Exporting Justice: Extradition and Expulsion from Mexico to the United States

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Project Overview

In the past two decades, Mexico has extradited more than a thousand nationals to the United States. Some of the extraditions are well known, involving the leaders of major organized crime groups, such as the extradition of Osiel Cárdenas Guillén, the leader of the Gulf cartel, in 2007, or Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, the leader of the Sinaloa cartel, in 2017. The majority of the Mexican nationals sought by the United States, however, are much less prominent crime figures, most of them charged with conspiracies involving drug trafficking and money laundering.

Extradition is both a legal and a political process. Despite judicial oversight, the final decision rests within the executive branch. In the United States, prosecutors working on cases involving foreign nationals request extradition through the Department of Justice's (DOJ) Office of International Affairs, but it is the State Department that decides whether to pursue it. In Mexico, extradition requests go through the Attorney General's office, but it is the Minister of Foreign Affairs who must sign them.

Although most Mexican nationals sought by U.S. prosecutors are extradited, extradition is not the only way they end up in U.S. jurisdiction. In several cases, like the one involving Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, El Chapo's longtime partner and co-founder of the Sinaloa cartel, individuals were kidnapped. In *US v. Alvarez-Machain* (1992), the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that, since the U.S.-Mexico extradition treaty "says nothing about the obligations of the United States and Mexico to refrain from forcible abductions of people from the territory of the other nation," a kidnapped person can be tried in U.S. courts. In other situations, those who receive notice about a pending request for their arrest for purposes of extradition "waive their extradition," that is, surrender voluntarily at the U.S. border while they still have information and resources to negotiate a deal.

In 2025, departing from what had become established norms and practices, Mexico handed over 55 individuals—the majority of them Mexican nationals—to U.S. authorities, bypassing typical extradition protocol (on February 27, they handed over 29 people, including Rafael Caro Quintero and Miguel Angel Treviño Morales (Z-40); on August 12, they handed over 26 others). Official press releases and legal documents referred to their transfer from Mexican jurisdiction to the U.S. as "expulsion." The Mexican government justified these expulsions by claiming that the transfers were carried out based on Article 5 of Ley de Seguridad and Article 89 of the Mexican Constitution in response to a written request from the United States. According to U.S. law in the aftermath of *US v. Alvarez-Machain* (1992), the manner in which individuals end up before U.S. courts is legally irrelevant to their ability to be prosecuted. Most, if not all, of these individuals had pending extradition requests prior to their expulsions.

Despite sporadic media coverage of extraditions and expulsions of foreign nationals from Mexico to the United States, little is known about broader patterns and implications of these practices: What is the difference between extraditions and expulsions? What are the most common charges in extradition requests? Are some

organized crime groups targeted more frequently than others? Do some U.S. states or districts request more extraditions than others? How long does it take to extradite someone from Mexico after their indictment in the U.S.? How often do extradited individuals take plea deals vs. go to trial? Does this depend on the type of crime they are accused of? These are only some questions that motivated our research project, which consisted of three parts. First, we used public records to create a database of 149 cases of extraditions and expulsions from Mexico to the United States. Second, we identified and analyzed treaties and laws that regulate the transfer of criminal suspects from one country to the other. Third, we conducted a comprehensive analysis of the data we collected. In this working paper we share preliminary results of our analysis, which provides a first systematic look into Mexico-U.S. extraditions and expulsions.

Legal and Historical Background

History of U.S.-Mexico Extraditions

The first extradition treaty between the United States and Mexico was signed in 1861, on the heels of the Mexican-American War. This treaty covered a variety of serious offenses, but notably prohibited the return of fugitive slaves and political offenders. The former was especially significant given diplomatic tensions between Mexico and the Southern United States over the large number of enslaved people escaping to Mexico, which abolished slavery in 1829. The treaty provided for executive approval similar to the process that exists today, but allowed for special, expedited processing for crimes in border states and territories.

Between 1836 and 1876, U.S. law enforcement, in an effort to combat transnational crime including smuggling and cattle rustling, repeatedly made incursions into Mexican territory along the Upper Rio Grande.[1] In 1877, as banditry increased, the Secretary of War officially sanctioned military border crossings into Mexico to apprehend criminals, sparking public outrage in Mexico. The U.S. and Mexico reached an agreement in 1882 limiting military incursions to sparsely populated regions.

In 1891, the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Texas held in *Ex parte McCabe* that, because the 1861 treaty did not expressly give any official the discretion to extradite a citizen, the United States could not extradite defendant McCabe, who had fled to Texas, to Mexico for a murder she allegedly committed in Tamaulipas.[2] As a result, the United States and Mexico signed a new extradition treaty in 1899, adding that the executive had the discretion to extradite citizens to the other country. However,

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[1] Zagaris, Bruce, and Julia Padierna Peratta. "Mexico-United States Extradition and Alternatives: From Fugitive Slaves to Drug Traffickers - 150 Years and Beyond the Rio Grande's Winding Courses." *American University International Law Review* 12, no. 4 (1997): 519–627.
[2] Ex parte McCabe, 46 F. 363, 364 (W.D. Tex. 1891).

Mexico consistently refused to extradite its own citizens, leading the United States to reciprocate in declining extraditions.

The current extradition treaty between Mexico and the United States was signed in 1978. However, Mexico largely continued to decline to extradite its nationals, preferring to try them in domestic courts. A 1988 U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee revealed that the formal extradition process was rarely used. In the occasional instances where Mexican nationals were handed over to the United States, they were either deported or the United States pursued alternative means of securing persons of interests, including kidnapping.[3] For example, in 1986, Mexican police officers directly transferred Rene Martin Verdugo-Urquidez, who later contested his detention before the U.S. Supreme Court, to U.S. Border Patrol agents in California.[4] However, by the 1990s, the United States and Mexico began using the formal extradition process more frequently, especially in relation to narcotics trafficking cases.

Overall, throughout the history of the extradition relationship between the United States and Mexico, U.S. policy has never prohibited the prosecution of individuals obtained outside of the proper extradition process. However, what has changed is the willingness of Mexico to extradite defendants. Mexico's 2025 expulsions mark a further dramatic shift away from its previous reluctance to surrender its nationals for prosecution in the United States. The empirical data below shows the extent of this shift, as well as how it breaks down by cartel affiliation, criminal charge, and federal district court.

National and International Law

Extradition Treaty Between the United States and Mexico (1978)

The Extradition Treaty Between the United States and Mexico is the foundational legal document governing extradition between the two countries.[5] Signed in 1978 and entering into force in 1980, this treaty replaced an 1899 agreement under which each country had discretion in extraditing its nationals to the other. The 1978 treaty establishes a mutual obligation to extradite criminal defendants. It operates under the principle of dual criminality, requiring that extraditable offenses be listed in the treaty or punishable under the laws of both countries. The treaty enumerates these offenses, their territorial applicability, and exempted offenses, including political and military offenses.

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[3] Zagaris and Peratta, 1997.

[4] United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez, 494 U.S. 259 (1990).

[5] "Extradition Treaty Between the United States of America and the United Mexican States." *United Nations Treaty Series*, May 4, 1978. https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%201207/volume-1207-I-19462-English.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2c-jNtr2daMm2MpKJuuGxUWyqyhuC9Oof2%5C_GK2z4-SSoUeAFCzUFkmQS4.

The treaty also establishes protections prohibiting extradition in certain circumstances. Article 6 enshrines the *non bis in idem* principle, prohibiting extradition for an offense that has already been prosecuted under the laws of the requested country. Additionally, Article 8 requires assurance that prosecutors will not seek the death penalty if the laws of the requested state prohibits it. Mexico abolished capital punishment in 2005, so U.S. officials must agree not to seek the death penalty for extradited individuals in capital cases. Finally, Article 17 establishes the rule of specialty, generally prohibiting prosecution of offenses other than those for which the individual was extradited.

Finally, the treaty instituted extradition procedures and documentation requirements. The country seeking extradition must present a statement of facts, relevant legal provisions, evidence, and a warrant or judgment to the diplomatic representatives of the other. In the United States, the Department of Justice Office of International Affairs drafts requests on behalf of federal prosecutors. The Department of State then forwards extradition requests to its Mexican counterpart.

