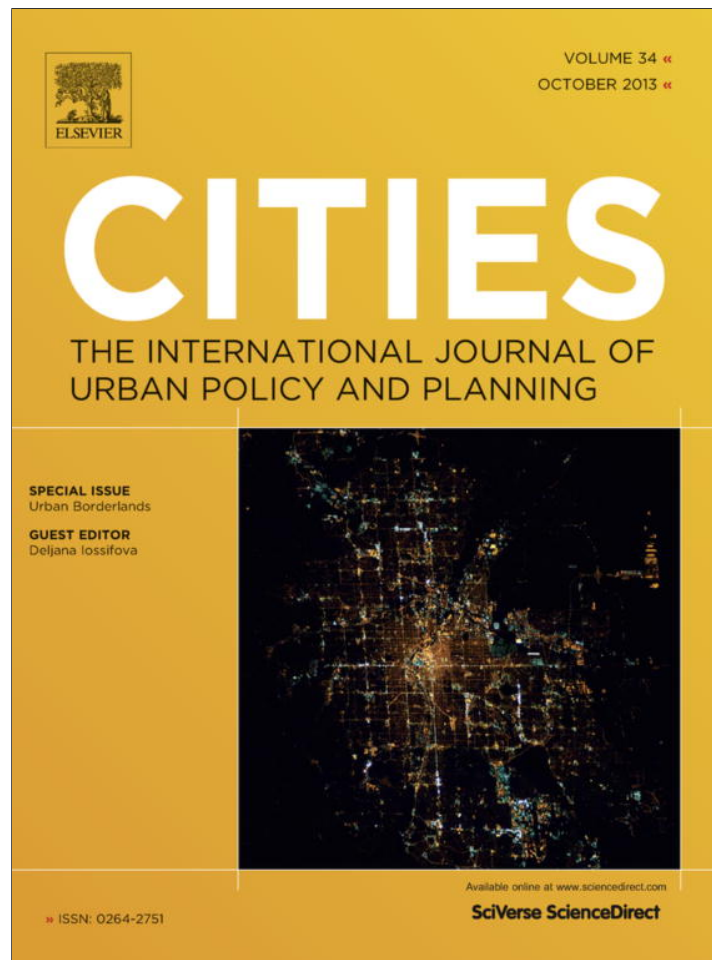


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Cities

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Is fear of crime splitting the sister cities? The case of Los Dos Laredos

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Available online 20 December 2012

Keywords:

Borders
Latin America
Security
Violence
Identity

ABSTRACT

This article describes the change in border dynamics of the Laredo–Nuevo Laredo U.S.–Mexican border during the first decade of the 21st century. While the sharing and blending of cultures has long been considered an integral part of the regional identity, publicity related to crime in Mexico and fear of the potential for spillover crime has created a significant degree of separation between the two communities that once lived as one. In terms of social construction of place, the Rio Grande boundary separating the sister cities was relatively meaningless for many years as laborers, shoppers and tourists crossed easily between the two nations. The integrated cultural bond has moved towards a coexistence favoring growth in the Laredo economy while Nuevo Laredo struggles.

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Introduction

When looking at the Mexico–United States border, the region of Nuevo Laredo, Tamaulipas and Laredo, Texas has one of the largest and strongest cross-border regional identities in North America. Because the United States side of the border is predominantly populated by people with Mexican identities (94%, *U.S. Census Bureau, 2009*), separation between the two sides in terms of ethnicity, culture, and skin color rarely comes into play. In addition to the demographic similarities, there is also a localized economy crossing borders in media, shopping and services that has a long and growing history, which was not slowed even by the Homeland Security actions taken post-September 11, 2001. However, crime problems and a general fear of violence in Mexico severely threaten the loss of this cross-border cultural identity.

