MIRANDA INTELLIGENCE

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Mexico Records Historic Reduction in Poverty—But Education and Health Lag Behind

According to the most recent INEGI report, multidimensional poverty decreased from 41.9% of the population in 2018 to 29.6% in 2024—a reduction of over 13 million people. Extreme poverty declined to 5.3% of the population, reaching its lowest point in four decades. The administration attributed these results to sustained wage increases, universal social programs, and expanded access to housing and basic services. “It shows that our development model works,” President Sheinbaum said, positioning the outcome as a validation of the policy approach inherited from the previous administration.

However, the data also expose persistent structural vulnerabilities. While income-based poverty indicators improved, social deprivations increased. Currently, 32.2% of the population lacks access to one or more key rights. Most notably, 34% of Mexicans remain outside the healthcare system, a figure that has remained stagnant despite the transition from INSABI to IMSS-Bienestar. The educational lag continues to affect 18.8% of the population—especially in rural and indigenous communities.

Even long-term critics of 4T such as Denise Dresser, Jesus Silva Herzog and others welcomed and embraced the reduction in poverty, even if they also argued that the improvements are not sustainable unless accompanied by systemic reforms to boost productivity, such as in education, health, formalization of employment, rule of law, and to raise the government tax take. Gerardo Esquivel, an economist close to the 4T, noted that professional classes underestimated the success of poverty reduction under AMLO due to persistent prejudices against the poor and misinformation. However, he also acknowledged that rights-based deficits—especially in health and education—pose long-term risks to the durability of recent gains.

The Sheinbaum administration has pledged to strengthen the social infrastructure behind these results. In the short term, the data offer a favorable narrative. In the medium term, the challenge lies in transforming meaningful relief into structural and sustainable inclusion. But there is no denying the important progress that has been made.

Cleaning House, Exporting Trials: Mexico’s Fast-Track to Alignment

Between August 12 and 13, Mexican authorities expelled 26 alleged members of organized crime groups to the United States—one of the most significant one-day transfers in recent years. According to official statements, the individuals were linked to the Sinaloa and Jalisco Nueva Generación cartels and were considered high-risk due to their ongoing influence. Security Minister Omar García Harfuch stated that these individuals continued to exercise operational control over extortion, logistics, and targeted violence from behind bars, calling their presence an “unacceptable risk.”

The transfers were conducted with standard diplomatic assurances regarding the death penalty, a consistent condition in Mexico-U.S. extradition agreements. However, the timing and scale of the

operation suggest broader strategic intent. The move came days after renewed U.S. tariff threats and increased pressure on Mexico to contain synthetic drug flows, particularly fentanyl.

While the official rationale centers on public safety and judicial cooperation, the broader context suggests a calculated message of alignment with Washington. President Claudia Sheinbaum's administration has sought to insulate security cooperation from trade dynamics; however, recent developments illustrate how the two tracks are increasingly converging.

Domestically, the action signals a shift in resolve against organized crime, though it also draws criticism from probably a small minority of the population that complain that high-profile cases are increasingly adjudicated abroad. Operationally, the removals may help disrupt prison-based command structures and reduce risks associated with internal transfers. Still, the underlying challenges—synthetic drug economies, fuel theft, local protection networks, and institutional fragility—remain, even if real progress is being made.

The durability of this approach will shape perceptions of Sheinbaum's security doctrine. A sustained rhythm of extraditions would indicate binational continuity and tactical pragmatism; an absence of follow-up could reinforce views that the initiative was reactive and politically timed. For now, the administration has underscored a core tenet: as long as criminal leadership persists behind bars, international transfer remains a viable enforcement mechanism.

That posture extends beyond the extradition tarmac. On August 18, the DEA unveiled Project Portero, a bilateral initiative targeting "gatekeepers"—the logistical coordinators who manage smuggling corridors for fentanyl, methamphetamine, weapons, and cash along the Southwest border.

The program embeds Mexican investigators inside a U.S. intelligence hub for joint targeting and operational planning. Strategically, it reflects a shift from top-tier kingpin takedowns to mid-level disruption—where continuity, not notoriety, sustains the criminal economy.

For Washington, Portero offers a performance metric at a politically sensitive moment. With tariff relief tied to measurable enforcement, arrests and route disruptions can be framed as progress. For Sheinbaum, it allows visible cooperation without explicit subordination—narratively useful amid sovereignty debates.

Yet familiar frictions remain. Legal asymmetries, bureaucratic inertia, and intelligence management challenges have hindered the effectiveness of past binational task forces. Sustaining momentum depends less on institutional branding than on operational friction: if corridor chokepoints emerge and costs rise for traffickers, expansion becomes justifiable. If not, Portero risks becoming another acronym with limited shelf life.

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Environmental Diplomacy Gains Ground in the Maya Forest

In Calakmul, President Sheinbaum joined Guatemala's Bernardo Arévalo and Belize's Johnny Briceño to sign the Calakmul Declaration—a multinational conservation accord covering 5.7 million acres across the Maya Forest. The agreement positions the region as the second-largest tropical reserve in the hemisphere, after the Amazon. Beyond its scope, the initiative signals Mexico's intent to expand its foreign policy profile into climate and biodiversity diplomacy, alongside its traditional roles in migration and trade.

The declaration encompasses operational elements, including the coordination of biological corridors, joint monitoring efforts, enforcement mechanisms, and the integration of social programs, such as Sembrando Vida, to link conservation efforts with economic incentives. It also acknowledges a dual reality—these ecosystems, while rich in biodiversity, function as illicit transit corridors for timber, wildlife, narcotics, and migration—the policy, therefore, bridges environmental protection with regional security interests.

For Sheinbaum, the moment offers a reputational counterweight. Her administration has faced sustained scrutiny over environmental oversight of megaprojects, notably her predecessor's Tren Maya. The Calakmul platform enables a regional leadership posture centered on ecosystem preservation, institutional cooperation, and sustainable development.

For Arévalo and Briceño, the agreement may channel attention—and eventually funding—toward under-resourced conservation and enforcement agencies facing pressure from illegal extractive economies.

The challenge, as with most public policies, lies in implementation: translating cross-border consensus into sustained patrols, budgetary commitments, and enforcement credibility remains the benchmark. Infrastructure expansion near protected zones could dilute the pact's impact if not carefully managed.

Still, amid heightened geopolitical tension elsewhere, the declaration delivers diplomatic capital and positions Mexico as a regional convener on environmental governance. May it last.

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