Treaty on Cooperation for Mutual Legal Assistance (1987)

In 1987, the U.S. and Mexico established a bilateral mutual legal assistance treaty. This treaty provides cross-jurisdictional assistance in the taking of witness testimony and evidence; execution of search warrants, seizures, and asset forfeiture requests; serving of documents; location and transfer of defendants; and exchange of information and other forms of cooperation.[6]

It enumerates the procedures for requesting and undertaking such assistance measures, including the coordinating authorities for each country (Department of Justice and Procuraduría General, now Fiscalía General, respectively) and allows for the denial of requests for assistance. Requests for assistance must also include certain basic information about the purpose of the request and be kept confidential. Finally, the treaty limits assistance in certain cases, such as political or military offenses, and restricts the use of assistance for reasons other than its original stated purpose.

Protocol to the Extradition Treaty (1997)

In 1997, the original treaty was modified to provide for the temporary surrender of individuals.[7] A person serving a sentence in the requested country may be temporarily surrendered for prosecution in the requesting country but must be returned to the requested country after proceedings conclude.

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[6] "Treaty on Cooperation for Mutual Legal Assistance." *U.S. Department of State*, May 3, 1991. https://www.state.gov/91-503/.

[7] "Protocol Between the United States of America and Mexico." *U.S. Department of State*, November 13, 1997. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/12897-Mexico-Law-Enforcement-Extradition-11.13.1997.pdf.

U.S.-Mexico Bicentennial Framework for Security, Public Health, and Safe Communities (2021)

In October 2021, the U.S. and Mexico announced a new framework for security cooperation. It included three pillars: protecting people (through public health, safer communities, and homicide and high-impact crime reduction), preventing transborder crime (through securing travel and dismantling narcotics, human, and firearms trafficking), and pursuing criminal networks (by disrupting financing, strengthening security and justice, and increasing cooperation in cyberspace and extradition).

In addition to expressing a goal of increased extradition cooperation, the Bicentennial Framework's provisions to expand binational law enforcement cooperation and information sharing aim to target transnational criminal actors as a joint national security threat. For example, the sharing of biometric information between law enforcement agencies aims to make it easier to disrupt criminal networks, regardless of jurisdiction.

In March 2023, the United States and Mexico announced a second phase of the framework, aimed specifically at combatting illicit fentanyl production, arms trafficking into Mexico, and transnational organized crime.[8] Under President Biden Administration, the Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, and interagency task forces targeted arms trafficking corridors at the U.S.-Mexico border. The Administration also increased illicit fentanyl seizures at ports of entry and invested in inspection and detection technology at U.S. borders.

Project Portero (2025)

In August 2025, during President Donald J. Trump's second term in office, the Drug Enforcement Administration announced the launch of Project Portero, a bilateral training and collaboration program aimed at dismantling cartel control over smuggling corridors along the U.S.-Mexico border.[9] The DEA unilaterally announced the project, which included bringing together Mexican investigators with U.S. law enforcement, intelligence, defense, and legal officials. However, Mexican president Claudia Sheinbaum denied the existence of such an agreement.[10] Project Portero demonstrates

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[8] "Joint Statement from Mexico and the United States on the Launch of Phase II of the Bicentennial Framework for Security." *The White House,* March 11, 2023. https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/03/10/joint-statement-from-mexico-and-the-united-states-on-the-launch-of-phase-ii-of-the-bicentennial-framework-for-security/.

[9] "DEA Launches Bold Bilateral Initiative to Dismantle Cartel Gatekeepers and Combat Synthetic Drug Trafficking." *U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration*, August 18, 2025. https://www.dea.gov/press-releases/2025/08/18/dea-launches-bold-bilateral-initiative-dismantle-cartel-gatekeepers-and.

[10] "Mexico's Sheinbaum says no agreement exists with DEA on 'Project Portero'." *Reuters*, August 19, 2025. https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexicos-sheinbaum-says-no-agreement-exists-with-dea-project-portero-2025-08-19/

U.S. ambition in bringing Mexican authorities further into cross-border law enforcement operations and shows the tension present in a diplomatic relationship in which the U.S. has continued to push for expanded Mexican enforcement operations.

U.S. Law

Under United States law, international extradition is governed primarily by 18 USC 209 §§ 3181–96, which details the federal statutory framework for extradition proceedings. Under this framework, federal or state judges may issue warrants for the arrests of foreign nationals who have been indicted in the United States. They then present this warrant, and all relevant testimony, to the Secretary of State, who seeks the issuance of an arrest warrant in the country where the foreign national is located.

Most prosecutions of foreign nationals occur at the federal level, not in state courts. In practice, once federal prosecutors obtain an indictment, the Department of Justice Office of International Affairs (DOJ OIA) drafts an extradition request, which the Department of State then sends to the foreign government. In the case of Mexico, these include the charges, evidence, including first-person witness affidavits, and, if applicable, an official assurance from prosecutors that they will not seek the death penalty.

Executive policy and procedure can vary between presidential administrations. For example, in 2025, the Trump Administration designated a number of Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, allowing for additional action against them.[11] As a result, the United States has been able to impose financial counterterrorism sanctions against these organizations. Additionally, the Department of Justice has pursued criminal charges against them for material support of terrorism, in addition to continuing the pursuit of narcotics trafficking charges.

US v. Verdugo-Urquidez (1990)

In 1990, the Supreme Court held that Fourth Amendment protections against unreasonable search and seizure do not apply to foreign property owned by a foreign national.[12] In the prosecution of a Mexican national, the government sought to introduce records that the DEA obtained through a warrantless search in Mexico into evidence. The Supreme Court found that the Fourth Amendment functions as a check on federal power over domestic searches, not to constrain U.S. action over foreign nationals on foreign territory or in international waters. In the decades following the Court's decision in *Verdugo-Urquidez*, lower courts have expanded its reach, applying it to

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[11] "Designation of International Cartels." *United States Department of State*, February 20, 2025. https://www.state.gov/designation-of-international-cartels/.
[12] United States v. Verdugo-Urquidez (1990).

circumstances and amendments beyond the scope of the original ruling.[13] As a result, U.S. courts afford law enforcement wide latitude in their operation on foreign soil.

US v. Alvarez-Machain (1992)

   In 1992, the Supreme Court held that the U.S.-Mexico extradition treaty did not prohibit the United States from prosecuting a defendant forcibly abducted from Mexico.[14] Under the direction of the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), several Mexican nationals had abducted defendant Humberto Álvarez Machaín in Mexico and brought him to the United States. He was tried (and later acquitted) in U.S. District Court in Los Angeles for the kidnapping and murder of a DEA special agent Enrique Camarena. The Supreme Court found that, although a defendant may not be tried in violation of the terms of an extradition treaty, the U.S.-Mexico treaty did not prohibit abduction. As a result, U.S. federal courts may generally exercise jurisdiction over Mexican nationals for extraditable offenses regardless of the mode of their arrival in the United States.

Mexican Law

   Article 15 of the Mexican Constitution prohibits extradition of politically persecuted and enslaved persons. It also prohibits extradition in violation of the rights enumerated elsewhere in the Mexican Constitution. Article 122 requires that extradition requests by foreign states be processed by the president while allowing for judicial intervention to carry out treaty and statutory duties or to order detention of the requested defendant.[15]

   In Mexico, the mechanics of incoming and outgoing extradition requests are governed by the Ley de Extradición Internacional (International Extradition Law).[16] Established in 1975, this law enumerates the procedure and limitations for extradition from Mexico. Mexico's International Extradition Law requires that extraditions be processed through federal authorities—who must determine that the case is "exceptional"—under an existing treaty. It further requires that charges be initiated in the requesting country, and does not allow extradition in cases within Mexican jurisdiction or military jurisdiction. It also does not allow for the extradition of defendants who have already been tried, are subject to political persecution, or may be subjected to human rights violations.

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[13] Mygatt-Tauber, Alan. "Rethinking the Reasoning of Verdugo-Urquidez." *Indiana Journal of Law and Social Equality* 8, no. 2 (2020): 240–67. https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3502411.

