

# HOW THE BORDER WORKS

## A View from San Diego

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## Foreword

This short book is in response to the frustration I felt from listening to the discussion of the border crisis. I understand how the crisis narrative can be used politically but many of the characterizations of the border I hear are completely misleading. I have lived in the largest urban area on the U.S.-Mexico border for more than 35 years and I have taught and collaborated with colleagues on both sides. San Diego and Tijuana have more than 5 million residents, or about 1/3 of the entire U.S.-Mexico border. It is often reported to be the busiest border crossing in the world for individuals—more than 52 million a year, or nearly as many as the entire U.S.-Canada border.

The worst descriptions I read and hear about the border are intentional distortions for political purposes. We are not in crisis nor a state of chaos. Our three ports of entry are orderly, too crowded, and too slow, but not chaotic. We are the port of entry for more than our share of immigrants and although the federal border authorities often drop them in our communities with no resources to get to their destinations, our civic organizations, religious groups, and local governments have responded. We have a problem with illegal drugs, but no worse and often not as bad as many places in the interior of the United States. And we have a problem with pollution in our shared river, but we have a clearly defined institutional mechanism for cleaning it up. We all know that the border chaos narrative is designed to score political points with certain constituents and not to address a problem. It is my hope that this short work will be a needed dose of reality.

The point of view I present is that of a U.S. citizen who lives in San Diego. I cannot claim to represent a Mexican perspective. Nevertheless, it is my sincere hope that many Tijuana residents will agree with most of what I say.

## One: Preliminaries

San Diego and Tijuana are one pair of the twin cities that are located along the entire length of the U.S.-Mexico border. According to the censuses of Mexico and the United States, Tijuana had 1.9 million residents in 2020 and San Diego County had 3.3 million. People

on both sides of the border claim the Tijuana number is underestimated. I am skeptical, but it is possible.

San Diego is the name of a county and a city. The county has 18 incorporated cities and 18 tribal governments, as well as extensive unincorporated rural areas. San Diego City is the largest city, and the 18 tribal governments are more than any other county in the nation. Unless there is a reason to specify San Diego City or San Diego County, I use the simpler San Diego.

Tijuana is a municipality (*municipio*). All states in Mexico are divided into municipalities. They are like U.S. counties in that they include all territory within the state, but they are different from counties in that they do not have separate city governments within them. The municipality is the city, but it includes both urban and rural areas. Tijuana's urban area includes more than 1.8 million of its 1.9 million residents.

A second Mexican municipality is on the border next to San Diego County. Tecate is a municipality of a little more than 100,000 people located to the east of Tijuana. It is adjoined to San Diego County but not San Diego City. It is in the Peninsular Range of mountains that are to the east of Tijuana and San Diego City, and before the steep drop into the Sonoran Desert. Tecate is a lovely city with great food and cooler mountain air, but since it is outside the main interactions between San Diego and Tijuana, I do not discuss it.

The border between San Diego and Tijuana has three official ports of entry (POE). From west to east, they are San Ysidro, Cross Border Express (CBX), and Otay Mesa. San Ysidro is the busiest crossing for people (but not commerce) on the entire U.S.-Mexico border. Otay Mesa is the second busiest commercial crossing, after Laredo. The annual number of people who move through the three ports between San Diego and Tijuana is nearly as large as the number that crosses between the U.S. and Canada in all the combined northern land border POEs.

Throughout this short book, I refer to U.S. citizens as Americans. I am aware that Mexicans are Americans too, since we all live in America, the continent. Nevertheless, I am going with common usage and the fact that everyone knows what is meant by the term American. Also, there isn't another good word. United

Statesian, the literal translation of *estadounidense*, is ugly and affected in English, although it sounds great in Spanish.

Common terms for people who live in the borderlands and are at home on both sides are the English word borderlanders or the Spanish word *fronterizo/a*.

In several places I mention the SENTRI border crossing card. This is part of the Global Entry Program and offers expedited crossing of the U.S.-Mexico border through a dedicated lane. It requires a fee, an interview with Customs and Border Protection, and a background check. For frequent crossers, it is essential.

One last note. A person who lives in Tijuana is usually called a Tijuanaense (Tee-wha-NEN-say) rather than the English language pattern which would probably be something like Tijuanan. In the border region, there are two dominant languages and those of us who grew up speaking only English need to get a move on and learn some Spanish. ¡Vámonos!

## Two: The border narrative is wrong

It is a cool evening in Denver, and we are standing at the airport's car rental bus stop. A couple from Pittsburgh strike up a conversation and when they hear we live in San Diego, the looks on their faces turn serious: "How are you guys doing with all those people pouring across the border?" I knew that nothing I could say would change the story they had playing in their heads. "It's not like that," I said. "Sure, a lot of migrants cross the border, but you usually don't see them unless you go to a shelter where people are helping them." The conversation drifted on to other subjects, but I was stunned by the realization that so much of what we hear about the border is a misleadingly dark narrative designed to scare people.

There are 15 million people living in the counties and municipalities along both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border. Five million of us are in San Diego and Tijuana. We go to school, and to work, we go shopping, and out to movies and other entertainment. We love our families and friends. We belong to faith communities, activist groups, and philanthropic organizations. In other words,

our lives are like the lives of people throughout the United States and Mexico, even though we live in the U.S.-Mexico border region.

When politicians and influencers tell their scare stories about the border, they leave out the people who live there. The story that "The border is in chaos" forgets about the 15 million people who are going about their daily lives the same as people elsewhere. Yes, it is true that migration is a difficult issue with challenges for communities, but to focus on that issue alone would be like judging the entire United States by its massive number of mass shootings. Guns and mass shootings are a serious problem, but they do not define the entire country. Immigration is a serious issue, but it does not define the entire border.

So much of life in the border is not what most people imagine. I once managed a program at a university in San Diego that held a weekly class in Tijuana. One evening after class, a group of students went to a bar. They noticed a picture of a female bullfighter on the wall and began to comment. One of the students, call him David, stunned the rest of the class when he casually let drop: "That woman is my mother." David did not seem Mexican. He had light skin color, and his unaccented English was perfect (so was his Spanish). His mother was Mexican and was one of the few women who trained to be a bullfighter. David also trained to be a matador, but I don't think anyone knew anything about that part of his life or his family history. The border is like that as well. It is often different from what we assume.

There are three main views on Tijuana that are most common in San Diego. A lot of San Diegans believe that it is a jungle hellscape filled with drug dealers and other criminals who violently control the streets and intimidate the police and judges who are also frequently corrupt. I'll call this group the skeptics since they do not think there is anything worthwhile in Tijuana. They rarely if ever visit the city and have no friends there. (That is key.) Another view is that it is a great place to enjoy spectacularly good food and visit friends and family amidst a vibrant arts and culture scene. These are the *fronterizos*, or borderlanders. They often have friends living in Tijuana, many of them have family there and they may have lived there at some point as well. The third view is that Tijuana is a great place to invest

and do business. These are the boosters. Their view is pragmatic, business oriented, and seeks to deepen the business and economic ties between the two cities.

Perhaps it is a surprise to some, but these views of Tijuana are replicated in the interior of Mexico. Tijuana is far from central Mexico and the capital, Mexico City, which defines the center of Mexican culture and politics. Tijuana does not have a long history and it lacks the colonial elegance of older Mexican places. In the minds of many Mexicans, it is an economic and cultural colony of the United States. That is the Mexican version of the skeptics. The equivalent of the *fronterizos* in Tijuana include both people who find a greater degree of cultural, economic, and personal freedom there, and those who regularly cross the border. They are not necessarily the same. The former are migrants from other states in Mexico who may never set foot in the United States but experience the personal freedoms that come with having a job and living beyond the control of the tight social restrictions of a small village. Regular border crossers have the experience of personal freedom that comes from being able to enjoy the best of two very different cultures. They are Mexican college students, hipsters, artists, chefs, musicians, teachers, doctors, businesspeople, and others who move between Tijuana and San Diego at will. The third group, the boosters, are people who work hard to change the external image of the city, who contribute to the creation of a vibrant economic life, and people who help make the city one of the most dynamic places you are likely to visit.

Is it safe to visit Tijuana? The short answer is yes. However, it is not safe to buy or sell drugs, to wander at night on dark streets in places you do not know, or to get stupid drunk. It is a big city and both Mexicans and Americans need to keep their city-wits about them when moving around. You should not walk out of a bank while counting a big wad of pesos you just withdrew from an ATM. You should not wear ostentatious amounts of flashy jewelry, designer handbags, or other highly visible displays of wealth. In other words, use common sense and it is fine.

The murder statistics for Tijuana are scary and if you read them out of context, you will not think it is safe. The murder rate is higher in Tijuana than in most places

because the narcotics cartels fight fiercely among themselves to have exclusive access to one of the busiest border crossings in the world. As drugs move from South America towards the United States, and from Mexican processing labs towards the border, each successfully navigated stage of the transportation route adds to the value of their product. Getting drugs across the border into the United States adds an insane amount of value, making that last big hurdle the most lucrative to get over. When a cartel controls the supply routes through the border crossing at San Diego-Tijuana, they control an extremely valuable asset. But if they control it today, another cartel will try to control it tomorrow. Their methods are bribes paid to cops and politicians, assassinations of rival cartel members and the police who protect them, threats and occasional actions against lawyers and judges that try to hold them accountable, and violence against journalists that try to expose corruption. Tourists and ordinary citizens are not the target.

My intent in writing this is not to argue about crime statistics, or the relative safety of San Diego versus Tijuana. What I hope to show is that the residents of both cities lead lives that are enriched by living on one of the world's busiest, most dynamic, and colorful borders. The border is a unique cultural region where our choices about what to buy and where, about educational opportunities, work options, business development, and cultural experiences are dramatically enhanced, if we choose to interact with the other side. The chapters in this short book explore some of the challenges and opportunities of living in this unique binational region.

### Three: Who we are

The first people of San Diego and Tijuana are the Kumeyaay. That is history, but it's also today: They are still here, and we live on their land. The Kumeyaay territory included both present-day San Diego and Tijuana. South of the border they are called by the same name but with a Spanish spelling: Kumiai. Their lands extended into present day northern San Diego County, south to Ensenada, and east to the Colorado River. Their environment included the coastal area, rich in oysters, mussels, and other seafood, the grasslands and mountains with their enormous variety of plants, and the seasonally abundant desert areas. They did not need

to migrate to survive as the surrounding natural world supplied so many useful plants and animals.

Europeans arrived in 1769 in the form of Franciscan missionaries and soldiers from New Spain (Mexico). They settled north of the present-day border on the San Diego River and the mission they built is the origin of San Diego City. The original members of that first European settlement were not actually all that European. They included Native Americans from Mexico, people of African origin, some Europeans, possibly a Jewish person or two, and every possible mixture of those ethnicities. They married people of the Kumeyaay tribe, and it was not until nearly a century later that Anglo Americans began to move into the region in numbers.

Living conditions for Native Americans in the Spanish and Mexican periods varied across California. The Kumeyaay were noted for their independence and the local mission system usually permitted them to come and go so that a majority were able to live traditional lives away from the mission. Nevertheless, conditions were worse than they had been before the invaders arrived. Death rates were higher than for traditional hunters and gatherers, at least in part due to the introduction of new diseases, although Kumeyaay death rates were lower than in the rest of the state. They worked as cowboys, wood cutters, craftsmen and craftswomen, nannies, and domestics, but a sizable share maintained their independence and continued to live traditional lives.

This changed when San Diego came under the control of Americans and the fate of the native population suffered. The federal government was barely present, and it was left to state and local authorities to determine the status and rights of native peoples. Across the state, many were forced into indentured labor contracts which were a form of slavery, and while involuntary servitude existed in San Diego, forced labor appears to have been less common than elsewhere. Nevertheless, the combination of second-class citizenship, the denial of civil and political rights, and arbitrary acts of violence created extremely difficult conditions for survival. In 1875, the federal government finally recognized 9 reservations on isolated lands where it was nearly impossible to live independent of the meager resources

provided by the federal government. At the cost of cultural extinction, the economic and social status of native people began to change when they left their reservations during World War II. More recently, in the last few decades there has been a complete reversal of their fortunes as the legalization of gaming on reservation lands has enabled many bands of the Kumeyaay tribe to become independent of the federal government and to invest substantially in their people. The Kumeyaay today have more than a dozen small reservations in San Diego County. Mexican law does not create reservations, but a half dozen small villages in northern Baja California are occupied by Kumiai people. They are one of the many Native American peoples divided by the U.S.-Mexico border.

The early settlers from New Spain, and then from Mexico after it became independent in 1821, moved freely through the region that was eventually divided into California and Baja California. Before the border, ranchers, landowners, and businesspeople owned property and businesses on what would eventually become different sides. After California and San Diego were seized by the United States during the Mexican American War (1846-48), an increased number of Anglo Americans began to arrive. The numbers were not great, however, during the first decades of the American period. The Gold Rush that began in 1848 changed the trajectory of California, but San Diego was not close to the gold fields and had little to offer fortune seekers. According to the U.S. Census, the entire county population in 1850 was only 798, not counting those Kumeyaay who lived traditional lives outside the bounds of census takers. Tijuana in 1850 simply did not exist as a town or place of settlement, although traditional Kumiai people inhabited the coast and areas around the Tijuana River and its tributaries. By 1900, Tijuana had grown to an official count of 242 residents and San Diego had 17,700 residents.

