



Crime Rates at the U.S./Mexico Border Concerns for Nearshoring

Map Courtesy of the White House

In considering whether to Reshore or Nearshore, companies often compare manufacturing sites in the U.S. and Mexico. One of the key decision factors is the crime rate in border towns, often cited as a major problem along the border.

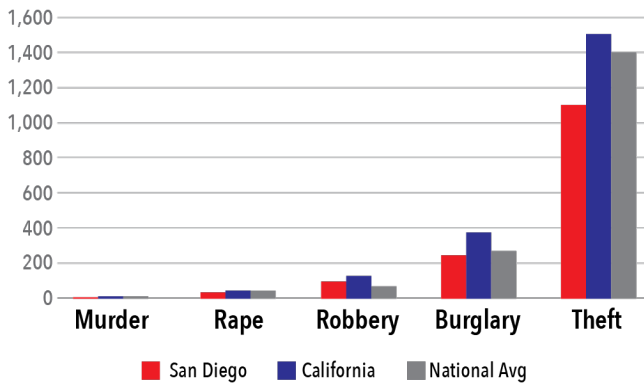
A common misconception about border cities is that they have higher crime rates than the average city in the U.S. This misconception stems from the idea and political rhetoric that immigrants bring crime with them as they traverse the U.S./Mexico border. However, the exact opposite is true. In cities such as Brownsville, Laredo, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Nogales, Yuma, and San Diego which are all major border cities, crime rates are consistently lower than the national average.

There are several contributing factors regarding the lower crime numbers in these cities. The first is that typically there are lower crime rates overall in immigrant communities than the average U.S. community. Secondly, there is a higher presence of law enforcement in these cities due to their proximity to Mexico. Whatever the reason may be, border cities on average have less crime than most cities in the U.S. The security and the location of these cities next to Mexico, as it emerges as a manufacturing powerhouse, make any of them great choices for business operations. To give a more in-depth look into this idea, this paper will go city by city and examine the rate of several serious crimes compared to the national average and other major cities in the U.S. The cities that are going to be examined further are major border cities including San Diego, Brownsville, Laredo, Eagle Pass, El Paso, Nogales, and Yuma.

SAN DIEGO

Starting with the largest of the cities listed above in terms of both sheer population size and the number of immigrants that traverse the border, San Diego comes first. San Diego had a population of 1,462,018 in 2022 making it not only the biggest of the cities in this report but also one of the largest cities in the U.S. San Diego County has several ports of entry into the U.S. - its two biggest are Otay Mesa and San Ysidro. San Ysidro is the busiest land border crossing in terms of vehicle passengers and pedestrians in the western hemisphere and it alone is responsible for cross-border passage of roughly 70,000 vehicles and 20,000 pedestrians per day. Otay Mesa was created after San Ysidro in an attempt to divert commercial traffic and alleviate long wait times. Otay Mesa has become the third busiest commercial crossing on the U.S./Mexico border. Mexico and the U.S. have recently agreed to a binational border renovation project worth roughly \$1.47 billion which is projected to result in \$3.4 billion in economic development for each country over the next forty years due to the time that will be saved crossing the border.

Crime in San Diego, CA (per 100,000 people)



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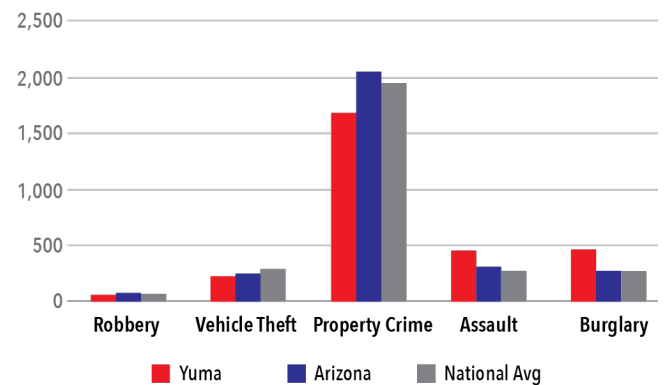
Despite the city's large size, it is among the safest cities in the U.S. according to annual crime statistics. From 2021- 2022 the city experienced a decrease of 7.5% in crime across all major crime categories.¹ According to the city of San Diego's data transparency crime statistics, the city experienced a decrease in 9 out of the 10 major crime categories given. As portrayed in the graph, burglary, rape, murder, and theft crime rates were not only below the national average but the average California city as well. This is impressive by any standard but especially when put in the context of how large the city of San Diego is in terms of its population.

