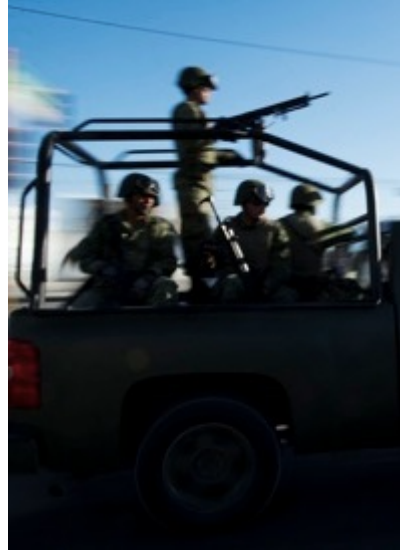




Written by [Kelly Holt](#) on December 31, 2010

## Residents Abandon Juarez by Thousands as Violence Escalates

Officials in this city of nearly 1.5 million are unsure exactly how many have left, because it is difficult to gauge the population. Juarez has always attracted thousands of high-turnover factory workers, many of whom work on one side of the border and live on the other. Additionally, the city is also used as a way-station for those crossing illegally into El Paso, Texas.



Yet one thing city officials are sure of is the reason for the fright flight: Juarez is crucial turf in the vicious drug wars. Incredibly, the city has witnessed more than 3,000 murders this year, as the number of bombings, massacres, kidnappings and beheadings mounts.

CBS reports:

Long controlled by the Juarez [drug] Cartel, the city descended into a horrifying cycle of violence after Mexico's most-wanted kingpin, Joaquin "El Chapo" Guzman, and his Sinaloa Cartel tried to shoot their way to power here beginning in 2008. President Felipe Calderon sent nearly 10,000 troops to restore order. Now, the Mexican army and federal authorities are going door-to-door, conducting an emergency census to determine just how many residents have fled.

A cultural term has even emerged for some of the evacuees: "juarochos" (those leaving Juarez). Many who previously immigrated to Juarez from central Mexico are now returning to their regions of origin.

More alarming for the U.S., though, are the thousands streaming across the border into El Paso, a city of 740,000. As a result, housing vacancies there are down, requests for utility hook-ups are increasing, and problems associated with the increasing number of illegals are rising.

Daniel Murguia, president of the Juarez Chamber of Commerce, reported that at least 6,000 city businesses have closed this year, not counting closings in 2008-2009, or those businesses targeted by arsonists. Some of those businesses, especially restaurants, have relocated to El Paso.

One of the businessmen is a 50-year-old factory owner who moved to El Paso last year, and asked to remain nameless for fear of reprisals. After being kidnapped [in Juarez] last year, he managed to escape, and declares he'll never move back to the city. He stresses,

There's a lot of people afraid. I don't blame them. Even if they haven't had a bad experience, they don't want to be the next to have one, so they run away.

It's a city that's dying. It's out of control.

As a result, Daniel Murguia observed of Juarez,



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Here it's a problem of opportunity, not just violence. There are no jobs, and that means there are more people who are becoming hit men and criminals.

Indeed, commerce in the city is declining. Restaurant owner Marta Ramirez told CBS that since 2007, sales have dropped 50 percent because fearful Americans stopped crossing into Mexico. Residents remaining in Juarez must now cross into El Paso more frequently for services no longer available in their city. And staying means paying off extortionists — a food wholesaler who asked not to be named, said, "Everyone is paying. Those who aren't paying are out of business, even dead."

In the last two years, his own customer base has dwindled from 500 to 200 — two of the customers gunned down in their own stores, a third in his home.

His son-in-law was kidnapped early last year, and only released when the family exchanged \$230,000 on a debit card for his safe return. In addition, his store had been burglarized. But once he began paying for "protection," all crime around him ceased and his customers are no longer harassed by police.

He receives a weekly call in which a distorted voice provides an account number in a bank branch where he is to deposit cash.

In a bizarre twist, the capitalistic law of supply and demand has kicked in. In September 2009, when the wholesaler was visited by members of "La Linea," (Juarez Cartel enforcers — hit men, corrupt police and soldiers), they required him to pay 4,000 pesos — about \$330 — a week for protection. But business dropped off so much that his extortionists recently reduced his weekly payment to about \$205 a week, warning him never to miss a week.

As bad as Juarez is, it isn't the only border town suffering a loss of residents. On November 20 FoxNews reported that [Ciudad Mier](#), hundreds of miles to the east of Juarez, was the site of a horrific bloodbath when two drug rivals fought it out in the streets. Hundreds of residents packed up and left. Pentecostal minister Santos Moreno Perez, a refugee in neighboring Miguel Aleman, observed, "It's like we're in the Wild West. We have no mayor, no police, no transit system. We have been left to fend for ourselves."

Fox News continued that in the State of Tamaulipas, home of Ciudad Mier, government is nearly a moot point. Gunmen run their own checkpoints, and

The cartels have forced Mexico's national oil company to abandon several gas fields. Many farmers have given up on tons of soybeans and sorghum in fields controlled by criminals. Leading families, fleeing extortion and threats of kidnapping, have escaped to Texas — as have the mayors of the state's three largest cities.

Few arguments are better than these for tightened U.S. border security; however, there seems no end in sight as long as such security remains lax and drugs and violence continue to flow unimpeded across the border into the United States.

*Photo of soldiers leaving a crime scene in Juarez, Mexico: AP Images*



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