

Taller sobre Seguridad Ciudadana en México
Organizado por el Woodrow Wilson Center,
CAF y el Instituto Tecnológico de Monterrey

Monterrey, Nuevo León

Octubre 28, 2014

CITIZEN SECURITY AND THE SOCIAL FABRIC IN CIUDAD JUÁREZ

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Violence erupted in Ciudad Juárez in January 2008, which would earn it the reputation as the most dangerous city in the Americas. In 2007, there had been 301 registered homicides¹ (at the time, the figure was record setting). However, in 2008 there was a five-fold increase over the prior year (1604 homicides²) and the murder rate continued to metastasize exponentially, reaching a peak of 3,622 in 2010. The city experienced four consecutive years (2008-2011, see table 1) of explosive violence averaging more than 2,500 murders per year (6.9 per day), for a total in excess of 10,000 victims during that interval. In 2007, the number of murders in Juárez, the largest city in the state of Chihuahua, represented 33.4% of the murders committed in the state. By 2010, the murders in Juárez represented 82.9% of the murders in the entire state³.

By any index, these numbers reflect a social tragedy of enormous proportions. No other Mexican city comes close to the sustained character of brutal violence that was experienced by the residents of Juárez between 2008 and 2011 (see table 1). I have described Juárez as a traumatized city (Ainslie, 2013) precisely because the violence was so pervasive, taking place in every neighborhood and at all hours. It is unlikely that any resident was insulated from it.

Table 1: Murders in Ciudad Juárez 2007 – July 2014*

Source: *El Diario de Juárez*

2007	301
2008	1,623
2009	2,754
2010	3,622
2011	2,086
2012	786
2013	535
2014	200 (Jan-July)
Total	1/07-7/14 - 11,907

Of course, murder rates are but one index of the lack of citizen security. Other crimes, including kidnapping, extortion, assaults, rapes, and robberies represent additional ways in which citizens are affected by crime. Beginning in 2009, there was an explosion of these crimes in Ciudad Juárez as well⁴.

¹ *El Diario* (Ciudad Juárez), January 1, 2008.

² *El Diario* (Ciudad Juárez), December 31, 2011.

³ Figures derived from Secretariado Ejecutivo Del Sistema Nacional de Seguridad Pública.

⁴ Mayor José Reyes Ferriz, personal communication

Law Enforcement and Citizen Security

Providing security to citizens and their communities is one of the primary responsibilities of the state. For law enforcement agencies this is their *raison d'être* (reason for existence). Although Mexican police forces have a longstanding reputation for corruption and collusion with organized crime, the emergence of powerful transnational criminal organizations has altered the historic relationship between law enforcement and organized crime. In Juárez, law enforcement had entirely abrogated its responsibilities to the citizens of the community. With approximately 1500 members, the Municipal Police force was woefully inadequate for a city of 1.3 million residents. That size of the force had not increased since the 1980s notwithstanding that the city had doubled in size since that time, showing that there was little investment in law enforcement. In addition, since the 1990s a subset of the Municipal Police comprised the core of La Linea, the widely feared enforcement arm of the Juárez Cartel. La Linea was responsible for many of the organized crime-related acts of violence in the city, especially “*levantones*” and assassinations. According to municipal and federal authorities (Facundo Rosas, Federal Police, personal communication), up until 2009 the Municipal Police officers that manned the Mexican equivalent of the 911 emergency response number reported relevant information coming from citizen calls to the Juárez Cartel. When the Sinaloa Cartel launched its offensive in Juárez, among its first targets were police officers assumed to be part of La Linea. In the spring of 2008, 71 police officers were executed, 67 in 2009, and 149 in 2010. Some of the executed police were Chihuahua State Police officers, but the majority were members of the Municipal Police.

Efforts to clean up the Juárez Municipal Police began in the spring of 2008 as a precondition for federal assistance⁵. In October 2008, 400 Municipal Police failed the Confidence Tests administered by the Federal Police and all were fired. Adding police executions and resignations, the city lost one-third of its police force between January and October 2008. The remaining 1000 Municipal Police represented at best a skeleton crew. Only a handful of State Police and Federal Police were in Juárez, and the military had no role within the city. For all intents and purposes, the residents of Juárez, a far-flung, sprawling city, were absolutely defenseless in the face of ordinary criminal activity, much less an eruption of widespread violence.