[14] United States v. Alvarez-Machain, 504 U.S. 655 (1992).

[15] "Mexico 1917 (Rev. 2015) Constitution - Constitute." Accessed December 8, 2025. https://www.constituteproject.org/constitution/Mexico_2015.

[16] Diario Oficial de la Federación. "Ley de Extradición Internacional." December 29, 1975. https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf_mov/Ley_de_Extradicion_Internacional.pdf.

The Código Nacional de Procedimientos Penales (National Code of Criminal Procedure), established in 2014, regulates aspects of extradition proceedings.[17] In addition to laying out the general criminal procedure governing defendants, Article 141 of the Code allows new arrest warrants to be issued against an extradited defendant once the proceedings for which a defendant was extradited have concluded.

Expulsions vs. Extraditions

The year 2025 was marked by two unprecedented and highly publicized expulsions of Mexican nationals from Mexico to the United States. These expulsions were tied to the broader U.S.-Mexico relations and the recent changes implemented by the Trump Administration. Security expert Raul Benitez at the National Autonomous University of Mexico explains: "It was a political extradition, without a doubt unique in the history of Mexico."[18] Given the uncharted nature of these actions, many terms have been used by both governments and the media to describe the expulsions.

Many mainstream media sources have been misrepresenting the expulsions as "extraditions," sometimes using the term interchangeably with other, less legally stringent, definitions. This misrepresentation is unsurprising considering the lack of information on this new procedure. For example, *The Guardian* reported on the August batch of expulsions using the words "transfer," "expel," "hand over," "send," and "extradite" interchangeably.[19] Even sources that recognize the unprecedented and ambiguous legal nature of these expulsions, among them *The New York Times*, have referred to them as extraditions.[20] However, some sources are careful to avoid the use of the word "extradition," since these transfers did not follow extradition's diplomatic provisions, acknowledging that although many of the transferred defendants have longstanding extradition requests, it was not through these requests that they arrived in the United States.[21]

U.S. and Mexican government sources, on the other hand, have largely steered clear of describing the transfer of these Mexican nationals as extraditions, using an

[17] Diario Oficial de la Federación. "Código Nacional de Procedimientos Penales." March 5, 2014. https://www.diputados.gob.mx/LeyesBiblio/pdf/CNPP.pdf.

[18] Lizbeth Diaz, "Mexico 'fast-track' expulsion of drug lords to US broke legal procedures, experts say." *Reuters*, February 28, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-fast-track-expulsion-drug-lords-us-broke-legal-procedures-experts-say-2025-02-28/.

[19] Guardian Staff and Agencies in Mexico City, "Mexico expels 26 cartel figures wanted by US officials in deal with White House." *The Guardian*, August 12, 2025, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/aug/12/mexico-cartel-extraditions-trump-administration.

[20] Jack Nicas et al., "Under Pressure by Trump, Mexico Sends 26 Accused Cartel Operatives to U.S." *New York Times*, August 12, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/12/world/americas/mexico-cartel-united-states.html.

[21] The Associated Press, "Mexico sends drug lord Caro Quintero and 28 others to the U.S." *NPR*, August 28, 2025, https://www.npr.org/2025/02/28/g-s1-51194/mexico-sends-drug-lord-caro-quintero-and-28-others-to-the-u-s.

array of replacement terms instead. Department of Justice press releases have used "transfer," "taken into custody," and simply "arrived in the United States."[22, 23] The U.S. State Department has used "expulsion" and the Attorney General's Office has used "transfer."[24] The White House, an outlier, has called these movements extraditions.[25] Mexican Attorney General Alejandro Gertz Manero has provided more clarity on Mexico's framing of these actions, asserting that the expulsions were carried out following a formal request from the United States in adherence to the UN's Palermo Convention, which sets rules for extraditions in order to fight organized crime. Gertz Manero reiterated that the sending of these Mexican nationals to the United States was not an extradition, but rather a "sending," "transfer," or "deliver."[26,27] The vague and convoluted nature of these official descriptions raise questions about the legal and diplomatic rationale for the expulsions.

If the 55 individuals moved to the United States were not extradited, under which legal framework does their transfer fall, and how is this justified? Given that their transfer does not follow the provisions set forth by the extradition treaties discussed above, the defendants in question cannot be considered extradited individuals and therefore, their transfer cannot be justified by extradition treaties. As noted previously, U.S. and Mexican officials have invoked two key legal pillars to legitimize these expulsions through the lens of national security: Article 5 of the National Security Law (Ley de Seguridad Nacional) and Article 89 of the Mexican Constitution.

Article 89 of the Mexican Constitution lays out the obligations of the Mexican government and president, a principal one of which is the preservation of national security. More specifically, Section VI of Article 89 details that the president has the ability and obligation to preserve national security with the entire armed forces at their disposal for the good of Mexico's "interior security and exterior defense."[28] Article 5,

[22] "Attorney General Pamela Bondi Announces 29 Wanted Defendants from Mexico Taken into U.S. Custody." *U.S. Department of Justice*, February 27, 2025, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/attorney-general-pamela-bondi-announces-29-wanted-defendants-mexico-taken-us-custody.
[23] "26 Fugitives Wanted for Violent and Serious Crimes Returned to the United States from Mexico Including Leaders of Foreign Terrorist Organizations and Alien Smuggling Organization." *U.S. Department of Justice*, August 12, 2025, https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/26-fugitives-wanted-violent-and-serious-crimes-returned-united-states-mexico-including-0.
[24] Zedryk Raziel, "Extradition, transfer, or expulsion: The legal controversy behind a historic operation against the cartels." *El País*, March 3, 2025, https://english.elpais.com/international/2025-03-03/extradition-transfer-or-expulsion-the-legal-controversy-behind-a-historic-operation-against-the-cartels.html.
[25] The White House, "Statement from the Press Secretary." *The White House*, February 28, 2025, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2025/02/statement-from-the-press-secretary-19a9/.
[26] Raziel, "Extradition, transfer, or expulsion."
[27] Rodolfo González Espinosa, "From Hugs to Handcuffs: The Costs of Mexico Illegally Transferring 29 Nationals to the US." *Verfassungsblog*, March 19, 2025, https://verfassungsblog.de/mexico-us-deliver-drug-lords/.
[28] Cesar Gutiérrez Priego (@cesargutipri), "El fundamento legal para el traslado de 29 líderes del Crimen Organizado Mexicano, todos con solicitudes de extradición a enfrentar cargos criminales a los Estados

Section III of the National Security Law defines acts that impede authorities from combating organized crime as threats to national security.[29] Together, these statutes empower Mexico's president to act with relatively broad authority against organized crime groups in the interest of national security. As an X post from Mexican judge Cesar Gutiérrez Priego points out, a central question in the debate of the legality of these expulsions regards the limits of governmental powers as they relate to national security.[30] This question is one asked countless times in modern history, often in the context of the abuse of individual and human rights.

The differences between the legal frameworks that uphold extraditions and expulsions create key practical disparities in the two judicial phenomena. These differences raise questions about why expulsions may have been chosen over extraditions. Perhaps the most obvious difference is the circumvention of bureaucracy, and therefore time constraints, that expulsion provides. Expulsion also allows for a wider selection of transferable individuals than does extradition, as those who have sought acquittal, pardon, amnesty, or have already served their sentence for the relevant crime are not extraditable.[31] Another key difference is the latitude expulsion gives to U.S. prosecutors to try defendants for crimes not outlined in their extradition requests. Rafael Caro Quintero has been an expeled individual at the center of this conversation, as he is believed to be responsible for the 1985 torture and murder of U.S. DEA special agent Enrique Camarena, an offense not included in his extradition request.[32]

The pivotal question of the death penalty has been one of the most controversial in the U.S.-Mexico expulsions-extraditions discussion. Since Mexico constitutionally prohibits capital punishment, the U.S.-Mexico extradition treaty states that the death penalty cannot be sought for extradited Mexican nationals. Although Mexico's Attorney General Gertz Manero has insisted that none of the expelled individuals can be executed, his claim is legally dubious.[33] It is true that the U.S. Attorney General's Office has stated that the death penalty will not be sought in these cases. However, the prosecutors for those cases have not publicly reaffirmed this statement.[34] Given that President Trump has openly supported seeking capital punishment for those, such as Caro Quintero, found guilty of murdering law enforcement officers, it is unsurprising some analysts have their doubts about the validity of Gertz's insistences. Within expulsion's legal framework, imposing the death penalty on those expelled is

Unidos, fueron el artículo 89 de la Constitución y 5° de la Ley de Seguridad Nacional. Artículo 89. Las facultades y." *X*, March 2, 2025, https://x.com/cesargutipri/status/1896238031100620973.

