

Culture of the Mexican Army¹

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ABSTRACT:

This scholarship provides a descriptive analysis of the professionalization and culture of the Mexican military, focusing on how two pivotal events—the War of Independence (1810–1821) and the Revolution (1910–1920)—shaped its modern values and traditions. It traces the military's transformation from a politically interventionist force in the 19th century to a professionalized institution with limited political involvement today, framed within the broader Iberian military tradition (Loveman, 1999). The paper highlights how distinct political and social dynamics influenced the professionalization of Mexico compared to Brazil and Peru, despite their shared heritage. Key reforms, such as the Organic Law of 1926, illustrate the Mexican military's evolving role in civic duties, disaster relief, and public emergencies, with a deliberate detachment from political affairs. Recent developments, including anti-drug operations and the creation of the National Guard, are examined as part of an ongoing cultural shift. Ultimately, the study underscores the enduring influence of the Iberian military tradition on Latin American military institutions.

KEYWORDS:

Organizational, Strategic, Culture, Professionalization, Predatory Praetorianism, Prescriptive, Descriptive, Mechanisms, Education

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1. INTRODUCTION:

This paper aims to provide a descriptive analysis of the culture of the Mexican army by examining its key characteristics, dimensions, and mechanisms. The analysis focuses on the military's evolution following two pivotal historical events: the War of Independence (1810–1821) and the Revolution (1910–1920). These two events—distinct in their motivations and outcomes—serve as foundational moments that shaped the values, principles, and traditions of modern Mexico. Therefore, understanding this period offers valuable insights into the professionalization and present-day culture of the Mexican army. To achieve this, the findings will be compared with those of other countries, particularly Brazil and Peru, and aligned with theoretical debates on military culture and professionalization as described in the literature.

Building on the work of Camp (2005) and Ronfeldt (1985), who analyze the evolution of the Mexican military into a professionalized and politically limited institution, this paper seeks to explore how the military's transformation has shaped its current role. The transition from the military's predatory practices following the War of Independence to its modern professional structure aligns with these scholars' findings on military evolution. However, the professionalization of the Mexican military must also be understood in a broader Latin American context, particularly in relation to what Loveman (1999) describes as the "Iberian military tradition."

The Iberian military tradition, inherited from Spain and Portugal, profoundly influenced the development of military institutions across Spanish America and Brazil. According to Loveman (1999), this tradition shaped the military's early intervention in politics and state-building across the region. Yet, over time, the push toward professionalization in these countries has resulted in

the gradual distancing of the military from direct political control, particularly in Mexico. This paper will use Loveman's framework to draw comparisons between the professionalization processes of the Brazilian, Peruvian, and Mexican armies, exploring how shared Iberian influences diverged in each case.

The War of Independence marked a transition from Spanish monarchic rule to one dominated by the creole oligarchy in Mexico. Following independence, the political landscape was shaped by civilians, politicians, and military officers, with the military playing a prominent role alongside civilian actors. The absence of a strong arbitrating institution often led military leaders to resolve political conflicts through force, sometimes driven by their own interests or aligning with political factions. The military's precarious financial situation further incentivized their involvement in causes that offered economic rewards (Fowler, 1996).

The Mexican Revolution, sparked by widespread discontent with Porfirio Díaz's 30-year dictatorship, led to significant political and social changes, culminating in the 1917 Constitution. The military was deeply involved in both the revolution and its aftermath, helping to forge the modern political institutions of Mexico. These changes have contributed to the relative political and economic stability seen today, a stability grounded in the military's professionalization (Ronfeldt, 1985).

The Organic Law of 1926 formally defined the military's responsibilities, which remained largely unchanged until the late 1980s. The law outlined three key functions: i) aiding in public emergencies, ii) engaging in civic and social work, and iii) providing assistance during natural disasters. In the past three decades, a fourth mandate—focused on anti-drug operations—has been added. Recent structural changes introduced by the current administration, including the creation of the National Guard, continue to influence military culture (Gámez, 2022).

The paper is structured as follows: Section 2 delves into the theoretical background, examining definitions of organizational and strategic culture, as well as embedding mechanisms within the military. This section includes a discussion on the impact of the Iberian military tradition and how it has shaped modern military institutions across Latin America, the evolution of strategic military cultures, and a comparative analysis of military evolution in Brazil and Peru. Section 3 presents a descriptive analysis, beginning with an examination of the Mexican Independence and Revolution and continuing with a comparative study of contemporary military professionalization in Mexico, Brazil, and Peru. Finally, Section 4 provides the concluding remarks, summarizing the key findings and insights of the study.

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND:

2.1 Organizational Culture

The impact of culture on organizational and strategic culture becomes observable in the military effectiveness of a country's army. Mansoor & Murray (2019b) describe culture as the most important variable that can influence military effectiveness, similarly they point out that its complexity lies in the fact that culture is in itself influenced by multiple and external factors. Therefore, in order to better understand culture, it is worth studying the formation and change of its organizational culture and influence in organizational functioning, as well as its development of strategy, operations and tactics.

The nature of culture is ambiguous, its mélange of assumptions, ideas, norms, and beliefs is materialized and reflected through and as symbols, rituals, myths, and practices which provide meaning to its members; and that shape how an organization functions and adapts to external factors. Furthermore, not only these habitual practices, default programs, hidden assumptions, and

abstract cognitive frames underpin how an organization function, but its invisible nature is often an unrushed, iterative, and continuous process. Exceptions to this usual process can be observed in extreme situations such as wars or severe trauma like those of the unconditional surrender of Japan, or in the revisionist German culture after 1945 (Mansoor & Murray, 2019a).

Military culture is also influenced by three external factors: geography, history, and environment. For example, the navy of insular states like Great Britain exhibits a more independent and aggressive nature, while the army in continental US places greater emphasis on logistics (Adamsky, 2010). Historical experiences, such as invasions, have influenced the Russian military's culture, emphasizing fear, suspicion, and expansionism, whereas the conservative culture of the Ottoman Empire was shaped by religious aspects and a desire to maintain traditions. Additionally, the environment plays a role; for instance, the incorporation of technology in the US Air Force, the independence of US Navy captains at sea, and the protocol for interacting with civilians and enemies reflect environmental influences (Posen, 1986).

The complexity of culture is compounded by the presence of subcultures within an organization, each with its own processes. For instance, US special forces, such as Marine Corps, aviators, SEALs, and submariners, exhibit different responses to changes in technology and strategies (Millett, 2019).

