

The Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force

Guardian of Gender Equality

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Abstract: The 2007 reforms implemented by President Felipe Calderón brought unprecedented changes for the Mexican Army. Female recruitment reached a new high, allowing women to join combat positions in tactical units and special forces as well to be admitted into some military academies for the first time, including the previously male-only Heroic Military Academy and the Higher War College. This article contextualizes these reforms and focuses on one of the most tangible efforts by the Mexican Army to set in motion gender equality: the creation, goals, and mission of the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force.

Keywords: modern Latin American history, Latin American armies, Mexican modern history, Mexican Army, women in the army, Latino women, gender equality in Latin America

In the last few years, the Mexican armed forces have been implementing actions to put into place gender integration and equality. These changes have significantly transformed the expectations and way of life of female and male soldiers. Although these reforms required some mediation and were put on hold for decades, at the end it was impossible to stop them as society changed, and with it, military life.

This article will provide a general view of these reforms and how their enforcement has become policy in the present-day Mexican Army. As a way to

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exemplify gender integration, the discussion will focus on one of the most tangible and easy to recognize organizations for gender policies implementation, the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force (*Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos*). This article will analyze its main roles, campaigns, expectations, and usefulness for female and male personnel.

For a better understanding of this organization, specifically created in 2011 as a watchdog organization, this article will describe the context in which it emerged and what trends were followed to implement gender equality policy in the army. Knowing the context will allow us to understand the reasons why, regardless of still being a predominantly male-oriented institution, the Mexican Army has become more welcoming to women, offering them new positions that were unthinkable just a few years ago, allowing women to achieve higher ranks.

For a more complete analysis on gender integration within the Mexican Army, it is important to look at the whole picture and not only at the observatory that is a small part of a large institution. It has been a long path for Mexican women to be able to achieve equality in the army. From the first woman in the institution, Maria Gonzalez de Carter, who worked as a janitor in 1934, to the School of Nursing opening in 1938 to the first female general nurse, Maria Eugenia Gomez Lopez, who was promoted to brigadier general in 1991 and major general in 2002 when she retired, as well today's Captain Andrea Cruz Hernandez, who in September of 2011 graduated as the first female pilot and could potentially be lieutenant general.¹

The author accessed archival data and earlier army magazines to follow the steps of the first women in the Mexican Army. There has been an active but silent participation since the 1920s through the 1940s, as shown by several images of women working as seamstresses, janitors, and cooks. The Mexican declaration of war on the Axis powers in 22 May 1942 accelerated the Mexican arms industry in an unprecedented way. And just as in the United States, women filled these positions as more personnel were needed in different areas, including offices where women's recruitment as secretaries increased notably. Perhaps World War II might have also influenced the creation of the military nursing school, whose admission and resources increased to educate exclusively female military personnel.

The first women in the Mexican Army were wives, which was an indirect but important presence that is traceable in different sources. A life insurance policy brochure from the 1940s for soldiers featured a woman holding a soldier's hand and talks about the importance of providing housing and financial security to army wives. Today, in different commemorations, such as Mother's Day, the Mexican Army pays tribute to army wives, who have different social roles that have not seen many changes.

The integration of women into a traditionally male dominated sphere prompts many questions for the larger military community. How did women obtain more positions in a still predominantly male institution? What are the challenges faced both by female and male personnel? What are the general actions needed to tackle gender inequality? And finally, how are these policies used in everyday life for army members? Those are some of questions that will be addressed in this article.

Mexico Moving Toward Gender Equality: The 2007 Army Reforms

To understand the reasons why the Mexican Army has an organization specially focused on gender equality, it is necessary to refer back to the 2007 reforms. The public face of these reforms was President Felipe de Jesús Calderón Hinojosa (2006–12) who, as we shall see, followed international trends and to a certain extent his own concerns to enforce them.² There is no evidence to suggest what extent these changes were already set in place before Calderón's presidency, but it is possible that military chiefs were already familiar with the changes and knew they were coming whether they liked it or not.

It is important to mention that we must *not* attribute these changes in the armed forces solely to a president concerned with and sensitive to gender equality, and whose wife ran for a short time for president in the 2018 elections. Strong evidence shows that Calderón responded to international trends to fulfill gender quotas and tackle gender inequality, because it was stated in international agreements signed by Mexico that had to be followed and that can no longer be postponed. Some of the most important agreements Mexico signed were the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), which achieved constitutional status in 1992; the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women; and the Fourth World Conference on Women.

