

Gulf Cartel



OVERVIEW

AS OF APRIL 2026

The Gulf Cartel, one of Mexico's oldest cartels and smuggles cocaine, heroin, fentanyl, and marijuana into the United States. The group was founded in 1984 and peaked in the early 2000s before it fractured after its then-leader was arrested in 2003.

Since the early 2000s, the Gulf Cartel has been plagued by internal conflict, law enforcement pressure, and conflict with rival cartels. As of 2025, the Gulf Cartel has three rival factions: Los Escorpiones, whose leader was captured by Mexican authorities in January 2024; Los Metros; and Los Ciclonos. Los Escorpiones is the Gulf Cartel's armed wing and battles with the Northeast Cartel and Los Ciclonos and Los Metros for territorial control of Reynosa and Tamaulipas. Los Metros has allied with the New Generation Jalisco Cartel (CJNG) to protect itself from the Sinaloa Cartel, Northeast Cartel, and Los Escorpiones and Los Metros. Los Ciclonos fights Los Metros and the Northeast Cartel.

Operating Area

Primarily in Coahuila, Nuevo Leon, and Tamaulipas, Mexico; more limited presence in Jalisco and Tabasco, Mexico; operates in at least 16 US states

Members

Unknown

Tactics And Targets

The Gulf Cartel uses various tactics—including hidden compartments in vehicles, tunnels, and bribery of officials—to smuggle arms, drugs, fuel, and money into the United States. The cartel is involved in migrant smuggling and trafficking, extortion, money laundering, and violence, including assassinating civilians and Mexican Government officials.

Terrorist Group Designation

The US State Department designated the Gulf Cartel as a foreign terrorist organization and a Specially Designated Foreign Terrorist entity in February 2025.



Gulf Cartel *(continued)*

KEY LEADERS

**Cesar Morfin-Morfin***a.k.a. Primito*

Los Metros leader

Sanctioned by the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) for being involved in drug trafficking and fuel theft for CJNG

**Remigio Morfin-Mor***a.k.a. Remi*

Brother and second- or third-in-command to Primito

Sanctioned by OFAC for being involved in drug trafficking and fuel theft

**Alvaro Noe Morfin-Morfin***a.k.a. R8*

Los Metros senior lieutenant

Sanctioned by OFAC for being involved in drug trafficking and fuel theft

**Jose Cardenas Martinez***a.k.a. Contador*

Los Ciclonos leader

**Jose Alberto Garcia Vilano** [DETAINED]*a.k.a. La Kena*

Former leader of Los Escorpiones and Los Ciclonos

NOTABLE ATTACKS

August 2025**Tamaulipas, Mexico**

Los Metros faction assassinates a Mexican Attorney General Office delegate.

March 2023**Matamoros, Mexico**

Los Escorpiones faction kidnaps four US persons, killing two. Afterward, the Gulf Cartel hands over to Mexican authorities five alleged members who the cartel claims were involved in the kidnapping.

