

Mexico Political Chatter

July 23, 2026

After the 16-year extension failed to materialize, the USMCA review entered a new phase of political pressure this week. U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer warned that it will be difficult to renew the agreement if Mexico does not cooperate on issues the Trump administration considers priorities, signaling that the negotiation will go beyond trade to incorporate security, migration, the fight against fentanyl trafficking, compliance with the 1944 water treaty, and China's role in regional supply chains.

Greer meets today with President Sheinbaum at the National Palace as part of the third bilateral round, with the expectation of reaching provisional agreements before the end of 2026, although issues such as rules of origin and labor and environmental commitments will require a longer process. As Enrique Quintana notes, security is not part of the trade table but does exert influence through a parallel lane; for Washington, both lanes converge in a single decision.

In parallel, the Mexican government stepped up its offensive on behalf of its nationals by filing 20 criminal complaints over the deaths of 17 Mexicans during operations or in ICE custody, and by taking the case before international human rights bodies. The decision marks a shift away from the traditional consular route and places migrant protection at the center of the bilateral relationship, precisely as both countries negotiate the treaty review.

And after the relative calm of the World Cup weeks, violence once again struck local authorities. The mayor of Temoac, Morelos, Valentín Lavín Romero, was murdered inside the municipal government building itself, months after surviving an attack in January. With this case, at least three mayors have been killed so far in 2026, in a pattern that exposes the level of government most vulnerable to organized crime's territorial disputes and with the fewest institutional protection capabilities. The crisis also reached the press: the murder of journalist Francisco Alejandro Leyva Aguilar in San Pablo Etlá, Oaxaca, brings to seven the number of journalists killed in the country during 2026.

The investigation against former Baja California Governor Ernesto Ruffo Appel escalated with the freezing of his bank accounts by the Financial Intelligence Unit, in a fuel smuggling case that, according to the FGR, allegedly brought more than 800 million liters of fuel into the country in just 15 months, causing an estimated 5.4 billion pesos in damage to the treasury. His daughter, Verónica Ruffo, went to the U.S. Embassy to request protection and called her father a "political prisoner" of the Sheinbaum government.

In New York, Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada was sentenced to life in prison and the forfeiture of 15 billion dollars, judicially closing the trajectory of one of the most influential drug traffickers in Mexican history — though not the security crisis his 2024 capture triggered in Sinaloa.

Finally, Ricardo Salinas Pliego suffered a judicial setback in the United Kingdom, where an appeals court determined that his legal team engaged in an "abuse of judicial process" by using information obtained through a covert operation by the intelligence firm Black Cube. As Salvador García Soto

analyzes, the businessman has consolidated himself as one of the 4T's main political adversaries, in a confrontation that moved from tax disagreements to a public and ideological dispute with projections toward the electoral arena.

USMCA: Washington hardens its tone

The USMCA review began to raise political pressure between Mexico and the United States after U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer warned that it will be difficult to renew the agreement if Mexico does not cooperate on issues the Donald Trump administration considers priorities. His statements, ahead of the meeting he will hold this Thursday with President Claudia Sheinbaum at the National Palace, signal that the negotiation will go beyond trade and incorporate matters such as security, migration, the fight against fentanyl trafficking, compliance with the water treaty, and China's role in North American supply chains.

For the Mexican government, the objective will be to preserve trade certainty and protect the competitiveness of national exports amid growing tensions with Washington. The meeting between Sheinbaum and Greer will mark the start of a negotiation that will define the future of Mexico's main trade agreement and that, from its earliest signals, is shaping up to be one of the most complex and strategic files of the bilateral relationship in the coming months.

According to Greer, in an appearance before the U.S. Senate Finance Committee, negotiations with Mexico and Canada continue with the expectation of reaching provisional agreements before the end of 2026: issues such as rules of origin and compliance with labor and environmental commitments will require a longer negotiation process.

 [La Jornada: Sheinbaum will meet with Jamieson Greer this Thursday at the National Palace](#)
 [Reforma: U.S. seeks to include border water in the USMCA](#)

Violence strikes mayors once again

The murder of Valentín Lavín Romero, mayor of Temoac, Morelos, inside the municipal government building itself, once again set off alarms over the vulnerability of local authorities in the face of organized crime. The mayor, from the PVEM, had already survived an attack in January and, after recovering, returned to office. His murder, carried out by armed men who entered the public building, comes amid investigations into alleged ties between members of his circle and criminal groups operating in eastern Morelos.