The label of Mexican American has always hidden more than it reveals. The people of San Diego who are referred to as Mexican American are European, Native American, African, and sometimes Asian. Today, some Mexican Americans speak perfect Spanish and English, some speak less than perfect, and some speak no Spanish at all. In the San Diego region, they are Chicano, Latino, Hispanic, or Mexican American. Mexican citizens

in Tijuana and the rest of Mexico sometimes label U.S. Mexican Americans as *pocho*, a derogatory term used by Mexicans to refer to the hybrid cultural blend of Mexico and the United States that is altogether different from the mainstream of either country. In the eyes of some Mexicans, a *pocho* is an U.S. Latino who has lost their Mexicaness. Many Americans also do not accept them as fully American, even though their family histories may go back to the first expedition and settlement in the border region, or even further if they have Kumeyaay ancestors. The challenges and dilemmas of a hybrid culture can be traumatizing when neither of the origins of the hybridity recognize the richness of the combination. A local folk hero and musician, Chunky Sanchez and his band Los Alacranes, explained the dilemma in their song *Pocho* (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7ls9zSWPWIM>).

San Diego today has a plurality of Anglos, but Latinos, African Americans, and Asian Americans are more than 50 percent of the population. In other words, this is not a place with a New England Yankee history or culture. Tijuana is less varied in the sense that most of its residents are Mexican, but even that is misleading since it includes citizen migrants from indigenous communities within Mexico such as Mixtecs, Zapotecs, and other Native American Mexicans. And there are the relatively new streams of migrants from Haiti and further-off places, along with 3rd, 4th, and older generations of Jewish, Japanese, and Chinese migrants whose families have been Mexican citizens for generations. Added to the mix are the recent deportees from the United States, many of whom are more American than Mexican, some with limited Spanish skills and little connection to Mexico. Now, however, they are part of the fabric of Tijuana.

## Four: Family life

Many people in San Diego and Tijuana never cross the border. You can live in either city and hardly be aware that the other exists. For many people, particularly in San Diego, the sense of living on the border is not a reality. I used to ask baristas and salespeople in San Diego if I could pay in pesos. I just wanted to gauge their attitudes and see how they would respond. Usually, the conversation went something like this:

"Do you take pesos?"

Smiling, "No."

"I just thought I would ask because I was in Tijuana yesterday and they take dollars."

Growing impatient, "We don't take pesos."

"Ok, you know I wasn't sure since we are on the border and all."

Emphatic, "We're NOT on the border!"

Ironically, the San Diego-Tijuana border crossing is perhaps the busiest in the world in terms of the number of people who cross. In 2019, before the pandemic, there were just under 52 million crossings into the United States by individuals who used San Diego's three ports of entry, San Ysidro, Otay Mesa, and Cross Border Express, the Tijuana airport crossing. To be sure, these are not unique individuals. Many, perhaps most people who cross the border between San Diego and Tijuana do so multiple times a year, or month. Many cross daily. Fifty-two million a year is more than 142,000 a day, seven days a week, 52 weeks a year.

One of the main reasons people cross the border is to visit family and friends. We know this from the many surveys of border crossers in different places and different times. The surveys show that in this regard, the San Diego-Tijuana border is much like the other ports of entry on the U.S.-Mexico border, whether in Texas, Arizona, or New Mexico. Visiting family and friends across the border plus the high number of border crossings, tell us that the number of families divided by the border is not a small group. We don't know how many it is, but it must be relatively large.

The consequences of families separated by the border can be profound and traumatic, but not in every case. As explained below, some separations are forced but many others are by choice. The differences often depend on when people came to San Diego. Families with ancestors that migrated two, three, or more decades ago are most likely U.S. citizens who are free to cross the border whenever they choose. Recent migrants, either with or without documents, are likely to be more



limited in their ability to leave the United States and return at any time. Many U.S. citizens of Mexican origin have family in Tijuana or other parts of Mexico even though they have been in San Diego for generations. In fact, this group is the core of the regional population that is bicultural, bilingual, and sometimes binational with dual citizenship. Their Mexican family members may have the ability to enter the United States, either with a Border Crossing Card which is given to Mexicans living on the border who can demonstrate a legal and economic connection to Mexico, or with a green card visa that gives them permission to work in the United States, or with some other legal route of entry. For these families, the border is not a barrier but rather a significant asset. It allows them to explore and take advantage of the opportunities created by Mexico and the United States, and in their ease of movement they enrich their lives and enlarge their worlds.

A few examples illustrate this point. A few years ago, I was invited to give a lecture to an executive MBA class in Tijuana. Executive MBA programs are targeted at working professionals and classes are usually offered in the evening or on the weekend. There were 14 students in the class and as I entered the building, two of them approached me. These were two of my former students in San Diego who were now getting their MBAs in Tijuana while working as managers in the city's vast manufacturing sector. Equally at home in Mexico and the United States, they could take advantage of the opportunities in two countries.

Aida is a friend who is at home in either city. She lives in Tijuana because she is a single mother, it is less expensive, and she wants her son to be immersed in Mexican culture even as he learns English at school. Aida works in both cities as a community development specialist and has extended family in both cities. Her brother studied architecture in Tijuana and now has a good job in San Diego. When I told her mother that I was working on a short book about the border and how it creates opportunities and challenges for people in the borderlands, she stressed that the border has treated her family very well. Aida's mom lives in Tijuana and can cross the border whenever she wants.

Luis grew up in Los Angeles, San Diego, and Tijuana. His family was Mexican, but they had green cards and could

legally work in the United States. His parents continued to look for the most congenial place to live and ultimately settled in San Diego. Luis went to community college and university and after he graduated, he studied the new security rules that apply to international trade. He and a friend started a consulting business that thrived on his ability to be both American and Mexican.

There are many stories of people who are at home on either side of the border and who can easily move back and forth, but not every pattern of family separation is as benign. Often it is a painful and traumatic reminder of the sacrifices people make to find better lives and more opportunities. Some families in the United States have members in Mexico that cannot cross the border. There are many reasons why that might be the case, most of which boil down to time, money, or legal status. Some families have members in the San Diego that cannot return to the United States if they leave. For example, individuals enrolled in the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) have legal status in the United States but cannot leave and re-enter. Andrea is undocumented but enrolled in the DACA program. She came to the United States as a small child and went to school and college in the United States. She has a good job and family members who live in the United States, but her father was deported to Tijuana. He lives in isolation and needs care but none of his family members can visit since they are either not authorized to be in the United States, or like Andrea, they are in the DACA program and not permitted to leave the country and return.

Some families in San Diego have one or more members who are U.S. citizens, and others who are undocumented residents. Families living in Tijuana may have U.S. citizen children or spouses, with some family members who are not authorized to enter the United States, so they choose to live in Tijuana. Many young adults who were born in the United States and therefore are U.S. citizens may choose to live in San Diego for work or to be with loved ones, but they may have parents and other family members in Mexico, some of whom may not be able to cross, or who choose to live in Mexico. More recently, there is a trend for U.S. citizens in San Diego to live in Tijuana, either because they find a more agreeable cultural life or lower housing costs. Every imaginable pattern—and many unimaginable—can be found.



During most of the 20th century, the movement of people was fluid across the border. U.S. border controls on entry from Mexico were essentially non-existent until the 1960s and border residents routinely walked across to buy an ice cream or to go to a movie. The ease of crossing did not automatically confer the right to work in San Diego, but no one was checking. During World War II, the United States created a guest worker program for Mexicans. The goal was mainly to fill the wartime labor shortages, although the program continued until 1965. Perhaps unsurprisingly, it created a wave of legal permanent residents. Inevitably, many guest workers made friends, fell in love, started families, bought houses, and became part of the fabric of American society. After the program ended, people continued to migrate, both temporarily and permanently, with and without papers. Then, in 1986, under President Reagan, the United States created an amnesty for undocumented immigrants who arrived before 1982. Most were Mexicans and by 2001, nearly 2.7 million were granted permanent residence status with the opportunity to become citizens. These programs plus long-run patterns of economic development in Mexico resulted in a permanent movement of migrants to the United States and the growth of the Latino population of San Diego. Today, around 30 percent of the total population is Latino, most of whom are of Mexican ancestry. In sum, the population of the San Diego-Tijuana region includes many people that have family connections with people living on the other side of the border.

## Five: Working

On most weekday mornings, a long line of cars waits for hours to cross from Tijuana into San Diego. These are people going to work or to school, or maybe just shopping for the day. Customs and Border Protection has a handy app that reports the wait times at the border. Around 2 in the morning (the main crossing at San Ysidro is open 24 hours a day) the wait time in the non-expedited lane where most people cross, is usually around 30 to 40 minutes but increasing. By 6 am it's usually 2 hours or more and doesn't begin to decline until 10 or 11 am. These are the general trends for a car without a SENTRI card which is the permit to use the expedited crossing lane. Wait times in the SENTRI lane

vary as well but are usually in the 10-to-20-minute range.

One of the issues of wait times is that they are unreliable. It may be 2 hours on one morning, but much longer on the next. This makes planning difficult and people who frequently cross the border know they must put extra time into their schedules because they cannot count on the border wait to be any specific length.

If someone going to work choses to walk across the border through the security checkpoint at the POE, they might save a few minutes waiting, but they will encounter the same indeterminacy for the wait time. They also won't have their car. Instead, they might be picked up by friends or coworkers who give them a lift to work, or they can take the trolley that stops right at the border and serves several of the county's cities: Imperial Beach, Chula Vista, National City, La Mesa, San Diego, El Cajon. Regardless how a cross border worker gets to work, it is a major hassle and an indeterminate chunk of wasted time.

Anyone thinking about this situation must seriously wonder why so many people are willing to give up 2 or 3 hours every day. The reality is that we do not know a lot about the people who cross the border to work although several mistaken beliefs circulate widely. For example, some people assume that cross border workers are all low-wage, mostly unskilled workers. Or that many of the commuters must be working illegally in the United States. Or that they hurt the economy on the U.S. side because they take jobs and spend their incomes in Tijuana rather than San Diego. Or that very few people commute the other direction, from San Diego to Tijuana.

All those ideas are mostly wrong. Cross border commuters include a range of occupations and skill levels. My gardeners, who write Spanish poorly and English hardly at all, may typify the kind of stereotype many people have, but I've met college professors and administrators, accountants, activists in non-profits, lawyers, medical professionals, building trades workers, mechanics, and a range of other skilled commuters. Unless you ask (rude!) and they are willing to answer, it is impossible to know if they have green cards that allow them to work in the United States, or if they have U.S. citizenship, or if they are working under the table.

They must have permission to enter the United States, and I would venture to guess that the vast majority have authorization to work. Crossing every day to go shopping or for some other non-work-related reason begins to look very suspicious after a while.

During the pandemic, the border crossing was closed to all but U.S. citizens, students, and necessary workers. We don't know how many people that included, but according to the CEO of the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce, approximately 18,000 riders took the trolley every day. Plus, there were still long lines of cars waiting to cross in the morning. These were people going to work (or school) mostly, and they had to be resident aliens (have a green card) or U.S. citizens to get into the United States. The economy of San Diego County could not have functioned without their labor.

There is also a flow of workers in the morning that heads south. It's a smaller number than those going north, but still sizable. The wage differences dictate that no one in their right mind would choose an unskilled, low wage job in Tijuana if the same or a similar job was available in San Diego. So, the workers that commute to Tijuana are probably more skilled and more highly educated, on average, than those that commute to San Diego. Managers of manufacturing plants, entrepreneurs, businesspeople, college professors, lawyers, and doctors, for example, have the resources to live in San Diego when their business or their work is in Tijuana.

In sum, it is safe to say that cross border workers include every imaginable combination of citizenship, residency, and occupation. Furthermore, it is not solely a south-to-north flow but includes a significant number of people who live in San Diego and work in Tijuana.

Neither Mexico nor the United States have systems for collecting data on cross border workers. Consequently, we don't know how many they are, how much they earn, or where they spend their incomes. We have anecdotal evidence about their employment—the types of jobs they hold—but no hard data. And we don't know how often they cross the border. Given the amount of time it takes to cross, it's likely that some workers may spend the week on the side where they work but have a residence on the other side, with a family that they

only see on weekends. It is even more likely that some Tijuana residents commute further north, to Los Angeles, Orange County, or the Inland Empire (Riverside and San Bernardino) and return home once a week or even less often.

University researchers have estimated the number of people crossing to work but the numbers vary quite a bit and there is no consensus. It's a sensitive issue for many reasons, and it's likely that some people would rather not talk about their situation. This causes some border scholars to claim that it is impossible to conduct an accurate survey. Most of the surveys that have been done are based on asking people why they are crossing the border (to see family, to go shopping, to go to school, to go to work, etc.) and the skeptics argue that the answers will never be an accurate reflection of reality. Most of the formal attempts to measure the number of people crossing to work come up with estimates that are much lower than the "gut feeling" estimates of people who observe the border as businesspeople or interested parties. The estimates range from 7-8 thousand to around 70-80 thousand. Clearly, we simply do not yet know.

The reason why people are willing to spend such a long time waiting in line during their commute is probably obvious to everyone, at least for those commuting south to north; wages are much, much higher in San Diego. Jobs in San Diego pay around 3 to 5 times more, on average, than the same job in Tijuana. As a Mexican friend told me, "Working in San Diego and living in Tijuana is the best of both worlds." She could live in San Diego, but she preferred the culture and other amenities of Tijuana.

