

What we know about Trump admin's reported deal allowing Mexican cartel family members to enter US

 snopes.com/news/2025/05/16/trump-admin-mexican-cartel-family-members

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Image courtesy of Getty Images

In mid-May 2025, [news outlets reported that](#) a Mexican security chief claimed U.S. President Donald Trump's administration made a deal allowing 17 drug cartel family members to enter the United States.

Many of these stories framed the security chief's statement as confirmation that the deal occurred. The Associated Press (AP), for example, [wrote](#) that, "Mexico's security chief confirmed Tuesday that 17 family members of cartel leaders crossed into the U.S. last week as part of a deal between a son of the former head of the Sinaloa Cartel and the Trump administration." The Sinaloa Cartel is a global criminal enterprise and one of two drug cartels "at the heart" of illicit drug-related dealings in the United States, according to the U.S. [Drug Enforcement Administration](#).

The stories spread on social media platforms like [Bluesky](#), [Facebook](#) and [Reddit](#). U.S. Sen. Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, [accused](#) Trump of allowing "17 relatives of El Chapo, one of the most notorious cartel drug dealers in the world, into America."

"What kind of message does that send? Who the hell knows? Maybe you got a presidential helicopter from them, who knows," Schumer said in a May 16 Facebook [video](#), referencing [Qatar's offer](#) of a Boeing 747-8 jumbo jet to the Trump administration.

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It is true that Mexico's security chief, Omar Hamid García Harfuch, [said](#) that 17 family members of former Sinaloa Cartel leader Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, who is [imprisoned](#) in the United States, crossed into America, apparently confirming [reporting](#) from independent journalist Luis Chaparro.

Harfuch told reporters it looked clear to Mexican authorities that the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) granted the family members entry as part of a deal with Guzmán's son, Ovidio Guzmán López, who is also a suspected member of the cartel's leadership. However, until the Trump administration confirms a deal occurred and the details of the purported deal — or documents verifying the deal took place are made public — Snopes cannot put a truthfulness rating on this statement. We reached out to the administration and await a response.

Mexican authorities [arrested](#) Guzmán López in 2023 and extradited him to the United States, where the government charged him with various drug trafficking-related offenses; he is expected to plead guilty on July 9, 2025, as part of a plea deal, per [court documents](#) filed May 6, 2025 — but details of the deal were not yet public as of this writing.

Journalist breaks story, citing anonymous sources

On May 12, 2025, Chaparro posted a [video](#) titled, "LUN 12 MAY | EXCLUSIVA: LA FAMILIA DEL CHAPO SE ENTREGA AL GOBIERNO FEDERAL DE LOS ESTADOS UNIDOS" on his YouTube channel — translated into English, his video title said: "MON, MAY 12 | EXCLUSIVE: EL CHAPO'S FAMILY SURRENDERS TO THE U.S. FEDERAL GOVERNMENT."

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Here's a transcript of his report citing anonymous sources, starting at [2:21](#), translated into English from Spanish with the help of Snopes reporters who speak Spanish (emphasis ours):

Seventeen members of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán's family, including a daughter and Ovidio Guzmán's mother, surrendered to the FBI this weekend at one of the international bridges between Mexico and the United States.

According to reports from our sources, the family surrendered to the FBI at noon last Friday at the San Ysidro border port in Tijuana. And according to the same sources, among these people are Griselda López, Ovidio's mother, several nephews, a grandson named Archivaldo and a daughter of "El Chapo" along with a son-in-law of the drug trafficker.

It is currently unknown why they surrendered, but the fact that they turned themselves in to agents who were already waiting for them is probably linked to the deal Ovidio Guzmán allegedly made with the United States government last week. The family reportedly arrived with several suitcases, at least two brand-name suitcases for each member, and between them all they were carrying more than 70,000 in cash.

Chaparro also shared pictures of what he alleged were the family members at the border in his report at [3:19](#) but censored the faces. [NBC](#) Chicago's investigative team on May 13 also reported, using anonymous federal sources, that "the immigration of 17 Chapo relatives, including a sister, were part of the deal that resulted in Ovidio's guilty plea."

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Mexican officials corroborate report

Then, on May 13, Mexican talk radio station Radio Fórmula published an [interview](#) with García Harfuch, wherein the security chief said the transfer of El Chapo's relatives was clearly part of a "negotiation" between the U.S. Justice Department and representatives of Guzmán López.

Here's the interview, translated into English (emphasis ours):

Journalist: How should we read this news, Omar, which is on the front pages of virtually every national newspaper today, about Ovidio Guzmán's family surrendering to the United States authorities, the FBI... 17 people? Were the facts as reported, and if so, where does this decision come from, or are they colluding with the United States? How should we read it, Omar?

García Harfuch: I think it's very clear that when — it's very clear that when Ovidio — we must first highlight who detained Ovidio. He was arrested by Mexican authorities in a Mexican army operation where fellow special forces soldiers were killed. Once the Mexican army arrested Ovidio, Mexico handed him over... extradited him to the United States. **Ovidio, as we all saw on the news, began negotiations with the United States Department of Justice, and it's clear that since his family was leaving for the United States, it was because of this negotiation or an opportunity that the Department of Justice itself granted him.** Let's also remember that this conflict in Sinaloa is understood to be an issue between the brothers themselves, and includes Ovidio and Ovidio's brothers, where they pointed fingers at other groups in the criminal organization, and it's clear that this is what's happening.

Journalist: **So is it an agreement between a defendant in the United States and the authority that is prosecuting him?**

García Harfuch: **That's right.**

[...]

Journalist: The 17 people, with the information you have — **the 17 people who left were Mexican citizens who didn't have an arrest warrant. They were exercising their freedom to cross into the United States.**

García Harfuch: **That's right, and [authorities] were already waiting for them in the United States.**

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As such, per Harfuch, the family members did not appear to "surrender" to authorities, as no warrants were out for their arrest, but voluntarily crossed into the United States. It's unclear if the family members were under some sort of protective custody; their whereabouts, as of this writing, were unknown.

Terms of family's entrance into US unclear

Mexico's president, Claudia Sheinbaum, [called](#) on the Trump administration to provide more information on why the cartel family members entered the United States [during](#) a May 14 news conference and said the United States did not alert Mexican authorities ahead of time about the alleged deal.

An excerpt from her comments are translated into English below:

We don't have official or public information that says why this family entered. We must recall the issue of extradition again, and yes, indeed, it is — there is a policy of [the U.S.] not to negotiate with terrorists. It was their decision to name some organized crime organizations [like the Sinaloa Cartel] as terrorists.

So, let them report if there's an agreement or if there isn't an agreement... they have to report it and they have to explain this to the people of the United States as well... how it is that, if they're reaching an agreement, how they're doing it. And to Mexico, obviously.

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Multiple news outlets reported that U.S. prosecutors and authorities declined to comment on the reported deal, including the Los Angeles Times, which also said the news outlet sent Guzmán Lopez's attorney, Jeffrey Lichtman a message, and did not receive a response. Snopes reached out to DOJ and Lichtman as well and await a response.

Thus, while the evidence indicates that the Trump administration may have made a deal with a suspected Sinaloa Cartel drug lord, Ovidio Guzmán López, to bring 17 of his family members into the United States, many details remain unclear, making it impossible to rate this claim.

Snopes reporters Anna Rascouët-Paz and Jack Izzo contributed to the Spanish-English translations in this report.

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