The people of Los Dos Laredos have shared trade and cultural events dating back to the 18th century, however commercial interests are beginning to drive a movement to publically split the regions. One of the classic questions in sociology is whether regions are held together through economic interests or identity politics (*Calhoun, 1994*). This paper illustrates the story of a region that was not directly identified with either the United States or Mexico but for many years was bound together into one identity. This region fits the classic definition of an interdependent borderland with relative stability and economic cooperation (*Martinez, 1994*). However, one recent sign of the start of a split was when the Laredo Chamber of Commerce requested that the Texas Department of Transportation remove the Nuevo Laredo, Mexico

reference from highway signs on Interstate-35. In the request, they claimed that there was a substantial decrease in Laredo tourism due to travelers having a hard time distinguishing Laredo from its sister city in Mexico, and that damage to the city's image was directly related to the high levels of violence in Nuevo Laredo.

Support for this claim of the fear of crime influencing behavior was reported by *Bennett and Lavrakas (1989)*, who showed that the fear of crime can bolster personal, household, and neighborhood protection behaviors (e.g., installing burglar bars and house alarms), and it is most likely to change one's attitudes about walking and/or visiting certain areas in the community, especially after dark (*Lab, 2004*). Admittedly, individuals respond to perceived harm in multiple ways, which may include creating neighborhood watch programs and becoming more active in community policing initiatives. However, it can lead to anxiety, feelings of insecurity and a negative attitude toward police, especially if individuals believe that the formal agents of social control are not doing enough to provide for the security and safety of the community. Also, changes in lifestyle may be solely dependent on vicarious victimization, as opposed to actual victimization, thus creating a fallacy about levels of safety and security which may have a corresponding impact on attitudes about the community's wellbeing and the police (*Lab, 2004*). Thus, fear of crime, whether actual or perceived, can have a resounding effect on an individual's behavior and a community's self-regulatory functions because it impacts perceptions of safety and security. The question now turns to whether fear of crime, or rather one's opinion of safety, can split or divide entire communities and alter mutual and long-standing collective efficacy.

According to *Maslow (1954)*, humans place their greatest energies into fulfilling their most basic needs before they focus on other needs. After the most primary physiological and sustenance needs

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are met, security becomes the most prominent factor. While individuals, and even entire communities, may have a similar ethnic heritage and share cultural histories, security (or lack thereof) may override and even alter the degree of cultural exchange between people living in borderlands.

This article examines the case of the Laredo–Nuevo Laredo border to explain the changes in relationships that have been produced by the fear of crime, as measured by perceived levels of safety among a sample of Laredo residents. While the sharing and blending of cultures has long been considered an integral part of the regional identity, fear of spillover crime and potential threats to border and/or homeland security have created a significant degree of separation between the two sister communities—communities that once lived as a unified population divided only by the Rio Grande. Through face-to-face interviews, we examine the extent to which Laredoans: (1) feel safe in their household, their neighborhood, the city, and the sister city of Nuevo Laredo, (2) feel the primary law enforcement agency in each city should bring order and security to the border, and (3) believe the current efforts of specific law enforcement agencies, such as the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) or Customs and Border Protection (CBP) have been effective in securing the border. This study is important because it investigates the feelings of safety in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo, with the latter city being plagued by persistent violence due to warring drug cartels. This study contributes to the emerging discourse, all too often based on anecdotal information, regarding life along the south Texas border. It also underscores the unique cultural ties between the two sister cities and the harsh consequences that are dividing divided Laredo and Nuevo Laredo.

Background

The History of Laredo and Nuevo Laredo

It would be difficult to find any large city in the United States that is more enmeshed with its sister city than Laredo is with Nuevo Laredo. Located along the south Texas border with Mexico, the two cities are informally referred to as *Los Dos Laredos* – or “the two Laredos” because of the high degree of social integration between them. For instance, it is not remarkable for citizens of Laredo to have both immediate or extended family members living on the Mexican side, nor is it uncommon for Laredoans and Nuevo Laredoans to cross the border to shop, eat, or partake in cultural or religious ceremonies. Laredo is closely tied to Mexico in several ways: 94.3% of the population is Latino (U.S. Census, 2009), 52.5% of the population reports speaking Spanish very well and an additional 23.8% of the population report speaking Spanish well (U.S. Census, 2001). Therefore, the large bilingual population makes this particular crossing of the Rio Grande conducive to efficient trade between the two nations. Also, the lack of cultural barriers leads to strong bonds of understanding the issues faced by each trading partner.