But why would someone commute the other direction? They also pay a penalty in border wait times since they must return to the United States in the afternoon and will sometimes be stuck in a long line. And as just noted, wages are lower in Tijuana, often by a wide amount, and living costs are higher in San Diego. Again, there are probably as many reasons as there are people. Some commuters have families where their partner is a U.S. citizen who prefers to live in San Diego; some have successful businesses in Tijuana, but want to raise their kids in San Diego, or they prefer the greater wealth and security on the U.S. side; some have very good jobs in

Tijuana that they could not duplicate in San Diego, or they work for U.S. based firms with offices in Tijuana (accountants, lawyers, engineers, computer scientists, medical professionals, and many others).

The reality of people crossing the border to go to work is part of the region's everyday life. Unfortunately, we know less about this than we should. Even so, it doesn't require an academic research project or a government funded study to know that it is extremely important to the region's economy. So important, in fact, that when the pandemic led to the closing of the border to all non-essential border crossers, policy had to keep the border open for a large number of people who continued to cross daily. Without their labor, everyone in the region would have been much worse off.

## Six: Going to school

Schooling and higher education in San Diego and Tijuana are simultaneously very similar and very different. Kids in both places mostly go to public schools and young adults go to universities or technical schools. The differences are probably much smaller than most people imagine, and only begin to be noticeable at the higher grades of K-12. Primary schooling is essentially universal in both cities and while Mexico has greatly expanded middle school and high school over the last decades, attendance and availability are still below U.S. levels.

Mexico's K-12 system is far more standardized than in the United States where each state and sometimes each school district determines curriculum. Public education in Tijuana and everywhere else in Mexico is administered by the Secretary of Public Education. There is a national curriculum, and a National Pedagogy University (UPN) to provide teacher training in its many branches. In addition, there are normal schools for the training of primary school teachers (K-6). In addition to its public school system, Mexico also has private schools, some of which are truly excellent by anyone's standards, but they are not cheap and are out of reach for many families. The public system has been heavily criticized for its quality and many wealthy families prefer to use private schools (perhaps it is not so different in the United States). In comparison to the test scores of students in most high-income countries,

Mexican students do not do well on the internationally standardized tests (PISA exam) that are administered worldwide. (The U.S. is spectacularly mediocre). But if you compare the test scores of Mexican students to the rest of Latin America or to countries with a similar level of income per capita, they do just fine.

The U.S.-Mexico border puts a lot of pressure on educational resources. Both Tijuana and San Diego have schools with large numbers of kids who have received some or most of their schooling on the other side. These are kids whose parents have moved between the two cities, sometimes by choice, sometimes involuntarily. There are U.S. citizen children in Tijuana who speak little Spanish, and Mexican citizen children in San Diego that are English learners. One study of 9th and 10th graders on both sides of the border found that over 25 percent of Tijuana's students had received at least some of their education in the United States. A similar percentage of students in a school district in the southern part of San Diego County had gone to school in Mexico.

Language and culture are not the only challenges. Deportation and migration create trauma. Children may be resilient, but family separation and long arduous treks across dangerous territories can leave physical and psychological wounds that are difficult to heal. I don't think you have to be an expert in the human psyche to know that the dangers and violence encountered by migrants will leave scars. As will family separation, whether it is a result of voluntary migration or involuntary deportation. The deep trauma that is frequently a part of the migrant's experience is not part of our national discussion, but it should be recognized since the border region has so many children (and adults) who have experienced violence, deprivation, and extreme insecurity. It is wishful thinking to assume that the children affected in this way will simply move on to the next stage of their lives and begin learning in a new environment as if nothing had changed. Yet the resources for addressing these issues are somewhere between scarce and nil.

Some students succeed despite the lack of resources. I knew a university student who came to San Diego from Mexico as a small child hidden in a van. When she arrived, she only spoke the indigenous language of her village in Mexico, but she learned Spanish playing with

neighborhood kids in San Diego, and English in school. I met her shortly before she graduated from university with honors. She is an example of a student who overcame significant obstacles to succeed, but how many success stories don't happen when our schools are unable to help remove those obstacles? Linguists define partial biliterates as individuals who know two languages, but neither of them completely. Don't ask me how they can get to the university because I don't know but I do know that I occasionally encountered partial biliterate students in the classes I taught. These students are so very close to bilingual fluency, but they usually could not write a grammatically correct sentence in either Spanish or English. Their desire was there—after all, they were in a 4-year university. But the K-12, community college, and university systems are not designed to consider their special needs.

Schools and universities across the border are also not designed to work together. That isn't surprising given that schools and universities on the same side of the border often cannot work together either. Still, it seems that there are potential gains for our region if we can produce a next generation of citizens who have at least some abilities to speak a second language and some knowledge of the institutions and culture on the other side of the border. Nationally, there are pitifully few U.S. university students who study abroad in Mexico. During the optimistic early years of NAFTA, institutions in San Diego and Tijuana built several flagship programs offering dual degrees from universities on both sides. However, when violence in the border region spiked in the mid-2000s, nearly all these programs were cancelled. And at the K-12 level, after 9/11 it became harder for kids in Tijuana to take field trips to museums, the zoo, and other venues in San Diego.

Formal academic programs that match schools or universities on opposite sides of the border are much harder to set up and run, particularly when the university's army of lawyers are managing risks, but individuals in the region are clear about what they want. Joining the long line of cars crossing the border every weekday morning on the way to work are cars with kids on their way to school. Since public school attendance in San Diego requires residency, these kids mostly go to private schools. (Inherently, that means they are mostly upper middle class or above since private schools are

not cheap.) They learn fluent English, prepare for high school and university in the United States, and become the next generation of educated, bilingual, binational citizens our region needs.

Whenever I felt comfortable enough to ask the students in my university classes whether any of them commuted from Tijuana, there was nearly always a show of hands. I don't know if the Tijuana students were 2 percent, 5 percent, or more of the student body, but they were a constant presence. Others lived in San Diego but had family in Tijuana, received some or all their K-12 education there, and moved back and forth with ease. I once asked a friend who was also an ex-student and worked at the university while earning her MA degree whether she felt more Mexican or American. "When I'm in Tijuana, I'm Mexican, but when I'm in San Diego, I'm American" she replied. Perfect answer, and exactly what the region needs.

Tijuana also offers several options for an excellent university education although that is not something most San Diegans know about. Once, a colleague at my university asked me if Tijuana had any universities. It was the proverbial white space on a map. As faculty, we observed Mexican students who came to our university, both on formal academic programs and as individuals choosing a school to attend for their degree. Mostly, however, we were unaware of the options across the border. Recently, in a reversal of the worldwide pattern in which students from poorer countries attend university in a richer country, some San Diego based students are now attending university in Tijuana. It is not clear how many, but it seems to be a growing trend. There are excellent opportunities to study, costs are far less, and the available degrees are equivalent to what is available in San Diego's public and private universities.

## Seven: Shopping and eating

One of the main reasons why San Diegans and Tijuaneños cross the border is to go shopping and to enjoy the food available on the other side. Shopping and eating are obviously not the same thing, but they often go together. When border crossers are surveyed, they often report that they crossed for shopping purposes. Crossing to eat is usually not a question that is asked in surveys of border crossers, and yet food, particularly on



the Mexican side, is a main attraction. The CEO of the San Ysidro Chamber of Commerce told me: "I buy my clothes in the United States, and I eat in Mexico."

The importance of cross-border shoppers is illustrated by the fact that a U.S. developer built an outlet mall with its back against the border wall and its eastern edge next to one of the two pedestrian crossings in San Ysidro. A steady stream of pedestrians from Mexico flows through the mall where about two-thirds of the shoppers are Mexican. Along San Ysidro Boulevard, which is perpendicular to the border and the main avenue that connects directly to the main San Ysidro border crossing, the percentage of shoppers from Mexico is even higher. As you move north from the border, further into San Diego County, the importance of Mexican consumers gradually declines. Communities like Chula Vista, which is nearer to the border than downtown San Diego, still depend on people from across the border, as evidenced by all the Mexican license plates on the cars in the Home Depot parking lot. Communities further north are further to travel for Tijuana residents, and generally less visited by Mexican consumers.

Over the last couple of decades, Costco, Walmart, and other big-box retailers have opened stores in Tijuana. That means that residents of Tijuana do not have to go through the time and hassle of crossing the border to shop for some items, although there are still advantages to doing so. The big box retailers and others are required to have a certain percentage of their inventories stocked with Mexican goods. Consequently, the quality of some items such as car parts, tools, and clothing suffer compared to the best. In addition, a surprising advantage for U.S. retailers is that they tend to have a more forgiving policy towards return items.

Shopping on the border is not a small matter for local businesses on both sides. During the pandemic, retail businesses in San Ysidro were severely hurt by the temporary loss of their Mexican customers. As late as the Christmas season of 2022, sales were still more than 25 percent below their pre-pandemic level. One estimate is that 200 businesses in San Ysidro did not reopen after the pandemic. A decade before the pandemic, drug cartel violence in Tijuana pushed U.S. residents away and caused some mobile

Mexican citizens to move across the border into the United States. The result was a severe downturn in the businesses along Revolution Avenue, the main tourist venue. Hundreds of businesses were forced to close as the absence of American shoppers, restaurant goers, and night clubbers, turned some of the city's prime real estate into an abandoned, run down, ghost town. The lack of border crossers caused a re-evaluation of the city's core area and a reconsideration of its best use. Should it wait for Americans to return, or do something else that doesn't depend on them? Ultimately, the loss of the bulk of their market forced a change in the types of businesses and activities that lined the avenue, and more shops and restaurants oriented their businesses towards a Mexican clientele. Boutique hotels, mescal bars, upscale restaurants, spas, and other venues became a draw for Tijuana residents, Baja Californians, and Mexicans from outside the region.

A main reason why both Mexicans and the Americans have returned to Tijuana is the growth of a regional Baja California cuisine. Branded Baja Med by some smart promoters, it is a good sign for Tijuana and Baja California's food scene when the cuisine and one of its best-known chefs has a multi-page spread in *The New Yorker* (January 22, 2012). The new cuisine takes Mexican flavors and dishes in a new direction. Mexican food is extremely popular in the United States, but the reality of Mexico is that it has many regional cuisines and an enormous variety of ingredients and flavors. Baja California's relatively new food scene combines the contributions of its Japanese and Chinese immigrant communities, the traditions of the indigenous Kumiai, Mexico's enormous variety of animal and plant life, fresh local seafoods, highly skilled presentations, and traditional Mexican recipes, to produce new flavors and textures that must be experienced to appreciate.

The bright and vibrant flavors available in Tijuana have only very partially crossed the border. San Diego has borrowed some of the taco choices routinely offered in Tijuana, such as shrimp in chili sauce, or the "taco gobernador" (shrimp with cheese, onions, and tomatoes) which appear more frequently in San Diego. San Diego 'taqueros' (taco makers) have begun to experiment with new combinations and ingredients, but the taco gap remains huge. Perhaps it has to do with the ubiquitous street vendors that are not allowed to exist in San Diego

but are all over Tijuana. Many are traditional vendors of carne asada tacos (grilled steak) or other standard fare, but they are also the source of new ideas and presentations.

What is true for tacos is also true for more complex fare: the best of Tijuana's cuisine doesn't seem to make it across the border. The reasons are somewhat of a mystery, but it may partly have to do with the availability of ingredients. Items such as grasshoppers, bone marrow, zucchini flowers, or fresh corn fungus (huitlacoche) may be hard to source in bulk. It is also possible that the new cuisine requires more kitchen workers than a restaurant in San Diego can afford to hire. Whatever the reasons for the differences in food, it seems likely that the incentive for San Diegans cross the border to eat is not going to disappear any time soon.

Both sides of the border produce good wines and beers. But where San Diego has become a global leader in the production of artisan beers and ales, Tijuana's artisan brewers produce excellent quality but far less in volume or variety. The irony of the situation is that while Mexico is rarely associated with quality wines, it produces some of the best in North America. The volume is small compared to Napa Valley and other sites in California, and most of it is consumed in Mexico rather than exported. The main production site is not in Tijuana, but nearby in the municipality of Ensenada. The Guadalupe Valley is about an hour and one-half from the border and has the right combination of hot summer days with cool ocean air in the evenings. It is a nascent Napa Valley and is promoted as such by the state's tourism agency. It is a favorite spot for San Diegans, but also for many people from Mexico City, Los Angeles, and other distant cities. The area's popularity has created an explosion of restaurants, hotels, and private residences, all of which put pressure on the over-stretched water supply.

## Eight: Medicine

People unfamiliar with Mexico or the border region may be surprised to learn about the growing medical industry. Medicine is complicated, technical, and expensive. A reasonable assumption is that dominant tendency will be for a high-income country to supply services to people living in a less well-off country if they live close by and can cross the border. So, it may

be a surprise to know that large numbers of Americans routinely seek medical treatment in Mexico. Most people have probably heard about the busloads of tourists, particularly seniors, that cross the border to fill their prescriptions but how widely known is the fact that many more people access some or all their health care in border towns on the Mexican side?

Medicine is an interesting case study of a type of cross border interactions that are so strong that they are shaping the direction of local economies. Twenty years ago, I attended a conference in Mexicali, the capital of the state of Baja California, where a local economic development specialist stressed the growing business opportunities of providing medical services to Americans who were unhappy with the costs of health care in the United States and who often lacked an ability to pay for it. U.S. seniors, he pointed out, want more than just a cheaper way to fill their prescriptions. They are also looking for less expensive assisted living arrangements and lower prices for doctor visits. Individuals and families are also searching for quality care at more reasonable prices, and people of Mexican and Latin American heritage often feel more comfortable in a Spanish speaking medical environment with shared cultural assumptions. Even pet owners in need of veterinary services are crossing the border with their pets to visit Mexican veterinarians.