Federal Security Involvement

The federal involvement in Juárez took place in four phases. In the spring of 2008, the Mexican federal government sent 2000 army troops and a handful of Federal Police to the city. In the face of continuing violence and evidence of Municipal Police collusion with organized crime, in March of 2009 the Municipal Police was entirely disbanded and an additional 8,000 army and 2,000 Federal Police were sent into Juárez, assuming all policing functions within the city. In May 2010, with allegations of human rights violations mounting against the military, the Federal Police took over law enforcement activities from the military. A new Juárez Municipal Police force was deployed after arduous, semi-mil-

⁵ Personal communication, mayor José Reyes Ferriz

itary training. Many of the new police officers were recruited from elsewhere in Mexico and many were former military. In the spring of 2011, the primary responsibility for law enforcement in the city reverted back to the Municipal Police, now under the leadership of the controversial former Tijuana Chief of Police, Julián Leyazola. By the end of 2011 murders in the city had dropped by almost 1500 to 2,086. By the end of 2012 the number had dropped to a 5-year low of 782. In 2013, with 535 murders, Juárez was near pre-drug war levels.

Violence and the Social Fabric

Prior to the eruption of violence in Juárez, in 2007, Clara Jusidman and Hugo Almada published a monograph entitled *La Realidad Social en Ciudad Juárez: Análisis Social*⁶, thoroughly documenting the frayed state of the city's social fabric (their research was conducted in 2004). The portrait of the social conditions in Juárez provided by Jusidman and Almada portrays a city that had long neglected infrastructure, education, and basic social programs. Their description of a neighborhood culture in which street gangs, as well as high levels of drug addictions, were prevalent is especially important for understanding the ensuing violence in the city. In January 2008, the Supervisor of Field Operations for the Municipal Police told the *El Diario* newspaper that there were an estimated eight hundred gangs operating in the city, with an active membership of approximately fourteen thousand adolescents between the ages of thirteen and seventeen⁷. These gangs became the spearhead for the ensuing violence. While media accounts of the Juárez violence emphasized the conflict between the Juárez Cartel and the Sinaloa Cartel for control of the city, in fact, much of the violence had less to do with controlling the flow of drugs across the border into the United States and more to do with efforts to control domestic retail drug markets which were run by local street gangs under the auspices of the warring cartels. This fact situates the explosion of violence within the framework of the fraying social fabric given the high incidence of school dropouts, absence of after school programs, and high incidence of addictions in the city. Teresa Aldama, the director of the Centro de Asesoría y Promoción Juvenil in Juárez observed that the state of Chihuahua had the highest incidence of school desertion in the country for children between 12 and 14 years of age.⁸ Similarly, in 2008, *El Diario* (Ciudad Juárez) noted that more than fifty-percent of the city's 15-17 year-olds were not in high school.⁹

Todos Somos Juárez Social Fabric Intervention

In February 2010, following the Villas de Salvárcar massacre of 15 people (most of them high school and university students), the Mexican federal government fast-tracked a social intervention project called “Todos Somos Juarez: Reconstruyamos la Ciudad” (We are all

⁶ Jusidman, Clara y Almada Mireles, Hugo (2007). *La Realidad Social de Ciudad Juárez: Análisis Social* (Tomo 1). Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez, Ciudad Juárez, Mexico.

⁷ Cited in R. Ainslie, *The Fight to Save Juárez: Life in the Heart of Mexico's Drug War*. University of Texas Press, 2013.

⁸ Quoted in Norte de Ciudad Juárez, July 20, 2007, Page 4, Section B.

⁹ Cited testimony before Federal deputies and senators. *El Diario*, April 9, 2008, Page 1 Section A.

