

El Chapo successor pleads guilty; could spell trouble for drug lord

[Chuck Goudie](#)

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After billionaire drug lord "El Chapo" Guzman was snapped up by a Mexican military squadron in 2014 and later sent to the United States, Damaso Lopez Nunez-aka "the graduate"-stepped up to fill the power void.

His ascension to the Sinaloa cartel throne didn't last long.

In May of 2017 Nunez, 52, was himself captured and sent to the U.S. last July to face trafficking charges.

On Friday, El Chapo's successor cut a deal with federal prosecutors in Alexandria, Virginia and pleaded guilty to cocaine trafficking charges. U.S. drug agents have long held that the powerful and ruthless Sinaloa cartel was responsible for supplying up to 80 percent of the illicit drugs to Chicago dealers.

Nunez, who admitted being a cartel executive and involved in the Sinaloa drug branch for 15 years, faces at least a decade in the federal penitentiary. He is scheduled to be sentenced in late November although that date could be pushed considering it is the same month that Nunez' ex-boss El Chapo is scheduled to go on trial in New York City.

Nunez' guilty plea could have disastrous implications if El Chapo were "The Graduate" to spill the beans for federal authorities-or worse yet for the drug lord-agree to testify at his trial. Jury selection in the El Chapo trial is set for November 5.

US authorities say Nunez engineered both of El Chapo's daring escapes from Mexican prisons, was deeply involved in the Sinaloa Cartel's drug trafficking activities and know the organizations oldest and deepest secrets.

In January 2013, the Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control said he was responsible for multi-ton shipments of narcotics from Mexico to the United States. Federal agents estimate his personal slice of the Sinaloa pie while in charge was at least \$280 million.

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