

@CHAPTER = MEXICO

Violations of human rights in Mexico include extra-judicial killings, "disappearances," violence and intimidation associated with rural land disputes and state and municipal elections; torture and mistreatment by the police of those recently arrested; and prison conditions that range from barely adequate to deplorable. In addition, Mexico has failed to address its substantial legacy of past abuses. While the June 1989 arrest of former director of the Federal Security Directorate Jose Antonio Zorrilla Perez, who is accused of the 1985 murder of journalist Manuel Buendia, is a positive step, government and former government officials accused of human rights abuses are almost never prosecuted. The same is true in many rural areas of *caciques* (local political bosses) and their agents who take part in rural violence. In addition, human rights groups claim there are more than 500 unresolved cases of persons who "disappeared" in Mexico.

The prevailing attitude toward these problems among Mexican government officials is that if ignored they will go away. This attitude was mirrored by the Bush administration. The administration made many statements saluting its close economic and political ties to Mexico (Mexico is the third largest U.S. trading partner) but made no statement on human rights in Mexico. Indeed, the only U.S. commentary on Mexican rights practices made in 1989 was contained in the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in 1988*, which while published in February 1989, was written by the Reagan administration.

One area in which the Bush administration's silence was surprising, given the priority the administration has placed on promoting free and fair elections, was election-related violence. Like its predecessor, the Bush administration placed no pressure on Mexico to ferret out those who murdered Francisco Ovando, a congressional candidate and close aid to Democratic Revolutionary Party presidential candidate Cuauhtémoc Cárdenas, and Román Gil, Ovando's assistant, four days before the federal elections in July 1988. Nor has the administration shown concern about the killings and other episodes of violence associated with state and local elections in Michoacan, Guerrero, Oaxaca and elsewhere.

The Bush administration's silence on human rights in Mexico can be attributed in part to its desire to highlight positive developments in U.S.-Mexican relations, including Mexico's renegotiation of its foreign debt and cooperation in "the war on drugs," and in part to President Bush's desire not to tarnish his close personal relationship with Mexican President Salinas de Gotari. But these factors should not prevent public protest from the administration on serious Mexican abuses.