

## Smuggling Of Cubans Surges In Mexico

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MEXICO CITY, Aug. 3 -- The bodies of three people suspected of smuggling Cubans to the United States through [Mexico](#) were found gagged and blindfolded Friday in a natural sinkhole near [Cancun](#).

The killings were the latest in a series of incidents related to the smuggling of Cubans into Mexico, where authorities have observed a marked increase in such attempts in recent months. At least four people linked to smuggling allegations have been killed this week in Cancun, which is 150 miles from [Cuba](#) and a popular landing spot for boats sneaking Cubans into the country.

Police were led to the three most recent victims -- Jesús Aguilar, Edwin Park and a woman whose name was not given, all of whom were Mexican -- by red arrows painted on a highway leading to the sinkhole, known as a "cenote." Three days earlier, police had found the bullet-riddled body of Luis Lázaro Lara Morejon, a Cuban American suspected of smuggling, on a roadside near Cancun. The woman found Friday was Lázaro Lara's girlfriend.

"We believe these people were executed by those who are part of a Cuban American mafia," Bello Melchor Rodríguez, attorney general of [Quintana Roo](#) state, told the [Associated Press](#). "They probably hired people to execute them. We don't know if the Cuban Americans themselves killed them."

The surge in Cubans being smuggled through the [Yucatan Peninsula](#) has piqued the Cuban government, which is quietly pressing Mexico to do more to stop the smugglers.

Eight people, including six Cuban Americans, were arrested this month and accused of smuggling Cubans through Cancun. And on Thursday, Mexico's navy intercepted 37 Cubans in a boat foundering with engine troubles off the coast of Cancun. The interception was one of the largest recorded in the area, but analysts do not believe it is an indication that Mexico will become more aggressive in combating smuggling groups.

"This is not a priority for our country's government," Victor Clark, an immigration expert based in [Tijuana](#), said in an interview. "Moreover, Mexicans have historical sympathies for Cubans. Cubans can probably find more support and solidarity here than Guatemalan and Salvadoran migrants."

Mexico played a key role in Cuba's revolution. [Fidel Castro](#) plotted the revolution while living here in exile, and a Mexican arms dealer provided the yacht that Castro and his followers used for their first assault on the island.

Cuban authorities say they believe that smugglers have shifted to Mexico because of increased enforcement in the Florida Straits by the [U.S. Coast Guard](#). By contrast, the

Mexican coast is lightly patrolled. The U.S. government's slow pace in granting visas to Cubans could also be propelling smuggling.

Under a 1994 agreement between the U.S. and Cuban governments, Cuba allows 20,000 people to leave the island during the fiscal year that ends Sept. 30 after they are granted visas by the U.S. government. But this year Cuba has complained that it appears the United States will fall well short of granting that many.