[29] Raziel, "Extradition, transfer, or expulsion."

[30] Cesar Gutiérrez Priego (@cesargutipri), "El fundamento legal"

[31] Lizbeth Diaz, "Mexico 'fast-track' expulsion."

[32] Raziel, "Extradition, transfer, or expulsion."

[33] Raziel, "Extradition, transfer, or expulsion."

[34] "Mexico - February 2025." *Global State of Democracy Initiative*, accessed December 8, 2025, https://www.idea.int/democracytracker/report/mexico/february-2025.

theoretically possible.[35] This lack of assurance is part of what makes Mexico's willingness to expel these 55 individuals so unusual.

Outside of the National Security Law and Mexican Constitution, proponents of the expulsions have pointed to gridlock in the Mexican judiciary as necessitating a more efficient process. One factor behind this gridlock is the abuse of the *amparo*, a mechanism built into Mexican law to protect citizens and their rights from miscarriages of justice. Amparos permit individuals to challenge any law, decision, or official action if they believe it violates their rights, and to appeal if their amparo is rejected. Officials have claimed that the abuse of amparos, with cartel leaders often filing copious numbers of amparos (for example, in the case of Abigael Gonzalez Valencia, 62) to delay their extradition. Cartel leaders are the few who have the resources to file so many amparos and appeals. This allows them to run criminal organizations in prison and circumvent justice, some experts contend.[36] Mexico's Attorney General Gertz Manero and Secretary of Security Omar García Harfuch asserted that the delays to extradition are "unjustifiable" and that they create possibilities for defendants to be released, putting the Mexican and U.S. publics at risk.[37] They claim that, thus, expulsions can actually strengthen the administration of justice in Mexico while improving relations with U.S. law enforcement entities.[38]

Many legal experts argue that expulsion's shaky statutory backing renders it illegal. The presidential powers outlined in the National Security Law are broad, but are still bound by the "principle of legality"—they must operate inside the law.[39] And given that neither the National Security Law nor the Mexican Constitution outlines a mechanism for transferring individuals accused of a crime outside of extradition, President Sheinbaum may have operated outside of the law in carrying out these expulsions. In other words, Sheinbaum invoked a presidential authority, carrying out extraordinary measures to override existing legal conventions, that is not explicitly defined anywhere in the law.[40] Furthermore, legal experts have reported that the expulsions breach existing legal conventions because many of the individual expulsions did not include formal requests, which is essential for a legally sound transfer.[41] As a result, these unorthodox expulsions could set a harmful precedent for Mexico's

[35] Santul Nerkar, "U.S. Says It Will Not Seek Death Penalty Against 3 Drug Cartel Bosses." *New York Times*, August 5, 2025, https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/05/nyregion/cartel-bosses-death-penalty.html.
[36] Jonny Wrate and Lilia Saúl, "ANALYSIS: Alleged Mexican Cartel Members Buy Time With Legal Mechanism." *OCCRP*, August 29, 2025, https://www.occrp.org/en/feature/analysis-alleged-cartel-members-in-mexico-buying-time-with-legal-mechanism.
[37] Fabiana Estrada Tena, "Seguridad nacional: otro reto para el nuevo poder judicial." *SDP Noticias*, March 2, 2025, https://www.sdpnoticias.com/opinion/seguridad-nacional-otro-reto-para-el-nuevo-poder-judicial/.
[38] Diaz, "Mexico 'fast-track' expulsion."
[39] Rodolfo González Espinosa, "From Hugs to Handcuffs."
[40] Fabiana Estrada Tena, "Seguridad nacional."
[41] Diaz, "Mexico 'fast-track' expulsion."

sovereignty and the protection of its citizens' rights, resulting in a weakened rule of law in Mexico—the exact opposite effect of the stated intention for the expulsions.

Given that the expulsions have caused significant controversy and may pose a threat to Mexican legal conventions, why might Mexico have been willing to hand over these 55 nationals to the United States? President Sheinbaum claims her decision was completely independent of U.S. trade negotiations, but it is doubtful that it is just a coincidence that these expulsions happened alongside certain aggressive moves by the Trump Administration. Just before the first batch of expulsions, President Trump had threatened a 25% tariff, beginning on March 4th, on Mexican imports if Mexico did not quicken progress in curtailing the stream of both drugs, namely fentanyl, and migrants across the Mexico-U.S. border.[42] The February expulsions took place just six days before Trump's threat was meant to take effect, with some calling it a "show of compliance" to the Trump Administration.[43] Trump has criticized Sheinbaum broadly for being soft on crime, advocating for military action from U.S. troops in Mexico, which Sheinbaum has staunchly repudiated in the name of Mexican sovereignty.[44] It is likely the expulsions were a move from Sheinbaum to appease the Trump Administration enough to ward off tariffs and continued talks of unilateral military action on Mexican soil.

The 2025 expulsions bring to the fore the ability of governments to take advantage of legal ambiguity to further their political aims. While these expulsions may have provided more short-term efficiency than extraditions, or saved Mexico from devastating tariffs, they may set a precedent that threatens Mexican sovereignty and its citizens' individual rights. In these ways, the expulsions represent a poignant moment in international politics where the limits of executive power, or lack thereof, are at a critical juncture. The response to these expulsions, and whether they continue, can inform this debate and the future of U.S.-Mexico relations.

Sources and Methods

To gather case information about extradited and expelled defendants, we used Public Access to Court Electronic Records (PACER), alongside press releases and media coverage. PACER allows for public access to U.S. federal court records, allowing searches by defendant, court, jurisdiction, and more. For the purposes of this project,

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[42] Diaz, "Mexico 'fast-track' expulsion."

[43] Al Jazeera Staff, "Why has Mexico handed over drug cartel leaders to US? Who are they?." *Al Jazeera*, February 28, 2025, https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/2/28/why-has-mexico-handed-over-drug-cartel-leaders-to-us-who-are-they.

[44] Emily Green and Diego Oré, "Mexico, under pressure from Trump, transfers 26 more cartel members to US." *Reuters*, August 13, 2025, https://www.reuters.com/world/americas/mexico-under-pressure-trump-transfers-26-more-cartel-members-us-2025-08-12/.

we searched by defendant, as we began with only the names of the extradited and expelled individuals, as well as sometimes the district in which they were charged. To find information on these defendants' indictments, charges, affiliation, and timelines, we used PACER's "party search" to locate defendants' court filings.

Information found in PACER was supplemented by official press releases (mostly from DOJ, DEA, and ICE), media coverage, and information from the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) website. Press releases often provided more information regarding the defendants' charges and extradition requests, while media coverage allowed us to fill in missing information about the defendant's arrest. The Bureau of Prisons website was used mainly to locate where the defendant was being detained and, if they had been released, their release date. To enhance our understanding of the political context and practical mechanisms involved in extraditions, we also conducted interviews with former U.S. and foreign government officials who had experience working on extraditions.

Findings

Data Overview

We used a Google spreadsheet to organize the data on extraditions and expulsions we collected. For each of the individuals we identified, we collected the following variables: affiliation with an organized crime group, date of indictment, date of the extradition request, date of arrest (in Mexico), date of extradition, date of sentencing, the U.S. district court where the case was located, whether the case ended with a plea or went to trial (except for expulsion cases, which were still in early stages at the time of data collection), the U.S. charges, the BOP location, and the release date. Overall, we collected data on 103 extraditions and 46 expulsions.

