



Murder rates in border cities lower than national average

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Even as the nation's homicide rate jumped in 2020 amid rising gun violence, the murder rate in 11 of the largest communities along the U.S. border stayed below the national average, an Axios analysis found.

Why it matters: The wide disparity between majority-Mexican American and Mexican immigrant border communities and other similar-size cities further north conflicts with images and myths of the U.S.-Mexico border as a region filled with crime and disarray.

- New FBI statistics show some cities along the southern U.S. border had a murder rate 10 times lower than northern cities of the same size.

By the numbers: The Axios analysis using FBI data and the 2020 census found 11 border communities from San Diego to Brownsville, Texas, had a homicide rate of 4.1 per 100,000 residents — well below the national average.

- Del Rio, Texas — a city of nearly 36,000 people, where mounted Border Patrol agents were seen charging at Haitian migrants last month — had a murder rate of 2.8. Lima, Ohio, a city nearly the same size in population, had a homicide rate of 32.9.
- The border communities of Sunland Park, New Mexico; Nogales, Arizona; and Calexico, California, reported no homicides in 2020.

Yes, but: The Axios analysis found the 11 border communities did see a small increase in the homicide rate in 2020 from the previous year when it was 3.7 — well below the national average of 5.1 then.

- In addition, Yuma, Arizona, remained the exception to the rest of the border cities around violent crime. The city of about 100,000 had a murder rate of 11 people per 100,000 residents.

But, but, but: The latest FBI numbers on the 11 border communities are consistent with previous years that showed those cities annually have a much lower violent crime rate than the rest of the country.

- San Diego Mayor Todd Gloria tells Axios the border city benefits from its diversity and binational relationships in the public and private sectors.
- "These partnerships are essential to keeping our border region a safe and thriving environment," Gloria said.

What they're saying: "I think people conflate different types of chaos [on the border] with people crossing and being apprehended ... with crime. And that's not true," Alex Nowrasteh, director of immigration studies at the Cato Institute, told Axios.

- Nowrasteh says the presence of the largest federal law enforcement agency along the border, as well as the research-supported fact that various studies show immigrants as less likely to commit crimes overall, help explain the region's consistently low murder rates.
- The rise in homicides nationally has little to do with immigrants, Nowrasteh said. "Basically, the surge in crime last year is among the native-born only."