Another element that might have influenced the decision to open more jobs to women was social pressure from the harsh economic reality that required two-income families as well as increasing rates of single mothers and divorcees. Compounding this is the fact that Mexico was in 2007 and is to this date a country in which the female population is higher than the male population, where most women fall within working age (15 to 64 years).³

From a social and organizational perspective, the 2007 reforms are one of the most monumental changes in the history of the Mexican armed forces. The changes consisted of unprecedented modifications in admission policies for both sexes in eight military academies, including ground and air combat positions, as well as allowing female officers to access higher ranks. Ordered by the

president, the army's commander in chief, reforms allowed entrance for female recruits in the Mexican Army and Air Force in 2007, enabling female recruitment to reach a new high, as they were now allowed to join combat positions in tactical units and special forces and admitted into some military academies for the first time, including the previously male-only Heroic Military Academy (*Heroico Colegio Militar*) and the Higher War College (*Escuela Superior de Guerra*).⁴

They transformed the way in which the institution depicts itself as well as the way citizens perceive it. The new presence of women in the army modified army life as First Lieutenant Yadira Suárez Martínez, a member of the first female generation of the Culinary School at the Military Academy, acknowledged in our interview held in November of 2015. She mentioned challenges that included adapting formal male dormitories for herself and her female fellows, which included different restrooms, installing shower curtains absent at male dormitories, as well as more numerous and larger mirrors. She remembered that guards of both genders were stationed at the doors to prevent males and females from entering the dormitories of the opposite sex at night. Female-fitted uniforms and shoes and new health challenges unique to female personnel were needed as well.

Reforms did not extend exclusively to new positions; technical, tactical, operative, and administrative tasks in which women were already participants experienced changes. The secretary of defense was ordered to open women's admission for the first time to military schools, such as engineering, aviation, communication, as well as in the military academy as cooks. Also, for the first time, the Higher War College, closed to women since its creation in 1932, allowed female officers to obtain graduate degrees, including specialties in military management to be potential commanders.

Women's admission to the Higher War College brought profound changes as well. Women could obtain graduate degrees offered at this college, providing access to higher ranks, particularly with the possibility of administrative and command posts. According to different interviews conducted by the author with female officers that were part of the first generation, they experienced several tensions at the time of their studies, for instance, physical tests were not adapted to women and neither were the school's facilities. The two graduated officers interviewed were at the time of our conversation still expecting to achieve command positions.

Changes were made at higher ranks as well. From 2000 to 2010, six female officers became generals after an average of 30 years of service. To this day, Mexico still does not have a female major general, and brigadier generals and major generals can only be found in health services such as nursing, dentistry, and medical schools. The latter is considered one of the top institutes in Latin America, and it opened its doors to women's admission in 1973. The nursing

school was founded in 1938 as the first military institution exclusively for women, and the dentistry school, founded in 1976, was the only one that admitted both genders of cadets since it opened.

What type of women did these reforms envision recruiting? Beside the descriptions from official sources, another way to approach the army's ideal of women is to look at brochures and posters targeting potential recruits. One poster from the 2010 campaign shows the smiling face of a young female soldier as she greets a rural family distressed by a natural disaster with the slogan: "In the Mexican Army and Air Force women and men take action for you." Notice that the noun for women (*mujer*) comes first, which is still featured in all public campaigns. Since that year, there has been an increasing display of pictures in brochures and posters of both sexes of cadets with women usually at the center, circulating in army schools and bases as well in public buildings.

For a better understanding of campaigns and their influence in women's recruitment into the army, it is important to discuss briefly the ideal women sought by the army from the initial campaigns up to the current ones. To promote first-time and continuing registrations to different schools, the army employed the services of professional image and media agencies, as evident in the quality of photographs, radio, television, and internet ads, which led to questions of whether those who posed for them were real recruits, as they fit perfectly in the message they wanted to convey.

