. Hundreds demonstrated outside the court building on Tuesday; some sobbed and others chanted "Vote by vote," the candidate's rallying cry for a full recount.

The decision Tuesday by the tribunal, which was created 10 years ago as part of a democratic reform movement, followed its earlier pattern of consistently ruling in favor of Calderón. One month after refusing López Obrador's request for a full recount, the tribunal also refused his bid to annul the election. But even as the tribunal was ruling against López Obrador's overall request, some of the magistrates were agreeing with the complaints he has raised about the electoral process.

Two of the magistrates announced that President Vicente Fox, the standard-bearer of Calderón's National Action Party, put the validity of the election at risk by making political comments during the course of the campaign. Mexican law prohibits the president from campaigning.

Magistrates also rebuked former Spanish prime minister José Maria Aznar for endorsing Calderón early in the campaign, a statement that violated prohibitions on foreign political figures campaigning in Mexican elections.

Still, the magistrates ultimately concluded that the interventions by Fox and Aznar -- as well as prohibited ad campaigns by business groups in favor of Calderón -- were not enough for them to overturn the results of the closest presidential election in modern Mexican history. The court also rejected López Obrador's claims of widespread fraud, including the alleged rigging of computers to assure a Calderón victory and massive alterations of vote-tally sheets.

Calderón's presidential victory comes after a remarkable series of unlikely political wins. He was elected president of the National Action Party and won its presidential nomination despite being a heavy underdog in both races.

Once the presidential campaign began, Calderón appeared to have little chance. López Obrador held an overwhelming lead in the polls, drawing on his popularity with Mexico City's legions of poor. But Calderón, who lacks López Obrador's charisma on the stump, chipped away at his opponent's lead with a disciplined campaign that painted his opponent as a danger to Mexico and compared him to Venezuelan President Hugo Chávez, who has been criticized as authoritarian.

Calderón also promised to continue the free-trade policies of Fox, a Bush administration ally who has clashed repeatedly with López Obrador. On Friday, lawmakers allied with López Obrador seized control of Mexico's congressional chamber and blocked Fox from delivering his State of the Nation address -- the first time a Mexican president has been unable to give the annual speech.

Mindful of the overheated environment, the tribunal urged the candidates and their political parties on Tuesday to take the "high road" in debating the day's events. But that appeared highly unlikely. Even before the decision was announced, López Obrador and

his top lieutenants were saying they would enter into conciliation talks with Calderón only if he quit and refused to take office.