



Written by [Luis Miguel](#) on February 2, 2024

DEA Investigated Mexican President AMLO's Campaign for Drug Ties

Relations between the United States and Mexico, already tense due to the overrun American southern border and the resultant migrant crisis affecting communities across the country, took a dive this week upon reports that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) is conducting an investigation into drug money in the unsuccessful 2006 campaign of Mexican President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO).

As seen at [The Hill](#), word of the DEA investigation into the Mexican head of state came by way of three different outlets: ProPublica, InSight Crime, and Deutsche Welle (DW). These followed up former allegations that members of López Obrador's staff accepted millions of dollars in bribes from Mexico's drug cartels on the condition that they ensure relaxed anti-crime policy if AMLO were to make it to the presidency.

López Obrador, a leftist, has run for president three times in the years 2006, 2012, and 2018 (Mexican presidential elections are held every six years and presidents serve one single six-year term without possibility of reelection), finally finding success on his third try.

The report from DW claims López Obrador personally made a "thank you" call to U.S. citizen Edgar Villareal, alias "La Barbie," who at the time was leader of the criminal Beltrán Leyva Organization (BLO), which was tied to the Sinaloa Cartel under an umbrella group known as "La Federación" (The Federation). AMLO's thanks was reportedly for Valdez Villareal having facilitated a sum of \$2 to \$4 million in donations to the López Obrador campaign.

While the three media reports were produced independently, they all arrived at the same conclusion: A probe by DEA agents found that longtime AMLO aide Nicolás Mollinedo was at the heart of a plot to get political donations from La Barbie.

The probe was done through the Sensitive Activity Review Committee (SARC), which is where officials from the Department of Justice and DEA conduct operations of a politically sensitive nature. SARC shelved its investigation in 2011, just prior to AMLO's second presidential election loss to Enrique Peña Nieto.



AP Images
Andrés Manuel López Obrador



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López Obrador lashed out at the reports that he was investigated by the DEA.

“In the case of the United States, the State Department and the agencies have a lot of influence in the management of media, and also here, but there is no proof. They are vile slanderers, although they are rewarded as good journalists,” said the Mexican president at a press conference on Wednesday.

He also blasted the notion of closer security cooperation between the United States and Mexico, criticizing the administration of one of his predecessors — Felipe Calderón — for readily cooperating with the United States when it came to combating organized crime.

“About the DEA and other agencies involving themselves [in Mexican politics], of course they involve themselves, and more when they’re allowed, as it happened precisely during the government of — I don’t know whether to say Calderón or [Calderón’s now-convicted former top security official] García Luna — then, they entered the country and did whatever they wanted. So that doesn’t happen anymore and that has them angry,” AMLO added.

The drug ties to the AMLO campaign in 2006 speak to a transformative period in Mexican politics in the first decade of this century.

López Obrador ran for president the first time in 2006 at a time when the traditional, decades-long power structure was breaking down. The Institutional Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional — PRI), which had held one-party rule since the Mexican Revolution in the early 20th century, lost the presidential election for the first time in 71 years to the conservative National Action Party (Partido Acción Nacional — PAN).

AMLO, at the time leading the left-wing Party of the Democratic Revolution (Partido de la Revolución Democrática — PRD), became mayor of Mexico City and left office in 2005 with high approval, making him a popular figure throughout the country and the logical choice to lead the PRD’s ticket in the 2006 presidential race.

Prior to the loss of its grip on total control, PRI had built a durable system that maintained the masses’ favor through populism while making money off of widespread corruption. Mexico’s cartels worked through the PRI party structure to funnel bribes in exchange for government favors.

But upon PRI’s defeat in 2006, the era of a single-party controlling regulatory agencies, law enforcement, the courts, intelligence, and other functions, there were three major parties competing for power. In response, the cartels formed groups such as BLO to serve as intermediaries between the cartels and the government.

And, if the recent reports are true, AMLO’s campaign was more than willing to work with these groups to get millions in campaign cash.

It should come as no surprise, then, that López Obrador has called on Americans with Mexican ancestry to oppose immigration-hawk Republicans and has been sluggish to cooperate on stopping the migrant crisis, for the migrant flow, like the drug trade, is one of the cartels’ major businesses.



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