



Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on February 17, 2011

## U.S. Immigration and Customs Agent Murdered in Mexico

Two U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents serving in Mexico were attacked Tuesday when gunmen opened fire on the blue Suburban in which they were traveling. Special Agent Jaime Zapata, on assignment from his post in Laredo, Texas to the ICE office in Mexico City, was killed.



Agent Victor Avila, shot twice in the leg, was transported back to the U.S. and is in stable condition, according to a statement from the agency Wednesday.

The two had been driving north along a four-lane federal highway from Mexico City to Monterrey, one of the nation's most prosperous — and dangerous — cities. A U.S. official, who was not authorized to discuss the case publicly, said the two were traveling on routine business, not as part of an investigation.

The two agents were stopped at what appeared to be a military checkpoint, according to the unauthorized statement of a Mexican official who also said the Mexican military had not established checkpoints in the area. The bullet-ridden Suburban was found by the side of the road. Police believe the attackers may have been trying to steal the vehicle, a type favored by drug gangs.

Three weeks ago American missionary [Nancy Davis](#) was shot and killed in a similar attack while driving with her husband in northern Mexico. Police believe that attack was also an attempt to steal the couple's vehicle.

Tuesday's ambush occurred in the State of San Luis Potosi, in northern Mexico. Though drug violence is still perceived by many to be only border-related, as it escalates, the incidences are spreading across the country. The Governor of San Luis Potosi, Fernando Toranzo, reported that the area has seen a sharp rise in organized crime due to drug turf wars. "It's had a major impact that we hadn't see before in San Luis Potosi," he commented. "Right now we're waging a direct fight with all our state resources to restore order."

Zapata, a native of Brownsville, signed on with ICE in 2006, right after graduating, and served on the Human Smuggling and Trafficking Unit as well as the Border Enforcement Security Task Force. He also served as a member of the U.S. Border Patrol in Yuma, Arizona.

Since President Felipe Calderon took office in December of 2006, a staggering number of almost 35,000 people have died in Mexico as a result of drug violence.

The U.S. is increasingly concerned, even though reports claim it's rare for U.S. officials to be attacked. U.S. support for Mexico through the \$1.4 billion [Merida Initiative](#), reported extensively by *The New*



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*American*, has failed to curb the problem.

As of January 2010, 26 ICE agents had trained over 4,000 new Mexican police recruits, according to the U.S. embassy in Mexico City. The State Department has also had to take measures to protect consulate employees and has authorized the departure of government employees in northern Mexico.

In July the consulate in Juarez was closed after receiving threats, and only this month, Guadalajara consulate officials were prohibited from traveling after dark.

Last March an employee of the American consulate in Ciudad Juarez was killed along with her husband and another person when a drug gang opened fire on them in Juarez. And in August, the U.S. government told consulate employees to [send their children out of Monterrey](#).

Homeland Security Secretary (HSS) Janet Napolitano declared that Tuesday's high-profile attack won't alter the U.S. commitment to supporting Mexico's drug crackdown, adding,

Let me be clear: any act of violence against our ICE personnel — or any DHS personnel — is an attack against all those who serve our nation and put their lives at risk for our safety. We remain committed in our broader support for Mexico's efforts to combat violence within its borders.

Texas businessman, firearms dealer, and television talk show host Bob Dacy says he believes Napolitano's remarks have all the substance of a wet noodle, adding:

How can we who live near the border trust the HSS? "Supporting Mexico's efforts to combat violence" hasn't worked, and we can't "support Mexico's drug crackdown" unless we first secure our own border. We'll believe the HSS is really opposed to drug and border violence when we get some help down here.

In spite of reports that it's a rare incident when a U.S. official is attacked, Americans continue to die in Mexico, and the U.S. government continues to adopt policies that endanger them.

*Photo: Fernando Toranzo, governor of the Mexican state of San Luis Potosi, center, speaks during a press conference in Mexico City, on Feb. 16, 2011, in which he addressed the assassination of a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement agent the day before, when he was traveling with a fellow agent from Mexico City to Monterrey: AP Images*



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