Laredo, being a border town, has a large influx of day laborers which support its economy. According to Kearney and Knopp (1995), many day laborers live on the less expensive Mexican side while working in Laredo. Thus there is a long history of crossing the border in a manner similar to crossing any U.S. county line. Walking or driving across the border is a perfunctory fact of life and the relative ease of crossing the river led to the economy of Laredo being built on a foundation of international trade, retail sales, tourism, and, more recently, federal policing and regulatory agencies.

The area encompassing both Laredo and Nuevo Laredo was founded in 1755 by Don Tomas Sanchez. In 1840 Laredo seceded from Mexico and the United States to form “The Republic of the

Rio Grande” as an independent nation. The people from both sides of the Rio Grande lived as one until the end of the 1846 Mexican–American War, which resulted in the 1848 Treaty of Guadalupe–Hidalgo and the declaration of the Rio Grande as the official border between Mexico and the United States. At this point in time, families chose their side of the border for residence, but the divide was relatively insignificant due to the relative ease of crossing the river (Klein, 1997). In physical terms, the Rio Grande is a “good boundary” in that it clearly separates the state of Texas from Mexico and is undisputed.¹

Throughout most of the twentieth century, the relationship between the two cities was clearly one of sharing an open border. Various business interests established stores and eateries on both sides of the river. The two cities enjoyed sharing a minor league baseball team with home games being split between both sides of the border (Trevino, 1999). Additionally, for more than 50 years, there has been an annual ceremony at Bridge #1, where the International Good Neighbor Council chooses two children from the Laredo side and two children from the Nuevo Laredo side to perform a ceremonial embrace to demonstrate the link between the two sister cities. This celebration of the “Abrazo Children” serves as a symbol of unity between the cities and a symbol of shared cultures.

The unity extends beyond simple ceremonial events. While the growth of the manufacturing sector led to significant changes in the border communities during the mid to late twentieth century (Suarez-Villa, 1985), Laredo’s economy is dependent on both the United States and Mexico. Some studies report that the dependence on international trade and retail sales makes it more dependent on the Mexican economy than that of the United States (Phillips & Canas, 2008). The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was very beneficial to Laredo as it boosted the number of crossings and thus revenue. As a result, Laredo has evolved into the largest land port in the United States and fluctuates between fourth to sixth place out of all U.S. ports in terms of the total dollar value of United States imports in the past 5 years. The population of the Laredo–Nuevo Laredo metropolitan area currently exceeds 700,000. Today, there are three international bridges for automotive, truck, and pedestrian crossings and a rail bridge.

As shown in Fig. 1, the number of pedestrian crossings has increased since 1990, but there is an even more significant increase in commercial traffic in that time period. This leads to substantial bridge revenue and has assisted in the creation of high growth in population, building permits, and tax receipts. While there was a small pause in this rapid growth rate following Homeland Security concerns post-September 11, 2001, the relationship between the sister cities continued to be strong and easily worked around the inconveniences of complying with new border crossing regulations.

However, there are several recent threats straining this relationship:

- (1) Homeland Security in the United States has increased vigilance at the U.S. Mexico border, thus inhibiting the easy flow of people, goods, and services between the sister cities.
- (2) Significant increases in high-profile violent crimes have led to substantial fears about U.S. travel to Mexico and commerce with Nuevo Laredo.
- (3) While federal law enforcement agencies provide a boost to the economy in terms of federal dollars spent by agencies and agents along the border, they have perpetuated an environment of fear and danger, as well as the provision of sym-

¹ See J. Minghi “Boundary Studies in Political Geography,” *Annals of the Association of Geographers* (1963) for detail on “good boundaries” as those that fit the natural geography and “bad boundaries” as those that do not fit a natural geography and therefore, are more subject to dispute.

