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NEWS

Why Mexico's National Guard Remains Vastly Unqualified

[MEXICO](#) / 9 JUN 2021 BY ALESSANDRO FORD

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Over 90 percent of active personnel in Mexico's National Guard remain uncertified two years after the security force's creation, marking the failure of a signature goal of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, who created the new force.

Though the [May 2019 law](#) creating the National Guard stipulated that all its officers must be evaluated within two years, some 90,000 were still not certified by June 2021, [Animal Político](#) reported. To be certified, officers must pass evaluations of basic training, physical and psychological fitness, and polygraph and toxicology tests.

Of some 2,400 [applicants tested](#) from July 2019 to March 2021, more than half did not pass.

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Guard certifications, meanwhile, lag far behind those of other police forces in Mexico. Some 65 percent of state and municipal police officers are certified, according to Animal Político.

President López Obrador made the creation of the National Guard a key piece of his government's strategy to fight rising crime when he assumed office in December 2018.

The guard has been controversial from the start because of its links to the military. Former Army General Luis Rodríguez Bucio [was placed](#) in charge, and some 75 percent of its members are [reported](#) to come from the armed forces, according to Animal Político.

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While police forces in Mexico have long struggled with being [fit for duty](#), the failure to certify more than 90 percent of the National Guard is likely to fuel further criticism of the force, which human rights groups say is ill-equipped for civilian policing.

Critics of Mexico's [militarized approach](#) to policing have long pointed to a history of troops implicated in human rights violations, torture, forced disappearances, extrajudicial killings and other crimes. Upon standing up the National Guard, President López Obrador [said](#) that the new force would “guarantee peace, but without excesses, without authoritarianism, respecting human rights.”

But its units have already been involved in the shooting and killing of civilians. The wife of an alfalfa farmer was shot dead when National Guard members opened fire on his truck, according to an [Amnesty International report](#). In another case, confusion was blamed after a guard unit [shot at least seven times](#) at a Chevy Tahoe carrying officials from the Attorney General's Office in the northern state of Sonora. One person was killed and another wounded.

Between July and November 2019, National Guard members received 32 human rights complaints, according to the [Washington Office on Latin America](#) (WOLA).

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Critics have also pointed to the National Guard's many roles for which its troops are not trained. Employing the military-dominated institution in that way has created an [identity crisis](#) within the force, much like that of Mexico's [most neglected](#) police institutions.

In theory, the hybrid military-civilian body is [responsible](#) for traditional policing, criminal investigations, supporting federal social programs, patrolling strategic infrastructure and migration installations, disrupting illicit supply chains, and providing civil protection during natural disasters.

However, the force [was first deployed](#) to patrol Mexico's borders in an effort to appease former President Donald Trump's demands that Mexico stop US-bound migrants. Untrained for that role, human rights groups [accused the unit](#) of human rights violations and attacking defenseless migrants.

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