

Mexicans vote in Baja California, Oaxaca

The Miami Herald
Aug. 05, 2007

TIJUANA, Mexico --

Voters in Baja California chose Sunday between the wealthy mayor of Tijuana and an economist from Mexico's ruling party in an election for governor of the economically vibrant but crime-plagued border state.

Polls opened under the close watch of election observers following candidates' warnings of the potential for fraud in the state across the border from California and Arizona.

Most polls give a slight advantage to economist Jose Guadalupe Osuna, of President Felipe Calderon's National Action Party.

His formidable opponent is Tijuana Mayor Jorge Hank Rhon - a dog-track owner and self-proclaimed billionaire. Hank Rhon, the scion of a powerful political family, built a faithful following by rounding up petty thieves, launching programs to keep kids in school and meeting privately with anyone from the public who asked to see him.

Osuna has accused Hank Rhon, of the Institutional Revolutionary Party, or PRI, of corruption and ties to drug traffickers. Hank Rhon denies the charges, calling them politically motivated.

Baja California is home to strong export-manufacturing, agriculture and tourism industries but is also menaced by organized crime, much of it related to cross-border drug trafficking.

A second election was taking place Sunday in southern Oaxaca state, where protesters who took over the state capital for months last year urged voters to reject lawmakers aligned with PRI Gov. Ulises Ruiz.

The protesters accuse Ruiz of rigging his election in 2004 and warn of similar dirty tactics in the state assembly election. Ruiz denies the fraud allegations. He still has three years left in his term.

Hours before the polls opened, a journalist was shot three times as he was arriving at his home in the Oaxaca city of Salina Cruz, Ruiz's office said in a news release.

Alberto Fernandez was taken to a local hospital, where he was in critical condition, said the release, which ruled out any connection to the elections. Polling "is taking place peacefully," the governor's office said.