Wong & Gerras (2019) note that the complexity of culture lies not only in its nature but also in its definition. They use a multi-level analysis known as the Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness (GLOBE) framework, which includes organizational culture and functioning. This analysis employs qualitative and quantitative methods, gathering data through questionnaires from middle-level executives to gain insights into cultural consequences and international differences in organizational values.

GLOBE	
Dimensions of military organizational culture	Measurement
1. Performance Orientation	Degree in which performance, improvement, and excellence are rewarded
2. Future Orientation	Extent to which delaying gratification, planning, and investing in the future are engaged
3. Assertiveness	Degree to which confrontation and aggressiveness is encouraged
4. Institutional Collectivism	Degree to which collective distribution of resources is encouraged
5. In-Group Collectivism	Degree to which pride, loyalty, and cohesiveness is expressed
6. Power Distance	Degree to which power is expected to be distributed
7. Humane Orientation	Degree to which fair, altruistic, generous, caring, and kindness are encouraged
8. Uncertainty Avoidance	Extent to which procedures and rules are relied upon to reduce unpredictability
9. Gender Egalitarianism	Degree to which gender inequality is minimized

Table 1: Adapted from Wong & Gerras (2019)

According to GLOBE, culture represents a collection of beliefs, values, attitudes, and learned behaviors of a group. Organizational culture refers to the pattern of shared assumptions developed through problem-solving processes. Once internalized and validated, these assumptions are shared with new members as the accepted approach to addressing problems. This process may be influenced by the boundaries established by the hierarchy and structure of a particular military organization (House et al., 2004).

Wong & Gerras (2019) concur with the fact that elements of foundation of a culture contain beliefs and values and are often reflected through artifacts such as symbols, propaganda, or weaponry. It is worth noting that they directly link this paraphernalia with the senses and how members of a particular organization can interact with what they touch, hear, see, smell, and taste. GLOBE's nine dimensions aim to avoid moral judgments and remain mission-driven. For example,

peacekeeping missions can explore the relativism of cultural features, while in-group collectivism can help explain phenomena such as insubordination or subversive attitudes.

2.2 Guardians of La Patria: Military Culture in Latin America

The concept of defending La Patria (the nation or fatherland) against internal and external threats is deeply ingrained in the culture of Latin American armed forces. According to Loveman (1999), this mission is seen as an inherent part of human nature and the essence of modern nation-states. The notion of national defense and security is considered immutable, despite evolving threats and shifting enemy identities. This historical mission underscores the foundational role that military institutions play in safeguarding the nation, reflecting a cultural legacy that has persisted across centuries.

Civil-military relations in Latin America, like in other modern nation-states, are shaped by constitutional and legal frameworks that define the formal relationship between the military and society. However, Loveman (1999) emphasizes that these relationships are also influenced by long-standing expectations, attitudes, and values that have evolved over time. The military traditions inherited from Iberian colonial powers, combined with the legacies of Spanish and Portuguese colonialism, have significantly shaped the political and social culture of the region. These traditions contribute to a unique military culture that blends historical precedents with contemporary practices.

The determination of what constitutes a threat to La Patria, and the appropriate response, is a critical aspect of military culture in Latin America. According to Loveman (1999), the preconditions for military intervention, whether routine or irregular, exist in many Latin American countries. While political, institutional, cultural, and professional barriers often prevent such

interventions, there are instances where these inhibitors fail, leading to military rule. This tendency reflects a deep-seated belief within both the military and civilian populations that the armed forces have a crucial role in identifying and responding to threats, a belief that is woven into the political culture of the region.

The role of the armed forces as "guardians" of a "protected democracy" is a significant component of Latin American political culture. Loveman (1999) points out that this role is not confined to the military subculture but is also embedded in the broader political culture and historical experience of many Latin American nations. Although the extent to which this premise is ingrained varies across the region, the idea that the military may intervene to protect La Patria remains a persistent and influential aspect of Latin American political life.

2.3 Embedding Mechanisms

The hierarchical nature of organizations entails leaders, making their actions critical to organizational culture. Schein (2006) categorizes these actions into primary and secondary embedding mechanisms. Leaders embody the sensory artifacts of an organizational culture, serving to sustain, transmit, and perpetuate that culture. Their actions provide direction and meaning, guiding members in learning and unlearning what is important according to the organization's needs.

These mechanisms can be analyzed as prescriptive and descriptive. Prescriptive mechanisms involve actions taken by leaders to realign the organization's culture, while descriptive mechanisms refer to evidence of assumptions, values, and beliefs within the organization.

Leaders' Mechanisms	
Primary (Embedding)	Secondary (Reinforcing and Stabilizing)
1. Pay attention, measure, and control	1. Organizational systems and procedures

2. React to critical incidents and crises	2. Organization design and structure
3. Criteria to allocate scarce resources	3. Design of physical space
4. Role modeling, teaching, coaching	4. Formal statements of philosophy, creed and charters
5. Criteria to recruit, select, promote, retire members	5. Organizational rites and rituals
6. Criteria to allocate rewards and status	6. Stories, legends, and myths

Table 2: Adapted from Schein (2006)

An example of how primary embedding mechanisms can be leveraged by leaders to promote cultural change is illustrated by the adjustments made in the recruiting policy of the volunteer force by US General Maxwell Thurman. This policy focused on quality over quantity by prioritizing educational standards to prepare for and prevent crises, and allocated financial incentives to members joining the army for educational purposes. This approach not only aimed to improve the quality of recruits but also addressed resource allocation and crisis management (Wong & Gerras, 2019).

Secondary reinforcing and stabilizing mechanisms influence culture when they align with the organization's values and beliefs. For example, the financial incentives provided to recruits to pursue education also improved their well-being and the quality of life for their families. This illustrates how primary embedding mechanisms, when effectively communicated by leaders, can lead to secondary mechanisms that reinforce and stabilize the organizational culture.

In the case of Mexico, Camp (2005) traces the military's seven decades of subordination to civil authority as the result of a rare consensus between civilian and military leaders following the Mexican Revolution, which emphasized the necessity of military withdrawal from politics. This consensus led to the establishment of several legacies that have sustained civil supremacy, including the creation of a one-party state, the development of a strong social consensus against

military intervention, a focus on subordination within military education, and institutional autonomy on certain internal matters. Additionally, various formal linkages between civilian and military elites have emerged as a result of this agreement, further reinforcing the balance of power.

