

# Mexico Purges 284 Police Commanders in Antidrug Effort

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MEXICO CITY, June 25 — [Mexico](#) purged 284 commanders from the top ranks of its federal police forces on Monday as part of the government's effort to contain corruption and halt an underworld war between drug traffickers.

“We know Mexicans demand an honest, clean and trustworthy police force,” the public security secretary, Genaro García Luna, said at a news conference. “It's obvious there are mafias that are acting to keep the situation from changing, to continue enriching themselves through corruption and crime.”

Mr. García Luna said the federal police chiefs in all 32 states were among those demoted and sent to be retrained. They will be replaced with officers who are from an elite corps that underwent special training and vetting and who have submitted to drug tests and polygraph tests.

Mexico has been plagued not only by corrupt officers working for drug dealers, but also by honest officers too terrified to take on the gangs.

Although new administrations have revamped the federal police in the past, the effort to put new commanders in key places throughout the nation's police forces was unprecedented, criminologists said.

Since taking office in December, President [Felipe Calderón](#) has waged an aggressive offensive against drug traffickers, sending thousands of troops and federal agents into towns and states where mobsters control local officials.

The new president, a conservative, has also promised to remake the nation's police departments, root out corrupt officers and pass legislation making it possible, among other things, for the local police to investigate drug rings.

But his efforts have so far unleashed the worst wave of drug-related violence this country has ever seen. Just this year more than 1,050 civilians, along with 178 police officers and 19 soldiers, have been killed in gangland shootouts and executions. Traffickers often employ corrupt officers as gunmen.

So far, the two most powerful drug trafficking organizations — the Gulf Cartel, based along the Texas border, and a group known as the Federation, which controls Ciudad Juárez, near El Paso — have continued to slug it out for control of smuggling routes worth \$10 billion to \$24 billion a year, United States law enforcement officials say.

Thirteen of the people killed in this struggle were decapitated to terrorize rival gangs, and 53 had warning messages stuck to their bodies, sometimes with ice picks.

Mexico's two main federal police forces have not been immune to corruption over the last few years. Mr. García Luna acknowledged that a handful of the senior officers demoted Monday were being investigated over allegations that they had taken bribes, but he provided no details.

Experts on reforming the police said the purge was a good first step, though some pointed out that the heart of the corruption problem had always been the lack of internal affairs investigators and of outside oversight of the police.

What is more, Mexico's police officers are poorly trained and poorly paid compared with their United States and European counterparts, making them ripe targets for bribes. Putting ostensibly honest commanders in charge does not guarantee that rank-and-file officers will change their ways, some experts said.

“You can change the people and not change the institution,” said Ernesto López Portillo Vargas, executive director of the Institute for Security and Democracy, an independent group that studies police corruption issues. “This is the big risk.”