Tijuana has long had a health care sector that catered to Americans, but in earlier decades it was less prominent than it is today. The somewhat more relaxed regulatory environment meant that experimental treatments not allowed in the United States could be offered. For example, in the 1970s and 1980s, Americans crossed the border to obtain advanced stage cancer treatment with laetrile, a compound found in ground fruit pits. The National Cancer Institute (part of the U.S.'s National Institutes of Health) reports that laetrile "has shown little anticancer effect in clinical studies" but for many years, it was available in Tijuana. Perhaps it still is. Nevertheless, the days are long gone when people crossed the border mainly for exotic treatments or for therapeutics that were not approved for use in the United States, or only to refill their prescriptions at a fraction of the price charged in the United States. Today, border crossers seeking medical care are as mainstream as can be imagined, and they are a growing economic

force that is having an impact on the shape of Tijuana's economy.

Examples of the impact include the New City Medical Plaza and the still-in-construction Cosmopolitan Health District. The former is a state-of-the-art medical facility and hospital located next to the San Ysidro border crossing. Its website proclaims that its "mission is to be the best medical tourism facility in the world." Cosmopolitan Health is finishing a 33-story medical facility near the border that has a similarly ambitious aim of establishing Tijuana as a destination for health tourism. These are two major examples, but they did not suddenly appear out of nowhere. Tijuana and other border communities have provided services to U.S. residents for quite some time as U.S. residents were priced out of medical services due to high costs and the lack of insurance. The types of medical facilities that are clustered at the border include private dental offices, private medical offices, medical labs for diagnostic analysis, and private hospitals. The San Ysidro port of entry strongly exhibits this characteristic.

The Affordable Care Act dramatically expanded access to health care in the United States, but medical options in Tijuana have continued to expand. For example, there are assisted living centers for seniors that charge a fraction of the cost of similar services in San Diego. Even after considering the inability to use Medicare to pay for services in Mexico, out of pocket costs are still much higher in San Diego. Successful assisted living centers that cater to Americans must offer additional services, such as transportation to the border for their residents that occasionally need to access their Medicare benefits and can only do so in the United States. Mexican hospitality and warmth can overcome many potential rough points that occur when someone seeks senior care in a foreign country, but probably not all. And relatives that remain in San Diego must navigate the border traffic bottleneck to see their loved one in a Tijuana facility. Nevertheless, the large population of Spanish speaking people of Mexican heritage living in the United States seems to imply that senior care facilities will expand in Tijuana as people age.

Since health care in the United States is mostly provided through one's place of work, cross border workers have a different set of needs than workers living in San

Diego. Many of them prefer to access their health care in Tijuana rather than San Diego but doing so requires a different set of insurance arrangements. San Diego employers are often willing to meet those needs, however, and several companies have been created to help them do so. San Diego employers now have a growing number of health care benefit packages they can offer their employees that allow them to access care in Tijuana. Health maintenance organizations (HMOs) such as SIMSA provide a complete set of medical services to cross border workers so they are protected against emergencies in the United States and can receive routine care at home in Tijuana. Similarly, companies such as MediExcel offers insurance plans to businesses in San Diego that let their employees access care in Tijuana.

Given the cost differences of medical care in Tijuana and San Diego, the demand for more medical services in Tijuana will probably continue to grow. As it does, it illustrates one of the most basic characteristics of communities on the border: they respond to and are shaped by conditions that originate on the other side. This characteristic is a fundamental element of the interactivity of border cities in general, and San Diego and Tijuana in particular.

## Nine: Public safety

Policing is complicated under normal conditions but when you add a border with different cultures and legal systems on the two sides, it becomes even more so. A community relations police officer for the San Diego Police Department put it like this: The region around the border becomes a blend of Mexico and the United States, and many individuals are not familiar with U.S. laws, customs, or culture.

The assumptions people make about the law and its enforcement can be radically different on the two sides of the border. I was once driving in Tijuana and made an illegal turn. A cop pulled me over and asked to see my identification. I gave him my driver's license (mistake one) and he told me to follow him to the police station as he put my license in his pocket. At the station he left me and my companions in the car and seemed to ignore us (mistake two). Eventually, he decided to scare me with stories of how much trouble I was in, but nothing

was happening until I realized he wanted a bribe. I asked him if he could take care of the fine for me (mistake three). He agreed to do me the favor because we are both gentlemen (*"Porque somos caballeros"*). I paid an amount that was probably 3 or 4 times more than the likely fine that the administrative judge inside the station would have imposed and, needless to say, there was no receipt. These mistakes happened because I did not know how traffic fines are handled or the legal and institutional customs of traffic stops.

The police in Tijuana have an even more complicated job because they cannot reliably depend on the rule of law. For one, there is no civil service system to protect them from arbitrary treatment by their superiors. At the same time, while most cops probably try to do a good job, they are confronted by far better armed and extremely ruthless narcotics dealers. The chaos of drug related violence, extortion, and protection rackets, ratchets up the level of uncertainty for the average cop who may have no idea which of their colleagues or superiors are taking drug money in return for helping a cartel. A large majority of Tijuana's cops are from Tijuana, have families, and are the sole breadwinner. We know this from a survey of the Tijuana police force done by researchers in a local university. Holding on to their jobs while navigating the dangerous waters of organized criminal syndicates with tentacles into the police and government is complicated.

Now, consider someone who grew up in this system and who crosses the border into the United States, either legally or illegally. Should U.S. cops be trusted? There are laws, certainly, but are they real? That is, are they enforced? Americans tell would-be immigrants not to come without papers, but likely as not, this hypothetical person will have family members and friends who crossed without papers and were gladly hired—at good wages, no less—by Americans who wanted their labor. So, this person might instinctively assume that there is little difference between Mexico and the United States when it comes to rules. If a cousin in San Diego has a good construction job and works without papers, what is the difference, other than the better wages? A mirror image of this hypothetical Mexican is a hypothetical American who has heard all the stories about corrupt Mexican cops and laid-back enforcement of the law. So, is it okay in Mexico to drink and get drunk in public, to

take recreational drugs, to swim nude, and to generally behave as if there are few rules that really matter?

Not all the cultural confusion on the border is as dramatic as migration or working without papers. San Diego's rules around street vending must be enforced by "vendor enforcement" and not by regular city cops who can only issue warnings. "So," the hypothetical vendor wonders, "is it really against the rules to sell my icy fruit bars here, or does that cop just not like Mexicans? They never enforce the rules, maybe they just make them up?" A Mexican entrepreneur starts an informal bus route, San Diego border to Los Angeles, like the route he operates in Mexico, Tijuana to Ensenada. He has no permits or insurance to be in business, but both routes are successful, at least for a while. Similarly, U.S. citizens may live in Tijuana and never know they need to have a different visa from the one given to tourists. Or that they need to register their car after a certain period of residency. Or, they might know, but they don't think it is important since no one ever gets into trouble for not following the rules.

I asked the community liaison officer of the San Diego Police Department what advice he might give to Americans in Tijuana or Mexicans in San Diego. His response was simple and clear: Know the laws, be respectful and be cautious. You are in a foreign country and the rules are likely to be different.

The border adds some layers of complexity to cooperation between police departments in San Diego and Tijuana. Consequently, there is not much interaction according to the San Diego District Attorney's office. Communications must go through a chain of command where there is a special liaison for interacting with Mexican officials. The possibilities are limited. For example, when witnesses flee San Diego, authorities must wait for them to return since they have very limited ability to track or to locate people who cross the border.

According to the District Attorney's office, the biggest issues for the police on the U.S. side are drugs and cars. For Mexican police, illegal arms trafficking, and the struggle to control organized crime are at the top. The illegal drug trade has an enormous impact on both sides due to the increase in deadly narcotics such as fentanyl,



the violence to control the trade, and the arming of criminals with military grade weapons illegally obtained from the United States.

Tourists in Tijuana are not the target of organized crime. As long as they stay out of the drug market and use their common sense to observe their surroundings, they are safe. The same cannot be said about Mexican kids in Tijuana. Part of the strategy of drug cartels on the border is to “flood the zone.” The price mark-up for cocaine or heroin or other illegal substances is enormous when it crosses into the United States. A cartel can have a substantial share of its shipments confiscated by border authorities and still make an enormous profit. So, they often break shipments into smaller packages and have them carried by school kids, or other gullible victims who think they are being cool or that they’ll make a few easy dollars. In this way, Mexican kids can be turned into victims that are pulled down by flow of illegal drugs even though they never bought, sold, or consumed them. They are instead, just naively doing one of the many stupid things all kids do.

## Ten: Philanthropy

When you cross the border from San Diego into Tijuana, you immediately know you are no longer in the United States. The aroma of taco carts and other vendors seeps into your awareness, along with the occasional stink of rotting garbage. Buildings are more brightly colored, there are far more people on the streets, and the flow of cars is more Italian than American. It’s not unusual to see juggling acts at busy intersections, or flower vendors, or lean, hyperactive men with rags who want to wash your windshield before the light turns green. Tijuana is a more active city than San Diego, at least for people with low incomes, because life there is also more precarious. If you’re not rich, and if you don’t hustle, you may not make it.

The standard of living in Mexico is not low by world standards. Its income per person is in the top half of the world’s countries, and above China, Brazil, and Thailand. The problem is that the economic pie in Mexico is divided highly unequally. That means there are fabulously wealthy people who can afford to shop in San Diego, stay in its most exclusive resorts, and eat in its finest restaurants, all while another group

of Mexicans struggle to meet their basic needs for food and shelter. Inequality is a problem in the United States as well, but it is worse in Mexico. And that means that when you cross the border into Tijuana, the conditions you encounter will range from the elegant and aesthetically beautiful venues that cater to people with money, to the dusty, thrown together shacks of squatters on hillsides where there are no paved roads or running water. Professionals in business attire are out and about in the city, along with kids in raggedy clothes who hold paper cups up to any passerby that might drop a peso or two.

The poverty part is shocking for middle class Americans who have not lived or traveled outside of our comfortable middle-class existences. I think it is one reason why some San Diegans are reluctant to visit Tijuana. To my mind, the best illustration of this point was given by a new dean at my university. To get to know the region, the dean was offered a tour of Tijuana guided by an internationally known faculty member who is a Mexican scholar specialized in the art and culture of the city. The dean declined the offer with the comment “I was in Tijuana once and it’s really sad.” (The dean did eventually attend some events in Tijuana and reportedly gained some awareness of the city.) It can be hard to see the dynamism and vibrant colors, the engaging boulevards, and the smiling faces when the focus is on the gap between U.S. and Mexican incomes.

Poverty is a problem in San Diego, as well, although probably not as extensive. One of the largest philanthropic organizations in the region estimates that about 10 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, but others put the poverty rate at 12 or 13 percent. Poverty lines are a bit arbitrary, but no matter how it is measured, there are many San Diegans with unmet basic needs. Finding shelter for the unhoused is a major problem in San Diego, but so is ensuring that all the basic nutritional needs of our children are met.

When unmet needs are not covered by a public program, private philanthropy often steps up to do what it can. The border and the reality of two national systems complicates philanthropy in the region. This is particularly the case when it tries to reach across to the other side, but also even within the boundaries of each nation. For example, Mexico’s current president, Andres

Manuel Lopez Obrador (2018-2024), or AMLO, believes that non-governmental organizations should be banned. He thinks they are corrupt and that they are usurping the power and responsibility of the government. He does not have the ability to ban them, but he has encouraged the disappearance of many organizations that were engaged in works of public benefit. On the U.S. side, large foundations and individuals give money to assist undocumented immigrants, but organizations that administer those funds have potential problems with the IRS. And efforts to take medical or other supplies across the border are sometimes challenged by Mexican customs agents who worry that the goods are untaxed illegal imports that will be resold on the Mexican market rather than donations to a charitable cause.

Organizing philanthropic efforts is the goal of the Border Philanthropy Partnership (BPP), one of the most active organizations in the arena of border philanthropy. Based in San Diego, they operate on both sides along the entire U.S.-Mexico border. They are a fiscal sponsor for organizations that receive grants and need someone to provide accounting and other management services, and they also advise donors who want to give but do not know how or where. The BPP also works with the Mexican consulate in San Diego, particularly in the consulate's outreach to migrants needing health care, and assists community organizations in Mexico with capacity building and institutional strengthening.

In recent years, migrant assistance in both Tijuana and in San Diego has become a significant part of local philanthropy. For example, the current wave of asylum seekers at the border puts pressure on shelters in Tijuana and on groups in San Diego to help them get to their families or sponsors in the United States. Asylum seekers have immediate needs because they often arrive in the United States with no resources and only the clothes on their backs. On both sides of the border, religious organizations play a key role, such as Jewish Family Services which sponsors the Rapid Response Network for responding to sudden waves of immigrants, or the Scalabrinian Missionaries who for many years have sponsored the Casa de Migrante in Tijuana. Individuals and non-religious organizations also sponsor migrant shelters, such as the Casa de Luz which serves LGBTQ migrants, and Juventud 2000

which is open to families and responded to the Central American caravans. These are only a few of the many.

There is probably a natural tendency to think that most charitable giving in Mexico comes from the United States, but that is not how it is. According to the Executive Director of the BPP, well over 90 percent of the giving in Mexico comes from Mexico. Giving in Mexico is hidden from most U.S. citizens who are not familiar with Mexico's institutions and customs. Many Americans are familiar with at least some of the efforts by U.S.-based church groups, student organizations, and service organizations that actively distribute resources in Tijuana. Lack of knowledge about the Mexican side, coupled with information about the U.S. side leads to some incorrect assumptions about the sources of funding.