Especially important in the context of our findings is how we identified an individual's affiliation with an organized crime group. Indictments often have information regarding individuals' alleged affiliations with cartels. For our database, we tried to corroborate these affiliations by conducting secondary research, specifically looking at DOJ press releases. There were a few highly represented organizations, forming patterns during the beginning stages of case systemization. With this, we constructed a drop-down feature in our spreadsheet that allowed us to identify the eight most frequently mentioned groups: Sinaloa cartel, Los Zetas, Juarez cartel, Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG), Beltran-Leyva organization, Guadalajara cartel, Cartel del Golfo (CDG), and Tijuana cartel. Some individuals were affiliated with more than one of these groups and the groups themselves changed over time. What mattered to us was how the U.S. prosecutors understood these groups as separate entities and how they chose to assign individual suspects to each of them. We also noted individuals that identified with no group—as "None"—or another group that was not highly represented

in our data—as "Other." As our analysis shows, many of the individuals coded as having "Other" affiliation belonged to smaller familial networks.

We used a similar process to identify and organize charges. After compiling the individuals' charges into the cells of our spreadsheet, we coded them into a drop-down menu of the most common charges: drug trafficking, money laundering, organized crime, guns, murder, and sex trafficking. We also included an "other" identification for cases with charges other than the main ones identified and an "unknown" identification for specific circumstances in which the information was inaccessible. The "drug trafficking" umbrella encompassed the possession, possession with intent to distribute, distribution, manufacture, trafficking, and importation of controlled substances, as well as the conspiracy to do any of the aforementioned acts. So, for example, Julio Cesar Valenzuela-Elizalde, who was indicted on charges that include "an international methamphetamine distribution conspiracy, conspiracy to possess with intent to distribute methamphetamine and conspiracy to import a controlled substance,"[45] is listed in our database as charged with drug trafficking. "Organized crime" category covered continuing criminal enterprise and racketeering charges. Our "guns" category encompassed the unlawful possession, unlawful exportation, and use in connection with other crimes of firearms or ammunition, as well as the conspiracy to do any of these acts. In many cases, individuals had multiple charges, as someone involved with an organized crime group engaged in drug trafficking is often also accused of racketeering, money laundering, weapons charges, and more.

The final dataset consists of 103 extradition entries and 47 expulsion entries with the following categories for columns: name, organized crime group affiliation, indictment date, extradition request date, arrest date, extradition/expulsion date, sentencing date, US district court, subdistrict, case number, whether the defendant had a plea deal or trial, charges, charges (standardized), BOP location, BOP registration number, release date, and comments.

Analysis Process

We used formulas to do preliminary data analysis in the spreadsheet, including counting the number of cases with each category of charge, affiliation, and district, and creating corresponding pie charts. We also used the spreadsheet to calculate the time between arrest and extradition for each defendant, as well as the average and standard deviation of this time difference for both the expulsions and extraditions datasets. Lastly, using the data encoded in the spreadsheet, we created contingency tables for both datasets that quantified and displayed the relationship in the dataset between the variables of affiliation and charge category. Following this analysis in the spreadsheet,

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[45] Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Mexico Extradites 13 Defendants to Face Charges in the United States," press release, September 30, 2015, https://www.fbi.gov/news/press-releases/mexico-extradites-13-defendants.

we downloaded the data into a CSV file and uploaded it into Google Colab. In Colab, we converted the data into a Pandas dataframe, cleaned it, and analyzed it using Python coding. This Python coding included conducting chi-squared tests to examine the relationships between affiliation and charge and their statistical significance, as well as creating visualizations of these relationships.

Results

General trends

      Our datasets of extraditions (103 cases) and expulsions (47 cases) suggest several trends. First of all, the majority of extraditions and expulsions from Mexico to the United States involve men charged with drug trafficking.[46] Drug trafficking was the most common type of charge in the extraditions dataset (occurring in 74 cases/71.84%), followed by organized crime, money laundering, other, guns, and murder (50, 32, 15, 10, and 9 cases, respectively), as shown in Figure 1. The expulsion dataset also showed the prevalence of drug trafficking charges, followed by guns, organized crime, money laundering, murder, and other (44, 13, 12, 11, 4, and 3 cases, respectively), as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 1: Charges Count, Extraditions

Murder 4.7%
Guns 5.3%
Other 7.9%
Money laundering 16.8%
Organized crime 26.3%
Drug trafficking 38.9%

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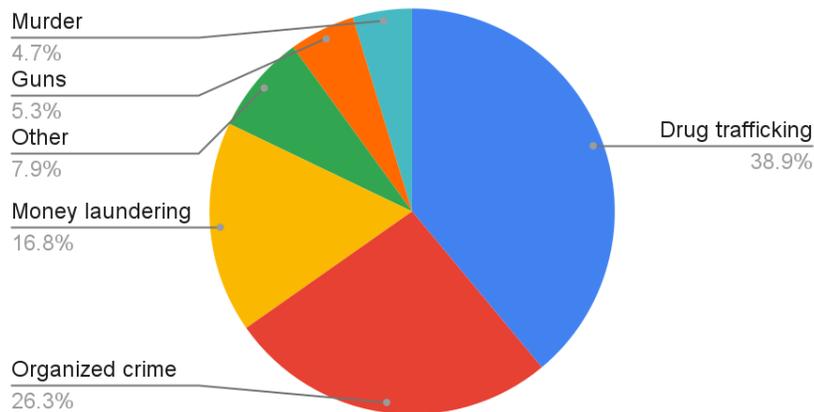
[46] The vast majority of the defendants in the dataset were men. Only five women were included in the dataset, all of whom were extradited, not expelled.

Figure 2: Charges Count, Expulsions

- Other 3.4%
- Murder 4.6%
- Money laundering 12.6%
- Organized crime 13.8%
- Guns 14.9%
- Drug trafficking 50.6%
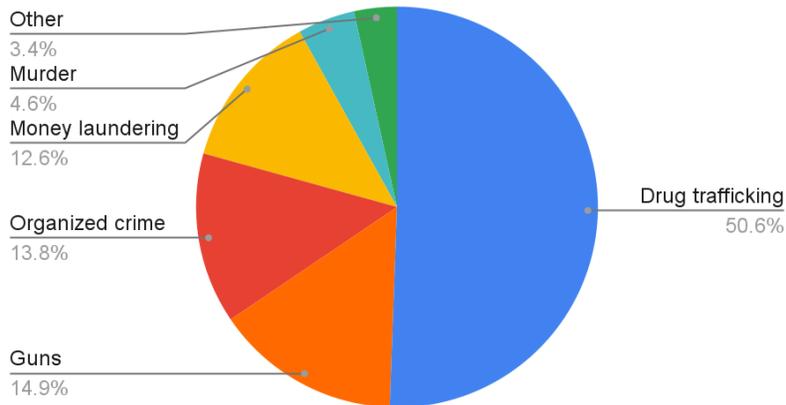
Sinaloa cartel was the most prominent organized crime group affiliation for defendants in both datasets. Figure 3 displays the distribution of organized crime group affiliation for defendants in the extradition dataset; Sinaloa followed affiliations with the Tijuana Cartel, Los Zetas, and Cartel del Golfo (CDG). Figure 4 displays the organized crime affiliation distribution for the expulsions dataset, where the next-most prominent affiliations were with Los Zetas and Cartel Jalisco Nueva Generación (CJNG). With the increase in Zetas affiliations and decrease in Tijuana-affiliated defendants, in addition to other changes between datasets, there was a significant difference in organized crime group affiliation between those extradited and those expelled (p = 0.0009 < 0.05).