Despite being the largest city with the most cross-border traffic of the cities in this report, San Diego is a safe place to live, and it is getting safer. Crime in almost all major categories has decreased even though the San Diego police department has stated that they are undermanned.²

YUMA

Yuma has more pedestrian traffic which skews the crime rate statistics. Many people use Yuma as the entry point into Mexico to go to many popular cities along the border. The most well-known is Mexicali which in recent years has been seen as the safer option than its counterpart, Tijuana. Agriculture is the primary cross-border commodity for Yuma and in the neighboring cities across the border. In winter, this area produces 91% of the leafy greens for North America,¹² making it a premier destination for farm workers to seek employment.

Crime in Yuma, AZ (per 100,000 people)



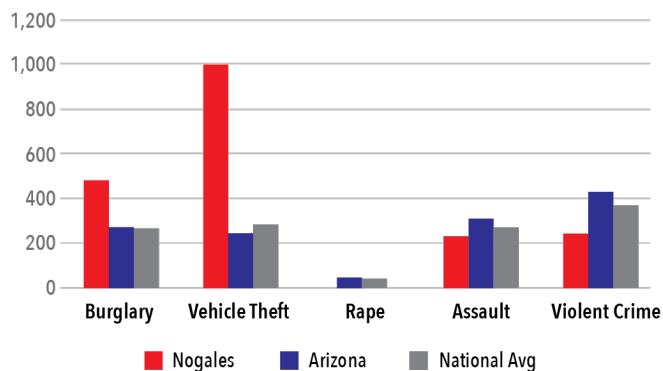
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The city's crime rate is relatively similar to the national average – about 3.2% lower.⁹ As the data in the graph indicates, Yuma is lower in some categories and higher in others. Yuma is aligned with the trend of border cities - reporting a lower crime rate overall than the national average.

NOGALES

Nogales Arizona is a well-known land-port city on the US-Mexican border. Nogales, Arizona has a sister city Nogales, Sonora across the border on the Mexico side. Roughly \$30 billion of international products cross the border every year making it one of the most important ports of entry into the U.S. These products range from fresh produce to industrial raw materials. A highway that leads to the city directly from the deep seaport in Guaymas, Sonora Mexico is one of the reasons for the robust trade, including seafood. This direct route is highly profitable as this seaport is where goods come into Mexico from other countries around the world, particularly from Asian countries. To handle the amount of international commerce that transits through the city of Nogales, three US Customs crossing points have been established.

Crime in Nogales, AZ per 100,000 people)



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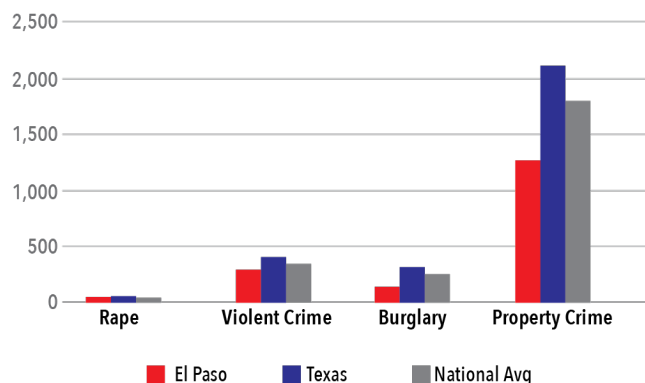
Nogales is the only city in this report where its crime rate was higher than the national average.¹⁴ This can be attributed to the fact that for Nogales the categories of burglary, theft, vehicle theft, and property crime were all significantly higher than the average city. Vehicle theft was the category with the most significant disparity as shown in the graph. In the categories of rape, assault, and violent crime Nogales had lower numbers than both the National average and the average city in Arizona.⁴ In 2022 there was one reported incident of both murder and robbery and zero reported cases of rape.¹⁴

EL PASO

The city demographics of El Paso are unique for border towns. Approximately 680,000 people live in the El Paso metro area making it the fifth-largest city in Texas. Nearly 85% of people living in El Paso as permanent residents are Hispanic. Thousands of people cross the border between El Paso and its sister city of Ciudad Juarez daily. The sister city of Juarez resides in the Mexican state of Chihuahua. The state is the fifth largest in Mexico in terms of its manufacturing GDP. Chihuahua produces goods in the automotive, aerospace, and medical as well as robust livestock and agriculture industries. Chihuahua has a climate that is beneficial for agriculture and is the leader in the production of cotton, walnuts, apples, oats, and chilis.

