

Amid Catcalls, Mexico's President Is Sworn In

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MEXICO CITY, Dec. 1 — It was not pretty, but Felipe Calderón, the new president of [Mexico](#), managed to take the oath of office in Congress Friday, as opposition lawmakers whistled and catcalled and the losing leftist candidate staged a massive march down the central avenue of the capital.



Legislators scuffled in Congress before bodyguards ushered in Felipe Calderón to be sworn in as president.



As allies applauded and opponents jeered, Mr. Calderón, in sash, beside his predecessor, Vicente Fox, took his oath and left.

Never before in modern Mexican history has a president been sworn in under such chaotic and divisive conditions. At midnight, as President Vicente Fox's term ran out, the government took the step of broadcasting the private swearing-in of Mr. Calderón at the presidential residence, a legal necessity usually not publicized.

Minutes later, Mr. Calderón spoke on national television to urge lawmakers to “respect the Constitution” and let the ceremony take place.

The call went unheeded. Mr. Calderón's opponents from the leftist Democratic Revolution Party tried to block the entrances to Congress to prevent him from being publicly sworn in. But with his conservative National Action Party supporters ringing the podium, he and Mr. Fox were spirited in by bodyguards through a door near the dais at the front of the chamber at 9:50 a.m.

Mr. Calderón quickly took the oath of office, and Mr. Fox handed over the traditional presidential sash, then both left the chamber. The entire ceremony lasted four minutes. Opposition politicians blew whistles, screamed insults and displayed banners saying Mr. Calderón was “a traitor to democracy.”

The tug of war over the ceremony provoked fistfights and pushing matches between lawmakers. It was the culmination of months of bitter disagreement over Mexico's hotly contested July 2 election, which the courts determined Mr. Calderón had won by a mere 240,000 votes out of 41 million ballots cast.

His leftist rival, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, the former Mexico City mayor, has never conceded defeat, and just before the swearing-in Friday morning, he held a rally in the city's historic central square, the Plaza of the Constitution, with more than 100,000 supporters.

Then he led a march down Paseo de la Reforma, the city's main avenue, toward the National Auditorium, where President Calderón spoke at noon to several thousand invited guests as hundreds of police officers in riot gear ringed the building and blocked roads for miles around.

While on the street Mr. López Obrador's supporters chanted slogans and waved banners, inside the auditorium the atmosphere was more like the Academy Awards than a political rally, with smooth-voiced announcers praising Mr. Calderón to a well-dressed crowd while a big-screen television showed a rosy biography of him.

As he has many times in the last two months, Mr. Calderón reached out to his leftist adversaries and called on them to put the national interest above partisan differences.

"To those who voted for other political options, I will not ignore the reasons and causes for your votes," he said. "And I ask you to let me gain your confidence with acts."

"It's clear that Mexico is living through tense times between the main political forces but, conscious of the seriousness of the disagreements, I assume completely the responsibility to resolve them and reunify Mexico," he added.

He went on to announce he would immediately push for two proposals near and dear to Mr. López Obrador. He promised to cut the salaries of the president and high government officials (a staple in his adversary's stump speech), as well as to provide universal health care to children.

Those gestures were not likely to make peace. Speaking to his supporters, Mr. López Obrador charged that the election was fraudulent and that Mr. Calderón's victory was engineered by a "neofascist oligarchy." He claimed the "imposition" of Mr. Calderón as president amounted to a "coup d'état."

"We are not rebels without a cause," he said. "Sometimes they forget the heart of the matter, which is that they robbed us of the election."

He also hinted darkly that he and his party might resort to violent protests in their efforts to "defend democracy."

He said: "We don't want to generate problems, but they have to understand for once and for all, we are going to defend the democracy of this country. We have always acted in a responsible manner, but understand me well, everything has its limit."

In Congress, the left and right seemed as entrenched as ever after the donnybrooks and yelling matches of the morning, boding ill for any agreements on important changes that economists say the country needs to remain competitive.

In the end, the conservative legislative leaders were successful not only in getting Mr. Calderón to the podium, but also in ensuring that dignitaries like former President [George H. W. Bush](#), who represented the United States, were able to attend.

The raucous behavior of the lawmakers of the Democratic Revolution Party, known by its Spanish initials as the P.R.D., provoked strong reactions. "The Democratic Revolution Party should lose its party registration because they don't respect institutions," said Héctor

Larios, the National Action Party leader in the Chamber of Deputies. “We have put a stop to the continual threats and extortions of the P.R.D., and that’s the way it must be, because this should not happen. We cannot respect people who don’t respect institutions.”

But the leftists, for their part, continued to lob verbal grenades at the new president, suggesting his refusal to accept a recount in the general election had pushed the country to the brink of revolution.

“Felipe Calderón does not enjoy legitimacy in his position, even when he has the law on his side,” said Senator Carlos Navarrete of the P.R.D. said. “Calderón’s government has started its rule by throwing matches everywhere, on dry straw.”