Nevertheless, many San Diego organizations are actively involved in providing resources to communities in Tijuana. They help sponsor orphanages, provide for medical services, and perform community service projects in schools and elsewhere. These efforts are usually well-received and make valuable contributions to local communities. Occasionally, the desire to do good overwhelms all other considerations. A community organizer friend who is Mexican and lives in Tijuana once told me that there are individuals who make their livelihoods from the weekly clothing and food drop received from a San Diego church group.

Both San Diego and Tijuana are relatively better off than their respective national averages, but there are still many unmet needs and a need for philanthropy to pick up where federal and local governments are limited in their ability to act. Organized philanthropic efforts improve public health systems, provide vaccines, help restore habitat, offer scholarships, and take many other actions that have a positive effect on the physical and mental well-being of border residents. These actions are successful because they increase people's capabilities and their ability to live healthy, independent lives.

## Eleven: Cross border planning

In 1971, First Lady Pat Nixon visited San Diego. Her trip included a brief visit to Border Field where Tijuana, San Diego, and the Pacific Ocean come together. A major

purpose of her visit was to inaugurate California's newly created Border Field State Park. In 1971, there was no wall along the border, only a simple barbed wire fence about waist high. Wanting to greet people on both sides of the fence, and at the invitation of the Mayor of Tijuana, Mrs. Nixon had her security detail cut the wire so she could walk into Mexico and greet the crowd. No passport check, no large men in dark glasses pushing back the crowd, and no visible guns. In her comments she hoped that there would soon be an international park, shared by both countries like the parks on the U.S.-Canada border. (You can listen to her description of the visit and watch a video of it on YouTube, minute 30: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ABfQjJGNQ78>).

Cross border urban planning is a heavy lift, and the goal of an open park area is still waiting to be completed. There are multiple designs for an international park, including ones that address security concerns, but still no park. That doesn't mean that cross border spaces and planning cannot be built, however, and there are several positive local examples. A local expert on cross border urban planning put it this way: "When money is involved, then things happen." Apparently, there was no money, or not at least enough for a binational park. It is hard to make a profit from parks.

The same is not true for other activities, however, and there are good examples of money moving cross border planning in some significant ways. The most recent and best examples is the Cross Border Express (CBX). CBX is an official port of entry but may only be used by travelers who are using Rodriguez Field, Tijuana's commercial airport, where there are frequent flights to Mexican cities and direct flights to China and Japan. The main structure of CBX is in the United States and backs up against the border. A traveler wanting to fly out of Rodriguez Field must have a plane ticket and pay a small fee to use the facility. Once they show they have done that, they walk through a two-block long passageway that crosses above the border fence. After descending a flight of stairs, they enter directly into the airport terminal. Payment to use CBX pays for the operation of the port of entry. On the U.S. side, there is lots of parking, a ride sharing area, and machines that print out a Mexican visa. The operation is a huge success. Investors in CBX took a risk, but unlike an urban park,

there was the potential for enough profit to make it worth their effort and money.

U.S.-Mexico trade and border crossing have outstripped the capacity of the border's infrastructure, but like the CBX case, trade generates profits, so binational planning has a strong incentive to overcome the inherent barriers. It is slow and unbelievably bureaucratic given that two countries and many layers of government are involved, but it does happen. New border crossings are a prime example.

San Diego is perhaps the busiest border crossing in the world for pedestrians. It is certainly near the top if not the actual number one. For many years there was only one pedestrian crossing in the downtown Tijuana area, along with a second smaller crossing several miles east at Otay Mesa. In 2016, after years and years of planning a second crossing opened to connect Tijuana with San Ysidro. Similarly, San Diego is the second busiest port of entry for the trucks that move goods between the two countries. They are routed east out to Otay Mesa to keep them out of downtown Tijuana. A commercial crossing needs more space than a pedestrian crossing, and with the growth of trade, Otay Mesa has become overwhelmed and inadequate. It has taken two decades of planning, but the new Otay Mesa East crossing for commercial vehicles is under construction (September 2023) and will open ... sometime.

Putting in new border crossings or expanding existing ones is seriously complicated. Walls and fences are much easier because they are on one side and do not require collaboration across the border. In the United States, Homeland Security has even been granted exceptions to environmental regulations, Native American sacred area protections, national park rules, and so on. A few years ago, San Diego's transportation planning agency, SANDAG, listed 30 local, state, and federal agencies that were involved in planning a new border crossing. There were 18 U.S. agencies and 12 Mexican, and this did not consider non-government agencies with stakes in the crossing such as chambers of commerce, environmental groups, and others. Coordination and negotiation are difficult and take time.

Many of the steps necessary to build border infrastructure require an international treaty.

San Diego and Tijuana cannot simply agree, and then implement whatever it is they've agreed on since federal governments reserve international agreements for themselves. For example, Rodriquez Field in Tijuana is the city's commercial airport. It is located next to the border, which is why the CBX border crossing works so well. But it is also a mile or two from Brown Field, a small airport in San Diego that handles small private planes and some cargo. Two airports next to each other but in different countries can only operate safely if there is an agreement about ground-to-air communications. But the agreement must be between the governments of Mexico and the United States because local governments are not permitted to sign agreements with foreign governments. So, there is an international treaty between Mexico and the United States that sets the rules for ground-to-air communications around airports in the border region.

There are many other areas where treaty agreements are necessary. As a result, and as noted in the discussion on water, the United States has more bilateral international treaties with Mexico than with any other country except Canada. Many, although by no means all, are agreements that are required because we share a border. Activity areas such as the use of shared water resources, habitat and environmental protection, boundary maintenance and definition, telecommunications, law enforcement, emergency response, and others require cooperation across the border, and agreement as to the rights and responsibilities of both countries.

Binational parks, a trolley line that crosses the border, even a residential neighborhood that sits on both sides of the border are all things we know how to do, but at the moment, the politics are too hard. Even so, who knows what the future will bring?

## Twelve: Water

A little known and underappreciated fact about U.S.-Mexico relations is that the United States has more bilateral treaty agreements with Mexico than with any other country in the world, except one. Canada has only a handful more even though it is our closest ally. These are formal international agreements embedded in U.S. and Mexican laws. They cover a wide range of

topics, from civil aviation, to taxes, to national defense and policing. The one area with the most agreements, however, covers the rules governing our shared international waters. Mainly, these are the Rio Grande, the Colorado, and the Tijuana River.

In the 1940s, the United States and Mexico created the International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC; its Spanish acronym is CILA). It is tasked with defining the precise location of the borderline and with managing the shared surface waters. It is a binational organization with Mexican and U.S. sections that have equal responsibility and authority. A friend and expert on border waters calls it "the greatest diplomatic success in U.S.-Mexico history."

Not everyone living in San Diego and Tijuana would agree about the "success" part of that last sentence. Our local problem—everyone agrees it is a problem—is the Tijuana River. It originates in Mexico southeast of Tijuana and flows towards the city. Before it gets there, it joins its largest tributary, Cottonwood Creek, which originates in San Diego County, on Otay Mountain. The river then flows through the outer suburbs of eastern Tijuana, down into the city, where it is canalized, and then back into San Diego just to the west of the San Ysidro border crossing. Along the way, it picks up a lot of pollutants and overwhelms Tijuana's capacity for treating the water. When it flows down into the Tijuana River Valley in San Diego, located on the north side of the border between the border crossing and the ocean, it meets the South Bay International Wastewater Treatment Plant. The plant was built by the IBWC to treat the wastewater that exceeds Tijuana's capacity, and to capture the flows that come down the nearby canyons. The amount of wastewater and solid waste often exceeds the capacity of the treatment plant and, as a result, the Tijuana River pollutes its estuary, the beaches in southern San Diego County (Imperial Beach especially, but also Coronado Beach), and Tijuana's Las Playas neighborhood. Imperial Beach is closed to swimming or surfing on more days than it is open. It's the IBWC's job to take care of this.

On one level this looks like a giant failure by the IBWC. Contaminated beaches and untreated wastewater are not new problems. Imperial Beach, for example, has been fighting contamination from the Tijuana



River since at least the 1970s. There have been gains in the cleanup effort, and setbacks, as the population in Tijuana has grown dramatically over the last few decades. The root of the current problem seems to be a lack of money to create a fix, and a lack of money to maintain it. When new treatment systems are installed, the funding often pays for construction but not for maintenance. Currently the IBWC says it needs \$150 million just to fix the system that was installed in the 1990s, and another \$700 million or more to build more capacity. The lack of funding is at least partly the result of being so far from Washington, DC, and Mexico City. If this problem existed on the Potomac River, it probably would not have lingered and worsened over the last 5 decades. But it is also probably a result of the fact that until recently, not enough of our federal representatives have pushed for a solution. And, on top of that, the most severely affected community, Imperial Beach, is poorer and browner than other parts of the county.

At this point, or maybe even sooner, you may be wondering how this can be considered a great success. Here is the point. The IBWC and its Mexican counterpart, CILA, have not solved all the issues around shared waterways, but they are a binational and symmetrical forum for addressing the issues. Environmental issues on the border, including water sufficiency, water quality, and water sharing, cannot be solved unilaterally because water and other environmental forces do not recognize the border or national governments. Air basins, animal and plant habitats, diseases, and water, cross borders easily. Both the United States and Mexico need a mechanism for joint discussion, negotiation, and action planning. The mechanism must be symmetrical (so the United States cannot force its will on Mexico), and that is exactly how the IBWC operates. If Congress chooses to ignore the issue at hand, that is a separate problem, but at least San Diego and Tijuana have an agreed method for creating solutions, even if they do not yet have all the funding for today's problems.

Water quality in the Tijuana River basin is not the only environmental issue in San Diego or Tijuana. It may not even be the most pressing issue. San Diegans and Tijuana residents rely on the Colorado River for nearly all their water supply (Tijuana) or as the largest single source (San Diego). Mexico's allocation—also negotiated via the

IBWC—is inadequate for its needs, particularly given the population growth in northern Baja California over the last five or six decades. The overwhelming majority of the basin is in the United States, but per the treaty agreement, Mexico is allocated a small portion of the river flow at its southern end where it enters Mexico. That water is diverted to irrigate the Mexicali Valley and to supply Mexicali and Tijuana with water. The long-term problem is that the population dependent on the river has grown dramatically while the flow in the river's basin seems to be in a long run decline. About 15 years ago, I attended a conference where a paleo-geographer from UCLA described how the Colorado was dry for a couple of centuries around the year 1200. A dried-up Colorado River would mean a world of hurt for San Diego and Tijuana.

The lack of water in Tijuana is both an environmental problem and a social problem. On the one hand, it explains the lack of adequate green spaces in the city. That means everyone breathes more dust and more of the harmful contaminants that are picked up from unpaved streets and backyard outhouses. Inadequate water also means it becomes a major item in the budget of low income Tijuana residents, and limits what they can do. Many households depend on "pipas", or water tanker trucks, that deliver to residences. That is an expensive way to obtain water.

None of this is good news but there is another way to look at these issues. If you think that the U.S. and Mexico—and San Diego and Tijuana—should work together within a rules-based system rather than using force, intimidation, and unilateral action, then the environment presents us with an opportunity for collaboration. The Tijuana River especially presents a difficult problem that neither side can solve on its own. It is claimed that, as polluted as it is when it leaves Mexico, the water can be recycled given the right equipment and resources. Cleaning up the river and recycling the water would be a tremendous achievement.

There are many other environmental problems shared by San Diego and Tijuana, some of which are being ameliorated by the California Air Resources board, the binational North American Development Bank, the EPA and Mexico's EPA, called SEMARNAT. There are also

major efforts by public health groups in both countries, particularly in the wake of the pandemic. The focus here is on water because it is basic to our lives and because it represents both a challenge and an opportunity.

## Thirteen: Manufacturing

Manufacturing is a major activity in the San Diego-Tijuana region. Most of it, however, is on the Mexican side of the border. San Diego's manufacturing sector is relatively small by national standards, but Tijuana is a global powerhouse when it comes to manufacturing jobs and output. Almost half of all its formal sector jobs are in manufacturing, along with more than half of the jobs in Tecate. The reasons for the two Mexican border cities' concentration on manufacturing goes beyond just wages, although they are clearly a factor. At the low end, an unskilled assembly line worker might only make the equivalent of \$300 a month for a 5 and a half days workweek. But wages were low in the 1970s and earlier and there wasn't much manufacturing activity then. Lower wages in Mexico are a factor, but not the only one.

Mexico also has the advantage of being close to the United States. In Tijuana's case it's also close to the large urban area of San Diego and, even more importantly, the even larger urban area of Los Angeles and its surroundings. Los Angeles brings one of the world's largest seaports to the mix of resources, and a shipping network that connects it to China and the entire Asia Pacific region. That is an enormous market for obtaining inputs and selling outputs. Firms in Tijuana can use the much better highways and port facilities in the U.S., while taking advantage of the lower labor costs in Mexico. But as with Tijuana's lower wages, the Port of Los Angeles-Long Beach has been around for many decades, while China, Japan, Korea, and the rest of Asia have been important markets for the United States, but less so for Mexico until 3 or 4 decades ago.

