



# UNITED STATES SENATE

**OFFICIAL LANGUAGE:**  
ENGLISH

**PRESIDENT:**  
CARLOS REYES RÍOS

**MODERATOR:**  
BLANCA ESTEFANÍA  
ESPÍNDOLA CABRERA

**OFFICIAL ASSISTANT:**  
ANTONIO RODRÍGUEZ  
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**HAYASMUN**  
5° EDICIÓN

**TOPIC:**  
DESIGNATING MEXICAN  
CARTELS AS TERRORIST  
ORGANIZATIONS

## **ABOUT THE COMMITTEE**

The United States Senate is the upper chamber of the United States Congress, established in 1789 under the Constitution. The Senate forms the federal bicameral legislature by convening with the US house of Representatives.

The United States Senate is a key component of the country's legislative framework. It is distinguished by its unique structure, in which each state elects two senators to six-year terms. It performs essential functions with the House of Representatives, including ratifying treaties, adopting legislation, and verifying presidential appointments. Senators in this Congress stand out not just representing the interests of their states but also for contributing to a methodical and careful approach to drafting legislation.

The senate has served as a forum for important national discussions and historical moments throughout its existence, covering everything from divisive topics such as slavery and civil rights to crucial choices in foreign policy. Due to their leadership and sway in the Senate, notable senators such as John C. Calhoun, Henry Clay and Daniel Webster have had a significant impact on American history. There are currently 100 senators in the senate, two from each state.

Every two years, there are elections that result in competition for around one-third of the senate members, which guarantees a consistent turnover. Through the election process, the legislative body will continue to reflect the changing objectives and interests of the American community having impacts worldwide by retraining a balance between new and experienced perspectives.

## **INTRODUCTION**

“Terrorism is a horrible thing that is the great threat to civilization on our planet.”

- Walter Isaacson

For decades, Mexican drug cartels have been responsible for drug trafficking and organized crime. In the past, this was a problem that affected only Mexico but now it has become an issue that also affects other countries such as the United States. According to the 2024 Cartel Threat report from the DEA, Mexican cartels have established operations in various regions of the United States, not just border states. This implies that solving this problem is a national priority.

In recent years, Mexican cartels have evolved from simple drug trafficking entities to complex criminal organizations that are involved in a wide range of illicit activities, including human trafficking, arms trafficking, homicides, etc. Due to this, there has emerged a debate over if Mexican cartels should be designated as terrorist organizations.

There is not a universally agreed definition of terrorism due to the complexities and varying perspectives among different nations. One of the definitions that the USA government has provided describes international terrorism as “activities that involve violent acts or acts dangerous to human life that are a violation of the criminal laws of the United States or of any State; appear to be intended to intimidate or coerce a civilian population; to influence the policy of a government by intimidation or coercion; or to affect the conduct of a government by mass destruction, assassination, or kidnapping; and occur primarily outside the territorial jurisdiction of the United States, or transcend national boundaries in terms of the means by

which they are accomplished, the persons they appear intended to intimidate or coerce, or the locale in which their perpetrators operate or seek asylum" (18 U.S. Code § 2331, 2018).

Designating Mexican cartels as FTO (foreign terrorist organizations) would imply a different way in the legal and diplomatic approach to solve this problem. This designation would signify different and more strict measures of combating Mexican cartels. However, this could significantly affect the political relationship between Mexico and the United States.

## **HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

During the 80s, Colombian cartels, such as the ones of Medellín and Cali, dominated the market of cocaine in the United States. However, the repression of these groups allowed Mexican cartels to enter the market of drug trafficking. At first, Mexican cartels only transported the drug from Colombia but eventually they began to produce and market their own drug.

By the year of 2000, Mexican cartels, such as the one of Sinaloa, lead by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán", established as the biggest drug traffickers in the United States. The Gulf Cartel and Los Zetas also established themselves in the drug market, with Los Zetas gaining notoriety for their extreme violence and paramilitary tactics.

The increase in power of cartels led to an increase of violence between them and against authorities. An internal fragmentation led to the creation of multiple factions and rival groups, such as the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG) and the Beltrán-Leyva Organization. These groups also entered the United States market and started trafficking not only cocaine, but also methamphetamines, heroin, and marijuana.

Mexican cartels are known by their extreme violence, including decapitation, torture, massive murders, etc. In recent years, Mexican cartels have been responsible for a lot of violent incidents in the United states.