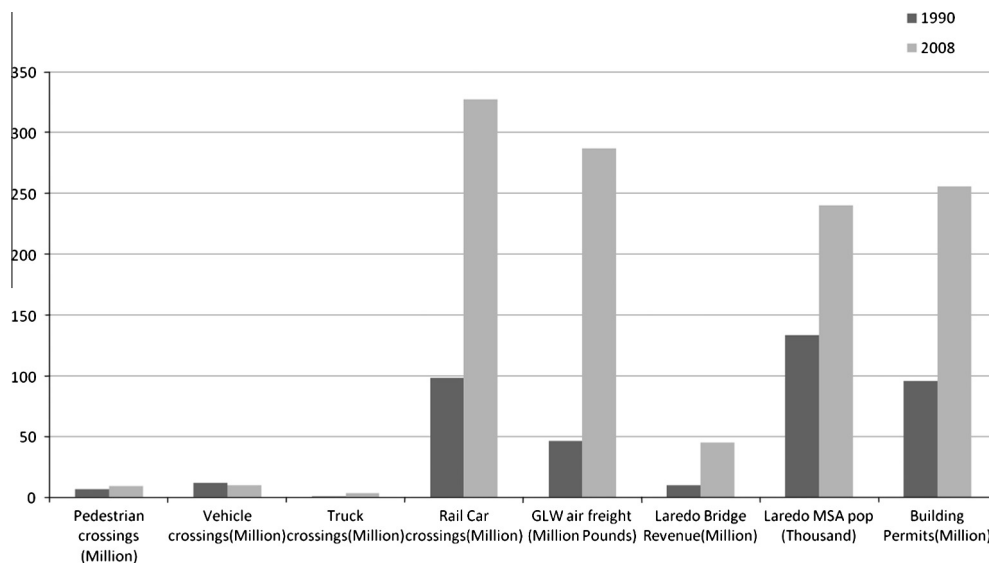


Fig. 1. The impact of the North American Free Trade Agreement opened the port of Laredo to an unprecedented rate of growth. Data from Texas Center for Border Economic and Enterprise Development.

bolic security. As these fears rise, local businesses related to trade and tourism are suffering greatly.

Currently there are two parts to the Laredo border economy that appear to be sensitive to the general identity and image of the border cities. One part of the economy is that of efficient trade passing through the Mexican border, clearing customs, and being sent along train routes or Interstate 35. The other part of the economy is the easy flow of tourism between the border towns. This aspect of the economy is dependent on the feeling of safety and lack of corruption in the entire region. When this feeling of safety is lacking, another vision of Laredo is perceived to be in place, one of a “war zone” where spillover violence from the Mexican drug war is leading to numerous mass-murders, kidnappings, and associated criminal activity.

Inarguably, the media will sometimes take an individual story that captures the public interest and publicize the story as part of a series of events, which results in a public misperception of crime being substantially higher than the real-world facts indicate (Weitzer & Kubrin, 2004). Examples of this phenomenon include the inflated threat of the “crack problem” in America, even though there was little widespread use (Reinarman & Levine, 1997), the creation of the myth of “crack mothers” (Humphries, 1999), and the serious rise in violent crimes frequently discussed in the general public, although the 2009 National Crime Victimization Survey shows a substantial decline in serious violence crimes. The concerns about “spillover violence” from Mexico have led to significant difficulties in terms of recruiting conventions to Laredo. This led to the Convention and Visitor’s Bureau of Laredo having an editorial entitled “Laredo is Safe” on their own website, which supplies a link to the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s Uniform Crime Reports.² The reality of the Uniform Crime Reports and several other data sources show that Laredo has lower than average rates of violent crime, when compared to other cities in the United States (Albuquerque, 2006, 2007). Nonetheless, the perceived risk of harm and victimization, even if driven by stories in the media, increases fear and has the potential to immobilize communities.

² For more than one year, the City of Laredo Convention and Visitor’s Bureau website (www.visitlaredo.com) has posted an editorial entitled “Laredo is Safe.” This article references the Uniform Crime Reports and compares index crime rates of Laredo to those of 12 other major cities in the state of Texas.

