

Leal García's execution will fuel Mexico's sense of injustice

Luis Hernández Navarro

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The disregard for international law shown by the execution of Leal García reflects growing anti-Mexican sentiment in the US

Whenever a Mexican convict is executed in the United States, the anti-US sentiment on the part of many Mexicans is aroused. It is perceived as a new insult added to a long chain of historical grievances. That is the case with [Humberto Leal García](#), who was executed on 7 July.

Leal García, 38, born in Monterrey, in the border state of Nuevo León, was sentenced to death by lethal injection after being found guilty of raping and murdering Adriana Saucedo, a 16-year-old girl, in San Antonio, [Texas](#), on 21 May 1994.

The White House, the department of state, the [Organisation of American States Inter-American Commission on Human Rights](#), the UN high commissioner for human rights, the Brazilian and Swiss governments, as well as Mexican authorities, all asked Texas governor Rick Perry to suspend the execution. Nevertheless, the Texas board on pardons and paroles unanimously refused to grant mercy.

Leal's execution sets a precedent for the disregard of international law by US courts. It is known that on March 2004 the international court of justice ordered to [review 51 cases](#) of Mexican convicts – Leal's included – sentenced to death across the border, stating that their rights under the convention of Vienna had been violated. The US supreme court ruled that Congress had not enacted laws compelling the states to obey international treaties. Texas refuses to suspend the executions of foreigners, arguing that no international court can take the place of state or US laws.

Mexico is an abolitionist country, where capital punishment doesn't exist. The US is the only country in the American continent that has applied it regularly since 1977, when it was reinstated after a decade without executions. Since then, more than 1,200 persons have been executed and more than 3,000 convicts are waiting for the day when their lives will end prematurely.

The infliction of the death penalty on Leal has caused deep anger in Mexico. It is viewed as a racist act of injustice, set in a context of growing anti-Mexican sentiment. Mexican undocumented workers in the US have been accused by xenophobic groups of being criminals who steal jobs and threaten the white culture. Several states have adopted more than 50 anti-immigrant laws. Some of them forbid offering jobs to undocumented workers, and others deny them the right to buy or rent houses.

As a part of this climate, dozens of crimes are committed against Mexicans by US border agents. From the US side, border patrol agents have shot dead Mexicans who were in

their own country. Those murders go unpunished, and the complaints of Mexican authorities to Washington are to no avail. According to the UN special rapporteur on the human rights of migrants, Jorge Bustamante, "the usual practice of the United States is not recognising the incident as a responsibility of its government. It refuses to reveal the name of the agent whom witnesses saw shooting the Mexican, and after that nothing else happens".

Border patrol complains that its agents are subject to hundreds of attacks with stones and that some of them are very dangerous, for the stones can be of good size. But, according to Brian Palmer, a columnist for Slate online magazine, only three security officers have been killed by stones in the US, the last one almost 70 years ago.

Leal was a criminal. But executing him was a barbaric act, similar to the one he committed. The death penalty violates the very first right of any human being – the right to life. That it is practised by a country who calls itself a defender of human rights is at least a contradiction.

Mexico and the United States share a 1,951-mile border. More than [12.7 million Mexicans live across the north border](#). They left their country and their families in search of a job that they couldn't find in their homeland. Far from discouraging crime and contributing to peaceful coexistence and multicultural integration, the execution of Mexicans in the US exacerbates social resentment.

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