Women depicted in those campaigns followed specific aesthetic patterns: young, in their 20s, slim and athletic, usually wearing custom-made fatigues, their working clothing, using light but noticeable full-face makeup, discrete pin earrings, gel-glued hair with a ponytail or a hair bun, and well-shaped, waxed eyebrows. At first glance, such campaigns show professional feminization, with the use of bright makeup and neat appearance. In a closer analysis, there is evident sexualization.⁵ The study of the way in which the Mexican Army portrays female soldiers can shed light into what is expected from women in the Mexican Army, which leads to a better understanding of this topic.

Another poster widely publicized across the country showed the smiling face of a young female soldier targeting potential recruits from the 2010 campaign, which states: "The opportunity to prepare yourself and to serve your fatherland has arrived! University of the Mexican Army and Air Force educating women and men loyal to Mexico." Notice that "women" appears before "men."

Context of the Reforms

Reforms began in 2006 and were enforced just a year after President Calderón started his administration. His six-year term became one of the most violent in recent years; among other things, this was caused by the way in which he enforced the so-called War on Drugs as a commander in chief by ordering the

participation of the armed forces.⁶ By that time, constant references in Mexican media mentioned an ongoing war that brought fear and violence into Mexican society, while at the same time gave a more active role for the navy and the army institutions, whose report on the latest effects of the War on Drugs commonly includes references on the actions achieved by the armed forces.

Since the beginning of his presidential period, Calderón launched an intensive and noticeable campaign named Equal Opportunities aimed at providing all citizens more access to education and jobs, which was reported on his first annual government report in August of 2007.⁷ Equal Opportunities was the first large-scale attempt to tackle gender-based discrimination and had three axes: the 2007–12 National Plan of Development (*Plan Nacional de Desarrollo*, or PND), the National Program for Equality between Women and Men, and the General Law for the Equity amongst Women and Men. The plan included five guiding principles: 1) rule of law and security; 2) a competitive economy that generates jobs; 3) equal opportunities; 4) environmental sustainability; and 5) effective democracy and responsible foreign policy. Its basic premise was “sustainable human development,” which was understood as a permanent process of expanding capabilities and freedoms that allows all Mexicans to have a dignified life without compromising the patrimony of future generations.⁸

The 2007–12 PND complied with article 26 of the Mexican Constitution as well with articles 4 and 20 of the Planning Law (*Ley de Planeación*). The plan was presented by Calderón to the National Congress, who circulated it among the different secretariats and departments. The more than 300-page document includes constant references to gender equality, opportunities for everyone, and aimed at “forging of a generation of Mexicans free of complex or insecurities, taboos, fear and prejudices. Opening the path to a generation of citizens with a winning mentality.”⁹ With the Planning Law, President Calderón sought to expand his notion of equality in a sort of “democracy for all” by enforcing a comprehensive strategy for development that was meant to eliminate the determinism that birth conditions represented for many.¹⁰ Although it can be inferred that his so-called determinism is mostly addressed to non-gender-related poverty disadvantages, based on the rest of the document it can also be understood as a gender inequality one.

Overall, Calderón’s national plan, from the self-proclaimed “employment president,” was aimed at improving Mexico’s social conditions, but its enforcement was not an easy task. The campaign was directed at all governmental organizations and federal institutions, such as the army, and it required important changes in Mexican society.¹¹

Reforms arrived at a time when gender debates were occurring in Mexican society, achieving legal recognition in the Constitution in articles 1 and 4. These articles protected citizens from all discrimination, including gender-

related discrimination and provided legal equality for men and women, enforced by the federal government by incorporating gender quotas at all levels of government.

Several national and international documents provided a legal framework for the 2007 army reforms. The documents that provided a legal framework included the UDHR; the CEDAW; 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women; and the Fourth World Conference on Women. One of the most relevant international agreements for its implications in changing Mexican society is the UDHR, which was adopted by Mexico in 1990 and achieved constitutional status in 1992.¹² The CEDAW adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, to which Mexico belongs, constantly refers to the importance of enforcing gender equity. The 1994 Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women, held in Belém do Pará, Brazil, and in the following year, the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing, China, sought to guarantee equity and avoid discrimination for gender reasons to “empower women to build egalitarian relationships, with social justice, development and peace.”¹³

Although it has been a slow process, the fact that Mexico has adhered to international norms is promising and shows improvements toward gender equality. Perhaps one of the most tangible results of these international agreements has been the creation of laws that drew upon those agreements, such as the 2006 General Law for Equality between Men and Women and the 2007 Law on Access to Women to a Life Free of Violence, reinforced in nationwide campaigns since its creation and constantly referred to in the army’s official documents.

