

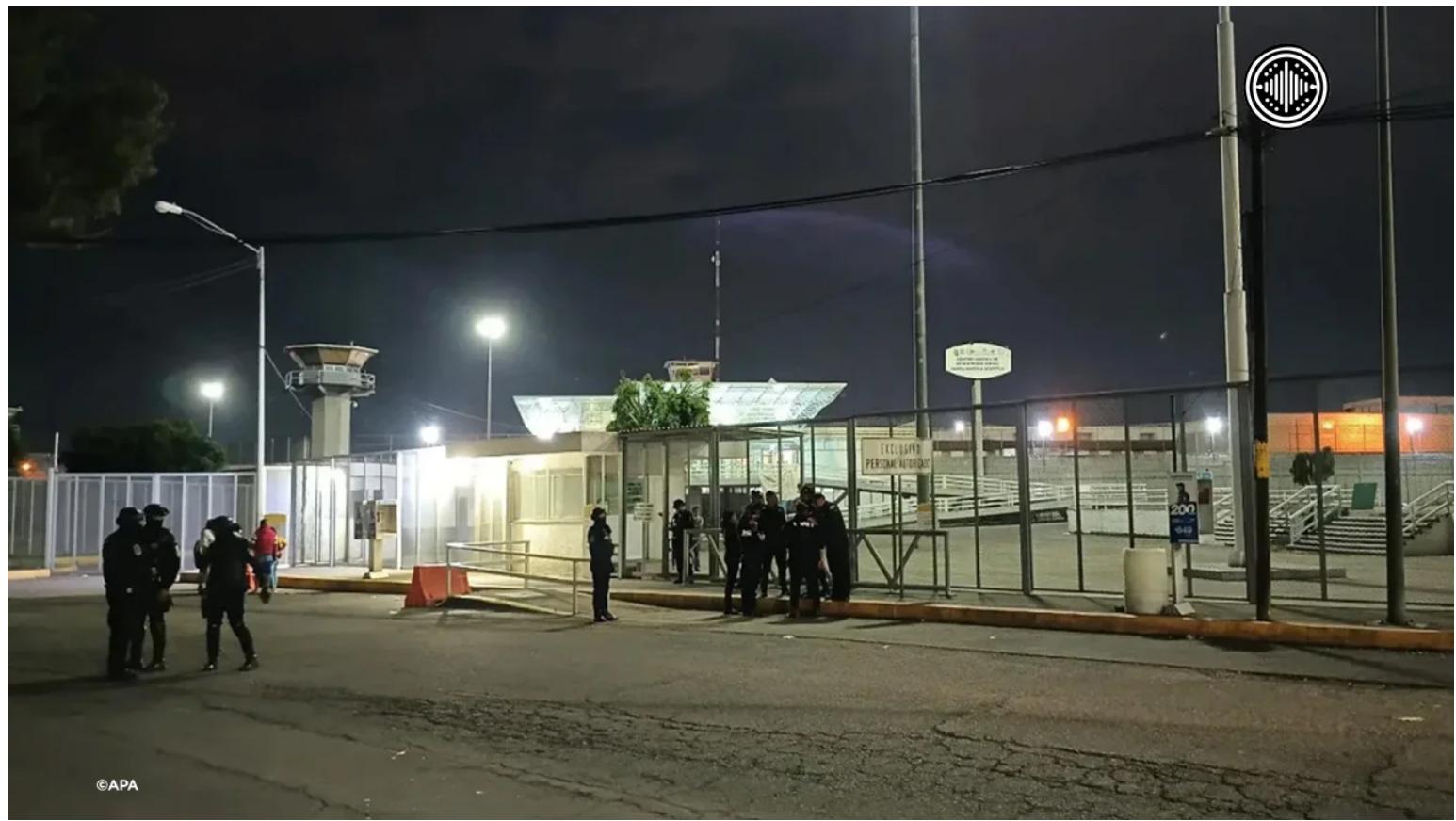
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Seven Dead, Eleven Injured in Veracruz Prison Riot Tied to Criminal Group Influence

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A violent riot erupted at the Tuxpan prison in the eastern Mexican state of Veracruz, leaving seven inmates dead and eleven others injured, according to local authorities. The

disturbance, which broke out Saturday, highlights ongoing challenges in Mexico's correctional system, including overcrowding, cartel influence, and systemic corruption.

The Department of Public Security of Veracruz confirmed the fatalities and injuries in a statement issued Sunday. Law enforcement and security personnel were deployed to regain control of the facility following reports of fires and smoke within the prison grounds. Footage posted on social media appeared to show chaos inside the prison, with flames visible and smoke rising over the compound.

The riot was reportedly triggered by inmate anger over extortion and abuse allegedly carried out by members of the criminal organization Grupo Sombra, who are believed to exert control inside the facility. The organization, which claims affiliation with the Gulf Cartel, has a growing presence in the region and a history of both criminal violence and attempts at public relations-style outreach.

Grupo Sombra first drew national attention in 2017 when its masked members distributed frozen turkeys and soft drinks to residents in Veracruz during the Christmas season, forcing recipients to pose in staged photographs. More recently, the group has been implicated in violent crimes, including the July killing of a 65-year-old retired schoolteacher, an act classified as femicide.

Mexican newspaper *Milenio* reported that Grupo Sombra presents itself as a breakaway faction of the Gulf Cartel and positions its activities as an alternative to state services. However, the group remains engaged in ongoing conflict with rival criminal organizations, including Los Zetas and the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), particularly over territory in Veracruz.

The Tuxpan prison, where the riot occurred, held 778 inmates as of June, over capacity for a facility designed for 735. Overcrowding is a widespread issue across Mexico's correctional institutions. A 2012 report from Mexico's National Human Rights Commission (CNDH) found that approximately 60% of the country's prisons are under the de facto control of criminal gangs or cartels.

Authorities have not disclosed the identities of those killed or injured, nor have they confirmed whether members of Grupo Sombra were among the casualties. The incident underscores the urgent need for reforms in Mexico's prison system, especially in regions heavily affected by cartel violence.

The Veracruz state government has announced that an internal investigation is underway to determine the root causes of the riot and to assess the extent of cartel influence within the facility.