The FBI has documented multiple incidents of violence, including brutal murders and shootings, specially in border areas. During 20004-2005, Los Zetas were responsible for a lot of murders in this region, characterized by their brutality and the use of violence to intimidate people.

Another remarkable case is the one that occurred in Houston. Where a kidnapping related to the CJNG took place. Members of the cartel asked for a big amount of money in order to liberate the victim.

These are just some of the many cases of violence and crimes that have been carried out by Mexican cartels in the United States. Currently, the United States government is considering designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations in order to address this issue.

### **CURRENT RELEVANCE**

“Transnational drug trafficking organizations pose an unprecedented public safety threat to both the United States and Mexico,” said Attorney General Merrick B. Garland.

Mexican cartels evolved into a multifaceted and complex obstacle with critical implications for Mexico and the United States. These criminal syndicates have been a U.S. national security concern for long, which ended up with an extreme increment of lethal narcotics smuggled into the U.S., affecting millions of lives in North America.

There are debates between governments and organizations on the most impactful way to combat these illicit groups. These have included the question of whether designating Mexican cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) would debilitate transnational criminal organizations and reduce the amount of drugs entering the United States.

Moreover The United States Senate remains fundamental in the country's politics, as it is key to the passage of laws and the confirmation of presidential nominations, such as judges and cabinet members. This gives it significant power in the improvement of the government and the judicial system. Furthermore, its ability to ratify international treaties and act as a counterweight to a divided government underscores its importance in foreign policy and domestic power dynamics.

It also plays a crucial role in political trials, allowing it to supervise and, in extreme cases, remove senior officials, including the president. In times of political polarization, the Senate is a central player influencing the direction of the nation, ensuring there is balance and accountability in government.

### **US SENATE ACTIONS**

In March of the last year, Senator Lindsey Graham introduced the "Ending the NARCOS Act of 2023". This legislation proposes designating 9 Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist organizations (FTO) as a way to combat the problem of Mexican cartels. This proposal was also supported by the Senators Mike Lee, John Kennedy, Marsha Blackburn, Josh Hawley and Steve Daines

This designation would imply a lot of consequences such as the imposition of financial sanctions and the criminalisation of “material support” to the FTO. Also, this could serve as a signal of a more aggressive posture towards the cartels.

Additionally, Senators Roger Marshall and Rick Scott reintroduced the “Drug Cartel Terrorist Designation Act” that is also aimed at designating some Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist organizations, specifically the cartels of Reynosa, los Zetas, Jalisco New Generation Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel.

These initiatives demonstrate the great desire and commitment of some of the members of the US Senate to designate Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. However, there are several senators who have maintained a more cautious position and have decided not to give any opinion regarding this designation.

## **INTERNATIONAL ACTIONS**

- **A double sided operation:** The United States of America and Mexico nailed to dismantle a narcotic operation near Sonora and through the border. The operation ended with the apprehension of five people and the detention of over 120,000 fentanyl pills, 6.5 kilos of methamphetamine, 7.7 kilos of heroin, 6.8 kilos of cocaine, 3 assault rifles, one 9mm handgun, and a vehicle.
- **Border Security Enhancements:** Nations have designed funds with the purpose to strengthen border security measures, including capacitated personnel and advanced technology, to prevent the flow of drugs and illicit goods.
- **Eliminating the supplies:** The US has been working on breaking the connection between major dealers and their exterior suppliers by enhancing survey areas in order

to intercept drugs on borders as well as working with drug's original countries to eliminate crops and dismantling clandestine drug labs.

- **An official investigation through law enforcement:** Official U.S. Departments have been investigating Mexico's president Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador allegedly connection with drug cartels for years. with inconclusive and censored results due to Mexico's alliance with America and the fact that it never transcended into a formal investigation.

## **BULLET POINTS**

- Definition of terrorist organization and criteria in order to designate Mexican cartels as such.
- Potential benefits of designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations
- implications of this designations
- Potential legal, economical and political challenges
- Impact on the political relationships between the US and Mexico
- Legal

## **DELEGATIONS**

- *John Cornyn, Senator of Texas*

Texas, being a border state with Mexico, is one of the states with more presence of Mexican cartels. John Cornyn has expressed his concerns about the way Mexico has addressed this issue and has introduced legislation aimed at training the Mexican military to better combat these criminal organizations. The delegation of Texas is strongly in favor of designating Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations. In September of 2022, Greg Abbott, governor of Texas issued an executive order with the purpose designating Mexican drug cartels as terrorist organizations.