During the most recent administration (2018-2024), the role of the armed forces expanded into public security tasks with the creation of the National Guard. A March 2019 decree integrated the Federal Police, Military Police, Naval Police, and National Gendarmerie into this new organization (Gámez, 2022). The most significant measure was the plan for the National Guard to gradually replace the military in high-risk regions, based on the rationale that the military should not be involved in public security functions. Additional measures included increased resources for police training and the establishment of the National College for Public Security, aimed at training specialist security personnel and providing career options for teenagers who are not engaged in work or study.

2.4 Strategic Culture

Kilcullen (2019) illustrates the relationship between culture, organizational culture, and strategic culture based on his experience as a teacher at the NATO Defense College during the early events of the Arab Spring. He describes culture as the shared, unspoken assumptions about what is normal and what is expected or appropriate within a group. Strategic culture, in turn, is seen as a continuation of ethnic and national characteristics—attitudes, norms, and expectations—that precede and shape organizational culture, becoming fundamental elements of a social organization.

Armed forces, as permanent social institutions, are influenced by the distinct styles of war and combat inherent to their cultural contexts. Thus, strategic culture emerges from these cultural factors, shaping warfare in specific ways. For example, during the conflict between Al-Shabaab

and the Somali National Army, the latter's strategy was heavily influenced by subnational cultural norms within one of its battalions. This battalion, part of the Somali National Alliance, used informal and traditional practices that led to a distinctive strategy where soldiers were sent into the field while the commander remained in a vehicle. This case highlights how the strategic culture of a non-state militia can impact the organizational culture of a national army, underscoring the importance of understanding such cultural influences and their tactical implications (Kilcullen, 2019).

To further clarify the subject, Kilcullen (2019) uses intersectionality to explain the overlap between national and subnational identities. As national and subnational cultures coexist, they include particularities related to gender, race, unit, or formation level. Group identities can be based on real or idealized self-conceptions, reflecting the complexities of these overlapping cultural dimensions.

It is from the notions of strategic culture and strategy that the concept of statecraft arises. Strategic culture encompasses historical, traditional, cultural, political, and social factors that shape statecraft by influencing strategic behavior and defense policies. The enduring circumstances of a nation help define how national power is perceived and used. By introducing the concept of Grand Strategy, it becomes evident that a country's long-term goals are shaped by the coordination and application of resources according to these perceptions, regardless of political orientation or administration. While policy choices are observable, strategic culture remains unobservable, and enduring circumstances are often unconscious. This model is useful for analyzing the underlying factors of countries and cultures (Kilcullen, 2019).

In Latin America, the military's involvement in politics has been deeply rooted in a belief in their mystical connection to La Patria and their historic mission as its ultimate guardians. This belief

has driven the military's direct assumption of political power and their insistence on participating in policymaking and maintaining autonomy in certain defense and institutional matters. Military officers have justified their actions—whether seeking to defend or transform the status quo—as a form of political salvation, invoking sacred images, historical imperatives, and constitutional duties to legitimize their political decisions. Even when such justifications were cynical, they served as a crucial ritual to sanctify the military's political role. This role has been embedded in Latin American constitutions and legislation since independence and is widely supported by both the general population and civilian political elites (Loveman, 1999).

The concept of military guardianship and protected democracy has evolved as a fundamental aspect of Latin American political culture, influenced by national variations in institutions and style. The Cold War, the Cuban Revolution, regional guerrilla movements, and counterinsurgency politics further reinforced and enhanced this role. These dynamics were reaffirmed during the transitions back to elected civilian governments and the "wave of democratization" from 1978 to 1993, reflecting the enduring nature of military involvement in the political sphere and its integration into the region's political framework (Loveman, 1999).

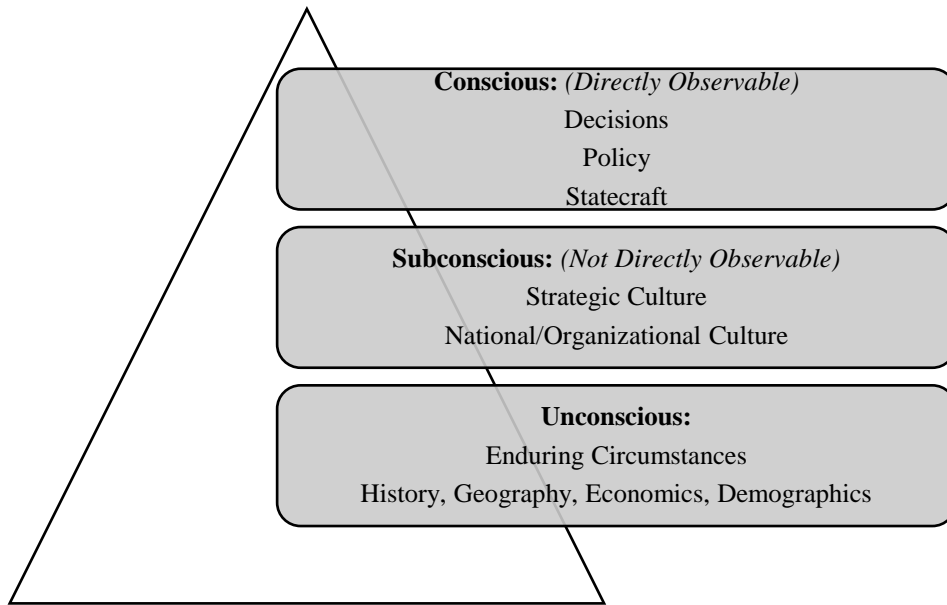


Figure 1: Adapted from Kilcullen (2019)

“It follows that policies that are misaligned with strategic culture are never, or at least very seldom, enacted in practice: real decisions follow behavioural patterns driven by underlying strategic culture, just as the above-water parts of an iceberg move with the much larger submerged portion” (Kilcullen, 2019, p.44)

2.5 Evolution of Strategic Military Cultures

The historical analysis of a country can elucidate why states adopt offensive or defensive doctrines (Kier, 1995). A well-suited strategic environment and military interests significantly impact a country’s stability. In examining the culture of the Mexican Army, it is insightful to consider the historical contexts of other nations. For example, Australia, as an insular, trade-independent maritime state with a three-ocean power dynamic, maintains a strategic culture of forward engagement, countering the continental view that its geographic location allows for isolation from external military conflicts (Kilcullen, 2019).