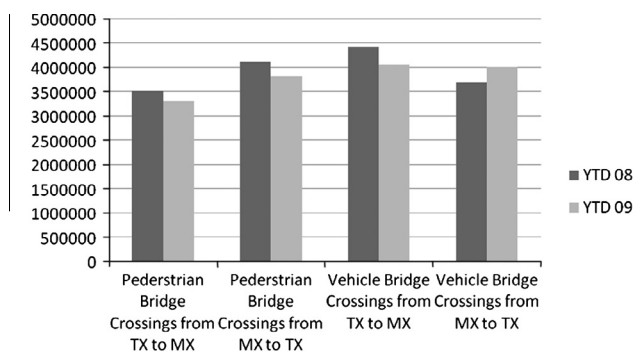
Addressing cross-border issues can be very complex because border areas have unique identities that are not simply nested in an allegiance to hierarchies of local, state and national governments. Sloan and West’s (1976) interview of local elites from both sides of the border led to the statement that

What frightened both elites is the belief that outsiders, especially policy makers in Washington, D.C. and Mexico City, do not understand the uniqueness of the border. The elites were fearful that rising economic nationalism in Mexico and growing U.S. concern about illegal aliens and drug smuggling might cause national policy makers to make decisions that would have disastrous consequences for the highly interdependent and vulnerable economies of the two Laredos. In recognition of this vulnerability, one particularly successful Laredo politician emphasized that intelligent border politics required one not only to have nurtured strong personal ties across the river, but also to both state capitals and the national governments in Washington, D.C. and Mexico City (p. 463).

The harm of the image of crime

The interdependence of the two cities’ economies became strained in 2005 as U.S. shoppers began to avoid going into Nuevo Laredo. In August 2005, the U.S. Consulate in Nuevo Laredo closed their office in response to security threats. The nature of these threats would lead others to question the safety of crossing over into Nuevo Laredo. By the mid 2000s, the economy in the service sector had dried up in Nuevo Laredo due to the fear of violence largely attributed to the warring factions of the Sinaloa and Gulf Drug Cartels (Parra, 2007). Hundreds of businesses have closed each year in Nuevo Laredo since 2005, while business growth boomed in Laredo. Garza (2008) documented 23 established businesses completely closing down in Nuevo Laredo and relocating their operations to Laredo, selling the same restaurant menu or product line.

Statistics and stories are difficult to gather in Nuevo Laredo because the local newspaper, *El Mañana*, has practiced a form of self-censorship with drug cartel-related stories since facing the murder of its editor in 2004 and an attack on the newsroom with machine gun fire. The cartel violence seemingly came to a boiling point when the Nuevo Laredo Police Chief, Alejandro Dominguez, was



Source: U.S. Bridge Operators in Laredo, TX; Oficina de Gaminos Y Puentes Federales, MX; South Texas Customs Management Center, Laredo; & Railroad Companies in Laredo.

Fig. 2. Frequencies of Bridge Crossings between U.S. and Mexico via International Bridges in Laredo, TX. Source: U.S. Bridge Operators in Laredo, TX; Oficina de Gaminos Y Puentes Federales, MX; South Texas Customs Management Center, Laredo; & Railroad Companies in Laredo.

shot dead on June 8th, 2005 after only 9 h on the job. His murder was preceded by the death of seven police commanders earlier that year. The lack of a truly free press leads to a situation where many crimes are not reported. Therefore, most of the general public is left to speculate on the safety in Nuevo Laredo. Myths, rumors, and the sensationalistic retelling of crimes continue to build an image of crime-filled streets where the drug cartels influence all businesses and the everyday lives of the city's residents.

Until the post-NAFTA factory boom, most of Nuevo Laredo's economy was built on tourism. However, the significant amount of crime and the fighting between the drug cartels for control over the city have led to a substantial drop in tourism. As shown in Fig. 2, pedestrian bridge crossings into Nuevo Laredo and Laredo were down 6% and 7.5%, respectively from 2008 to 2009. Vehicle bridge crossings into Nuevo Laredo decreased 8% while vehicle bridge crossings from Nuevo Laredo to Laredo increased 8.5%.

