

Mexican president blames state, local police for crime surge

[Associated Press](#), Sep 3, 2018

MEXICO CITY –



In his final state of the union address Monday, outgoing President Enrique Peña Nieto blamed surging violent crime in Mexico on the inability of state and local police to handle the smaller gangs that emerged following the capture of cartel leaders.

Peña Nieto, who leaves office with historically low approval ratings, sidestepped blame for poor economic growth and rising debt during his six-year term, and he warned Mexicans not to turn to a foreign policy of "indifference."

His successor, left-leaning Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador who takes office Dec. 1, has pledged to refrain from any kind of intervention in the affairs of other countries, in contrast to Peña Nieto, who has sought out solutions to Venezuela's economic and political crisis. Non-intervention was a bedrock of Mexico's foreign policy before 2000.

"Don't confuse non-intervention with indifference to what is happening in the world," Peña Nieto warned.

Apart from corruption scandals, one of the things that has reduced Peña Nieto's approval ratings is Mexico's unabated gang-fueled violence.

The president said the federal government "had success in significantly reducing the capacity and size" of criminal gangs.

"Unfortunately, this weakening brought with it smaller criminal groups, without there being the capacity on the local level to effectively confront them," Pena Nieto said. While local police in most parts of Mexico have long been ill-trained, poorly equipped and often corrupt, critics say Pena Nieto has done little to strengthen federal law enforcement,

Mexico had 25 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants in 2017, the highest since comparable records began being kept in 1997, and higher than at the height of the drug war in 2011. Pena Nieto took office in 2012.

"Regarding law enforcement and security in this administration, little was done, much was abandoned and even less groundwork was laid," wrote newspaper columnist Alejandro Hope.

He noted there was very little increase in security budgets, federal police strength or the military under the current administration.

The economy was another weak spot for Pena Nieto. While growth in tourism — in part attracted by a weaker peso — was a bright spot, the economy as a whole lagged.

Pena Nieto presided over a devaluation of almost 50 percent in the Mexican peso, and the economy grew by an anemic average of 2.1 percent annually in his first five years in office.

Government debt, meanwhile, rose from about 33.8 of GDP in 2012 to an estimate of 45.4 percent of GDP by mid-2018.

Pena Nieto claimed he was leaving "a manageable and declining level of debt."

"When my administration ends, I will have fulfilled 97 percent of the promises I made to the public," Pena Nieto said.