Officially, the reforms were presented by the Mexican president on 1 September 2007, and a few months later, the army General Guillermo Galván Galván announced the Program for the Equality Amongst Women and Men of the Secretary of National Defense 2008–12, an adapted version for military personnel in compliance with the presidential plan.¹⁴ The 17-page program considers four main objectives. The first objective refers to the importance of the creation of mechanisms that assure equal opportunities for women and men introducing a public policy concept, gender mainstreaming, which seeks to recognize the importance of using a pluralistic approach that values the differences of both sexes. The second goal calls for a strengthening of the institutional culture and management process in favor of equity and gender equality. The third objective updates the legal framework of the Secretariat of National Defense’s gender perspective, and the fourth objective creates mechanisms to register information and indicators to follow and fulfill the national policy of equality.¹⁵

The Program for the Equality Amongst Women and Men of the Secretariat of National Defense 2008–12 was announced in January 2012 with 11 projects

aimed to fight discrimination and accomplish gender equality. Known in 2011 as the Program for Training and Awareness for Troops in Gender Perspective, it is without a doubt a valuable source to understand how the army management conceived female personnel in those years. It established the guiding lines for 22 projects toward gender perspective institutionalization. This program drew upon the “Sectorial Program of National Defense 2007–2012” and was designed by a multidisciplinary committee of military personnel specialists in public policy and gender. By November 2010, congress approved necessary funds toward these gender equality actions to be employed in 2011.¹⁶

The Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force: A Watchdog of Human Rights

The Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force was created on 14 December 2011, months before President Calderón ended his term. It is the only organization within the army specifically tasked with reporting internally and publicly the way in which gender reforms are being enforced as well to suggest changes, which makes it an unprecedented effort to provide gender integration within the Mexican armed forces. Its facilities are placed within meters of the office of the army’s commander in chief. It works as a watchdog organization that follows gender-integration policies by organizing campaigns, questionnaires, and conducting research and its results, which are circulated in different army departments. It has agreements with different universities and governmental institutions such as the National Institute of Women (*Instituto Nacional de las Mujeres*) for training their personnel as well others who want to attend seminars on gender topics.

The creation of the observatory was the result of several actions promoted by Mexico’s Human Rights Commission, a civil organization, as well other federal policies enforced by the Secretariat of National Defense in concordance with President Calderón’s orders. It is important to state that the observatory does not have the legal means to order any reform to the military, as it only issues recommendations for internal use that might be followed by the higher commandant, emulating what the Human Rights Commission does. The organizational chart found on its website places this organization under the Secretariat of National Defense (*Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional*, or SEDENA), who created a directorate-general of human rights exclusively for army members that supervise the observatory’s actions.¹⁷

Since its creation, this organization has only been managed by female officers. Lieutenant Colonel Nurse Yadira Paredes Rojas is in charge of the observatory, a position she has held since 16 October 2016. She has a 22-year career in the army and has completed several courses and certifications on

human rights and gender, sexual harassment prevention, and public policy.¹⁸

During the fall of 2015, the author interviewed one of the observatory's directors, Lieutenant Colonel Dental Surgeon Maria Dolores Dominguez Rocha, who joined the army when she was 16 years old and had a 28-year career with the army. In the interview, she acknowledged that "we are in a masculinized space. . . . It is important to secure women's development in all the areas where they can now participate with infrastructure and learning tools so we can recruit more women."¹⁹ Her answer reflected a vast knowledge of the Equity Law (*Ley de Igualdad*) and how engaged she was with the role and programs promoted by the observatory. The Equity Law promulgated in 2006 received its name from the federal government and is key to the army reforms.²⁰ Dominguez Rocha described the actions of the observatory:

to detect situations with sex discrimination, to verify the impact of the equality actions implemented by the Secretariat inside the institution and the way in which they benefit men and women. We act as consultants in army-personal only campaigns and all the gender programs as well, we make proposals and diagnoses and issue recommendations such as changes in educational programs and regulations, as well in the way that all personnel, from the board of directors to students, is being trained.²¹

This statement shows the limits placed on the observatory to enforce gender equality in the Mexican Army, but at the same time, its actions are aimed at dealing with the problems that the increasing number of female army members have brought to the institution. Issuing recommendations, just as the Human Rights Commission does, can be seen as an important limit to its usefulness; however, until the federal Human Right Commission reaches judicial level, it is impossible to pretend that the actions and recommendations of the observatory are mandatory.