The large US and Asian markets didn't suddenly appear, and wages did not suddenly fall, so what happened? How did manufacturing take-off in Tijuana, Tecate, Mexicali and other Mexican border towns? NAFTA is one explanation that many people assume was responsible, because it was so dramatic. The debates were heated, and the agreement began after a long

period of decline in U.S. manufacturing. It clearly had an impact on trade, but Mexico began to send more than half of all its exports to the United States in the 1880s, more than a century before the agreement. NAFTA's main contribution was probably that it increased the confidence of investors in the U.S., Japan, Korea, and other countries: if they opened a branch in Mexico, the government was not going to suddenly change the rules or do something radical like nationalize their investments. So, NAFTA was important, but once again, it cannot be the whole explanation because some of the changes it encouraged were happening before it was signed.

What happened was modern telecommunications and shipping. Telecommunications improvements made it much easier to resolve small problems that inevitably arise when you try to do business in another country. Several years ago, I was invited by a Mexican colleague to give a talk at the Tijuana campus of UABC, the state university. I agreed to meet her at 3 so we could chat before the talk. At 3, I was waiting for her. I waited and waited, wondering what was going on when she finally arrived, about 45 minutes after the agreed time. I politely made a joke, and she politely informed me that Tijuana did not move its clocks ahead for another week and a half. I'd never considered the idea that timekeeping might be different across the border, but there used to be a period of about two weeks when California had changed its clocks and Baja California hadn't. That problem has since been corrected and both states now change at the same time but in years past, this was a small difference with the potential for larger complications.

Manufacturing is infinitely more complicated than just knowing what time it is somewhere else, but if all you have is a landline with no email, texting, zooming, or any of the other communications advances since the 1980s, it becomes slower and much more complicated to work out even the smallest problems. And if you want to change the design of a product, or if there are quality issues, or a need to ramp up production for a new market, you essentially had to go to the factory, wherever it was, and communicate in person. Today, I can do a simple browser query and learn what time it is right now in any part of the world and factory managers

have a variety of more-or-less instantaneous ways to communicate with a branch plant in another country.

The Internet and several other relatively new inventions—container shipping for example—made it much easier for U.S. companies to manage a firm in Mexico. In the span of a few years in the 1990s, email, satellite communications, mobile phones, and the Web made it possible to take advantage of lower Mexican wages and nearby U.S. infrastructure. Border investments were close enough to the U.S. so that if a visit was necessary, it did not involve flying halfway around the world.

Telecommunications pushed U.S.-Mexico trade forward and made it the second largest trading relationship between any two countries on the planet. Only the U.S.-Canada trade relationship is larger, and usually not by much. Most trade between the United States and Mexico moves in trucks and has turned Otay Mesa into the second busiest port on the southern border. In 2020, more than \$42 billion in goods moved through the port, about 1/3rd of it going south and 2/3rds going north, packed into more than 700,000 trucks.

The goods moving across the border may cross multiple times as they are processed, refined, and assembled into larger components. Logically, the large flow of cross-border trade creates new jobs in support industries on both sides. Customs brokers, logistics analysts, import and export specialists, transportation and warehouse workers, accountants, lawyers, financial experts, insurance brokers, and realtors provide the services required to move more than \$44 billions of goods across the border.

The goods manufactured by firms on the border include a variety of products. Tijuana at one time was the world's largest manufacturing site for television sets. Panasonic, LG, Samsung, and other major brands all had (and still have) large plants in the city. It is no longer the leader in television sets, but it continues to churn out a range of electronic products, including products for the aerospace and defense industries, medical devices, and many types of consumer electronics. In addition, border manufacturers in Tijuana produce parts for the auto industry, household appliances, and a variety of other goods. Not all are high-tech, but some are, and

the stereotype of a dirty factory producing cheap goods is long out of date. The reality is a mix of manufacturing sophistication that includes dust-free clean rooms for making sensitive components. Unskilled manual laborers are part of the scene, but so are employees with advanced engineering and extensive software programming skills.

## Fourteen: Crossing the border

I once asked a graduate assistant if he wanted to visit Tijuana. I had a few errands to run, and I thought Mamadou would be interested in tagging along. We'd visit Mercado Hidalgo, an outdoor market in central Tijuana, and a few other places along the way. Mamadou seemed very interested in comparing life on the ground in Tijuana to his home country in West Africa. I made sure to stress that he had to have a visa that allowed exit and re-entry to the United States. If he wasn't certain, he could check with our International Student Center.

Mamadou was extremely competent, so I did not worry too much about his visa. But in addition to being competent, he was very dark skinned, well over 6 feet tall, and from a small West African country many people had never heard of. And it was shortly after 9/11. We ran my errands and walked around a bit but when we were ready to return to San Diego, things became complicated. We were immediately sent to secondary inspection where a border guard looked at his papers, rejected them out of hand, and pronounced "We can't let just anybody in." Particularly if they are tall, dark skinned, and foreign, I thought. The rejection set us up for a couple of hours of fretting, during which we were instructed to go to the U.S. consulate in Tijuana and get the paperwork straightened out. The only problem was that this was Friday afternoon, the consulate was closed, and it would not re-open until Tuesday since Monday was a holiday. I was thinking about a hotel and spending the weekend with Mamadou in Tijuana when another border guard informed us that they were about to have a shift change and that the person that rejected Mamadou's visa was not supposed to be checking visas. "Wait until the next shift manager comes on," she said. A couple of hours later, his visa was re-checked, found to be perfectly in order, and Mamadou was permitted to re-enter the United States.

This is a mild case compared to many, but it illustrates a couple of issues. Border guards are often not well trained in the technical details of visas. The first guy couldn't understand Mamadou's paperwork because it was slightly non-standard, so he rejected it. Secondly, if Mamadou had been white, I am skeptical that he would have run into this obstacle. That may seem unfair to the people that protect our border, but my experience is that I am never sent to secondary if I'm alone or if the other people in the car are all Anglo looking. On the other hand, I'm frequently sent there if there is a person of color in the car. I was once sent to secondary when I was driving back to San Diego from the Tijuana airport with a university colleague who is Chinese American. I protested that they were racially profiling but the border guard said it was all just random. Three years later, I went for an interview with Customs and Border Protection (CBP). The interview is required for the SENTRI card which gives access to the expedited crossing lane. (It's much faster.) The first question they asked me was to tell them about my colleague.

CBP does not believe in customer service because they are not accountable. They have been given the authority to ignore the 4th Amendment (protection against unreasonable searches), they are not subject to the environmental rules that apply to private businesses and government agencies, and they are allowed to ride roughshod over the protections granted sovereign Native American tribal lands and sacred places. They have absolute authority to make life and death decisions and to determine who may enter and who may not. Shockingly, they have murdered several people, some of whom were in Mexico when they were shot by Border Patrol agents, and no one has ever faced consequences. (See the case of Anastasio Hernández Rojas, for example: [https://www.alliancesd.org/justice\\_for\\_anastasio](https://www.alliancesd.org/justice_for_anastasio).) For years, they had an emergency response unit that was created to cover up crimes committed by agents while on duty. Eventually Congress forced them to disband the unit. CBP has never offered an analysis of the effectiveness of its tactics and has not defined what "controlling the border" means. It's an amorphous, military-sounding objective with no quantitative analytics or reasonable meaning.

To be sure, not all agents are a threat to people living on the border. There are tens of thousands of agents,

and many are sincere, dedicated public servants. Many have gone out of their way to help migrants in distress, and many of them are migrants themselves. CBP offers good wages and benefits and is an opportunity for its agents to improve their own lives and the lives of their families. But there is no incentive to root out the problem cases, and like policing everywhere, it is an occupation that attracts more than its share of racists and sociopaths.

Entering Mexico has always been relatively easy. Secondary inspection of vehicles is infrequent and random and usually moves quickly except on some weekends when the waves of cars travelling into Mexico overwhelm the border crossing and produce moderate wait times. (Recently this has changed and wait times in the evening have grown dramatically as the flow of cars returning to Mexico after work encounter fewer open crossing lanes. It remains to be seen if this is a permanent change or a temporary one.) For a while, Mexico required pedestrians to present their passport or other ID and fill out a form requesting a visa which was automatically granted. This appeared to be in retaliation for U.S. rules but was abandoned after a couple of years in the 2010s. Crossing the border into the United States has always been slower but after 9/11 it became even more difficult as wait times in the pedestrian lines and car lanes increased dramatically in San Diego-Tijuana, and passport requirements began their phase-in period. Although no 9/11 terrorists entered from Mexico, inspections became much more time consuming and wait times rose accordingly.

The increase in border wait-times gave rise to several creative responses. Burrito vendors who push their carts between the rows of cars lining up on the Mexican side began to advertise their phone numbers so people could text or call ahead. When they arrived near the cart, a warm carne asada, beans and rice, or another burrito would be waiting. At one point after 9/11, a few brave souls ditched their cars for bicycles so they could ride between the car lanes. This seemed suicidal, however, so a special bike lane was created. Then, young Mexican entrepreneurs began renting bikes to people standing in the pedestrian line and soon there were big and small border crossers pushing kiddy bikes down the bike lane.



One must wonder about the theatrics of border crossing into the United States. Is it an effective deterrent to any of the bad outcomes we hope to avoid, or is it a performance for the sake of politics? Particularly since 9/11, but really beginning in the mid-1990s, the number of personnel protecting the border has increased around 5 times while the budget is 3 times larger in inflation adjusted terms. Every recent presidential administration has ineffectively addressed the "problem of the border," which usually seems to be equivalent to "too many people want to enter the United States." U.S. policy cannot determine the number of people wanting to enter because migrants are largely driven by conditions outside the country.

International terrorists are less of a threat than domestic terrorists, although a threat, nonetheless. They usually enter with legal visas or expertly forged documents and come through legal ports of entry. The CBP has not been able to demonstrate that any international terrorist threat has been stopped at the U.S.-Mexico border and is unwilling to discuss the issue, preferring instead to talk generally about all ports of entry and terrorist watch lists. Meanwhile, drugs are more plentiful and dangerous than ever, and guns still flow into Mexico. In short, whatever we might want to call the CBP's performance, it does not seem to have deterred drugs from entering nor guns from leaving. It has increased border wait times dramatically and perhaps it has deterred international terrorists, but it is impossible to say.

## Fifteen: The wall

One day during the summer of 1994, I had lunch in Tijuana with a Mexican colleague from Baja California's state university, Universidad Autónoma de Baja California (UABC), and a colleague from my university. It was a splendid lunch at a popular seafood restaurant. We were celebrating the end of a summer program that combined students from both our campuses in a study of the binational region. Everyone had worked together more or less seamlessly, and I was very satisfied with the outcome. But even though everything had gone exceptionally well, my Mexican colleague was irate and deeply offended. I could not blame her, and as the only Californian at the table, I felt a sense of shame and embarrassment over Proposition 187.

Proposition 187 was a popular initiative passed by California voters in 1994 making it illegal to provide any public services to undocumented immigrants: no schooling for children, no emergency medical services, and certainly no public support payments (which they hardly ever received in any case). It was thrown out by the courts as unconstitutional, but it was a slap in the face to Mexico and Mexicans, and my colleague was letting me know how she felt. I was completely opposed to it, yet I felt some responsibility since it was my state. Making matters worse, it came on the heels of the beginning of the Border Patrol's Operation Gatekeeper in the San Diego region. Gatekeeper reinforced fencing between the two cities and put more border guards on the ground. The goal was to force immigrants without papers to move east in their crossing attempts, where they would be deterred by the mountains and the desert. They did shift their crossing patterns to the east, but they were not deterred and many perished in the harsh conditions of the rugged terrain. This year, 2023, there have been more than 500 deaths of border crossers, and we are not out of September yet. (See the talk by anthropologist Jason De Leon: Decoding stories of border crossing: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vwhbWikqlkw>)

Proposition 187 and the big increase in anti-migrant sentiment began when the United States had a mild recession in 1991-92. The recession was mainly caused by the conversion of defense firms after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. The recession hit California harder than the rest of the country given its high concentration of defense firms, plus a persistent drought that hurt farm incomes, and a burst real estate bubble that crippled construction and the regional banking industry. Not surprising, perhaps, was the scapegoating of undocumented immigrants that resulted from the state's hard times. Building walls and denying medical care to immigrants was a populist response that won statewide support.

More than 25 years later, we not only live with a wall, but we now have multiple walls. As I write, the CBP is rebuilding the walls between San Diego and Tijuana, replacing the 18-foot high inner one into a new 30-foot wall. In CBP logic, 30 feet is a significant improvement on 18 feet because it is far more likely to cause physical damage if someone jumps or falls from the top.

Emergency room doctors can attest to the increase in spinal, head, and limb injuries that are showing up at local hospitals, and a few people have died from their falls. One of the ironies of the new wall is that a large section was built through Friendship Park. That is the park that was created to demonstrate the goodwill and friendship between the people of Tijuana and San Diego.

The wall must be seen in order to understand its offensiveness for Mexicans. The first wall consists of metal bollards with flat panels welded together at the top to give it a completely smooth and unclimbable surface. It is about a foot inside the United States and adheres to the older 18-foot-high design. Then there is an open space 3-4 car lanes wide which is completely without vegetation since the CBP recently uprooted all of the Friendship Garden that was planted just inside the United States (see <https://www.friendshippark.org> for information about the park, the ex-garden, and the latest news on the wall through the garden). Then there is the new 30-foot-high wall. The wall continues into the ocean—another surreal element—and Border Patrol agents monitor the entire space from a bluff above the surf.

CBP occasionally offers a ride along that lets you travel with an officer from the eastern edge of the urban areas of Tijuana and San Diego to the coast, inside the two fences. It is worth an afternoon, both for the views of Tijuana and the sense of the CBP. The route is in the United States between the walls, but it looks into several working-class neighborhoods in Tijuana where, unlike San Diego, the city is constructed right up to the wall. Houses, apartments, roads, and commercial buildings are practically touching the wall in places. On the U.S. side, there are none of those things except right at the border crossing gates. Mostly the land is open and often for some distance before the first buildings are encountered.

