

"El Chapo" Guzmán's Extradition: What's Next for U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation?

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Related Authors

- [Clare Ribando Seelke](#)
 - [June S. Beittel](#)
-

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Clare Ribando Seelke, Specialist in Latin American Affairs (cseelke@crs.loc.gov, 7-5229)

June S. Beittel, Analyst in Latin American Affairs (jbeittel@crs.loc.gov, 7-7613)

Liana W. Rosen, Specialist in International Crime and Narcotics (lrosen@crs.loc.gov, 7-6177)

The notorious drug trafficking kingpin Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán is in U.S. custody, following the Mexican government's high-profile decision to [extradite him](#) to the United States on January 19, 2017, the day before President Donald J. Trump took office. According to a 2016 superseding [indictment](#) filed with the Eastern District Court of New York, Guzmán is charged with operating a continuing criminal enterprise and conducting drug-related crimes as the purported leader of the Mexican criminal syndicate commonly known as the Sinaloa Cartel. According to the [Drug Enforcement Administration](#), the Sinaloa Cartel has the widest reach of any transnational criminal organization into U.S. cities and is [vying with another cartel to supply](#) surging U.S. heroin demand.

Introduction

Mexico's extradition of Guzmán to the United States has been widely [welcomed](#) by U.S. officials. Some [analysts](#) viewed the extradition as the culmination of bilateral security cooperation under the Obama Administration, whereas others saw it as a goodwill gesture to President Trump. Following Guzmán's 2014 capture by Mexican marines supported by U.S. intelligence, the Mexican government was [resistant](#) to extradite Guzmán to the United States. Views appear to have shifted in light of Guzmán's brazen prison escape in 2015. By the time he was recaptured in 2016, the Mexican government proved willing to provide "[extensive cooperation and assistance](#)" to U.S. authorities to secure his extradition. Guzmán's arraignment occurred less than a week before the abrupt [cancellation of a meeting scheduled for January 31](#), 2017, between President Trump and Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto. Current tensions in U.S.-Mexican relations over trade, executive actions on immigration, and a border wall have raised questions about [whether Mexico will be willing to continue cooperating](#) with the United States on antidrug and other security efforts, which remain top concerns for many U.S. policymakers.

Guzmán, the Sinaloa Cartel, and Drug Trafficking in Mexico

Guzmán reputedly led the Sinaloa Cartel to become the dominant criminal syndicate in Mexico and to control a majority of the [country's illicit drug trade](#). Sinaloa's prowess in cocaine trafficking catapulted the syndicate to international prominence, but the syndicate also allegedly engages in all types of drug trafficking, including heroin, methamphetamine, and marijuana—often destined for cities inside the United States. Guzmán gained a reputation as an innovator among drug traffickers, embracing novel drug trafficking techniques, and was responsible for the construction of more than 200 tunnels to move narcotics across the U.S.-Mexican border and evade authorities.

It remains unclear how Guzmán's recapture and extradition may affect drug trafficking groups in Mexico. Some observers posit that Guzmán's Sinaloa Cartel has suffered in recent years from the same fragmentation that other trafficking groups in Mexico have experienced, resulting in a complex and shifting dynamic of competing criminal organizations involved in the production and movement of illicit drugs to the United States. Others maintain that Sinaloa has remained among Mexico's most cohesive criminal syndicates.

Cartel fragmentation and high-profile enforcement actions against major Mexican drug traffickers have not appeared to yield desired reductions in illicit drug production in Mexico or reduced use of Mexico as a major trafficking corridor to the United States. According to the *2016 National Drug Threat Assessment*, [illicit opium poppy cultivation in Mexico](#) in 2015 had the potential to produce 70 metric tons of heroin, an increase from an estimated 42 metric tons in 2014 and 26 metric tons in 2013. As more crime groups have become involved in opium cultivation and heroin trafficking, [violence has surged](#), particularly in Mexican states along the Pacific Coast, such as Guerrero. Drug trafficking and organized crime-related violence in the country as a whole increased slightly in 2015 and significantly in 2016, reversing downward trends since 2012.

