

Border Battleground – Day Five

Presidential hopefuls will stump on border security

By *SERGIO CHAPA*
The Brownsville Herald

BROWNSVILLE, August 18, 2005 — A recent wave of cartel-related violence, kidnappings and the threat of terrorist infiltration have made security and public safety top issues in the Mexican presidential election, political analysts say.

A prolonged war between rival drug cartels along the U.S.-Mexico border has resulted in the deaths of more than 800 people since January, most of which were execution- or guerrilla-style killing.



At the same time, thousands in the business community and members of nation's middle- and upper-middle classes have been the targets of kidnappings at the hands of criminal organizations demanding ransoms.

The deteriorating security situation prompted American officials to issue a travel alert that has been extended twice for the Mexican side of the border as well as temporarily closed its consulate in Nuevo Laredo.

While security is expected to be the key issue in Mexico's July 2006 presidential elections, Ohio State University Mexican culture professor Ignacio Corona said Mexican voters have low expectations for candidates.

"When Fox took office, he promised to solve the insecurity, but it has not happened," Corona said.

Corona said each of the leading candidates in the 2006 race has a history that suggests they would be as ineffective as Fox.

Corona said leading candidates with the centrist Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and Fox's right-wing National Action Party (PAN) would have trouble restoring order because of alleged ties to corruption and the current administration.

Political observers believe Andrés Manuel López-Obrador with the center-left Party of Democratic Revolution (PRD) already appears to be the frontrunner in the presidential elections, but Corona said his record suggests little will change if he wins.

"He didn't do anything as mayor of Mexico City to change the insecurity there," Corona said.

University of Texas Latin American studies professor Hector Dominguez Ruvalcaba disagreed noting that Lopez-Obrador has already made a strong campaign out of criticizing Fox and Mexico's dominant PRI party.

"Lopez-Obrador has more of a chance than anyone else," the Austin professor said of enacting reforms to bring more security. "He was more contact with the people and officials in the D.F. (Distrito Federal) and the border."

Under Mexican law, the nation's presidents are limited to one six-year term in office with the winner of the July election taking office in December.

University of Texas public affairs professor Peter Ward said the next Mexican president would take office and barely get his administration running when American voters go to the polls in 2008 to elect a new president, senators and congressmen.

"The timing is horrible," Ward said.

Although ties between the two nations are strong, Ward said the outcome of the Mexican and American elections could influence border and security issues based on how the winners are able to work together.

Ward said the PRI and PAN already work well with Democrats and Republicans in the United States.

If PRD candidate López-Obrador wins, Ward said observers only have to look at Brazil's president Luiz Inácio Lula de Silva as an example of how he will act once he takes office.

Although Lula enacted some leftist social reforms, he maintained Brazil's international standing and economic status quo.

"A proven leftist leader coming to power has to act pragmatic," Ward said.

schapa@brownsvilleherald.com