At the beach, where the wall goes into the ocean, the contrast is particularly great. On the U.S. side is a mostly empty Border Field State Park, patrolled by very serious and hyper-vigilant CBP agents. Across the wall, on the Mexican side, families gather on the beach, vendors push their carts, a boardwalk lets visitors stroll down the beach, restaurants broadcast music and the last

official border marker monument pinpoints the exact placement of the borderline.

Mexicans began to paint their side of the fence years ago. They gave it a lot of color with political and social messages, some very funny and others very serious. There are portraits of people who have made a difference to the region, names of deported U.S. veterans, poems, lists of people who died in the desert and mountains, and Dadaist statements. The newest addition to the Mexican side is an ironic piece of satire: A new monument fashioned from a large slab of the Berlin Wall. The wall is an open wound, but Mexican humor and irony are alive and well.

The purpose of a wall is relatively straightforward. We can disagree about its necessity, or the type of wall it should be, but at least we all have an idea of what it is supposed to accomplish: prevent unauthorized entry into the United States. What is head scratching about the wall is that it doesn't deter entry. Around half of all undocumented immigrants enter with a valid visa and then never leave. A large share of the rest of the immigrant population voluntarily turns themselves over to CBP so they can begin an asylum claim. Then there are the tunnels, the desert trails, and other pathways to the United States. In fact, the wall is so ineffective that some of its most vocal supporters—members of the Republican Party—have begun to call for the U.S. military to be sent into Mexico.

The wall is one more policy that has never been scrutinized for cost effectiveness. It costs billions, but does it work? How well? Is it the best way to accomplish whatever it does accomplish? The wall falls into that category of policies that are more a performance than a real policy. On top of it all, it is offensive to one of the U.S.' closest collaborators. I'm sure most Mexicans understand the need for some sort of barrier, but an 18-foot-high outer wall, a bare strip of land that is 3 or 4 lanes wide, and a 30-foot inner wall, is more political theater than an effective policy.

## Sixteen: Migration

A few years back I did an organized bike trip around southern Arizona. It is a beautiful landscape of desert and mountains, small towns, and tree-lined streams.

We rode close to the border in a couple of places and that caught the attention of another middle-aged white guy who happened to be from Tennessee. I don't know if he considered himself a racist, but after a few minutes of conversation, there was no doubt in my mind. One day, after we passed a couple of Border Patrol checkpoints and several of their patrols in pickups, he expressed surprise at all the immigration enforcement. I was surprised that he didn't know this about our immigration and border control system. Later I realized that the story of the border that was playing in his head was a story shaped by a media that describes an open border in crisis with waves of undocumented immigrants. When he saw the reality of an active, strong, and very noticeable border enforcement effort, it startled him. When we talked about this, it was also apparent that his antagonism towards people of color was a way for him to cope with his fears.

It's October 2023 and the local newspaper is reporting that federal immigration authorities have allowed 18,500 asylum seekers to enter the San Diego region since mid-September. That is a lot. And there is no doubt that it strains the systems of support provided by local governments, civic groups and religious organizations. Supporting asylum seekers while they try to connect with their families and supporters who are scattered across the United States requires resources: Temporary shelter, meals, medical care, bus and plane tickets, diapers and clothing, toiletries, and the other pieces of everyday living we all require for our basic dignity.

America has had a love-hate relationship with migration throughout its history and our current cultural battles are often fought out over the theme of migration. We confuse it with security issues, we sometimes denigrate and fear people who come from different cultures, and we confuse narcotics cartels (narcos) with innocents who are fleeing violence and repression. Most migrants are simply looking for a better life where they can earn a decent living, raise their kids in safety, and live with dignity. Most of them blend into the United States, and their kids grow up American.

San Diego and Tijuana have immigrants from around the world—Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. Even so, many immigrants and

asylum seekers pass through the region and do not stay here because their families and contacts are elsewhere. The immigrants that do stay become part of the social fabric of San Diego and Tijuana. Two examples that stand out are Tijuana's relatively new Haitian-origin community of working people and businesses and San Diego's Iraqi-origin population which has both recent and earlier generations. In fact, there are communities from every continent.

The period of high Mexican out-migration from the 1970s until the 2000s has ended. As migrants in Mexico moved north to be near the border, not everyone crossed into the United States, and as a result, Tijuana became a diverse city of people from across the country. Mexico is a nation with more than 100 indigenous languages and many of those communities sent their members to the border and Tijuana. In the last decades, they have been joined by Central Americans, Haitians, Venezuelans, and even more recently by Indians, Middle Easterners, Russians, Ukrainians, and people from Asia and Africa. Some manage to enter the United States, many do not.

San Diego is like other urban areas in California with respect to the diversity of communities that migration has created. This is probably what bothers some people and may be at the source of a lot of the anti-immigrant sentiment that is expressed nationally. The diversity of languages, food, and customs undoubtedly contributes to San Diego's cultural richness and makes it a more interesting place, but it also creates challenges. Schools in immigrant neighborhoods have scores of languages, and public and private service providers must be able to interact with people from a range of different cultures speaking many different languages.

We know quite a bit about the migrant communities in the United States, including San Diego. One, they pay taxes. This is true regardless of whether they are authorized to be in the United States or not. They pay sales taxes, property taxes, income taxes, vehicle licensing taxes, and social security taxes. About ten years ago, the Social Security Administration estimated that at the national level it was receiving around \$13 billion per year that was not attributable to any specific account and was most likely paid by undocumented immigrants. And a large share of undocumented

immigrants are homeowners. It's below the percentage for native born residents and is lower still in California and San Diego, which have high housing costs. Nationwide, around 28 percent of undocumented immigrants are homeowners, while in San Diego about 20 percent.

We also know that U.S. communities with large numbers of migrants have lower, not higher, crime rates and border cities have lower rates across the entire U.S.-Mexico border. This doesn't prove a connection between immigration and lower crime, but it is suggestive, and it certainly contradicts the assumption of higher crime rates.

We also know that despite the constant efforts to link migration and security, no terrorist acts have been committed by people who entered the United States across the U.S.-Mexico border. Customs and Border Protection has never been able to show otherwise, and although they talk about apprehending terrorists (who are on their opaque terrorist watch lists) they are amazingly tight-lipped when it comes to names and details. More recently, anti-immigrant rhetoric has tried to associate migration with the entrance of narcos. There is no doubt that narcotics cartels use terror to intimidate, but political terrorism and narco-wars are not the same. Plus, Mexican narcotics cartel networks have operated in the United States for some time. Otherwise, how would drugs be distributed in the United States? The narcos and their allies are here but the U.S. criminal justice system ensures that they cannot operate in the same ways they do in Mexico.

It is extremely hard to migrate, not only physically but also financially, psychologically, and emotionally. People leave everything they know and often make a dangerous journey to reach the border. Sadly, many have died or have been seriously harmed. Yet they still come. In their view, what they are leaving is far worse than the dangers and trauma of the journey. We know from our own history that migrants are often the most energetic, hardworking, and high achieving members of their communities. They come to the United States, both with and without papers, because they love their families and they want to offer them lives with greater security and dignity. What's not to like?

## Seventeen: Deportation

Imagine you are living your happy life and minding your business when there is a knock on the door. The next thing you know, you are being deported to Tijuana, Mexico, a place you have not seen since you were a small child. Your Spanish might be shaky, and all your friends and family contacts are on the U.S. side, but you cannot return. What now?

This imaginary example is a fairly common story. People are deported for a variety of reasons, some serious and some trivial, and they have all kinds of backgrounds. There are veterans of the U.S. military, gang members, construction workers and businessmen. I intentionally write businessmen instead of businesspeople because most deportees—as high as 90 percent—are men. Some have been deported before, some have lived for years or even decades in the United States, and some have barely set foot on U.S. soil before they are apprehended and sent back across the border.

I have a friend who was deported for a minor drug charge even though he worked as a high-level manager for a large corporation. He was not granted his rights for a due process hearing before he was dropped in Tijuana. He was eventually allowed to return to the United States, but not until he had spent many years separated from his family while he built a new life across the border helping deported veterans and vulnerable migrants.

That is one type of deportee—a successful contributor to his community and family who paid a high price for an addiction. I have another friend who met two deported men at the wrong end of a gun. Ivan (not his real name) climbed into a taxi in Mexico City one day and was immediately pushed against the door by an armed thug who climbed in next to him. It was an “express kidnapping.” He was taken to an ATM and forced to withdraw the maximum. Then they drove to a house and parked in the garage. The kidnappers tied him up and left him in the back of the car while they partied away inside. After midnight, they took him back to an ATM and forced him to withdraw the maximum again, after which they let him go. Ivan is a sociologist and, in his trauma about what was happening, his training came through. He began to “interview” his kidnappers. They were small children when their families left Mexico



and settled in Los Angeles. In their late teens they were deported to Tijuana but without much formal Spanish, job skills, or education. They discovered they could make some money committing robberies and other crimes, and Mexico's dysfunctional criminal justice system was unlikely to catch or punish them. Eventually, they realized that Mexico City was a much bigger market for their crimes, and they left Tijuana.

Millions of people have been deported so there is some of everything. Obviously, some deported people are criminals. Deporting people with criminal records seems like an easy decision, but when they are people who came to the United States as children and grew up here, I personally wonder what Mexico has to do with any of it and why Mexican society should have to receive people that learned their criminal behavior in the United States. For many deportees, the only crime they committed was entering the United States without authorization. For some deportees, crossing into the United States is a conscious choice, but others are simply children following their parents when they entered. And most of those kids grow up to become good citizens who contribute to their communities. Recognition of this fact is why the federal government created the DACA (Deferred Action on Childhood Arrivals) program which lets young people remain in the United States if they do not have a criminal record. They live in a kind of limbo, however, since the "deferred action" could be rescinded at any time.

Some people are a bit surprised to learn that U.S. military veterans are deported. On the Tijuana side of the border wall some of their names are painted along with poems and statements of support. The reality of serving in the U.S. military and then finding yourself expelled from the United States is somewhat beyond my ability to comprehend. Apparently, it is also hard for some veterans to understand. People who work with deported veterans tell me that not uncommonly, they believe they are citizens for having served, and they think they are not subject to a deportation order since serving in the military has been a path to citizenship in previous times. When they are detained or incarcerated, they often agree to sign a removal order so they won't continue to be locked up and often they do not realize they just agreed to be deported.

Some deportees lack fluency in Spanish, although no one has studied the number of people in that situation. Not knowing Spanish or not speaking it well means they have a harder transition to life in Mexico. People with roots in Mexico often return to their communities in the interior, if their family is still there, but many others stay in the border region where they can be close to their U.S. family members and their social networks. Staying near the border also supports their belief that they will have a chance to return to the United States. People that work with deportees say that their self-identities are complex, and many have a very hard time coming to terms with their situation. They may not feel Mexican, but they've been pushed out of the United States, and they do not want to make a new life in what seems like a foreign country.

Nevertheless, some deportees flourish in Mexico. A few years ago, I met a young man who was teaching English in a Mexican university where my students spent part of the summer studying. He told me he was extremely angry when he was deported, and it took a couple of years to accept the reality of it. But he eventually accepted that he was never going to be able to return to the United States. He earned a college degree in Mexico and got a good job using his native-level English ability. He told me that if he was allowed back into the United States, he would stay in Mexico where his life was much better than it had been before he was deported.

The fate of people deported from the United States depends on several factors. It is difficult to fully understand the pain of deportation and for some it becomes an emotion that dominates all else. Not at all surprising is the fact that the more capabilities and education one has, the easier the adjustment is. Speaking English well, having a high school diploma or a college degree, knowing how to do complex things such as programming or operating medical technology, smooth the path towards a good life in Mexico. English opens the door to working in call centers, which have sprung up in Tijuana and some other border cities where there are large numbers of deportees, or working in businesses that cater to a U.S. clientele, such as medical offices, tattoo parlors, and tourist venues. Deportees without any of those abilities often end up in much more precarious circumstances such as working as day laborers for poverty wages and with no job security.

Deportees and migrants in the border region are both very vulnerable. Many lack the social and family networks that often protect people in Mexico, and they do not have the cultural background needed to move easily in a foreign country. Many have no job history in Mexico, and whatever formal education they received in the United States probably did not teach them anything about the country. It is not hard to understand why many see their best option as trying to return to the United States, even if the reality is that it is not likely.

## **Eighteen: The nature of the crisis**

To the extent that there is a crisis on the border, it is a result of too few local resources to respond to the needs of migrants who are escaping from violence, persecution, and poverty. They are in search of a place where they can lead their lives with dignity, where they can care for their children and their loved ones, and where they will be able to work and thrive. This is the story of America, but it is one that many Americans have forgotten or have chosen to reject. The crisis we frequently hear about does not report accurately on the lives of the 15 million border residents. That is especially true for the 5 million of us who live in San Diego-Tijuana, the busiest border crossing in the world and the entry point into the United States for a very large number of new immigrants. Women and children from Guatemala or Venezuela or the other places of origin are not a security threat to the United States, to California, or to San Diego, and the men that accompany them can be vetted. This is a great country and welcoming immigrants should be a small task.