Similarly, Indonesia's strategic culture has been shaped by its experience as an insular, multiethnic archipelago with a colonial past. The Dutch military legacy and a desire to forge its own military identity have influenced its strategic posture, marked by anti-imperialism and Cold War neutralism. In contrast, Russia, a vast continental state, has faced numerous invasions and conflicts, including those with Napoleon and during the World Wars. Its post-Cold War era has been characterized by revisionism and authoritarianism, combining military force with the strategic management of civilian infrastructure (Kilcullen, 2019).

An analysis of the German Army culture from 1871 to 1945, as detailed by Wintjes (2019), highlights the complex and evolving nature of its operational culture. The consolidation of the German Army by the end of the nineteenth century involved a combination of technological advancements and the integration of various regional forces within the German Confederation Army. This process, which spanned five phases, countered the notion of a simple “Prussianization” of the army. Initially, there were four distinct armies, each with its own culture and traditions. Over time, these differences were narrowed after World War I, leading to a more unified German Army. However, the Treaty of Versailles, by restricting the number of personnel, accentuated the Prussian influence within the military structure.

Understanding this historical evolution underscores the significance of cultural dimensions in shaping military organizations. The integration of diverse traditions, regional practices, and religious influences illustrates how these elements slowly merged to form a cohesive operational culture (Wintjes, 2019). However, significant disruptions, such as the aftermath of World War II, led to radical shifts in Germany's strategic culture. The post-war period saw Germany's transformation into a cooperative, non-interventionist continental power, characterized by its

strategic use of infrastructure and policies shaped by its partition, occupation, and eventual reunification.

The Israeli Defense Force (IDF) presents a unique case in military culture studies due to its intentional and strategic formation rather than an organic development over time. Established during the country's formation and independence in 1948-49, the IDF incorporated former paramilitary groups such as the Haganah and Palmach, along with British officers. This deliberate construction of the IDF emphasized discipline, manners, physical appearance, and a rigorous dress code. It also focused on tactics, offensive planning, and a clear chain of command (Adamsky, 2010). Rather than simply emulating existing military cultures, the IDF studied and drew inspiration from various armies to develop a military structure tailored to the specific needs and challenges of the newly established state of Israel (Vardi, 2019).

The IDF's development illustrates how organizational culture can be intentionally designed to meet particular objectives. Emerging from a version of Zionism, the IDF's primary mandate was the preservation of Israel's territory and national security. As a result, it evolved into an increasingly independent and offensive-oriented force. Despite its initial intent to remain separate from political matters, the IDF gradually gained significant political influence, driven by its core mission of maintaining the state. This case underscores how a pre-designed military culture can have profound implications for both organizational effectiveness and broader national politics (Vardi, 2019).

The US Army's cultural evolution provides a compelling case of reconstructing a military force to address failures and adapt to modern challenges. Post-war crises, including issues related to career advancement, officers' superiority complexes, racial tensions, substance abuse, and low morale, exposed deep-seated problems within the army. Experiences in the Arab-Israeli and Vietnam wars highlighted deficiencies in readiness for full-scale conflicts involving new technologies. The

inability to learn from mistakes and implement effective reforms led to inadequate training and failed reforms. However, the success of specialized operations such as Operation Just Cause (Panama, 1989) and Operation Desert Storm (Iraq, 1991) underscored the need for radical changes. These changes included the professionalization of the army, setting clear and attainable objectives, and conducting detailed risk and cost analyses, which influenced subsequent operations and the integration of strategies necessary for the digital revolution (Mansoor, 2019).

While the digital revolution brought significant advancements in speed and efficiency, it also introduced new challenges related to micromanagement, command hierarchies, and the need for enhanced intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. As noted by Mansoor (2019), the army's adaptation to these new demands allowed it to apply lessons learned from previously underestimated experiences such as unconventional warfare and military occupation. For instance, the failure to plan effectively for major combat operations during the Iraq War (2003-2011) exposed the consequences of political missteps, lack of vision, and mismanagement. Although improvement was clearly attained, it revealed the difficulty that change entails, and how present biases like selection based on charisma rather than expertise, the competence of operational matters, and the incentive structure play a role that cannot be immediately instituted into an organization.

The Royal Navy's history is pivotal for understanding the cultural evolution of armed forces characterized by its historical constructs and transformation. In the early twentieth century, the Royal Navy was the most formidable fleet globally, distinguished by its clear hierarchy, career path, and incorporation of technological advancements such as steam power, steel hulls, and wireless radio. Its insular nature shaped its defensive strategy, aimed at protecting the island from invasion, securing maritime trade routes, supporting the army, and preventing enemy access to sea

lanes. Despite its acknowledged importance, the Navy often received minimal recognition and investment outside wartime, being viewed as a mere insurance policy. Social dynamics, including the high cost of supporting cadets and Victorian values emphasizing deference and obedience, played a significant role in shaping the Navy's internal culture (Williamson, 2019).

Significant changes came following the Battle of Jutland, which exposed deficiencies in command centralization, training, and communications. This prompted reforms in the pre-WWII era, focusing on recruitment, naval education, strategy, and the adaptation of new tactics. Innovations included the use of destroyers in offensive roles, the incorporation of naval aviation for reconnaissance, and the implementation of night battles and torpedoes. These reforms, highlighted by Williamson (2019), led to successful outcomes such as effective night actions and cooperation with American convoys. However, despite these advancements, the Royal Navy was eventually surpassed by the US Navy, reflecting how entrenched traditions and Victorian values, coupled with reluctance to fully embrace modernization, impeded the Navy's adaptation and evolution in the face of emerging challenges.

As demonstrated by the cases of Soviet, U.S., and Israeli strategic cultures, and as emphasized by Adamsky (2010), military innovation stems primarily from the adoption of new organizational structures and deployment methods rather than merely the introduction of new technologies. While technological advancements provide new tools, they do not guarantee immediate change. True innovation occurs when these tools are thoroughly studied, accepted, and integrated within the military's organizational framework. It is only through this deeper process of adaptation that technological advances become powerful drivers of change, capable of rendering previous methods of warfare obsolete.

The distinction between the arrival of technology and the actual transformation it brings is crucial. Simply acquiring new technology does not automatically lead to innovation in military culture. Instead, the cultural and operational adaptation of these tools—how they are incorporated into military strategies and embraced by relevant personnel—determines their impact. When effectively integrated, new technologies can enhance the efficiency and capabilities of military forces, leading to a more potent and innovative approach to warfare, ultimately surpassing outdated methods (Adamsky, 2010).

