



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on October 20, 2025

Illegal-alien TdA Member Who Lived With Judge Pleads Guilty to Gun Possession, Evidence Tampering; Judge & Wife Indicted

The Tren de Aragua (TdA) terror-gang member who was hiding out in a judge's home in New Mexico until arrested by authorities has pleaded guilty to evidence tampering and illegally possessing a firearm.

Cristhian Ortega-Lopez became famous because he was living with a far-left Democratic magistrate judge and his wife, Jose and Nancy Cano, in Las Cruces. Cano had to quit his post, and he and his wife were indicted recently on evidence-tampering charges.

Like so many 23-year-olds, amusingly enough, Ortega-Lopez thought it would be a bright idea to post photos of himself on Facebook while breaking the law — in this case, shooting firearms. Illegals are not allowed to have them.



Michał Chodyra/iStock/Getty Images Plus



U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement

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ICE arrested Cristhian Ortega-Lopez, an alleged TdA affiliate, following an anonymous tip. Thank you, anonymous tipster — we appreciate you!

He's been charged with possession of a firearm or ammunition. He's safely in custody.



Learn more: [ICE.gov/newsroom](https://ice.gov/newsroom)

NEWS UPDATE



ICE

7:00 PM · Mar 14, 2025



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Arrest and Charges

Ortega-Lopez is a typical Venezuelan Biden migrant, as the criminal complaint filed February 28 explains.

Border agents caught him after [he jumped](#) the border at Eagle Pass, Texas, on December 15, 2023, then released him three days later because of “overcrowding” at the detention facility. Almost as soon as the Biden administration loosed him upon unsuspecting Americans he began committing crimes. The [complaint explained](#):

On December 30, 2024, Cristhian Ortega uploaded a collection of photographs and videos to his personal Facebook account featuring himself and other Venezuelan illegal aliens, at what appears to be a Shooting Range in Las Cruces, New Mexico, in possession of firearms and a large amount of handgun ammunition and rifle ammunition.

One photo featured him holding an AR-15-style rifle “in one hand and a black semi-automatic handgun” in the other. Another photo featured a hand holding ammunition.

Video posted to Facebook shows Ortega-Lopez shooting an AR-15-style rifle with a suppressor.

Ortega-Lopez confessed that the Canos allowed him to use firearms while he lived with them. He also identified the firearms he fired at the shooting range: a “Geissele SD 5.56 rifle, a Sig Sauer P365 9mm handgun, and a Volquartsen VTz .22 caliber rifle,” the [complaint says](#). “Ortega-Lopez admitted that he knew it was illegal for him to possess firearms.”

As for his gang membership, the complaint says the photos and videos “displayed clear indicators”:

Observations observed on Cristhian Ortega and the illegal aliens he resided with include tattoos, clothing apparel, and displaying hand gestures, commonly associated with TdA. These visual indicators, widely recognized as symbols of TdA and consistent with existing intelligence, provide strong evidence of Cristhian Ortega’s potential connection to TdA.

[He pleaded guilty](#) to being an illegal alien in possession of a firearm and ammunition and conspiracy to tamper with evidence. He faces 20 years in the slammer when sentenced.

The Canos’ Indictment

The Venezuelan did all this while hiding with the Canos and their daughter, Nancy, [federal prosecutors in New Mexico allege](#).

“On December 24, 2024, Ortega-Lopez posted photos and videos of himself at the residence of April Cano, a social media influencer and gun enthusiast, holding a rifle with tactical equipment while wearing a ballistic helmet with night vision goggles,” prosecutors allege:

In the videos, Ortega-Lopez referred to April Cano’s parents, Nancy and Jose Cano, as “Patron” and “Patrona,” and told an informant he had received a firearm as a Christmas gift from the Cano family.

Ortega-Lopez worked for the Cano family and received housing in return. Additionally, the Cano family took Ortega-Lopez to the shooting range to fire weapons and allowed him



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access to firearms.



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Venezuelan Illegal With Alleged Tren de Aragua Ties Arrested for Possession of Firearm While Reportedly Living at Home of New Mexico Judge

Judge Jose "Joel" Cano abruptly resigned days after ICE HSI raid at his house in Las Cruces

Full story coming...




BOOKING DETAILS

Booking No: 2200000000
 Booking Time/Date: 10/18/25 08:44

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Name: LOPEZ ORTEGA, CRISTIAN
 Address: LAS CRUCES, NM 88001
 Sex: M Race: W
 Hair: BRN Eyes: BRN Height: 5'07" Weight: 155 Skin: BRN
 ABO: O2

CHARGES

Statute: 18.66 VIOLATION FEDERAL IMMIGRATION LAWS Charge Type: FEL

12:38 PM · Apr 18, 2025

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The [Canos were indicted](#) on October 7 for tampering with evidence.

When federal agents raided the Canos' residence and arrested Ortega and "multiple associates," they seized three cellphones. Told he could make a phone call, Ortega-Lopez told agents that the phone he wanted to use wasn't among the three.

"Video calls ... later showed Nancy Cano holding a black iPhone believed to be Ortega's fourth phone," [DOJ alleges](#):

In a March 7 call with Ortega-Lopez, Nancy Cano used the device to contact a person named



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“Michelle” via WhatsApp, then facilitated a FaceTime conversation between Michelle and Ortega-Lopez using her personal phone. Additionally, in an April 20 call, Nancy Cano and Ortega-Lopez discussed deleting his Facebook account — a platform where he had previously shared incriminating content, including gang affiliations and images with firearms.

On April 24, when Homeland Security Investigations agents searched the Canos’ home for the phone, the judge confessed to destroying “Ortega’s cellphone by smashing it with a hammer approximately five weeks prior, believing it contained incriminating photos and videos of Ortega with firearms.”

He was right.

U.S. Attorney General Pam Bondi elaborated on Fox News.

After smashing the phone with a hammer, Cano “walked the pieces to a city dumpster to dispose of it to protect him,” she said. As for Ortega-Lopez, “This TdA member ... had on a necklace that said ‘kill,’ something about death, he had tattoos all over him,” Bondi explained. The phone contained pictures of two decapitated murder victims.

Strangely, the Canos do not face charges of [harboring illegals](#), despite border czar Tom Homan’s many promises [to charge](#) sanctuary officials with that crime. The statute is clear on three points. A person commits a crime if he:

- knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that an alien has come to, entered, or remains in the United States in violation of law, transports, or moves or attempts to transport or move such alien ...;
- knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that an alien has come to, entered, or remains in the United States in violation of law, conceals, harbors, or shields from detection, or attempts to conceal, harbor, or shield from detection, such alien in any place ... ; [or]
- encourages or induces an alien to come to, enter, or reside in the United States, knowing or in reckless disregard of the fact that such coming to, entry, or residence is or will be in violation of law.

The disgraced [Judge Cano quit](#) his job in March.



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