The case adds to a worrying trend of political violence in the country. According to press records, at least three mayors have been murdered so far in 2026, with Oaxaca as the most affected state. Most of the attacks have concentrated on municipal authorities, the level of government most exposed to

organized crime's territorial disputes and, at the same time, the one with the fewest institutional protection capabilities.

Beyond the local impact, the murder reopens the debate over the security strategy to protect municipal governments and shows that, even after surviving a first attack, protective measures remain insufficient to curb violence against those who lead city halls.

 [El Financiero: Valentín Lavín Moreno, mayor of Temoac, Morelos, murdered; they came for him at the municipal government building](#)

Mexico escalates its offensive against ICE

The government of Claudia Sheinbaum raised pressure on the United States by filing 20 criminal complaints over the deaths of 17 Mexicans during operations or in the custody of Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In addition to actions before state prosecutors and the U.S. Department of Justice, the Mexican administration took the case before international human rights bodies, in a shift that hardens its diplomatic strategy toward Washington.

The decision marks a change from the traditional consular route and reflects the government's intention to make the protection of its nationals a central issue in the bilateral relationship. The case also increases pressure on the Donald Trump administration, at a moment when both countries are negotiating the USMCA review and maintain open differences on security, migration, and human rights.

 [Proceso: Sheinbaum files 20 complaints over the deaths of 17 nationals at the hands of ICE in the U.S.](#)

Judicial setback for Salinas Pliego over alleged espionage

A United Kingdom appeals court determined that Ricardo Salinas Pliego's legal team engaged in an "abuse of judicial process" by using information obtained through a covert operation by the intelligence firm Black Cube in the litigation he maintains against businessman Vladimir Sklarov. According to the ruling, the firm — made up of former Israeli intelligence agents — created a false identity to approach and secretly record an opposing counsel, material that was subsequently presented as evidence before the courts. The court dismissed that evidence, ordered the payment of legal costs, and questioned the conduct of the Mexican businessman's team, in a ruling that represents a new setback in an international dispute that had already placed his legal strategies under scrutiny.

 [Reforma: Salinas Pliego accused of espionage](#)

Violence against the press claims another victim

The murder of journalist Francisco Alejandro Leyva Aguilar in San Pablo Etla, Oaxaca, once again exposed the security crisis facing the press in Mexico. Leyva, former director of the Oaxaca Radio and Television Corporation (CORTV) and author of the column "El Zumbido del Moscardón," was known for his analyses of state politics and had recently published criticism of Governor Salomón Jara's administration and the state's security situation. With this crime, seven journalists have now been killed in Mexico during 2026, according to press protection organizations, while questions persist over impunity in attacks against journalists and the inadequacy of protection mechanisms. The Oaxaca Prosecutor's Office opened an investigation with support from the FGR to determine whether the murder was related to his journalistic work.

 [El País: Journalist Francisco Alejandro Leyva shot dead in Oaxaca](#)

us U.S. sentences "El Mayo" to life in prison

The life sentence handed to Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada in a federal court in New York marks the judicial closure of one of the most influential drug traffickers in Mexican history. After pleading guilty in 2025 to charges of drug trafficking, organized crime, homicide, and money laundering, the Sinaloa Cartel co-founder avoided a trial but was sentenced to spend the rest of his life in prison and to forfeit 15 billion dollars. During the hearing, Judge Brian Cogan highlighted the magnitude of the violence and drug trafficking attributed to Zambada, while the kingpin offered an unusual message of remorse and called for an end to the violence. His fall represents the culmination of a decades-long pursuit by the United States, though not the end of the security crisis: his 2024 capture triggered the internal war between Los Chapitos and La Mayiza, a conflict that keeps Sinaloa immersed in a wave of violence and that continues to have repercussions on the security agenda and the bilateral relationship between Mexico and the United States.

 [NYT: El Mayo Zambada sentenced to life in prison](#)



Financial Intelligence Unit freezes Ernesto Ruffo's accounts

The investigation against former Baja California Governor Ernesto Ruffo Appel escalated after the Financial Intelligence Unit ordered the freezing of his bank accounts while the hearing continues to determine whether he will be bound over for trial on alleged charges of organized crime, hydrocarbon smuggling, and operations with illicit funds. The measure is part of the strategy to prevent the movement of funds allegedly linked to a fuel smuggling network that, according to the Attorney General's Office, illegally brought more than 800 million liters of fuel into the country in just 15 months, causing an estimated 5.4 billion pesos in damage to the treasury. Ruffo's defense maintains that this is political persecution, while authorities assert that there are indications of irregular financial operations and links between the companies under investigation. The case

represents one of the highest-profile proceedings against a former governor and a historic figure of the PAN, and anticipates a new political and judicial front in the fight against fuel smuggling.