El Paso has a crime rate that is 27.2% lower than the national average.¹³ In the major categories of murder, robbery, assault, violent crime, theft, and property crime, El Paso was not only lower than the average Texas city but the average city in the U.S.⁴ The only major statistical categories where El Paso is higher than the national average is rape where El Paso had a rate of 43.3 compared to the national avg rate of 40.0, per 100,00 people. Despite being higher than the national average in this regard it is still lower than the average Texas city for the category of rape, 50.0 per 100,000 people.⁴ Despite having the largest Hispanic population of the cities discussed, El Paso is a safer place to live than the average American city.

Crime in El Paso, TX per 100,000 people)



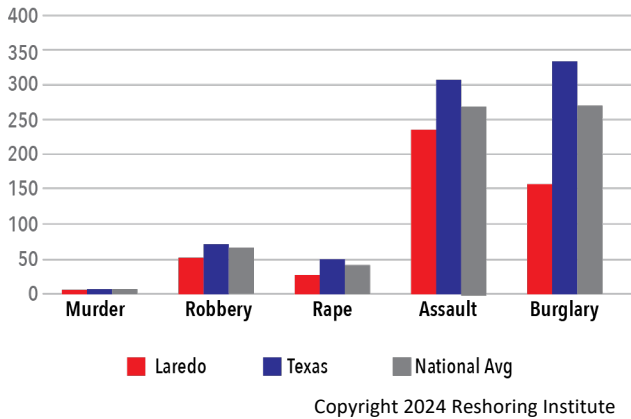
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LAREDO

Laredo, TX is one of the most important cities along the U.S.-Mexico border and is now the largest land port in the U.S. Each year billions of dollars in cross-border trade traverses through Laredo. As the largest border city in the region by volume and value of cross-border trade, Laredo processes commerce from all parts of Mexico. Cross border commerce products range from primarily automotive parts, medical equipment, tequila, and silver. Because any delay in getting these goods from Mexico to their destination in the U.S. could cost companies millions of dollars, the bridge and crossing authorities in the U.S. and Mexico have focused on technology to assist in processing imports and exports. The international bridge crossing authorities have implemented automated scanners and weighing devices, computerized document filing, and other technologies to facilitate trucks crossing the border. 14,000 trucks per day cross the border at Laredo.¹⁶

The Rio Grande River flows swiftly and wide through Laredo, making it an unfavorable border crossing for immigrants. This results in fewer resources deployed by the U.S. government to manage immigration at this crossing point.

Crime in Laredo, TX per 100,000 people)



Per 100,00 people, Laredo’s crime rate was 31% lower than the national average. For almost all major categories including murder, rape, robbery, assault, and burglary Laredo’s crime rates were lower than the average Texas city and also the national average per 100,000 people.⁶ However, while the numbers are lower than average in many categories the crime in Laredo increased in the last two years.⁴ The crime rate increased by 3.8% but that can be attributed to several factors including the rising population which has grown on average by 6,000 residents each year.¹⁰ Despite the city having experienced an overall increase in its crime the city is still very safe when compared to the average city in Texas and the average city in the U.S.

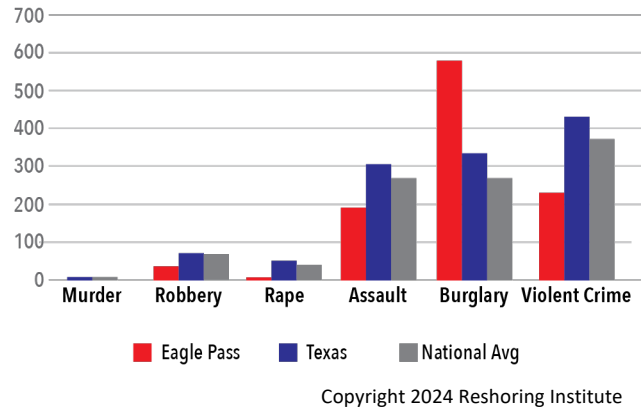
EAGLE PASS

Eagle Pass is the smallest of the cities reviewed with a population of 29,245¹¹ however, the city is one of the most important for facilitating cross-border commerce. It is used as an alternate commercial crossing point to Laredo, as it is only 60 miles west. Eagle Pass has become controversial over the past few years because of the high number of immigrant crossings, where the Rio Grande is shallow compared with other cities. U.S. politicians have made Eagle Pass the focus of the immigration crisis.