2.6 Strategic Culture and Military Evolution in Brazil and Peru

Brazil's military history is marked by a unique evolution influenced by external and internal dynamics. The origins of the Brazilian military culture trace back to its colonial past and its separation from Portugal in the early 19th century, which led to the formation of an independent nation-state. Early military influences were shaped by European traditions, particularly Portuguese, which imbued the army with a sense of mission tied to national unity and territorial integrity. The military saw itself as a stabilizing force amidst political turmoil and social unrest. This idea of guardianship has persisted throughout Brazilian history, solidifying the military's involvement in both domestic and political affairs, especially during periods of perceived instability (Filho & Zirker, 2000). This belief in the military's role as a national protector was institutionalized during the First Brazilian Republic (1889–1930), where the army often intervened in politics to maintain order.

In the mid-20th century, Brazil's military took on a more overtly political role, particularly during the Cold War era. The military coup of 1964, which led to a 21-year dictatorship, is a critical period for understanding the evolution of Brazil's strategic culture. The military justified its takeover as a necessary act to save the country from the perceived threat of communism and internal disorder,

reinforcing its image as the guardian of national security (Stepan, 1988). Under the military regime, national development and modernization became intertwined with military objectives, and the regime pursued a doctrine of internal security, economic nationalism, and developmentalism. These policies aimed to secure Brazil's geopolitical position while addressing domestic challenges like economic instability and insurgency. During this period, the Brazilian military developed strong ties with U.S. forces, adopting counterinsurgency strategies and doctrines influenced by the broader Cold War context (Filho, 2021).

The return to civilian rule in 1985 marked a significant transformation in Brazil's military culture. The military's withdrawal from formal politics was gradual and marked by a shift in focus from domestic policing to external defense. Constitutional reforms in 1988 enshrined democratic principles and limited the military's political role, although the institution retained considerable autonomy over defense matters. The contemporary Brazilian military has repositioned itself within the framework of regional security and peacekeeping missions, particularly through involvement in United Nations peacekeeping operations (Kenkel, 2013). While it no longer exerts the same political influence it once did, the Brazilian military remains an important institution in national defense and regional security, reflecting an ongoing adaptation to Brazil's evolving strategic culture in the post-Cold War world.

The case of Peru's military culture is shaped by its historical role in nation-building and its engagement in internal conflicts. The Peruvian military initially emerged as a key actor during the wars of independence, and by the 20th century, it became heavily involved in domestic politics. One of the most significant periods was under General Juan Velasco Alvarado, who led a military coup in 1968 and implemented left-wing nationalist reforms aimed at redistributing wealth and land (McClintock, 1992). The Velasco regime fostered a sense of military guardianship over

national sovereignty and social justice, positioning the armed forces as protectors of the nation from both internal and external threats.

Peru's military faced significant challenges during the 1980s and 1990s with the rise of insurgent groups, particularly the Maoist Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) and the Marxist Túpac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA). These internal threats led to the militarization of domestic policy under Presidents such as Alan García and later Alberto Fujimori, whose regime leveraged the military to combat these guerrilla movements (Mauceri, 1996). The military's counterinsurgency tactics were often criticized for human rights violations, with the state granting the armed forces significant autonomy to carry out operations against insurgents. This period of conflict further embedded the military's role in politics and security, though at a high social cost.

Post-conflict Peru saw a gradual shift toward professionalization and depoliticization of the military. Efforts were made to modernize the armed forces, reduce corruption, and build stronger civilian oversight. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Comisión de la Verdad y Reconciliación, CVR) established in 2001 highlighted the atrocities committed by both insurgents and the military during the conflict, fostering a process of institutional reform (Stern, 1998). While the Peruvian military no longer plays a direct political role, its legacy of involvement in domestic security and counterinsurgency continues to shape its strategic culture and relations with civilian governments.

Brazil and Peru offer contrasting yet insightful cases when it comes to military involvement in politics and national development. In Brazil, the military has historically played a central role in shaping state policies, particularly during the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. This period saw the military as a self-proclaimed guardian of national security and order, justifying its control over the state through the doctrine of National Security, which framed internal dissent as a threat

equivalent to foreign enemies (Skidmore, 1990). By contrast, in Peru, the military's most significant political intervention came during the Velasco regime in 1968, where it pursued left-wing populist reforms, including land redistribution and nationalization of industries (McClintock, 1992). While both countries experienced military regimes, Brazil's focused on maintaining order and development through authoritarian control, whereas Peru's attempted to combine military authority with socialist-inspired structural changes.

Another key difference lies in their approach to internal conflicts. Brazil, with its more consolidated state apparatus, faced fewer existential threats to state authority during its military rule, allowing it to focus on economic modernization projects, such as the “Brazilian Miracle” of the 1970s (Skidmore, 1990). Conversely, Peru’s military was deeply entrenched in internal conflict, particularly during the insurgencies of the Shining Path and MRTA in the 1980s and 1990s. The Peruvian military’s counterinsurgency campaign, which operated with considerable autonomy, was marked by severe human rights violations and social unrest (Mauceri, 1996). While both militaries ultimately relinquished power, Brazil's transition was more orderly, whereas Peru’s military left behind a legacy of civil-military tensions and a need for extensive institutional reform post-conflict, highlighted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Stern, 1998).

The cases of Brazil and Peru offer clear examples of how Latin American civil-military relations have been shaped by a blend of local traditions and foreign influences (Loveman, 1999). In both countries, the military has been a significant political actor, influenced by centuries-old Iberian military traditions and evolving foreign doctrines. In Brazil, the military saw itself as a guardian of national security and political order, a role inherited from the Portuguese colonial military apparatus and strengthened by European and later U.S. influence. The National Security Doctrine, heavily influenced by U.S. Cold War-era military thinking, allowed the Brazilian military to justify

its long authoritarian rule (1964–1985) as essential for protecting the nation from communism and internal threats. This framework gave the military substantial autonomy in defining national interests and exerting influence over civilian governance (Loveman, 1999).

In contrast, Peru's military intervention in politics, while also influenced by colonial and foreign traditions, has been more episodic and focused on internal reform, particularly during the Velasco regime (1968–1975). The Peruvian military's engagement with social reforms, such as land redistribution, reflected a unique blend of nationalist and left-wing populism not seen in Brazil's more conservative military government. However, both countries share the trait of having military institutions that evolved from a mix of local and imported influences. The Peruvian military, like Brazil's, became deeply involved in shaping the political landscape, with internal conflicts and insurgencies, reinforcing its role as a key political actor well into the 1990s. The observation by Loveman (1999) that military intervention is an enduring feature of Latin American politics holds true for both Brazil and Peru, where the military has played a pivotal role in the consolidation and destabilization of civilian rule.