The observatory's mission is stated on its website: "planning, detecting, evaluat[ing] and implementing actions aimed to prevent and eliminate any form of discrimination originated by gender and to ensure equal opportunities for women and men in the Mexican Army and Air Force."²² The resources employed to achieve its mission include access to monetary funds to accomplish several activities, including numerous conferences, seminars, campaigns, and visits to supervise military schools with female recruits to verify that gender policies are being applied. There are several opportunities for personnel to be constantly trained on gender topics in courses offered by specialized officers and civilian institutions. Its facilities and technological resources have been recently improved with a vast acquisition of bibliographical resources on gender topics exclusively for military personnel use.

The chief of the observatory supervises six branches: 1) Administration and Archive; 2) Information Technology and Communication; 3) Analyzing Statistics and Evaluation 4) Institutional Culture; 5) Public Policies and Organizational Development; and 6) Gender Perspective Training.²³ The observatory's facilities are located at Avenida Industria Militar No. 261, Campo Militar 1-K. Naucalpan, State of Mexico, in a highly secured facility just a few blocks from the Mexican Army headquarters. Access to civilians is allowed only by providing official identification, which is retained while the visit takes place, as well as filling out a registration with your name, telephone, and email. Cell phones must be turned off, no cameras can be used, and sunglasses and hats are forbidden. Civilians are escorted by military personnel at all times.

In an interview with the author, Lieutenant Colonel Dominguez Rocha mentioned specific actions by the observatory on collecting data for statistics, planning, and instituting potential programs: "We just received paternity and maternity data from Personnel Area and right now we are working in the design of a standardized protocol for pregnant women, regarding the absence months for the authorization of their maternity leave."²⁴ This exemplifies the type of data collected by the observatory and how it is used for specific purposes based on the needs of the army, whose commander in chief, through his different bureaus, requests research to improve army personnel's life and career.

The observatory also creates brochures about different campaigns enforced by the federal government and the Secretariat of National Defense. One downloadable example of these brochures can be found on its website. Entitled "For a culture in gender equality for Mexican women and men (basic concepts)," it is a model of several brochures with different topics that are distributed among personnel. It describes basic concepts for gender equity as well what constitutes sexual harassment, how many types there are, how to identify them, and what to do in case of experiencing it. These brochures are sent by the Department of Social Communication and distributed in schools, army bases, and bureaus—usually for personnel to have free access to them at the head offices.²⁵

Another way for the observatory to collect data and to inform on gender equality is to ask chiefs and personnel to constantly fill out questionnaires and booklets that teach them how to identify potential or actual harassment, discrimination, and gender-based violence in their offices that needs to be recognized and prevented. In a conversation with Major General Tomás Jaime Aguirre Cervantes, director of the Army Staff Division of the Secretariat of National Defense (*Dirección General de Personal de la SEDENA*), in November 2015, the author found him filling out several booklets, and he commented about these campaigns where the use of Violentometers (*Violentómetros*) is common.

Violentometers are colorful charts with a gradual blending of one color

hue to another that contain examples of hurtful phrases, behavior, and sexist assumptions that are aimed at helping readers identify and measure violence against women and, if necessary, to take appropriate action.²⁶ Major General Aguirre Cervantes described how he and his staff had to constantly send out the materials to the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force for planning specific actions while educating on gender-specific topics.²⁷

The observatory does have specific roles and policies that, from the outside, seem positive and well-thought out. However, it is important to consider that all the information that civilians see from the observatory is generated by the organization. If we wish to know something that is not reported by the Secretariat of National Defense, the Mexican government has introduced ways to request and access information from public servants regarding government organizations. This is called Right to Petition (*Derecho de Petición*) described in article 8 of the Mexican Constitution, which states:

Public officers and employees will respect the exercise of the right to petition provided that petition is made in writing and in a peaceful and respectful manner. Regarding political petitioning, only citizens have this right. Every petition must be decided in writing by the authority to whom it was addressed, who has the duty to reply to the petitioner within a brief term.²⁸

Under this article, civilians can write a letter to federal authorities and request information from organizations, secretariats, authorities, and individuals in public service, which is often a laborious process that takes several months. It is very common to have your request denied by authorities who often argue that the question or request was unclear, or as in the author's case, they wait until the last deadline to have your request not properly answered.