Juárez: Let us Rebuild the City). TSJ had been in the planning stages for nearly a year and was part of Pillar Four of the Merida Initiative, underwritten by the Inter-American Development Bank, USAID, and the Mexican Government. The Pillar Four aims were building strong and resilient communities by focusing on job creation programs, engaging youth in their communities, expanding social safety nets, and building community confidence in public institutions, among other aims. TSJ was unprecedented, ambitious, and called for a 270 million dollar investment in Cd. Juárez in six targeted areas: security, economy, employment, health, education-culture-sports, and social development. In interviews with some of the architects of the TSJ program¹⁰, they commonly referenced efforts by the Colombian government to address the violence in Medellín as a model for what might be done in Mexican cities experiencing high levels of violence. The heads of key ministries assigned high level, trusted staffers to the effort, giving them authority to make decisions. Over the course of the spring, the same core team of approximately 25 individuals spent every week in Juárez meeting with their counterparts in the state and municipal governments as well as representatives of the city's key sectors in working groups aimed at identifying and prioritizing problems within each of the six identified areas. These working groups developed actionable items that were posted on the federal government's Todos Somos Juárez website¹¹ along with corresponding budget allocations for each. In all, between the six working groups, 160 actions, or "compromisos," were targeted with 100-day goals¹².

One of the most important targets of TSJ was the education system in the city where, as Jusidman and Aldama had noted, there was an insufficient number of schools and high rates of "school desertion" (school dropouts). TSJ targeted educational issues and their relationship to crime in a variety of ways. For example, 5 new high schools and one university were built in areas where schools were insufficient or non-existent, while an additional 205 schools received significant infrastructure improvements. In the city's poorest neighborhoods, where "latch key" conditions were commonplace, 71 schools implemented a program that extended the school day. Many of these schools also were able to offer summer programs for the first time through USAID-funded International Youth Foundation. Over 1000 schools were included in "Escuela Segura" which included violence prevention and addiction prevention programs for students and training for teachers. "Culture of Legality" programs were instituted in many of the Juárez schools. 14,552 new scholarships were funded for high school and college students.

TSJ included a program that resulted in the creation or refurbishing of 19 public spaces in poor urban neighborhoods with sports facilities, parks, and community centers. The implementation of *Seguro Popular* brought free universal health coverage to the city and four major health care facilities were built while others were strengthened. Programs for the treatment and prevention of drug addictions were also implemented. Finally, the federal

¹⁰ In the summer of 2011 I conducted a series of interviews in Mexico City with Adriana Obregón at Presidencia and Enrique Betancourt, at the time with SEDESOL.

¹¹ [http://www.sep.gob.mx/work/models/sep1/Resource/889/2/images/todossomosjuarez\(1\).pdf](http://www.sep.gob.mx/work/models/sep1/Resource/889/2/images/todossomosjuarez(1).pdf)

¹² For most areas the reigning assumption was not that projects would be fully completed within 100 days (a school cannot be built in three months, for example), but that clear, specifiable targets were being achieved within that timeframe.

doubled the size of *Oportunidades* under TSJ, an anti-poverty program, to cover 21,808 families. TSJ also included programs to support small businesses, job training and unemployment programs, among many other components. Beyond the funding and human capital, the sheer breadth of the TSJ effort was impressive.

Assessing the Impact of *Todos Somos Juárez*

It is difficult to determine the specific impact of TSJ. Some of the key individuals responsible for implementing the program noted that in the rush to activate TSJ as rapidly as possible following the Villas de Salvárcar massacre and the outcry that ensued, pre-post measures were not in place to assess the program's success. This is not unique to TSJ. Jones¹³ and others have noted that efforts to measure the impact of social fabric interventions are uniquely challenging. Further, given the complexity of the intervention (160 specific goals across the six substantive intervention domains), it would be impossible to allocate relative contributions even if a gross index of impact could be ascertained.