- *Alex Padilla, Senator of California*

California is one of the states with more Mexican cartel presence . Senator Alex Padilla has advocated for policies that would strengthen border security, but has also expressed concerns about the way to approach this situation since he believes in protecting immigrant communities and having a good diplomatic relationship with Mexico. He has not taken a position about designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations but because of his record, he is unlikely to support proposals that could create tension between the governments of the United States and Mexico.

- *Kyrsten Sinema, Senator of Arizona*

Arizona is a state with a lot of Mexican cartel presence. Kyrsten Sinema has demonstrated being active against Mexican cartels. Some of her efforts have been to sponsor the “FEND Off Fentanyl Act” that aims to stop the flow of fentanyl into Arizona and the introduction of the “Combating Cartels on Social Media Act” that fights against illegal recruitment of youth in Arizona through social media for smuggling activities. However, Sinema has not given an opinion about designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations.

- *Martin Heinrich, Senator of New Mexico*

New Mexico is a state with high intensity Mexican cartels. Senator Martin Heinrich has expressed reservations about the idea of designation Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. While acknowledging the seriousness of the violence associated with cartels, the senator Martin Heinrich expresses his concern about the potential negative implications for the United States - Mexico relations. Considering that such designation could complicate security cooperation and exacerbate violence without addressing the conflict. This stance

reflects a cautious approach to diplomatic relations and cross border cooperation to confront organized crime.

- *Rick Scott, Senator of Florida. Roger Marshall, Senator of Kansas*

Senator Rick Scott is strongly in favor of designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. In the same way, Roger Marshall has also made it clear his position in favor of this designation. Together, Senator Marshall and Senator Scott introduced the “Drug Cartel Terrorist Designation Act” which would designate certain Mexican cartels as foreign terrorist organizations. This designation would designate the following cartels as terrorist organizations:

- Reynosa/Los Metros faction of the Gulf Cartel.
- The Cartel Del Noreste faction of Los Zetas.
- The Jalisco New Generation Cartel.
- The Sinaloa Cartel

- *Chuck Schumer, Senator of New York*

Despite being one of the states furthest from the border with Mexico, New York has a lot of Mexican cartel presence. Chuck Schumer hasn’t made any public declaration about his opinion on designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations but most of the Democrats are taking a cautious position on this topic because of the consequences that this designation could imply. Because of this, it’s probably that Chuck Schumer would be against designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations.

- *Dick Durbin, Senator of Illinois*

Illinois is a state with high intensity Mexican cartels. Senator Dick Durbin hasn't made any public opinion about designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. However, he has fought to reduce the flow of weapons from the United States to Mexico and lead legislative initiatives such as the "Stop Arming Cartels Act".

- *Jon Ossoff, Senator of Georgia*

Jon Ossoff hasn't given any public opinion about designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. However, he has been active in the fight against drug trafficking. Early this year, he cosponsored the bipartisan Fentanyl Eradication and Narcotics Deterrence (FEND) Fentanyl Act, which focuses on implementing sanctions and measures to combat drug trafficking. Taking into consideration the record of Senator Ossoff, probably he would rather strengthen and improve the existing laws than look forward to designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations.

- *Catherine Cortez Masto, Senator of Nevada*

Even though the state of Nevada is considered a High Intensity Drug Trafficking area, Senator Catherine Cortez has not announced her position on whether Mexican cartels should or should not be considered FTO's. However she has been an active combatant against the production and distribution of synthetic drugs, by biparting PFISDA *Preventing the Financing of Illegal Synthetic Drugs Act* along with senator John Cornyn.

- *Bob Casey Jr., Senator of Pennsylvania*

Senator Bob Casey Jr. has made no explicit public statements about identifying Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. He has stated that the state must secure the US border and maintain national security while treating immigrants with compassion and dignity. For instance he called attention to the role of Mexican cartels in the opioid crisis, and highlighted the importance of international cooperation to combat the problem. He has also encouraged the Biden presidency to address China's role in supplying precursor chemicals to the cartels.

However, Senator Bob Casey Jr has stated that the key to confronting this threat stands in greater collaboration between both countries, Mexico and The United States, strengthening shared intelligence, and supporting economic and social development in affected regions, rather than resorting to designations that could complicate diplomacy and transactions.