During the author's visit to headquarters of the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force, she saw both genders working in its different areas. Since its creation in 2011, all its directors have been female officers, which provides evidence of positive gender integration of the observatory by enabling women to achieve upward mobility and leadership positions.

The services provided by this organization to army members through courses, seminars, workshops, brochures, posters, and articles, in which egalitarianism is stressed, provides evidence of the desire to achieve gender integration. The statistics, design of the programs, recommendations, visits to all army schools to supervise the enforcement of official gender policies, and seminars

fulfill a key role in promoting a healthier environment for both genders of army members.

Conclusion:

Is the Observatory Successful at Gender Integration?

There are different ways to tackle this question. If we only consider official sources and government-authorized sources, the answer is positive judging from the uplifting numbers they provide of women's participation and employment, coupled with such campaigns as the Violentometer aimed to create awareness of gender-related discrimination and violence against women for chiefs, officers, and troops, as well as the several reports on their website of how the Mexican Army is moving toward gender equality.²⁹ However, contrasting that information with what the sources do not tell by reading the opposition press, such as *Proceso* and others, then some of the challenges of achieving gender equality in the Mexican Army become apparent.³⁰

To evaluate the effectiveness of the gender integration, we must first ask how the army conceives gender equality. To begin, it is necessary to consider federal laws in the matter and then the particular campaigns launched by the army to its members. A point that is constantly stressed is the right to access equal job opportunities, with adequate mechanisms to create a secure environment for women to keep their jobs and achieve promotions. This was summarized by one of the several campaigns launched by the observatory with this slogan: "That the difference does not translate into inequality" (*Que la diferencia no se traduzca en desigualdad*). It states in another part, "here we work so that there are equal opportunities, rights and obligations." The materials for this campaign included a compact disc and a booklet distributed among personnel of different areas who, after taking several lessons in a one-month period, became "gender agents" and received a certification by the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force.³¹

Presently, there is no indication in official sources of any commitment to equality of gender, such as the stereotyping of masculinity and femininity, in addition to equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) individuals for army members. Although the army subscribes to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and provides education on gender-related issues with the document Gender Equity Card (*Cartilla de Equidad de Género*), this is aimed at acknowledging heterosexual gender differences and preventing gender-based discrimination exclusively for men and women.

It can be inferred then that for the Mexican Army intersexuals and individuals who identify as LGBT do not exist in official documents. The Gender Equity Card only refers to women and men, in that order, saying that to incor-

porate gender equity would include offering military personnel of both genders the opportunities of “work and professional development in an environment free from discrimination and with equality.”³²

Personnel who attend seminars provided by the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force study their brochures and participate in their campaigns, including their participation within personnel files and *résumés*. Also, judging by the commander in chief’s yearly reports, which has included a section on Gender Equity since 2006, the awareness of the issue of gender equality is growing within the armed forces.

For example, we can refer to a very small pocket book with the title “Military Booklet” (*Cartillas Militares*) that compiles 20 important documents that are mandatory for military personnel to be familiar with. This booklet must be carried at all times by military personnel, as it is mandatory to show it at the daily review of soldiers by their officers before starting their duties. This booklet cannot be found on the website as a compilation, but all the 20 documents and regulations can be found in Spanish on SEDENA’s website.³³ Notice that gender equality norms are second in this important booklet and that all personnel are constantly informed by their chiefs or by other officers about respect for gender equality. Of course, this does not mean that they fully understand it or respect it, but at least there is an awareness of it and, when compared to the years before 2006, a step in the right direction for respect and equality for people regardless of their gender.