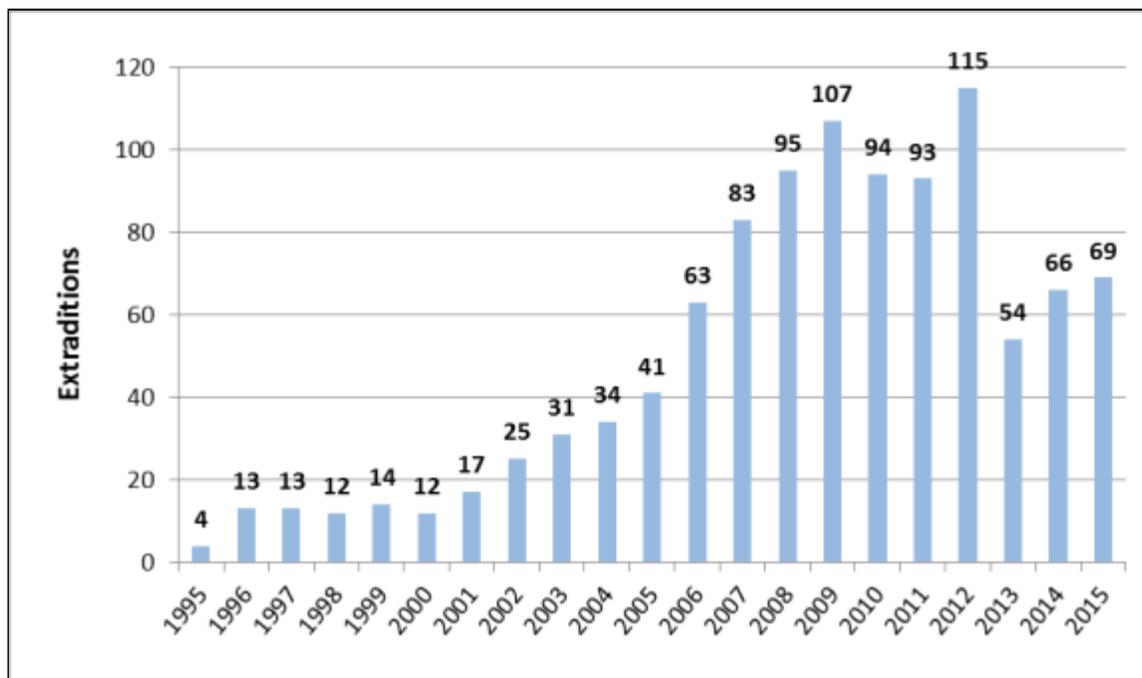
U.S.-Mexican Extraditions

Extraditions to and from the United States and Mexico are governed by a 1978 bilateral extradition treaty. Mexican cooperation with the United States on extradition requests traditionally has been a sensitive issue. Some Mexican politicians have preferred to prosecute drug kingpins on Mexican soil. Counterdrug policy experts often view the threat of extradition to the United States as a potentially effective tool to deter traffickers, who fear conviction and long prison sentences levied by the U.S. criminal justice system. The Mexican government's willingness to approve U.S. extradition requests, however, also could be perceived as tacit recognition of problems in the security of Mexico's prisons and integrity of its criminal justice system.

Since the early 2000s, the number of individuals extradited from Mexico to the United States has increased significantly—particularly under the former administration of Felipe Calderón (2006-2012). Extraditions fell sharply after President Enrique Peña Nieto took office in 2013 but have since risen (see [Figure 1](#)).

Figure 1. Individuals Extradited from Mexico to the United States

(1995-2015)



Sources: U.S. Department of Justice and U.S. Department of State.

Note: 2016 data are not yet publicly available.

Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation

U.S.-Mexican security cooperation has grown closer in recent decades, but tensions in the bilateral relationship have escalated recently, possibly [threatening to reverse](#) the deepening of binational collaboration. In addition to cooperation on extraditions, U.S.-Mexican law enforcement, intelligence, and military forces have increased information-sharing and coordination on a range of security issues. Any U.S. policy changes that run counter to Mexican interests or are perceived as threatening Mexico's sovereignty, such as recent proposals regarding payment for a border wall, could cause Mexico to scale back security cooperation, including efforts to arrest and extradite drug kingpins and to combat illicit drug production and trafficking. In a [joint statement](#) released on January 27, 2017, Presidents Trump and Peña Nieto acknowledged the need for their "two nations to work together to stop drug cartels, drug trafficking and illegal guns and arms sales."

For more information, see CRS Report R41349, [U.S.-Mexican Security Cooperation: The Mérida Initiative and Beyond](#); CRS In Focus IF10400, [Heroin Production in Mexico and U.S. Policy](#); and CRS Report R41576, [Mexico: Organized Crime and Drug Trafficking Organizations](#).