- *Sherrod Brown, Senator of Ohio*

Senator Sherrod Brown of Ohio has been critical of the designation of Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. Sherrod Brown asserts that designating cartels as terrorists could have not anticipated consequences. In addition, it is considered that designating Mexican cartels could cause an increase in diplomatic tensions, which would affect trade and security relations between both countries. Instead of this measure, Senator Brown advocates strengthening intelligence efforts and improving addiction prevention and treatment policies in the United States, addressing the problem from a broader and more strategic perspective.

- *Marsha Blackburn, Senator of Tennessee, Josh Hawley, Senator of Missouri & Lindsey Graham, Senator of South Carolina*

These three eastern state senators consider that Mexican cartels must be designated as terrorist organizations in spite of the welfare of American citizens. U.S. Senators Lindsey

Graham, Marsha Blackburn , and Josh Hawley introduced Ending the Notorious, Aggressive, and Remorseless Criminal Organizations and Syndicates (NARCOS) legislation.

“Despite what the President of Mexico says, drug cartels are in control of large parts of Mexico. They are making billions of dollars sending fentanyl and illicit drugs into the United States where it is killing our citizens by the thousands. Designating these cartels as Foreign Terrorist Organizations will be a game-changer. We will put the cartels in our crosshairs and go after those who provide material support to them, including the Chinese entities who send them chemicals to produce these poisons”

-Lindsey Graham.

“We urge the Biden Administration to use expanded sanctions authority as leverage and adopt a more assertive approach”

-Marsha Blackburn.

“I remind the government of Mexico that their cartels are murdering American citizens, and trafficking children, and flooding our communities with deadly drugs. So yes, I do believe sanctions are warranted for those who refuse to take action.”

-Josh Hawley.

- *Gary Peters, Senator of Michigan*

The state of Michigan has maintained a skeptical and cautious stance towards Mexican Cartels. Senator Gary Peters has declared that narcotics have caused a high percentage of addictions in the community of the state of Michigan. Side by side with the federal government, Senator Peters will take actions, which have not been yet explicit, to reduce consumption of these narcotics and prevent overdoses. Likewise, Michigan's senator shares that the bipartisan project will be a major contributor in ensuring that the Department of Homeland Security uses resources at its disposal to combat trafficking and confiscate mortal narcotics.

- *Thom Tillis, Senator of North Carolina*

North Carolina's senator, Thom Tillis, has been an outspoken advocate for designating Mexican narcotic cartels as foreign terrorist groups. Thom Tillis has said that the State Government would have more resources to combat the influence and actions of the cartels if it were designated as such.

Furthermore, Senator Tillis contends that the National Security of the United States is seriously threatened by the cartel's involvement in violent crime, narcotic and human trafficking. By classifying Mexican cartels as terrorists, according to Thom Tillis, the United States would be able to impose harsher financial and economic sanctions, more effectively disrupt their operations, and fortify cooperation with the international allies in the fight against the transnational threat.

- *Mark Warner, Senator of Virginia*

The Mexican cartels with more presence in Virginia are the Sinaloa Cartel and the Cártel de Jalisco New Generation. This is one of the reasons why Jason Miyares (Virginia's Attorney General) leads a coalition of 21 states calling on President Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken to designate cartels as terrorist organizations. Despite this, Mark Warner hasn't given any public position on designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. Taking into consideration Mark's record probably he would take a more cautious position and express some concerns about this designation.

- *Patty Murray, Senator of Washington*

Senator Patty Murray has decided not to share publicly her opinion regarding the designation of Mexican Cartels as terrorist groups. However, she has highlighted the importance of taking an adequate and comprehensive approach to encounter narcotic trafficking and accompanying

violence. Despite her restrained expression, she is in favor of increasing border security, funding community based preventions and treatment programs, promoting international collaboration as a method to deal with the root causes of narcotic related issues. Senators strategy consist in a realistic planning process taking into consideration both the supply and demand sides of the issue, rather than focusing solely on punitive measures

- *Michael Bennet, Senator of Colorado*

Colorado is a state with a high presence of Mexican cartels. Senator Michael Bennet hasn't given any public opinion addressing the debate over whether Mexican cartels should be designated as terrorist organizations. However he has expressed his concerns about the situation of Mexican cartels in the US. Bennet, along with colleagues, has insisted that president Biden prioritize border security. He asked president Biden to provide a larger funding for border security and drug interdiction efforts in the upcoming Fiscal Year 2025 federal budget.

