

First presidential debate

# Mexican presidential candidates call for increased police and military activity

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On April 23, the office of the public prosecutor of the central Mexican state of Jalisco announced that three film students who were kidnapped on March 19 in the Guadalajara suburb of Tonalá were killed and then had their bodies dissolved in vats of acid by members of the Nueva Generación drug cartel.

The college students—Salomón Aceves Gastélum, 25, from Mexicali, Baja California Norte; Jesús Daniel Díaz, 20, from Los Cabos, Baja California Sur; and Marco Ávalos, 20 from Tepic, Nayarit—had been working on a film project in a house formerly occupied by the rival cartel. When the students left the house, Nueva Cartel members dressed as local police grabbed them in the street at gunpoint. The students were taken to a farm where they were interrogated, tortured and then killed.

One week before the film students were kidnapped, the Mexican army seized the weapons of 700 local police in Tlaquepaque, the Guadalajara suburb bordering Tonalá, due to alleged infiltration by drug gangs.

The Tonalá incident is only the latest in a series of disappearances and killings of workers, youth, newspaper reporters and politicians, many of them involving federal and state police and the army acting in collusion with criminal gangs.

During the government of current president Enrique Peña Nieto, more than 100,000 homicides have occurred in just under six years. Three-thousand people disappeared from Jalisco state in the year 2017 alone, and more than 200,000 were killed since the “war on narco-trafficking” began 11 years ago under the previous president, Felipe Calderón.

On April 22, the day before Jalisco authorities

revealed the horrific demise of the three Guadalajara film students, the five official candidates for president in the July election—Andrés Manuel López Obrador (“AMLO”) of the National Movement for Regeneration (Morena), Ricardo Anaya of the National Action Party (the PAN), Jose Antonio Meade, of the Pena Nieto’s Institutional Revolution Party (the PRI), and two “independent” non-party candidates, Margarita Zavala (the wife of former PAN president Calderón), and Jaime Rodriguez Calderón (“el Bronco”)—held their first debate in Mexico City.

The two topics for debate were precisely the violence and lack of security in the country, and the related wholesale corruption of the government, police and military.

Despite the involvement of the police and armed forces in massacres, repression and cover-ups, four of the five candidates glorified the military, pointing to bulking up the police and military as the solution. One of the candidates, el Bronco, called for a military presence in the nation’s high schools, and even cutting off the hands of “delinquents”—whether thieves or corrupt officials was unclear (“I am serious,” he said).

Despite being questioned as to why Mexicans have lost faith in the ruling establishment, no candidate made mention of the three recently disappeared film students, or of any other crimes that have triggered angry protests across Mexico.

López Obrador, well ahead in the polls so far, made a perfunctory connection between increasing violence and the rising levels of poverty and youth unemployment, a position that was rejected by all the others. El Bronco demanded the abolition of social programs for the poor, and Zavala accused AMLO of

“criminalizing the poor.”

However, rather than putting forward any serious proposals for the elimination of the poverty that underlies the resort to crime, López Obrador instead repeated over and over the main theme of his campaign, his promise to cleanse corruption “from top to bottom, like sweeping a staircase.” “There is no gang that steals so much” as corrupt officials, he said, robbing the government budget of billions of dollars a year.

Along these same lines, López Obrador was the only one to take up a question by the debate moderators as to why the massive corruption scandal involving the Brazilian conglomerate Odebrecht, which has dethroned politicians throughout the Americas, has had “few consequences” in Mexico. He said that “things are not clarified because senior officials are involved”—a reference to president Peña Nieto’s involvement in the scandal.

López Obrador demagogically called for constituting a “popular convention,” to which Pope Francis would be invited, to discuss how to deal with the drug cartels.

Mexico’s economic and social crisis—the most protracted since the Mexican revolution a century ago—was otherwise scarcely touched on by the candidates. Terms such as the working class, peasantry, and inequality were never used. Only passing references were made about the conditions facing indigenous communities (by Zavala), and to those in extreme poverty (by Meade), but no policy recommendations or demands were put forward.

Also notably absent in the debate were the effects on poverty and drug dealing arising from Mexico being under the boot of US imperialism, its massive arming of the Mexican military and federal police, the Trump administration’s military and intelligence collaboration with Mexico over policing Mexico’s northern and southern borders, and the US turning away and deportation of poor immigrants, thereby feeding poverty, drug trafficking and violence.

Nothing was said in the debate that would give the Mexican population reason to believe that it will not be business as usual regardless of which candidate wins in July. In the meantime, protests of the government’s involvement in and failure to reduce mass violence will continue.

Last week, hundreds of Mexican workers and youth marched in Guadalajara and other cities to protest the

kidnapping and murder of the three film students. The marchers chanted, “It is all of us, not just three!” and demanded an end to the disappearances and killings. Mothers of other disappeared youth spoke to the protesters.

Students interviewed by the Spanish daily *El País* talked about the levels of violence and insecurity that they face every day. “When a vehicle stops in front of you,” said one student, “you do not know if it belongs to the police or organized crime.”

At the protests, many chanted “¡No al carpetazo!” (No to the cover-up!). One group of students carried a banner alluding to the 43 disappeared Ayotzinapa students.

Students also demanded the resignation of Jalisco’s governor, Aristóteles Sandoval. Entire families from nearby neighborhoods spontaneously joined in the protest.



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