

ABOUT JUÁREZ

VIOLENCE IN JUÁREZ⁴

Since 2008, Juárez has been the most violent city on Earth. There have been over 11,000 killings in the past six years, 95 percent of which—according to the government’s own estimation—have never been investigated. The city’s death toll in 2010 skyrocketed to nearly ten killings a day. To put this in perspective, the estimated murder rate was 80 times greater than that of New York City in 2010.

Year	City	Murder Rate
2010	New York City	3.8 per 100,000
2010	Juárez	300 per 100,000

Killings in Juárez have become spectacles—“decorations” or “performances” as Alice Leora Briggs puts it. One Juárez street gang has even taken on the ominous moniker: *Artistas Asesinos* (“The Murder Artists”). Thus the scene of each gruesome execution, each severed head, each corpse strapped with a pig’s mask is imbued with the message of the artist: “You are not safe.”

The people of Juárez have taken note. One quarter of the population has fled the city in a mass exodus, leaving behind thousands of abandoned homes and businesses which are subject to looting, arson, and vandalism. Property values have declined precipitously. “Juárez is exhausted by gore, poverty, terror and business flight,” says Charles Bowden, author of numerous books on the city. Neat little neighborhoods have transformed into empty streets and rows of housing have been stripped to the bones. This was not the expected outcome for Juárez, the poster-child for free trade in the 1990s, the so-called “Model of the Future.”

But Juárez is not dying. The local economy has gravitated to crime. Mexican cartels dominate the wholesale distribution of marijuana, methamphetamines, ecstasy pills, and cocaine. The smuggling relationship with the United States is

⁴ The statistics in this document are borrowed from Molly Molloy, Research Librarian, New Mexico State University. Molloy is nationally-recognized for her work in documenting and discussing the violence along the U.S.-Mexico border. To learn more about her work, including the figures cited here, visit her publication website: <http://fronteralist.org/>.

symbiotic: Drugs and people move north while guns and money move south. Walls have sprouted up along the border and billions of U.S. dollars have poured into Mexico's war on drugs with little effect.

Drugs are still cheap in El Paso, indicating that supply has not diminished.

Scholars like Bowden, Julian Cardona, and Molly Molloy have noted that there is more to the daily massacre than gang-on-gang violence. Death reaches all social classes. Soldiers, police, and paramilitaries have doubled as hitmen, implicated in numerous killings. Journalists have been targeted as they investigate corruption among the political elite. One police chief has even publicly announced that those who look too closely are "digging their own graves."

This is the situation that has inspired Briggs to spend the past five years "cutting, scratching, and gouging out" her disquieting similes in the sgraffito form.