In both Brazil and Peru, civil-military relations were not monolithic, but rather complex interactions among competing factions within the military and between civilian groups seeking military support for their own objectives. The coups of 1964 in Brazil and 1968 in Peru illustrate how civilians often sought military intervention as a solution to perceived national crises. In Brazil, conservative civilian elites viewed the military as the safeguard of national stability against left-wing threats, urging its involvement to remove the João Goulart government. Similarly, in Peru, nationalist and reformist civilians saw the Velasco government's military rule as a vehicle for social change. Both cases highlight that military coups often had substantial civilian backing at the outset, though over time, human rights abuses and failed policies eroded this support (Loveman, 1999).

The case of Mexico provides an interesting contrast when examining civil-military relations and professionalization in Latin America. While Brazil and Peru's military institutions actively intervened in politics through coups, Mexico's military has historically maintained a more restrained role in governance, particularly after the Mexican Revolution. The professionalization of the Mexican armed forces followed a different trajectory, one shaped by a deliberate separation from politics after the 1940s, focusing on institutional loyalty to the state rather than direct involvement in government. Unlike in Brazil and Peru, where military coups were common, the Mexican military avoided overt intervention in civilian rule, serving as a stabilizing force under the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) for much of the 20th century (Loveman, 1999; Camp, 2005; Ronfeldt, 1985).

3. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS:

3.1 Independence

Obligatory military service for males was introduced in 1941 as a response to the possibility of Mexico entering WWII. Since then, the process has involved registering in January of the year of turning 18 at the local municipal level and participating in a lottery to begin training for a period of 12 months starting January of the following year. The military training usually includes calisthenics, social service, and, in some cases, a 3-month full-time training either in the air forces, army, or the navy. After completing the service, conscripts remain in reserve status until the age of 40. Completion of the service requirement is acknowledged by a Military Identity Card, which is necessary for any male aspiring to a public servant position. This process evolved from historical lessons learned after the independence and revolution, reflecting its rational and justification (Camp, 2005).

The analysis by Fowler (1996), focusing on the period following the end of the war of independence and the subsequent 30 years, sheds light on the foundations of the Mexican armed forces and Mexican nationalism. This era, often characterized by instability and chaos, was also marked by a complex interplay of multiculturalism, ethnicity, movements, conflicts, ideologies, and behaviors among society, politicians, and institutions. Fowler challenges the notion that this instability equated to a lack of ideology within the army. Instead, he proposes that high-ranking officers, military elites, and particularly the Ministers of War, shared a baseline reformist political agenda, characterized by a conservative or traditionalist stance and strong corporate interests.

While it may be tempting to explain the period solely through the lens of predatory praetorianism, the early national period of Mexico can be better understood through the reformist nature and political identity within the military institution. The 34 years between 1821 and 1855 saw 25 presidents, 18 of whom were generals, with Santa Anna becoming president on 11 occasions (Fowler, 1996). This era, defined by frequent shifts in leadership, was shaped by high-ranking officers from the independence war, who, despite their varied stances on the “Plan de Iguala,” became key intermediaries in the formation of modern Mexico. This treaty, also known as “the 3 guarantees” (independence, religion, and union), formalized independence and established an army to protect these guarantees, dissolving the Spanish viceroyalty that began in 1535.

Evaluations by Little (1987) highlight 16 successful coups during this period, demonstrating the military's significant involvement in politics. Fowler synthesizes Little's analysis, presenting four possible explanations for the political resolve of the army: i) the rise of predatory praetorianism; ii) the conditions of the military; iii) the army serving the politicians; and iv) the army reflecting societal beliefs. This elucidates the Mexican military's fundamental role in the early politics of independent Mexico. A high percentage of top-ranking officials held political positions, and

civilian prefects at state and municipal levels were overseen by general commands, giving the military considerable power.

The notion of predatory praetorianism dates back to General Agustín de Iturbide's brief reign as emperor from May 1822 to March 1823. His ascent set a precedent where promotions could lead to power through coups or "pronunciamientos," incentivizing the military to conspire and seek public office for personal gain. This doctrine, alongside the perceived irrelevance of doctrine and public opinion, emphasized the pursuit of power as decisive. The archetypal predatory praetorian is Antonio López de Santa Anna, who served as president eleven times. As Lynch (1992) describes, Santa Anna did not have a political party to support him nor any clear policy to champion. Lacking a fixed ideology, he navigated through political landscapes opportunistically, adapting to circumstances as they arose. He aligned himself with various parties, switched allegiances frequently, upheld no consistent political values, and his only constant was his willingness to do whatever was necessary to maintain power.

Frequent military protests over employment and payment conditions reveal that loyalty depended on financial support. Leaders who could afford to pay their troops enjoyed their backing, but once the money ran out, support waned, leading to overthrows. Another interpretation suggests the army was at the service of politicians, expanding the view of predatory praetorianism by highlighting that military intervention often aligned with civilian political agendas (Fowler, 1996). This interaction reveals a constitutional conflict within the military, driven by political beliefs and factions, including conservatives, liberals, and moderates.

If political beliefs and movements were important in determining the behavior of governments and politicians, it suggests that the strategic culture of politicians had an impact and was not solely motivated by predatory praetorianism (Lynch, 1992). This clarifies that both the military and

civilians could have had motivations, and that there were political factions such as conservatives, liberals, and moderates. This interpretation provides more nuance than simply labeling the entire period as chaotic. It follows that military interventionism could have been a response to the volatility caused by civilian politics, raising the concept of “politics of antipolitics,” which views instability as primarily a result of civilian politics. Porfirio Diaz's response to this volatility was the creation of a technocratic state, aimed at forming a capable, prepared cabinet that could steer the country's development and would, in theory, be less biased and ambitious (Ronfeldt, 1985).

The final interpretation is that the military did have a political ideology, as numerous army officers dedicated time and effort to political interests. However, they were not a homogeneous class or entity, like the clergy, but rather a mosaic reflecting the ideas and attitudes of the nation itself (Fowler, 1996).

The brief periods of exile followed by forgiveness for high-ranking officers who rebelled against various governments in independent Mexico, along with the military's perception of itself as a separate class with its own codes of behavior, contributed to the notion that individual rebellions could be forgiven granted that they were led by high-ranking officers. This dynamic was reinforced by the “fuero militar,” a legal status originating from Spain that allowed military leaders to avoid punishment from civilian authorities. It became one of the founding pillars of military class superiority and solidarity (Camp, 2005).