It is true that local resources are stretched thin, but that is because we are doing a large share of the work for the rest of the nation. We receive a disproportionate share of immigrants, and our local organizations care for them and help them locate their families and friends and travel to their next destination. Other than that, our border is fine. It is not in crisis unless you want to call an administrative backlog of asylum cases a crisis. If that is a crisis, it is not one for the border. Rather, it is a crisis for the individuals and families waiting patiently, often in inhumane conditions, for their cases to be heard.

Clearly, there are problems in the region. There is too much traffic and our public transportation systems are not taking enough cars off the roads. Unhoused people struggle to live on the street, and the local governments struggle to find a solution. Drugs are a scourge, as they are in many parts of both countries. And the effects of climate change are a dark cloud over the region. But none of those are border problems, let alone a border crisis.

There is a local joke told on both sides of the border: "What is the best part of San Diego? Tijuana. And what's the best part of Tijuana? San Diego." Our border is one where many San Diegans and Tijuaneños move back and forth, where commerce flows relatively easily, and where friends and families visit each other. School kids, people working in all types of jobs, wine and beer lovers and other culinary tourists, moms and grandmas on shopping trips, people going to the dentist or the doctor, or taking the dog to the vet, are all part of the enormous range of interactions that occur daily on our border. Those interactions make this region one that is culturally, linguistically, culinarily, and aesthetically rich.

There are a lot of positives, but we can also do better. Some problems of the border are unnecessary, but they continue to grow worse because of our lack of attention. For example, there is no reason for the incredibly long wait times at the border, other than inertia and a lack of concern by the CBP. If you think I am exaggerating, then I invite you to look at the CBP's wait times on the U.S.-Mexico border. Open the free CBP app (CBP Border Wait Times) and check it, randomly, over several days. You'll find that the border crossing times for California POE and especially for two main crossings in San Diego, Otay Mesa and San Ysidro, are among the longest on the border, and often by a factor of 2 or 3 or more. CBP may not care, but why hasn't our Congressional delegation, our local chambers of commerce, and others exerted pressure to fix this?

Similarly, the problems of International Wastewater Treatment Plant have been allowed to persist for a very long time, polluting local beaches and making people sick if they go in the water. There is finally some movement on this issue, but it has taken far too long and is still encountering obstacles to a complete fix. There is also the struggle for a permanent budget that

allows for maintenance of the equipment and expansion of the facility as population grows.

Moving students across border is complicated, but in the 1990s several formal university programs started. Most were shut down in the late 2000s, largely due to precautions taken by administrators on the U.S. side. A few showcase events have been created in their stead, but a daily back and forth of students in sponsored programs is mostly gone. Nevertheless, individual students seek educational opportunities across the border, and that tells us that there is a demand for degrees granted by universities on the other side. We need to bring back the dual degree programs and others that were created in the 1990s and involve all our border universities more systematically. Our goal should be the creation of the next generation of graduates who can work on both sides, who know the systems on both sides, and who move easily back and forth.

That goal also requires a more dedicated effort to promote language learning in all grades. Students and schools in Tijuana are ahead of the ability of their system to find instructors of English and an increasing number of bilingual K-12 schools in San Diego offer Spanish. But at the university level, Spanish language instructors tell us that too many students believe that Spanish is not a professional language. Too often they associate it with gardeners, farm workers, and restaurant workers, and not with Nobel Laureates, diplomats, great literature, or business development. Oddly enough, this is not a problem in Wisconsin or Kansas, where students do not interact with Mexican immigrants as frequently.

Several key issues affecting the San Diego-Tijuana region require federal involvement. That is an obstacle, but at the same time, San Diego has 5 federal representatives and 2 senators. In theory, their attention to the issues plus pressures from the region's mayors, city councils, and county supervisors could accomplish a great deal. The problem is that while everyone acknowledges the importance of the border and relations with Tijuana, most of the region's elected representatives have more immediate and pressing issues such as the region's unhoused population. Cross border relations become a lower priority. Plus, commuters from Tijuana do not vote in San Diego. Consequently, until a problem festers long enough to

affect voters in San Diego there is little incentive to spend political capital to create change. The problem of the Tijuana River and wastewater pollution is a clear example.

One fact that is certain, is that San Diego and Tijuana will share a common border far into the foreseeable future. Consequently, it is equally certain that the two urban areas will continue to interact in profound and mutually beneficial ways. Over the long run, we must build more institutional mechanisms for leveraging our unique binational and bicultural region. In the short run, it is time to push back against outsiders who use claims of a border crisis as a way to promote a draconian security-heavy regime that suppresses civil liberties and political rights and, in the process, reduces our economic prosperity.

## Notes

Foreword:

P. 3. "San Diego and Tijuana have more than 5 million residents, or about 1/3 of the entire U.S.-Mexico border." This is from the 2020 census counts of residents in U.S. counties and Mexican municipalities that touch the border.

P. 3. "...52 million a year...." Data on border crossings are from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics: <https://www.bts.gov/browse-statistical-products-and-data/border-crossing-data/border-crossingentry-data>.

Chapter 2:

P. 5. "The murder statistics for Tijuana are scary..." See the Justice in Mexico Project website at the University of San Diego. [https://justiceinmexico.org/publication\\_type/special-report/](https://justiceinmexico.org/publication_type/special-report/)

P. 5. "As drugs move from South America towards the United States, and from Mexican processing labs towards the border, each successfully navigated stage of the transportation route adds to the value of their product." See Chapter 1 of Tom Wainwright's *Narconomics*.

Chapter 3:

P. 6. "Death rates were apparently higher than for traditional hunters and gatherers, at least in part due to the introduction of new diseases, but rates among the Kumeyaay were lower than in the rest of the state." See Richard Carrico, *Strangers in a Stolen Land*, Chapter 2.

Chapter 4:

P. 7. "One of the main reasons people cross the border is to visit family and friends." There are many surveys of border crossers. One of the earliest studies of the San Diego-Tijuana border was San Diego Dialogue (1994). *Who Crosses the Border: A View of the San Diego/Tijuana Metropolitan Region*. San Diego, California: University of California, San Diego. See also the study done by faculty at El Colegio de la Frontera Norte: Del Castillo, G., Peschard-Sverdrup, A. & Fuentes, N.A. (2007). *Estudio de Puertos de Entrada México-Estados Unidos: Análisis de Capacidades y Recomendaciones para Incrementar Su Eficiencia. Resumen Ejecutivo*. [https://www.colef.mx/doc\\_coyuntura/estudio-de-puertos-de-entrada-mexico-estados-unidos-analisis-de-capacidades-y-recomendaciones-para-incrementar-su-eficiencia/](https://www.colef.mx/doc_coyuntura/estudio-de-puertos-de-entrada-mexico-estados-unidos-analisis-de-capacidades-y-recomendaciones-para-incrementar-su-eficiencia/)

P. 9. "...by 2001, nearly 2.7 million were granted permanent residence status...." See Nancy Rytina, (2002), IRCA Legalization Effects, Office of Policy and Planning, U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service: [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/IRCA\\_Legalization\\_Effects\\_2002.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/IRCA_Legalization_Effects_2002.pdf)

Chapter 5:

P. 9. "By 6 am it's usually 2 hours or more and doesn't begin to decline until 10 or 11 am." Wait times are estimated based on the times given in the CBP Border Wait Times app. Many experienced border crossers believe the wait times are not accurate and are usually underestimated.

P. 10. "Jobs in San Diego pay around 3 to 5 times more, on average, than the same job in Tijuana." This is an estimate and probably understates the difference. The precise value will vary depending on the job and the conditions at work. By comparison, GDP per person in San Diego is more than 3 times greater than Tijuana when price differences are taken into account and 6 or 7 times different when they are not. These differences are approximately the same as the U.S.-Mexico difference. The gap is probably larger for unskilled construction workers and perhaps smaller for some types of highly skilled labor. Orraca estimated that commuters from Mexico earned twice as much as Mexicans working in a northern Mexican border community. See Orraca, P. (2019). Cross-border earnings of Mexican workers across the US-Mexico border. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 34(3), 451-469.



## Chapter 6:

P. 11. "One study of 9th and 10th graders on both sides of the border...." See Floca, M., Mungaray, A. B., & Matus, M. (2022). Educational challenges and opportunities facing binational youth in San Diego and Tijuana. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, 37(1), 173–185.

P. 12. "Recently, in a reversal of the worldwide pattern in which students from poorer countries attend university in a richer country, some San Diego based students are now attending university in Tijuana." See the article by Gustavo Solis in *The World*, October 20, 2023: <https://theworld.org/stories/2023-10-20/hundreds-us-students-cross-border-daily-attend-college-tijuana>

## Chapter 8:

P. 15. "The types of medical facilities that are clustered at the border include private dental offices, private medical offices, medical labs for diagnostic analysis, and private hospitals. The San Ysidro port of entry strongly exhibits this characteristic." Manzanares Rivera, J. L. (2017). Does the border matter for health care? A study of medical services provider's location at cities in the Mexican side of the border. *Estudios Fronterizos*, 18(36). Universidad Autónoma de Baja California. <https://ref.uabc.mx/ojs/index.php/ref/article/view/590>.

## Chapter 9:

P. 16. "We know this from a survey of the Tijuana police force done by researchers in a local university." See: <https://justiceinmexico.org/publication/justice-in-mexico-presents-results-of-new-study-of-tijuana-police/>

## Chapter 12:

P. 20. "...more bilateral treaty agreements with Mexico than with any other country in the world, except one." This is from the U.S. State Department, *Treaties in Force* (<https://www.state.gov/treaties-in-force/>)

## Chapter 13:

P. 23. "In 2020, more than \$42 billion in goods moved through the port, about 1/3rd of it going south and 2/3rds going north, packed into more than 700,000 trucks." Data are for 2020 and are from the Bureau of Transportation Statistics, International Freight Gateways (<https://data.bts.gov/stories/s/International-Freight-Gateways/4s7k-yxvu#trade-with-canada-and-mexico>) and Border Crossing/Entry Data (<https://www.bts.gov/browse-statistical-products-and-data/border-crossing-data/border-crossingentry-data>).

## Chapter 14:

P. 24. "For years, they had an emergency response unit that was created to cover up crimes committed by agents while on duty." See Joe Davidson, Border Patrol Disbands Critical Incident Teams, *Washington Post*, May 12, 2022: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/05/12/border-patrol-disbands-critical-incident-teams/>

P. 25. "...the number of personnel protecting the border has increased around 5 times while the budget is 3 times larger in inflation adjusted terms." This is based on published Department of Homeland Security and Border Patrol data.

See (1) Department of Homeland Security (2019) *Budget in Brief: Fiscal Year 2004*. [https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY\\_2004\\_BUDGET\\_IN\\_BRIEF.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/FY_2004_BUDGET_IN_BRIEF.pdf);

(2) Department of Homeland Security (2021) *FY 2022: Budget-in-Brief*.

[https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/dhs\\_bib\\_-\\_web\\_version\\_-\\_final\\_508.pdf](https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/dhs_bib_-_web_version_-_final_508.pdf). (3) U.S. Border Patrol. (n.d.) "Border Patrol Agent Staffing by Fiscal Year." <https://www.cbp.gov/newsroom/media-resources/stats>

## Chapter 16:

P. 27. "About ten years ago, the Social Security Administration estimated that at the national level it was receiving

around \$13 billion...." See Goss, S. et al. (2013). *Effects of Unauthorized Immigration on the Actuarial Status of the Social Security Trust Funds*. Actuarial Note 151. Social Security Administration. [https://www.ssa.gov/oact/NOTES/pdf\\_notes/note151.pdf](https://www.ssa.gov/oact/NOTES/pdf_notes/note151.pdf).

P. 28. "Nationwide, around 28 percent of undocumented immigrants are homeowners, while in San Diego about 20 percent." This is from the Migration Policy Institute <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/programs/us-immigration-policy-program-data-hub/unauthorized-immigrant-population-profiles>.

P. 28. "We also know that U.S. communities with large numbers of migrants have lower, not higher, crime rates and border cities have lower rates across the entire U.S.-Mexico border." There are many sources for this.

See (1) Contreras Contreras, R. (October 2021). U.S. Border Cities Again See Low Violent Crime Rates. *Axios*. <https://www.axios.com/us-border-cities-low-violent-crime-rates-6f781eb0-f8f9-45c0-a41c-4b19fce33bbb.html>.

(2) Rumbaut, R. G. (2008) Undocumented immigration and rates of crime and imprisonment: Popular myths and empirical realities. Paper presented to the Police Foundation National Conference on "The Role of Local Police: Striking a Balance Between Immigration Enforcement and Civil Liberties," Washington, DC, August 21-22, 2008. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228196946\\_Undocumented\\_Immigration\\_and\\_Rates\\_of\\_Crime\\_and\\_Imprisonment\\_Popular\\_Myths\\_and\\_Empirical\\_Realities](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228196946_Undocumented_Immigration_and_Rates_of_Crime_and_Imprisonment_Popular_Myths_and_Empirical_Realities).

(3) Ousey, G.C. and Kubrin, C.E. (2018). Immigration and crime: Assessing a contentious issue. *Annual Review of Criminology*, 1, 63-84.

#### Chapter 17:

P. 29. "Speaking English well, having a high school diploma or a college degree, knowing how to do complex things ...." See Hualde, A. & Israel Ibarra, J. (2021). La reinserción laboral de los deportados y retornados en Guadalajara y Tijuana: ¿Empleos sostenibles o empleos precarios? In París Pombo, Hualde, & Woo Morales (coordinadores), *Experiencias de Retorno de Migrantes Mexicanos en Contextos Urbanos*. Tijuana, MX: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte. 121-156.

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