The Mexican Army is not an exception within the armies of the world that are predominantly male organizations. As Lieutenant Colonel Dominguez Rocha stated, the army is a masculinized space, but that does not mean that female soldiers are forced to modify their social practices to fit in. As discussed, there is an inherent femininity in posters, ads, brochures, and media campaigns that seems to be encouraged and supported by military authorities. Being a minority in an institution brings both advantages and disadvantages.³⁴

The prevalence of men in the military are shown in the following statistics. Table 1 shows the noticeable increase in female army members in a four-year period, which almost doubled, but the percentage is still less than 6 percent of the military’s population.³⁵ The increase in the employment of women found in the official data, the only one available for civilians, is remarkable when considering the way in which female personnel has increased substantially in 10 years (tables 2 and 3).³⁶

The call for peace by national and international groups seeking to stabilize Mexican society by reducing violence seems to contradict the army’s trend to boost its members, which includes the process of increasing the number of female personnel. Women called into the army to combat and noncombat po-

Table 1. The total population of women in the Mexican Army and Air Force

Period	September 2007	September 2008	September 2009	September 2010
Number of women admitted in the army	6,825	7,958	9,090	10,223
Representation within the institution	3.83%	4.46%	5.10%	5.73%

Source: "Program for the equality amongst women and men of the Secretariat of National Defense, 2008–2012."

Table 2. Female personnel, ca. 2012

Generals	Chiefs	Officers	Cadets	Troops	Total
2	651	2,578	532	6,421	10,184

Source: "Program for the equality amongst women and men of the Secretariat of National Defense, 2008–2012."

Table 3. Comparison of numbers of women and men by rank, January 2018

Rank	Women	Men	Total
Lieutenant general	0	45	45
Major general	0	175	175
Brigadier general	5	316	321
Colonel	21	852	873
Lieutenant colonel	132	1,503	1,635
Major	560	3,052	3,612
First captain	307	3,792	4,099
Second captain	260	3,564	3,824
First lieutenant	1,321	13,705	15,026
Second lieutenant	698	8,669	9,367
Staff sergeant	937	16,148	17,085
Sergeant	1,501	36,405	37,906
Corporal	2,630	46,779	49,409
Private	10,417	60,363	70,780
Total	18,789	195,368	214,157

Source: "Actions and programs. Frequently asked questions of the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force."

sitions will enforce the controversial and profoundly contradictory "army-peace process." This means that the military's presence has become more active and permanent with the enforcement of a constant dissuasion campaign by the armed forces whose presence is visible throughout the country. The goal of the constant presence of the military is to disrupt the drug-related violence.

The official line of "serving your country" (*sirviendo a tu patria*) acquires a different perspective in the light of the current war on drugs when the enemy is inside the beloved *patria* (homeland). New laws are being approved quickly by the Congress of the Union to seek peace at any cost. Military police are growing in numbers, marines are patrolling cities, and women are called to join the military police and other risky positions. Still, a vast majority of army members of

both genders fulfill other duties and use their time and efforts to maintain the large and complex organization that is the Mexican Army.

Notes

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11. Arturo Rodríguez García, "El Presidente del 'empleo,' un antiobrerista" [The "employment" president, an anti-worker], *Proceso*, 11 May 2012. Original in Spanish.
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14. "Programa para la Igualdad de Oportunidades entre Mujeres y Hombres SDN 2008–2012" [Program for the equality of opportunities among women and men, Mexican Office for National Defense (SDN), 2008–2012], accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
15. "Program for the Equality of Opportunities among Women and Men, Mexican Office for National Defense (SDN), 2008–2012." Original in Spanish. For more on gender mainstreaming, see "Gender Mainstreaming," United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, accessed 18 August 2018.
16. "Estructura Orgánica del Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos" [Organic structure of the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force], SDN, accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
17. "Headquarters of the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force, Curriculum Vitae of the Agency Holder," SDN, accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
18. Information taken from LtCol Yadira Paredes Rojas's public profile. See "Jefatura del Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos. Currículum vitae de la Titular del Organismo" [Headquarters of the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force. Curriculum Vitae of the Agency Holder], SDN, accessed 18 August 2018.
19. LtCol Dental Surgeon María Dolores Domínguez Rocha, interview with the author,