Because of the proximity of Eagle Pass to Laredo, several commercial initiatives are underway to improve and expand the physical crossing infrastructure, including a commercial development called Puerto Verde. This private development includes warehouses and rail sidings on both sides of the border and a new truck and rail bridge.

Across the border from Eagle Pass is the Mexican state of Coahuila, where many major industries are located. The mining and automotive industries located in the state are some of the largest operations in Mexico.

Crime in Eagle Pass, TX per 100,000 people)



The city's overall crime rate is lower than the national average. As displayed in the graph - assault, murder, rape, robbery, and violent crime are all significantly lower than the national average however, burglary is higher.⁴ Murder rates in Eagle Pass in 2022 were zero.⁷

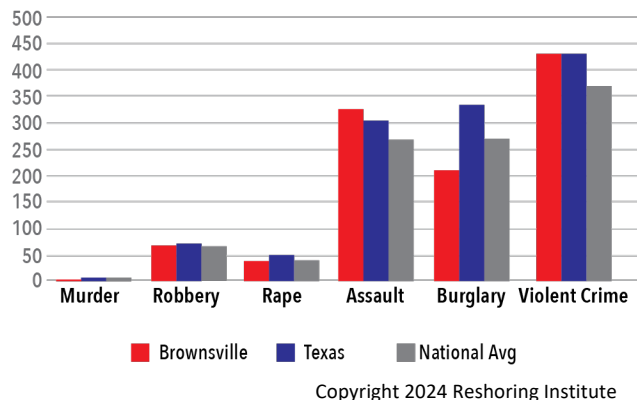
BROWNSVILLE/MCALLEN

The metropolitan area of Brownsville/McCallen is a major cross-border trading region. The Gulf of Mexico is just east of Brownsville and provides the city with the unique advantage of processing ocean import shipments via the Gulf of Mexico from all over the world. Despite being smaller than Laredo, Brownsville plays a pivotal role in both the U.S. and Mexico’s cross-border commerce. Across the border from Brownsville is the Mexican city of Matamoros, perhaps most famous for its historical battlegrounds as major battles from the Mexican Revolution and the Mexican/American war took place here.

Brownsville also plays a key role in transporting many of the goods from the Mexican state of Tamaulipas to the U.S. McAllen/Reynoso is a closely related border crossing area, about 60 miles west. The Tamaulipas region is the largest agricultural state in Mexico and a large portion of the food produced there goes directly to the U.S. In addition to agriculture, Tamaulipas has prominent fishing ports. Brownsville is responsible for much of the importing and exporting of goods by sea for the state of Texas. Adjacent to Brownsville is the city of Port Isabel, founded in 1928. The city is home to one of 12 deep

seaports in the state of Texas. Due to its location at the southernmost tip of Texas, the Port of Isabel receives a significant portion of shipping containers from all around the world.¹⁵

Crime in Brownsville, TX per 100,000 people)



While having a smaller population than Laredo the city of Brownsville has a higher crime rate. Even though Brownsville’s crime rate is higher it is still 2.1% lower than the national average, per 100,000 people.⁸ As shown in the graph, Brownsville’s crime rate is lower than the Texas and National average in the categories of murder, burglary, and rape. However, it is higher in some categories such as assault and violent crimes.⁴ On average, Brownsville is safer than many cities in Texas and the U.S.⁸ The safety of the city and the advantageous geographical location offer an excellent combination for business.

BORDER CITIES HAVE LESS CRIME

The crime statistics of these cities reinforce the claim made earlier that, on average, border cities have less crime than the average American city. Whatever the reason may be to explain these reported statistics, more businesses are moving to Mexico and border cities become important links in supply chains. These cities may become premier locations for businesses interested in the booming business of cross-border commerce including manufacturing, warehousing, trucking, light assembly, and other businesses based on international trade.

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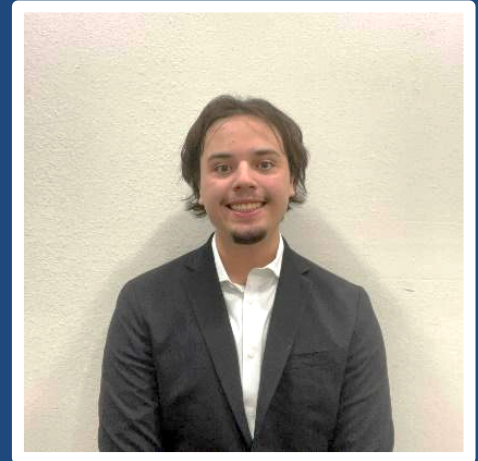
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