In conclusion, this era marked a transition from monarchic and European rule to one dominated by the creole oligarchy. The political debates following independence involved civilians, politicians, and military officers, with the military playing as much of a role as civilians. The absence of an arbitrating institution led military members to use their force to resolve political problems between factions. This intervention could be motivated by the interests of the military,

politicians, or a particular faction. In addition to the ambitious pursuit of power by civilians, politicians, and military members, the military's weak financial situation encouraged them to support a given cause providing that economic compensation was assured.

3.2 Revolution

The revolution was a civil war fueled by popular discontent with the 30-year dictatorship of Porfirio Diaz. A new constitution was established in 1917, which prohibited reelection and reshaped the political and social structures of the country. As Wager (1994) notes, the military played a significant role in both the revolution and its aftermath, during which many of the political institutions of modern Mexico were forged. This contributed to the relative political and economic stability that has persisted to the present day.

The first organic law of 1926 officially defined the functions of the military. Until the late 1980s, this law underwent few changes and outlined three primary mandates for the military: i) to provide aid in cases of public emergencies, ii) to perform civic and social work to contribute to the country's progress, and iii) to offer assistance during natural disasters. In the last three decades, a fourth mandate, focusing on the anti-drug campaign, was added. Further structural changes by the current administration have unified the army and navy under a new entity, the National Guard, which continue to shape the culture of the Mexican military (Gámez, 2022).

In 1971, the organic law was amended to shift the military's mandate from protecting the constitution and its laws to assisting in public emergencies, natural disasters, and civic/social work. This modification transferred the responsibility for upholding the constitution and laws to the legislative branch, while it formalized the civic role the military had been playing since the end of the revolution in 1920.

By the end of the 1970s, a transition began that reduced the military's direct involvement in politics, favoring stability over political leadership from within the armed forces. Ironically, this shift was initiated by former military political leaders and solidified with the founding of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI), which sought to institutionalize civilian political power. As leadership transitioned from military figures to civilians, the military's role became focused on protecting the nation and instilling values of loyalty, patriotism, and revolutionary heritage in its members. From this point forward, the army's mission and role were redefined and proudly embraced by its ranks.

3.3 Contemporary Mexico, Brazil and Peru: From Military Intervention to Institutional Professionalization

Mexico began a new path toward democratic reform, but like other young democracies experiencing rapid growth, it had not yet developed the institutional strength needed to support and sustain democracy (Klingner, 2000). Institutional weakness characterized the state, and the government could resort to military power to restore authority and law when necessary (Ramírez & Ramírez, 2020).

Similarly, as Ackroyd (1991) describes, when civilians took control of political life in Mexico, the intent was to prevent the recurrence of military coups. However, this also created a complex relationship between the military and civilian leadership. Ackroyd uses the paradigm of military professionalism to explain how decisions to carry out coups are influenced by the military's perception of its environment and its responses to external stimuli. Since perception and response are part of a social learning process, it makes sense to examine the education system that prepares military personnel.

Ackroyd further draws on the concept of “new professionalism,” introduced by Markoff et al. (1985), to argue that there are two types of military professionalization: one focused on external threats and the other on internal threats. In the classic model, the focus on external threats such as international war leads to a depoliticized military. In contrast, the internal focus addresses threats arising from inadequate national development and assumes that failure to promote national progress must be corrected. Thus, the military's view of civilian politicians’ performance can influence the decision to stage a coup, and that view is shaped by the values and professionalization within each country's military institution. The highly professionalized coups of 1964 in Brazil and 1968 in Peru offer useful comparisons for Mexico, highlighting three possible explanations: i) the Mexican military has not undergone significant professionalization, ii) it has not professionalized in response to internal threats, or iii) the "new professionalism" model requires adjustment to fit the Mexican case. Since education is the key method of professionalization, comparing these countries provides insight into institutional professionalism.

There is a 30-year gap between the establishment of Mexico’s defense college and those of Brazil and Peru. While this suggests a disparity in the ability to transfer skills, knowledge, experience, and technology, it also offers the potential advantage that Mexico may have drawn inspiration from lessons of these two institutions. In terms of professionalization, Mexico’s focus on internal threats—such as maintaining social, economic, and political stability—has been clearly addressed. Analyzing the military education system could shed light on the relationship between macro-level behavior and individual decision-making.

	Education and Professionalization		
	Brazil	Peru	Mexico
Military Education	Four-tier	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Career Advancement	Competitive and Progressive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Highest Education and Year of Creation	Escola Superior de Guerra (ESG) - 1949	Centro de Altos Estudios Militares (CAEM) - 1951	Colegio de la Defensa (CD) - 1981
Political Content in Courses (First Two Years)	10%	13%	5%
Political Content in Militar Media	40%	50%	1.7%
Professors Background	Militar / Civilian	Militar / Civilian	Military with Civilian exclusively for higher education

Table 1: Reproduced from Ackroyd (1991)

The Mexican educational system concentrates on two main efforts: first, inculcating values and norms, and second, teaching skills with a clear restriction against political interests. The formation of military values like obedience, honor, justice, morality, faith, and adherence to military laws and regulations is grounded in discipline. However, the concept of discipline varies across countries, with North American and European scholars noting that the Mexican military's concept of discipline emphasizes complete conformity and unquestioning obedience to superiors. In Mexico, order is believed to be achieved through authority (Ackroyd, 1991).

This notion of discipline and obedience encourages the Mexican military to follow orders from civilian politicians and the president without question, as disobedience would contradict core military values. In contrast, in Brazil and Peru, the military highly values resolute action, which encourages intervention when necessary. In Mexico, however, military personnel are taught that civilian politics govern, which inhibits intervention.

Loyalty and patriotism are central values for the Mexican military, placing the nation, the state and its institutions, and lastly the military itself, in descending order of importance. Due to the

predatory practices discussed earlier and the strong sense of nationalism shaped by the revolution, this hierarchy limits the military's power and reinforces civilian control over politics. Any military intervention would be seen as an attack on the nation, its revolutionary heritage, and its values. This contrasts with Brazil and Peru, where the military has greater capacity to determine the people's interests, with the nation and state viewed separately, as permanent and temporary entities, respectively (Loveman, 1999).

Regarding the second effort of the education system, Ackroyd (1991) indicates that political content in social science courses is more prominent in Brazil (10-13%) and Peru than in Mexico (4-5%). In Brazil's ESG and Peru's CAEM, general tactics account for 70-71% of the curriculum, while Mexico's curriculum focuses on discipline and group behavior, with minimal political content. Additionally, political content in military publications is scant in Mexico (1.7%) compared to Peru (50%) and Brazil (40%). Interest in political matters is encouraged in Peru and Brazil, while in Mexico, civic action and loyalty to the nation are prioritized.