Figure 3: Affiliation Count, Extraditions

- Other 21.1%
- Guadalajara 1.1%
- CJNG 2.2%
- Juarez 4.4%
- Beltrán-Leyva 5.6%
- CDG 10.0%
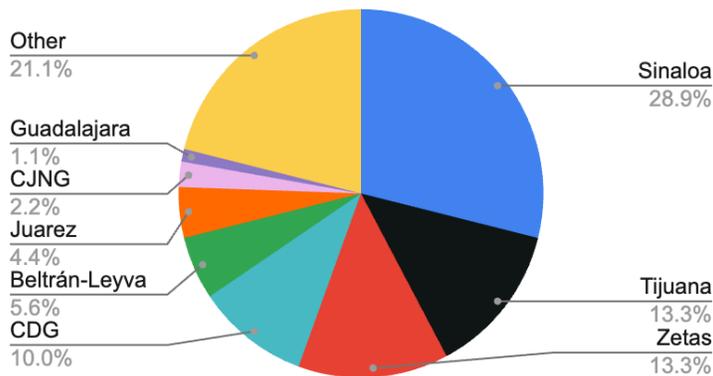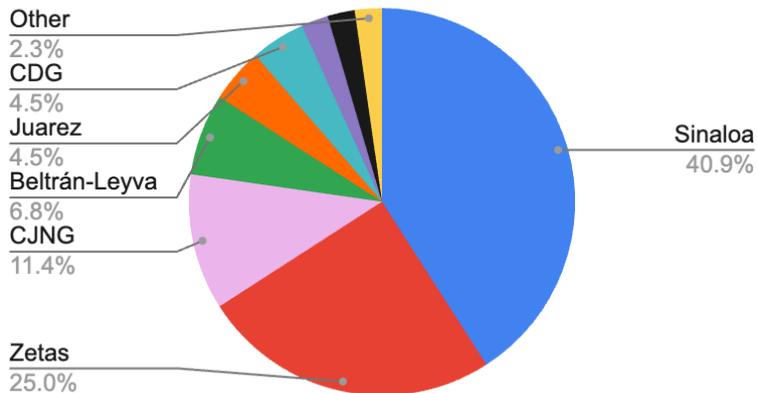- Sinaloa 28.9%
- Tijuana 13.3%
- Zetas 13.3%

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Figure 4: Affiliation Count, Expulsions

Figures 5 and 6 display the distributions of districts in which defendants were charged in both datasets. For extradited defendants, the most common jurisdictions were Southern California, Washington DC, and Eastern New York (18, 16, and 14 cases, respectively). For expelled individuals, the most common jurisdictions were Washington DC, Southern New York, and Arizona (10, 5, and 5 cases, respectively). The distribution of districts between our two datasets was found to be significant ($p = 0.023 < 0.05$).
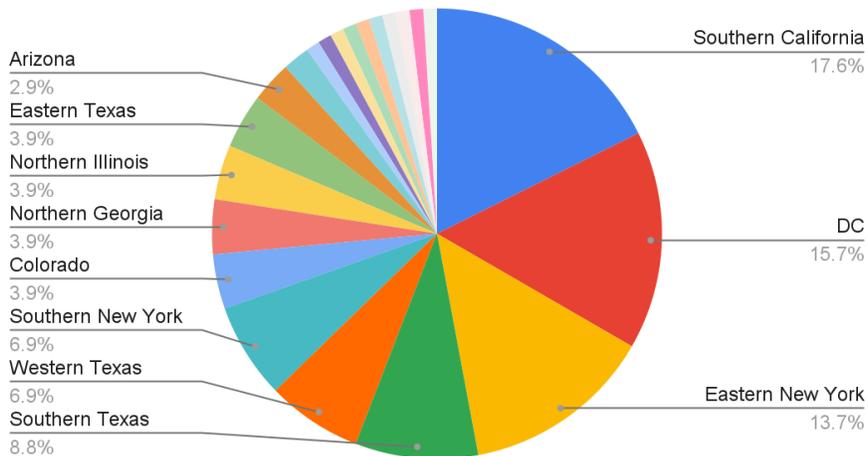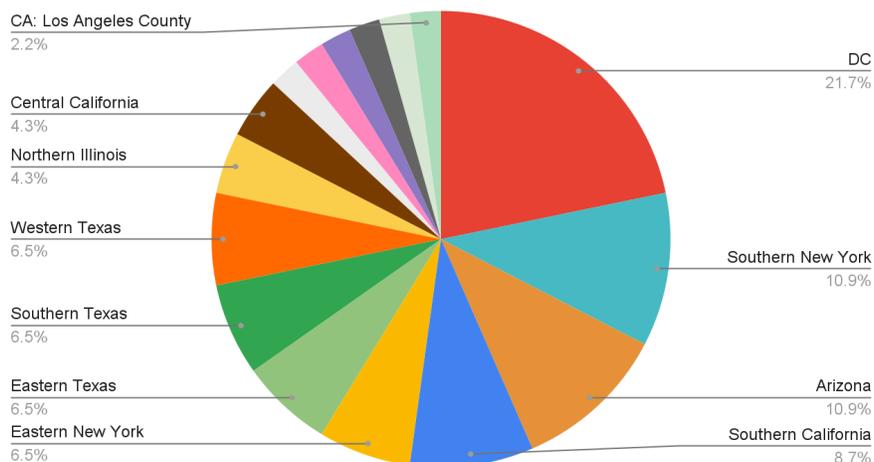

Figure 5: District Count, Extraditions

Figure 6: District Count, Expulsions

CA: Los Angeles County
2.2%

Central California
4.3%

Northern Illinois
4.3%

Western Texas
6.5%

Southern Texas
6.5%

Eastern Texas
6.5%

Eastern New York
6.5%

DC
21.7%

Southern New York
10.9%

Arizona
10.9%

Southern California
8.7%

Our dataset also tracked the time between initial arrest, typically in Mexico, and extradition or expulsion to the United States. The average time between arrest and extradition for extradited individuals was 1328.7 days, or approximately 3.6 years, while for expelled individuals, it was 1853 days, or approximately 5.1 years. Further examination found no statistically significant difference in the time between arrest and extradition between datasets ($p = 0.08 > 0.05$).

When we examined the relationship between organized crime affiliation and charges, an overall significant relationship was found between these two variables in the extraditions dataset ($p = 0.01 < 0.05$), but this was not the case for the expulsions dataset ($p = 0.75 > 0.05$). A chi squared test along with a map of standardized residuals demonstrated that the following significant relationships for extradited individuals: Sinaloa cartel affiliates are 5.2 times more likely to be charged with drug trafficking and 4.2 times less likely to be charged with a crime in the "Other" category. Los Zetas affiliates are 4.2 times more likely to be charged with murder than the typical extradited individual. Those with no organized crime affiliation are 6.3 times less likely to be charged with drug trafficking offenses and 4.4 times and 3.9 times more likely to be charged with organized crime and "Other" charges, respectively. No significant relationships were found between organized crime group affiliation and charge type for expelled individuals. The heat maps below display the residuals for the relationships between cartel affiliation and charge. However, it is important to note that only the relationships detailed above are statistically significant.

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Standardized residuals by Affiliation and Charge type - Expulsions

Standardized residuals by Affiliation and Charge type - Extraditions
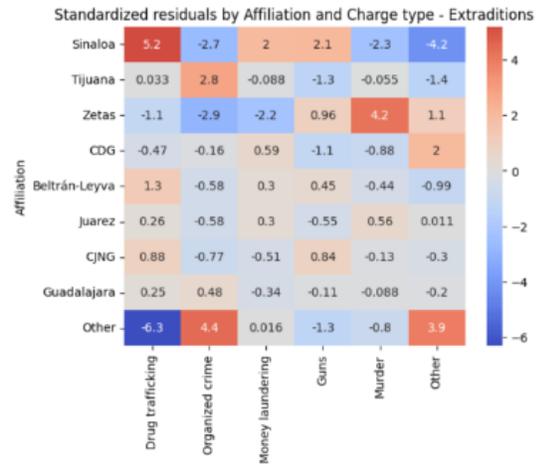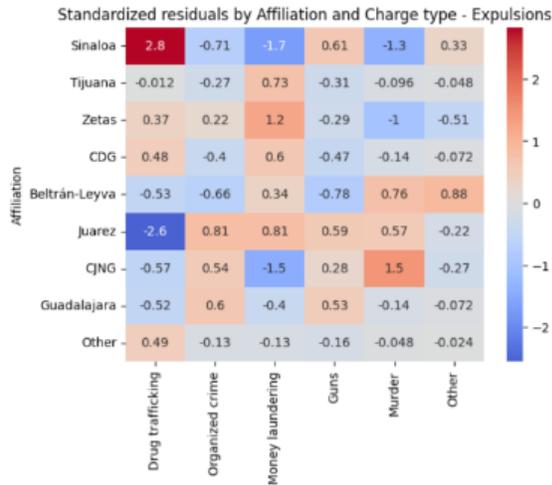
While all of the legal cases regarding expulsions are ongoing and therefore it is unknown whether defendants will take a plea deal or go to trial, out of the closed cases in our extradition dataset, six (5.83% of the defendants in the extraditions dataset) went to trial and 82 (79.61% took plea deals. A chi squared test revealed a significant relationship between the type of charge and the possibility of plea/trial only for those charged with gun offenses, who were less likely to go to trial ($p = 7.86 \times 10^{-9} < 0.05$).

