

Geography In The News™



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CHAOS IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

Extreme drug violence is occurring in the border towns of northern Mexico. Feuds between drug-trafficking groups and the federal government's military crackdown against organized crime have left more than 5,300 dead in 2008. No town, however, has been hit harder than Ciudad Juárez, where 1,300 people died last year, mostly in drug-related gang violence.

Ciudad Juárez, also known as Juárez, is a Mexican border city of approximately 1.5 million people.

Located just south of El Paso, Texas, Juárez is located along the Río Grande River on the northern edge of the state of Chihuahua. An international bridge over the river connects the two cities.

Founded in the late 17th century as Paseo del Norte, Juárez was renamed in honor of the 19th-century reformist president Benito Pablo Juárez. During the French intervention in Mexico (1862-1867), President Juárez used the city as his headquarters. The city is scattered with historic buildings and monuments that recall the intense fighting there between 1910 and 1920 during the Mexican Revolution.

Juárez was a glamorous place during the United States' Prohibition Era of the 1920s and early 1930s. American film stars and singers found the city's lack of rules especially alluring.

Juárez now is a major port of entry for central northern Mexico. Since the 1994

North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), Juárez has become a commercial and industrial center, producing goods for the U.S. market. More than 300 *maquiladoras* (assembly plants) are located in and around the city. Until the violence escalated this year, Juárez also had a thriving tourist trade.

Unfortunately, even with economic growth, social infrastructure projects in Juárez, such as city parks and public transport, have languished. The availability of factory jobs associated with NAFTA caused a population explosion and the city is now full of shantytown housing areas and garbage dumps.

Violence in Juárez is not new. The city is infamous for the unsolved murders of hundreds of young women since 1993. Many people alleged that the police, government officials and local elites were involved in the killings or their "cover-ups." As a result, Juárez is now a center of protest against sexual violence throughout Mexico.

The recent violence in Juárez, however, is astonishing. Between January and October 2008, 1,100 people were murdered

Joaquin "Shorty" Guzman, sent members of his cartel to drive the Juárez Cartel out of Juárez. Unfortunately, the Gulf Cartel based around the Gulf of Mexico coast has joined Guzman in the fight.

At its height in the 1990s, the Juárez Cartel was likely responsible for about 50 percent of the illegal drugs that passed through Mexico en route to the United States. In the past decade, the Juárez Cartel rose to become one of the hemisphere's—if not the world's—most influential crime organizations. In the late 1990s, under its boss Amado Carrillo Fuentes, the Cartel's income reached as much as \$200 million a week. Fuentes mysteriously died in 1997 after receiving plastic surgery to alter his appearance, apparently leaving a power vacuum in the Juárez Cartel's management structure. This vacuum may be largely responsible for the incursions by rival cartels.

Mexico's government recently deployed 3,000 army troops to Juárez. Their presence, however, has done little to rein in the violence. Many police officers in the city have quit their jobs after their names were listed publicly as targets for hit men. More than 40

Juárez police officers were killed in 2008.

Juárez city streets are almost empty these days. U.S. tourists are largely gone and few citizens venture out to bars and restaurants after dark. In July alone, around 1,700 people had their cars stolen in the city. Many citizens with family ties in the United States are applying for visas to cross the border to live in El Paso where there were only 12 homicides last year.

The violence along Mexico's border has ties to the U.S. market for illicit drugs. As long as the demand for drugs continues north of the border, drug suppliers south of the border will prosper.

And that is *Geography in the News*™. January 16, 2009. #972.

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Troubles at the Border



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and <http://www.ihf.com/articles/2008/04/15/america/smuggle.php>

in the city—an average of four a day. Two rival drug groups, the Juárez Cartel, based in Juárez for many years, and the Pacific-coast Sinaloa Cartel, are fighting for control of the city's drug trade and smuggling routes to the United States. Sinaloa's head honcho and Mexico's most wanted man,