As education increases, so do political efficacy and participation. Thus, the method and extent of educational experience are worth examining. Most Mexican military members complete only a four-year academy program, equivalent to a high school level. There is a significant discrepancy between the education levels of military personnel and civilians in Mexico, whereas in Brazil, the military often receive education equal to or better than that of civilians, reinforcing the roles and relationships between officers and civilians (Ackroyd, 1991).

Moreover, the interaction between military personnel and civilians in Mexico is unequal, with vertical interaction between military students and civilian professors. In contrast, Brazil encourages interaction and integration, with 51% of ESG attendees being civilians. Former

Brazilian President General Emilio Garrastazu Médici referred to the ESG as one of the most effective instruments for integrating the Armed Forces with civilians.

The inhibition of political subjects and the educational experience in Mexico place the military at a lower level than civilians, discouraging personal growth through interaction and integration. This has a psychological toll, discouraging efficacy and political participation by prioritizing discipline and obedience. The inability to question or challenge instructors affects military members' behavior and self-esteem, and the institutionalized method of memorization inhibits critical thinking. This contrasts with Brazil, where discussion and participation in important subjects, such as national security, are encouraged.

Finally, controlling the educational environment heavily influences students' behavior and self-esteem. In traditional education, students spend about 25% of their week at school, with the rest of the time spent with family and friends. In Mexican military education, however, students spend about 80% of their week at school, where food, clothing, and shelter are provided. Due to the school's location on the outskirts of Mexico City, there is little incentive to leave campus on the only free day (Sunday). This situation creates a dependent relationship between students and the military education system, reinforced by a strict routine of work, rigorous physical training, and pressure.

4. CONCLUSION:

As the lingering effects of predatory praetorianism continue to have a historical burden, analyzing the professionalization of the Mexican military helps to understand the values and traditions of its educational system. According to Ackroyd (1991), as education increases, so does political efficacy, and since efficacy and participation are strongly correlated, the better-prepared military personnel

become, the higher the likelihood of military intervention in political affairs. The cases of Brazil and Peru demonstrate that the professionalization of their military institutions and sensitivity to political matters led to the 1964 and 1968 coups (Filho, 2021; Mauceri, 1996). Additionally, the new professionalism does not focus on political efficacy and values but rather on the relationship between national security doctrine and mission concerning internal and external affairs.

Even with access to higher education, the conditions of the educational environment in Mexico play a significant role in limiting political efficacy, suggesting that professionalization alone does not guarantee it. This is not only due to the content, which restricts political training, but also the environment, which discourages participation and intervention. In contrast, Brazilian military education fosters open discussions between instructors and students, including civilians, which promotes higher-quality discourse (Markoff et al., 1985). This stands in opposition to Mexico's superior-inferior hierarchical structures and reliance on traditional memorization techniques, which hinder such exchanges. By limiting interaction between military personnel and civilians, the perception of military inferiority is exacerbated. Furthermore, the prioritization of the nation, the state, and finally the military in descending order of importance creates a loyalty dynamic that contrasts with Brazil and Peru, where the military institution takes precedence over the government.

While both Brazil and Peru's military regimes positioned themselves as protectors of La Patria, their approaches to governance and reform diverged significantly. Brazil's military prioritized the National Security Doctrine and economic modernization through conservative policies that favored elites and foreign investments. Peru, under Velasco, implemented radical reforms, particularly land redistribution, aiming to address deep-rooted social inequalities. These contrasting paths in military governance demonstrate the regional diversity Loveman (1999) references. Yet, both countries illustrate how military elites, steeped in Iberian colonial traditions

and bolstered by foreign doctrines, positioned themselves as supra-political guardians of their respective nations, creating a sense of professionalization tied to historical legacies and political exigencies.

Considering the most important events in modern Mexican history, the independence and revolution offer an interesting explanation for the culture of the Mexican army. As the need for military involvement, both internally and externally, has decreased, it makes sense to prevent predatory practices by limiting political content in the military education system. However, this represents a clear imbalance compared to Latin American peers like Brazil and Peru, which acknowledge the importance of military preparation and their place within society, but also accept that interventions will occur when necessary. The trade-off between limiting the military or not may come at the cost of coups. In Mexico's case, the trauma generated after independence caused a strong need to limit the military, which now fulfills its mandate as protectors of the nation and specializes in civic action and social programs. However, they are still treated as second-class citizens, as can be observed in the quality of their education and its environment.

The Mexican military's civic action has brought it closer to society, and while its role in addressing war-related threats has diminished, there is an opportunity to enhance its education system to benefit the country in areas such as natural resource protection, renewable energy, and the safeguarding of autonomous institutions. The military remains a key partner in governance through mandates established by military organic law, but improving professionalization will require strengthening institutional and international relations. Focusing on higher education and reinforcing anti-drug campaigns, particularly in collaboration with the US, could further evolve the military's role, aligning it with the goals of the current administration.

The deliberate limitation of military professionalization in Mexico, particularly in restricting political training and participation, raises important questions about the long-term implications for the country's governance. On the one hand, this approach has helped prevent the recurrence of military coups and intervention in political affairs, fostering a civilian political culture that is largely immune to the militarization of politics. However, it also risks weakening the military's preparedness in addressing complex national security challenges. As the role of the military becomes more intertwined with domestic affairs—such as disaster relief, civic duties, and anti-drug operations—the question arises as to whether this limited professionalization truly serves the evolving needs of the nation. The creation of the National Guard, which merges military and law enforcement functions under a single institution, further complicates these dynamics. Blurring the lines between military responsibilities and internal security may open the door to a return of the military's overreach in civilian matters, echoing past authoritarian tendencies.

Moreover, aligning the fourth mandate—anti-drug operations—with the concept of "new professionalism" suggests a shift toward an internal focus on threats, as described by Ackroyd (1991) and Markoff et al. (1985). While this shift may be necessary given Mexico's ongoing challenges with organized crime and internal security, it risks stretching the military's role beyond its traditional boundaries. The inclusion of the military in these operations under the guise of national security could revive concerns about the militarization of governance. Ultimately, the question remains whether Mexico's approach to military professionalization can continue to balance the delicate line between maintaining civilian control and ensuring the military is adequately equipped to address both internal and external security threats.

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