MEXICALI — Perceptions toward immigrants have changed because of new policies, immigration experts said Thursday at the third Binational Conference.

"Something that comes to mind is at what moment did immigrants become a threat to national security?" asked panelist Nancy Pérez García, who works at the Social Development and Citizen’s Initiative in Mexicali.

A panel of Mexican and American experts addressed an audience of students, academics and activists about immigration policies and social development at the Universidad Autónoma de Baja California.

SDSU-Imperial Valley campus Dean David Pearson welcomed the audience at the opening ceremony, stating there isn’t a more important issue than immigration that will influence the November elections.

Pérez said there have been more negative consequences than benefits as a consequence of post-9/11 security, which she said has resulted in discrimination against immigrants and the deepening of radical militarization.

She said Mexico needs its own immigration policy, asserting that the same Mexicans who are often discriminated against in the U.S. discriminate against Central American immigrants in Mexico.

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Arizona Congressman Ben Miranda discussed SB 1070 and other anti-immigration proposals in the state.

"The Constitution was made for everyone in the United States, not just citizens," he said, adding that even if immigrants are in the country illegally their rights should be respected.

"The lack of respect to the Constitution is, however, another topic," he said.

Miranda said more than 50,000 cars have been confiscated from immigrants in Phoenix who were unable to present a driver’s license, insurance and vehicle registration. Most of the cars aren’t picked up because the immigrants can’t prove their legal status, he said.

The congressman pointed to the record 400,000 deportations this year, stating that out of that number only 16,000 had a criminal record. Miranda said President Obama hasn’t been able to implement an immigration policy because he doesn’t have congressional majority.

"The electoral power is the only way to change things," he said.
The conference was co-sponsored by SDSU-Imperial Valley and UABC. It continues today at the Facultad de Ciencias Sociales y Políticas at the UABC in Mexicali.

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