- November 2015, hereafter Dominguez Rocha interview. Since no army member is authorized to give public interviews, the author had to request it through the Secretary of National Defense through its department of communication (Comunicación Social), which took several months to be authorized.
20. For more information on the Equity Law, see the full document consulted: “Se Expide la Ley General para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres” [The General Law for Equality between Women and Men], Secretaría de Gobernación (Interior Secretary), 8 February 2006. Original in Spanish. The Mexican government website includes a summary of the history of this law and how it evolved. See “Igualdad entre mujeres y hombres” [Equality between men and women], Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores [External Relations Secretary], accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
21. Dominguez Rocha interview.
22. “Misión del Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos” [Mission of the Observatory for Equality between Women and Men in the Mexican Army and Air Force], Secretariat of National Defense, accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
23. For the observatory’s organizational chart, see the section titled “¿Cómo está Organizado?” [How is it organized?], SEDENA, accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
24. Dominguez Rocha interview.
25. For the brochure on gender equity, see “Por Una Cultura en Igualdad de Género para las Mujeres y Hombres de México (Conceptos Básicos)” [For a culture of gender equality between the women and men of Mexico (basic concepts)], SEDENA. Original in Spanish.
26. For an example of the Violentometers distributed by the Mexican government, see “Violentómetro,” Secretary of Public Education, accessed 15 September 2018. Original in Spanish.
27. The use of the Gender Equity Card for all ranks and personnel is common. See “Cartilla de Equidad de Género” [Gender Equality Card], SEDENA, accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
28. See article 8 of the Mexican Constitution, which details the right to petition. For the English version, see “Mexico’s Constitution of 1917 with Amendments through 2015,” Constitute Project, accessed 18 August 2018.
29. The Secretariat of National Defense website has a link dedicated to gender perspectives, which highlights the achievements on this matter. See “La perspectiva de género en la Secretaría de la Defensa Nacional” [The Gender Perspective in the Ministry of National Defense], SND, 1 January 2018. Original in Spanish.
30. During the author’s life as a Mexican Army brat, she had many conversations with army members, mostly family friends, which included women who in different ways have described their struggle in a male-dominated institution. She has known about sexual harassment cases that were not investigated or punished. For an example of the government’s lack of oversight, see J. Jesús Esquivel, “Bajo el cobijo de Peña, militares violan reiteradamente derechos en México: HRW” [Under the shelter of Peña, the military repeatedly violates rights in Mexico], *Proceso*, 12 January 2017. Original in Spanish. See also an article by Alejandro Melgoza Rocha of Univision News, which presents a critical view of gender violence and harassment inside the Mexican Army. Alejandro Melgoza Rocha, “El acoso a las mujeres en el Ejército: el drama invisible de la ‘pandemia’ de violencia de género en México” [The harassment of women in the army: the invisible drama of the “pandemic” of gender violence in Mexico], 7 December 2016.
31. These statements come from the interactive CD “Equality between Women and Men.” It is exclusively used by the army and not available online.
32. See “Cartilla de Equidad Género” [Gender Equity Card], SEDENA, accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
33. These are the order and titles: “Legitimate use of force,” “Gender Equity,” “Human Rights,” “Humanitarian International Law,” “Sexually Transmitted Diseases,” “HIV Prevention Measures,” “Military Virtues,” “Code of Ethics,” “Tobacco Use Law,” “Computer Security,” “Military Medical Insurance Laws,” “Military Values,” “Traffic Laws

- and Regulations,” “Prevention of Medical Emergencies,” “Basic Safety Measures in Handling and Using Firearms,” “Soldier’s Prayer,” “Alcoholism,” “How to Prevent Suicide,” “White December (Prevention for the Use of Drugs),” and “Military Health.” SEDENA, accessed 18 August 2018.
34. Dominguez Rocha interview.
 35. “Program for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men SDN 2008–2012,” SEDENA, accessed 18 August 2018. Original in Spanish.
 36. “Program for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men SDN 2008–2012.” Original in Spanish. Statistics from “Preguntas Frecuentes del Observatorio para la Igualdad entre Mujeres y Hombres en el Ejército y Fuerza Aérea Mexicanos” [Frequently asked questions of the Observatory for Equality between Men and Women in the Mexican Army and Air Force], Secretariat of National Defense, 1 January 2018. Original in Spanish.