- *Angus S. King, Senator of Maine*

Angus King, Senator of Maine has demonstrated concern over the impact of Mexican narcotic cartels on the opioid crisis in the United States. The Senator King has been involved in legislative efforts to face the flow of illegal narcotics, including supporting measures to enhance Mexico's military capabilities to encounter these cartels. Senator Angus S. King has not yet announced explicitly his position however his actions indicate a strong concern addressing the threat they pose. He highlighted the need for strategic solutions to protect American citizens from devastating consequences of narcotic trafficking.

- *Elizabeth Warren, Senator of Massachusetts*

Senator Elizabeth Warren has expressed her concern about the complexities of designating Mexican cartels as terrorists, however, she has not specifically commented about the situation. Even so she has been consistent with the broader policy and would likely focus on the root causes of the situation involving trafficking and violence.

- *Tommy Tuberville, Senator of Alabama*

Although Senator Tuverville has not stated his opinion on whether Mexican cartels should be considered terrorist organizations, he has made his concerns about the border crisis pretty clear by introducing the Border Safety and Security Act. In which he states America should suspend the illegal immigrants entry to the country in order to get their border's control back. He originally submitted it in march 2023 with the intention of fixing president biden's immigration policies border crisis.

- *John Kennedy, Senator of Louisiana*

Senator Kennedy has expressed his disconformity with Biden's new open borders, remarking that terrorists, cartel members and sex offenders are taking advantage of the chaos to access the country illegally. Even though he has stated that Mexican cartels should be considered as Foreign Terrorist Organizations, he has also mentioned that the U.S. should invade Mexico because of the presence of drug cartels.

- *Tom Cotton, Senator of Arkansas*

In Arkansas, Mexican drug cartels have caused great concern to Senator Tom Cotton, who believes Mexican Cartels and related violence represent a serious threat to the national

security of the United States. Senator Cotton mentions as well that these corporations could be related with terrorist groups such as ISIS to infiltrate the United States and carry out attacks. Furthermore he has also introduced legislation that imposed sanctions on these cartels and recommended military intervention in Mexico to combat them.

- *James Lankford, Senator of Oklahoma*

In Oklahoma, Lankford is taking a different approach, he has not stated officially his opinion on the subject, but Lankford considers that the best way to eliminate completely the cartel issue is by disrupting the supply chain by enforcing inspections in borders to cut the product supply from Mexico, and the filthy money from the U.S. back to Mexico. His plan includes improving border patrols equipment, training and personnel by designation a part of the federal budget, adding x-ray inspections, and a 20 percent increase in random inspections.

- *Todd Young, Senator of Indiana*

Senator Todd Young of Indiana presented arguments referring to the threat represented by Mexican cartels. In his capacity as the highest senator on the Senate Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, South and Central Asia, the Middle East, and Foreign Relations, he pointed out the importance of categorizing these cartels as foreign terrorist organizations (FTOs) Senator Young outlined the dangers the cartels' operations pose to national security in a letter sent to president Biden, in this letter he highlight that these dangers go beyond the trafficking of drugs and include people trafficking and acts of murder. If terrorist organizations were given this designation, the United States would have greater resources to face the threats , strengthening international cooperation and law enforcement capabilities.

- *Mitch McConnell, Senator of Kentucky* Senator Mitch McConnell hasn't given any public opinion about designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. However, he has always been supportive of the implementation of stricter policies and laws addressing the problem of drug trafficking in general, not only from Mexican cartels. Other republican Senators like Lindsey Graham and John Kennedy have made it clear that they are in favor of designating Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations but McConnell hasn't given any position on this.

- *Amy Klobuchar, Senator of Minnesota*

Amy Klobuchar, Senator of Minnesota has expressed her concerns over the designation of Mexican cartels as terrorist organizations. Senator Klobuchar states that this could have significant implications in diplomatic relations between the United States and Mexico, complicating the hostilities of narcotic trafficking. Klobuchar emphasizes the need for strategic international collaboration addressing both the supply and demand of narcotics.

- *Ron Johnson, Senator of Wisconsin*

Senator Ron Johnson has had a statement defending the designation of Mexican cartels as terrorists. Defending his position with a complete argument, the senator mentions that this would allow the United States to use more complete and precise measures to combat drug trafficking and associated violence. According to Senator Johnson, the Mexican cartels are a threat to the state and treating them as terrorists would facilitate an effective response.

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