For her part, Verónica Ruffo, the former governor's daughter, went to the U.S. Embassy in Mexico City to request support and protection, denouncing that she has been the victim of harassment for defending her father. The Somos México party, with which Ruffo Appel collaborates, stated that Verónica considers her father a "political prisoner" of Claudia Sheinbaum's government, whom she holds responsible for his health and safety.

 [El Universal: Financial Intelligence Unit froze Ernesto Ruffo's accounts, his daughter says; accuses FGR of obstructing the defense](#)

 [Animal Político: Ernesto Ruffo's daughter goes to U.S. Embassy to request protection](#)

Opinion express

- **The poll — Luis Carlos Ugalde**
Ugalde analyzes the role polls have played as a mechanism for defining candidacies within the Mexican left, particularly from the 2011 selection process between Andrés Manuel López Obrador and Marcelo Ebrard, and subsequently with Morena. The columnist notes that this method replaced traditional internal deliberation processes and became a key tool for resolving leadership disputes, though it also generated discontent among those left out. Drawing on these precedents, he argues that the use of polls to define candidacies will remain a central element of Mexican politics, but warns of the risks of depending on exercises whose methodology and legitimacy can be questioned by the participants themselves.

 [Reforma: The poll](#)

- **Salinas Pliego, the 4T's new villain — Salvador García Soto**
García Soto argues that Ricardo Salinas Pliego has become one of the main political adversaries of the Fourth Transformation government, in a confrontation that moved from tax disagreements to a public and ideological dispute. The columnist notes that the businessman has sharpened his criticism of Morena and its leaders, while the ruling party has cast him as a symbol of the large business figures resisting the new rules of power. The confrontation, he argues, has a political dimension oriented toward the future electoral scenario, as Salinas Pliego seeks to maintain a public presence as a critic of the government, while the federal administration uses the conflict to reinforce its narrative against the privileges of economic groups.

 [El Universal: Salinas Pliego, the 4T's new villain](#)

- **Does security enter the USMCA negotiation? — Enrique Quintana, *El Financiero***
Enrique Quintana argues that, although security is not part of the trade table, it does exert influence through a parallel lane: the political assessment the White House makes of Mexico

as a comprehensive partner. Two opposing narratives coexist in Washington — that of Homeland Security Secretary Markwayne Mullin, who acknowledges Sheinbaum's government as "much more cooperative" than the previous one, and that of the DEA director, who alleges collusion between drug traffickers and senior Mexican officials. Neither is decisive, the columnist warns, because the final decision passes across Trump's desk with a subjective and shifting yardstick, as illustrated by the case of Canada, on which he imposed new tariffs this week in the middle of the review. His conclusion: cooperation does not buy immunity, though a lack of cooperation does guarantee punishment, so the task of Mexican negotiators is to arrive with a clean technical file and keep the lanes separate, knowing that in the end they converge in a single decision.

 [El Financiero: Does security enter the USMCA negotiation?](#)

- **Route 2027: Morena seizes the governors' succession — Alfredo González**
González analyzes Morena's advance toward the 2027 elections, where 17 governorships will be at stake, and argues that the ruling party seeks to consolidate its territorial dominance through the early definition of profiles and alliances. The piece notes that the political force arrives at this process with an advantage given the number of states it currently governs, but faces the challenge of managing internal disputes among hopefuls and local groups seeking to control the candidacies. The electoral race is beginning to intensify with the emergence of names, polls, and political maneuvering, in a process where Morena will attempt to expand its state presence and maintain control of the national political map.

 [El Herald de México: Route 2027: Morena seizes the governors' succession](#)

 Agenda in brief

July 23 | President Claudia Sheinbaum confirmed that this Thursday she will receive U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer at the National Palace as part of the third bilateral round of talks to review the Agreement between Mexico, the United States, and Canada (USMCA). The meeting comes amid Washington's pressure to strengthen cooperation on trade, security, and supply chain issues, while Mexico seeks to guarantee the agreement's continuity and maintain certainty for investment.

July 25 | It will be two years since the operation that brought Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada and Joaquín Guzmán López, son of Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, to U.S. territory — an event that altered the internal balance of the Sinaloa Cartel and triggered a dispute between criminal factions.