That said, the clearest metric pertaining to Juárez is the fact that violence, as measured by the brute index of the number of deaths, declined dramatically between 2008 and 2014. Among the prevailing explanations for that decrease are often found the following: 1) Some argue that the Sinaloa Cartel defeated the Juárez Cartel, removing the basis for continuing conflict; 2) The economic conditions in Juárez hit a low in 2009-2010 with the American economy in full recession, costing tens of thousands of Juárez jobs. With the American economy rebounding by 2012 (especially the auto industry, which accounts for a high percentage of the maquiladora production in Juárez) recovery has had an impact on Juárez unemployment and overall economic conditions; 3) Improvement in the security situation due to law enforcement efforts: Between Mexican law enforcement and the military, a large number of Juárez Cartel and Sinaloa Cartel operatives, as well as members of their affiliated street gang networks, were either arrested or killed. These are the most common explanations cited for the reduction in the Juárez murder rates. However, it seems likely that TSJ, with its enormous investment in funding and talent, in the context of an intervention strategy that sought to enlist local perspectives and local participation, also played a meaningful role in the reduction of violence specifically, as well as in the bettering conditions in the city more generally (by 2012, tax revenues were up, as were building permits and real estate sales¹⁴). In short, I believe that there is an argument to be made that TSJ played a meaningful role in the reduction of violence in the city even as specific, incontrovertible documentation of that assertion remains elusive.

In addition to the sheer drop in Juárez' murder rates, there are some potential data points that support this view. For example, if we take failure to pass to the next grade as a proxy for the opposite, namely, rates of school success, it appears that more Juárez children are staying in school. In the 2007-2008 academic year, for example, for the 4th, 5th, and 6th

¹³ Jones, N. "Understanding and addressing youth in 'gangs' in Mexico." Working Paper Series on Civic Engagement and Public Security. Woodrow Wilson Center, August 2013.

¹⁴ Ainslie, R. "Mexico Rises from the Drug Ravages" *The Washington Post*, August 10, 2012.

grades, approximately 12.9%, 12.1% and 8.8% of the elementary school children (respectively) were failing the last three years of school. By the academic year 2011-2012 (that is, a year-and-a-half after TSJ was launched) the percentage of children failing 4th, 5th, and 6th grades had dropped to 5.9%, 8.1%, and 3.5% respectively. These figures strongly suggest something positive taking place within the Juárez primary grades, although a direct cause-and-effect is difficult to draw in relation to the TSJ school-related interventions. Similar figures for middle school are less dramatic but clearly trending in the same direction. For 1st 2nd and 3rd years of middle school, in the 2007-2008 school year, 23.3%, 27.1% and 22.5% (respectively) failed the academic year, whereas for the 2011-2012 academic year those numbers had decreased to 21.6%, 24.8%, 18.1% (or between 1.7% and 4.4%).¹⁵ Tellingly, among the students failing a middle school grade, boys were significantly overrepresented for each of the three middle school years. Relatedly, in discussing the TSJ summer school programs' aims at keeping students in school, Jones¹⁶ notes that 87% of the participating students who were not registered for middle school after 6th grade successfully registered following the summer school programs in 2010, 2011, and 2012.

Notwithstanding the strong emphasis on school-related programs as part of TSJ, in addition to the other aspects of the social fabric intervention, the majority of Juárez' residents did not view TSJ as having had a significant impact. A Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez poll asked city residents if security had improved in the city. In 2010 78.7% answered, "No." A year later, in 2011, the number responding "no" had dropped to 55.5% (those saying "yes" had more than doubled from 15.9% to 36.8% during the same interval). However, when asked if *Todos Somos Juárez* was functioning effectively, more people said it wasn't (40.8%) as compared to those who viewed it as an effective program (31.5%).¹⁷ This poll, taken at a time when the murder rate was beginning to fall and at least a year after the implementation of TSJ amid considerable local media coverage, suggests that citizens themselves may not have been drawing the connections between TSJ and what was taking place in their communities.

The education-related interventions were a core component of TSJ. Given the well-known links between dropping out of school, gang membership, and criminal activity, these interventions targeted the very core of the Juárez violence. It seems very plausible, then, that in their collectivity, these efforts had an impact on the Juárez violence and on the conditions that helped spawn it. However, it is rare for TSJ to be cited as one of the contributing factors to the bettering conditions within the city.

¹⁵ Figures are from the Secretaría de Educación del Estado de Chihuahua

¹⁶ Jones, N. *ibid.*

¹⁷ Centro de Investigaciones Sociales del Instituto de Ciencias Sociales y Administración de la Universidad Autónoma de Ciudad Juárez.