The chart below shows these data plotted over time. In total, extraditions remain relatively low, fluctuating between one and ten per year, for most of the duration of the dataset. It shows a striking surge in 2025, representing the 55 individuals expelled from Mexico.
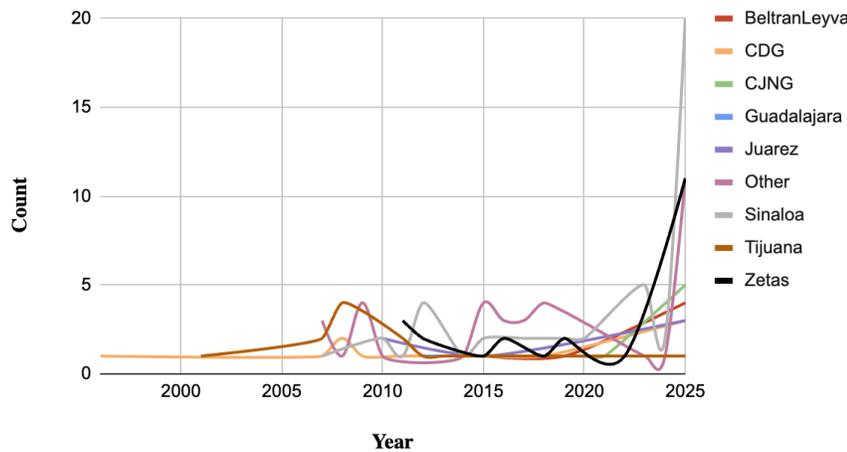

Total Extraditions by Year
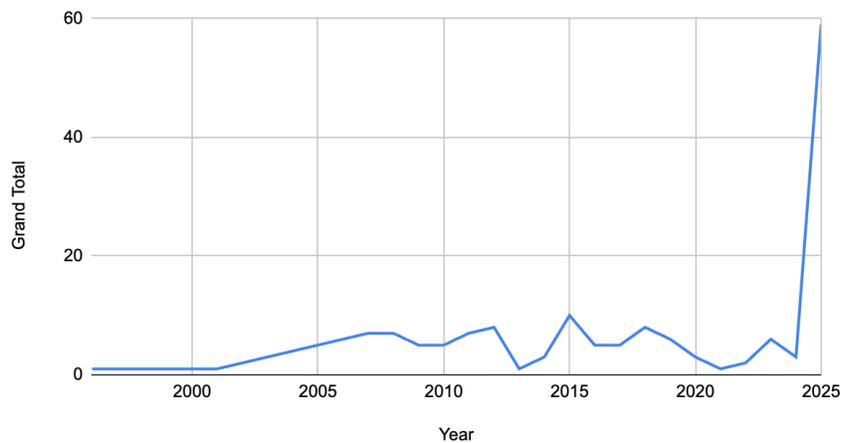
Until 2007, under the administrations of Mexican presidents Ernesto Zedillo and Vicente Fox, extraditions to the United States were few. Extraditions increased to an average of around 6.5 per year during the administration of President Felipe Calderón and his militarized campaign against cartels. In 2013 and 2014, the early years of President Enrique Peña Nieto Administration, extradition numbers dip, but rebound to similar levels during the latter half of his six-year term. From 2019 to 2024, under President Andrés Manuel López Obrador, extraditions decrease again, averaging 3.5 per year during his term in office. Finally, in 2025, under President Claudia Sheinbaum, expulsions supplement a handful of extraditions, constituting a dramatic surge.

The charts below show the number of extraditions per year disaggregated by cartel affiliation and their share of total extraditions in that year, respectively. At the outset, the Tijuana cartel and unaffiliated or other cartel members dominate extraditions. In the 2010s, other cartels, most notably the Sinaloa and Zetas cartels, enter the mix, with no one organization dominating among extradited individuals. The Sinaloa cartel dominates extraditions in the years leading up to 2025, and the Sinaloa and Zetas cartels make up the majority of individuals expelled in 2025.

Number of Extraditions by Year

Share of Annual Extraditions by Year
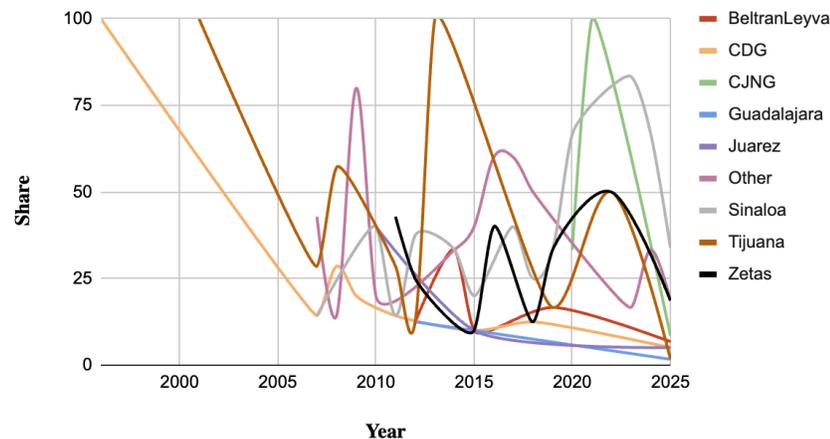
Connection between Group Affiliation and Charges

Given their statistical significance, we further examined the associations between the Sinaloa cartel and drug trafficking charges and between Los Zetas and murder charges. To better understand the subset of cases with murder charges, we looked at both the individual murder cases and their victims in both datasets. To understand the associations between these organizations and their members' charges, we conducted an analysis of how media and government sources framed their narratives of the Sinaloa and Zetas cartels. This media analysis was conducted first by reading the U.S. government press releases for the indictments of all members of the dataset charged with murder, then finding other media sources discussing the Sinaloa and Zetas cartels. For the purposes of comparison, the media sources were chosen from the past decade and were either reports or articles that discussed both cartels, or different articles from the same source, each discussing one of the cartels (for example, InSight crime's two profiles, one on the Zetas and one on Sinaloa).

Out of the extradited individuals included in our study, there were nine with murder charges, five of whom were affiliated with Los Zetas. All five Los Zetas members were charged under two indictments, both regarding the 2011 murder or attempted murder of U.S. government agents, Jaime Zapata (ICE) and Victor Avila (HSI) in San Luis Potosí state in Mexico.[47, 48] Jose García Soto, Alfredo Mendoza Hernandez, and Jesus Quezada Piña were implicated in one indictment and Jose Nava Villagran and Julian Zapata Espinosa in a similar indictment. Given the connection between all the Zetas members charged with murder to one incident, the association between Los Zetas and murder charges may not be as strong as the data initially suggested. Expectedly, the perpetrators of murders of U.S. government agents are highly sought after; out of the remaining, non-Zetas-affiliated individuals with murder charges, two out of four were indicted on charges relating to the murder of U.S. Consulate members.[49] One out of the four people with murder charges from the expulsions dataset was also

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[47] "2 cartel members found guilty of murder and other charges in slaying of ICE Special Agent Jaime Zapata and attempted murder of ICE Special Agent Victor Avila." *U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement*, July 27, 2017,
https://www.ice.gov/news/releases/2-cartel-members-found-guilty-murder-and-other-charges-slaying-ice-s pecial-agent.

[48] This incident occurred in February 2011, when ICE HSI Special Agents Jaime Zapata and Victor Avila, were sent to Mexico to combat the stream of drugs coming northward across the US-Mexico border. They were traveling in a diplomatic-plated vehicle from San Luis Potosi to Mexico City, when they were ambushed by a Zetas-affiliated hit team who fired into the vehicle. It is believed that this hit team's goal was to use the agents' vehicle for cartel operations. Zapata was killed while Avila survived, despite being seriously injured.

[49] Ravelo and Guajardo are implicated in the March 2010 murder of three US Consulate members in Juarez. The three murder victims were US Consulate employee Leslie Ann Enriquez Catton and her husband Arthur Redelfs, along with Jorge Alverto Salcido Ceniceros, also a husband of a Consulate member. Apparently, the victims were targeted because they were mistaken to be rival gang members.

implicated in the death of these Consulate members.[50] It is notable that Rafael Caro Quintero's indictment in the Eastern District of New York does not include murder charges; he was convicted for the murder of the DEA special agent Enrique Camarena in Mexico and served part of his prison sentence there before being expelled to the U.S. in February 2025.

Although a second look at the data may cast doubt on the association between Zetas and murder and Sinaloa with drug trafficking, an analysis of narratives surrounding these cartels in the media shows that these associations have permeated public discourse. Media and government portrayals typically frame the Sinaloa cartel in terms of their long history of power in the region and their drug trafficking network's international reach.[51, 52, 53] Although Sinaloa has forayed into other areas of crime, the media focuses on their involvement with drugs. In recent years, U.S. media and government sources have emphasized Sinaloa's responsibility for facilitating the movement of fentanyl across the Mexico-U.S. border.[54, 55] As opposed to other organizations, InSight crime reports that although Sinaloa strategically uses violence to further their aims, they typically "opt for bribery over violence and alliances over battles."[56] This portrayal of a more rational group, who has used violence sparingly (at least until the recent breakup of the organization following Mayo Zambada's kidnapping by one of El Chapo's sons in 2024), is at odds with portrayals of Los Zetas.

Media and government portrayals of Los Zetas have focused on their reputation for violence and ruthlessness.[57] This focus on violence dates back to the group's inception; Los Zetas emerged as it splintered from CDG, originally CDG's special forces of sorts—their "paramilitary enforcement arm."[58] Although, of course, Los Zetas are known for drug trafficking, media portrayals emphasize their armed violence and their aggression towards citizens and public officials.[59] The group has been described as

[50] Daniel Borunda, "Mexico arrests Luis 'El Tio' Mendez, last FBI fugitive in US Consulate murders in Juárez." *El Paso Times*, May 18, 2020, https://www.elpasotimes.com/story/news/crime/2020/05/18/fbi-fugitive-luis-gerardo-mendez-el-tio-la-empresa-consulate-murders-arrested-mexico/5217753002/.
[51] "Cartels." *United States Drug Enforcement Administration*, https://www.dea.gov/cartels.
[52] Amy Tikkanen, "Sinaloa cartel." *Britannica*, December 4, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/Sinaloa-cartel.
[53] CFR Editors, "Mexico's Long War: Drugs, Crime, and the Cartels." *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 21, 2025, https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/mexicos-long-war-drugs-crime-and-cartels.
[54] "Designation of International Cartels."
[55] Pablo Ferri, "From fentanyl to avocado: The many faces of the Mexican cartels targeted by Trump." *El País*, February 20, 2025, https://english.elpais.com/international/2025-02-20/from-fentanyl-to-avocado-the-many-faces-of-the-mexican-cartels-targeted-by-trump.html.
[56] "Sinaloa Cartel." *InSight Crime*, May 19, 2025, https://insightcrime.org/mexico-organized-crime-news/sinaloa-cartel-profile/.
[57] "Mexico cartels: Which are the biggest and most powerful?." *BBC*, October 24, 2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-40480405.
[58] CFR Editors, "Mexico's Long War."
[59] "Designation of International Cartels."

"known for its violent tactics,"[60] "'[Mexico's] most technologically advanced, sophisticated, and violent' group of its kind,"[61] and "the protagonist of violent attacks against security forces."[62] Los Zetas, more than Sinaloa, has also been depicted as moving beyond drug trafficking as their primary focus, diversifying into generally any type of organized crime that profits them the most.[63]

This is not to say that Sinaloa is not portrayed as an extremely violent organization; however, its media representation is not as singularly focused on a reputation for violence in the same way as Los Zetas. Although all Zetas-affiliated murders in our dataset are connected to a singular incident, this media analysis suggests that the association between Zetas and murder and Sinaloa and drug trafficking, as legal and reputational categories, exists elsewhere, in public discourse. While these associations are grounded in reality, they also warrant further examination: Do public narratives of organized crime groups affect the actual charges brought against their members?

Case Study: Sex Trafficking

While most Mexico-U.S. extraditions have targeted larger organized crime groups primarily dedicated to drug trafficking, such as Los Zetas and the Sinaloa cartel, smaller familial networks are also represented in cross-border prosecutions. Sex-trafficking extraditions showcase unique patterns across variables like processing speed (time between arrest and extradition) and geographic jurisdiction. From our dataset of 103 extraditions cases, a subset of 12 cases involve charges such as sex trafficking and transporting women for commercial sex. Analyzing this subset highlights how legal infrastructures shape the outcomes between familial trafficking networks and larger drug cartels. Unlike the cartel cases, the sex-trafficking subset is unified by its familial structure; all 12 individuals are linked to the familial Granados-Rojas and Rendon-Reyes trafficking networks. Cross-referencing PACER files with DOJ documents and press releases confirms that all 12 defendants had geographic origins in Tenancingo, Tlaxcala.[64]

A significant difference between larger cartels and the Tenancingo networks appears in processing speeds. The Tenancingo cases averaged 425 days (1.2 years) from arrest in Mexico to extradition. By contrast, cases related to drug trafficking averaged 1,490 days (about 4.1 years). This difference is likely due to the fact that drug trafficking groups have resources and their leaders and members facing extradition can

[60] Britannica Editors, "Organized crime." *Britannica*, November 13, 2025, https://www.britannica.com/topic/organized-crime.
[61] CFR Editors, "Mexico's Long War."
[62] Pablo Ferri, "From fentanyl to avocado"
[63] "Designation of International Cartels."
[64] Human Smuggling and *Trafficking Center, HSTC Intelligence Note, Tenancingo Bulletin #1: The Anatomy of a Trafficking Ring: Origins and Recruitment* (October 28, 2010), https://2009-2017.state.gov/documents/organization/151384.pdf.

afford to hire competent lawyers who delay the process for years. In contrast, these family groups engaged in human trafficking for sex work don't have financial means to pay good lawyers. On the other hand, the discrepancy may also be due to different legal frameworks governing each type of case. Sex trafficking investigations and arrests we looked at were processed under the 2009 U.S.-Mexico Bilateral Human Trafficking Enforcement Initiative, which streamlined cooperation and bypassed many of the bureaucratic barriers that slow drug trafficking related extraditions. As a result, sex trafficking defendants were processed about 3.5 times faster than drug trafficking defendants.

Limitations

Our analysis is limited by the small number of cases with complete information we were able to include in the datasets. According to the Mexican government records, from 2000 until June 1, 2022 Mexico extradited 1,389 people to the United States.[65] This means that the extradition cases we analyzed in this report (103) comprise fewer than 10% of all extraditions from Mexico to the United States in the first quarter of the 21st century. Unfortunately, both the Mexican and the U.S. governments are reluctant to provide more detailed information about individuals subjected to extradition. A FOIA request to the DOJ submitted on June 24, 2024, is still pending (as of February 2026). The data we managed to find is limited to what has been available through PACER and public sources online. Furthermore, in some cases, even when the research team was able to identify an extradited individual in public records, we were not successful at finding enough information about the variables we were interested in, such as an unsealed indictment or the dates of the extradition request and/or the arrest. Such small numbers, particularly in expulsions dataset, restricted our ability to use statistical analysis. Regardless of these limitations, our analysis points to some trends in extradition cases that call for further research.

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[65] Rocío Gallegos, Gabriela Minjares and Blanca Carmona, "Extradited: the banishment of justice in Mexico," *El Paso Matters*, July 4, 2023, https://elpasomatters.org/2023/07/04/u-s-mexico-extraditions-justice-along-border/