Concerns about crime led to the relocation of established businesses in Nuevo Laredo to Laredo in hopes of doing business in a safer environment (Garza & Landeck, 2009). Additionally, residential property values declined in Nuevo Laredo and many affluent Mexican families began to purchase or build residences across the border in Laredo. This concern about businesses relocating and individual citizens moving to Laredo began to strain the relationship between the sister cities.

Another stressor in the relationship came from concerns regarding "spillover violence" and the nature of the border being a real homeland security threat in terms of terrorism. Both Ackelson (2005) and Andreas (2009) claim that media reports and public reactions to undocumented migration and drug trafficking lead to significant rates of public fear about homeland security threats in the United States. While this justifies the growth of federal employment in agencies such as DEA and CBP, it nonetheless conjures images of a tremendous amount of violence spilling over into the U.S.

From an international perspective, there has been a "blame game" of United States officials expressing concerns about the drug violence of the cartels and Mexican officials blaming the United States for supplying Mexico with guns and the constant demand of drug consumers funding the drug operations. John Cornyn, a U.S. Senator from Texas, was quoted as stating: "As President Calderón said when he was here, one of the problems his country has is guns going south, and we need more [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives] agents to ... enforce our own laws against bulk purchase and transfer to the hands of the drug cartels in Mexico" (Dunham, 2010).

There are some advantages to being seen as a city with a high crime rate. Cities with high crime rates may be first in

line for getting more funding for local police and even more support from federal agencies that fight crime. Therefore, the Border Patrol maintains a strong presence around the city of Laredo. Orrenius and Coronado (2005) conclude that the influx of U.S. Border Patrol officers has been related to lower rates of property crime in the areas (see also, Coronado & Orrenius, 2005). Additionally, the addition of federal employees such as Border Patrol boost the local economy with federal dollars and high paying jobs.

Methodology

The Laredo Community Survey (LCS)

Data from the Laredo Community Survey (LCS) were used to examine feelings of safety in Laredo and its neighboring city of Nuevo Laredo. Face-to-face interviews were conducted with 274 Laredo residents throughout the city. Because of the sensitive nature of the study, we asked interviewers to administer the survey in their local neighborhood. Similar to National Crime Victimization Survey, individuals 12 years of age or older were interviewed in each household. The interviews were meant to capture the extent to which Laredoans: (1) feel safe in their household, their neighborhood, the city, and the sister city of Nuevo Laredo, (2) feel the primary law enforcement agency in each city should bring order and security to the border, and (3) believe the current efforts of specific law enforcement agencies have been effective in securing the border.

Although we employed snowball sampling, the data should accurately represent the population of residents in city of Laredo. In terms of social characteristics, the sample matched the general population figures of the U.S. Census. For example, 91.4% of the sample population was Hispanic/Latino, while the U.S. Census American Community Survey reported 94.3% as Hispanic/Latino. Average household size for the LCS was 3.76 people per household as opposed to 3.66 in the American Community Survey (ACS). The proportion of residents in each zip code closely matched the study sample.

The survey was modeled after other large national surveys and included questions about household structure, socioeconomic status, and sentiments regarding their own neighborhoods. In particular, several questions were asked about personal safety, the safety of their homes, neighborhoods, the city of Laredo in general, and the safety of Nuevo Laredo.

Findings and discussion

Descriptive statistics are illustrated in Table 1. With regard to demographic characteristics of respondents, the majority of respondents were Hispanic (91%) and Catholic (81%). Slightly over half of them were married (54%) and employed (68%). About 73% of people think that they are in the working and middle class and their household income is approximately \$45,000 per year. Finally, the average age of respondents is 41 years with a range of 18–82 years old.

In general, people feel substantially safer in their own homes and households than they do in Nuevo Laredo (see Table 2). The respondents also reported that Laredo is somewhat safer than Nuevo Laredo (*T*-test for mean difference between Laredo and N. Laredo = -21.57 , *df* = 269, *p* < .01).

Because Nuevo Laredo is seen as much more dangerous than Laredo, we may wonder if there is a perception that the primary threats to security are perceived as caused by criminals residing in Nuevo Laredo. However, this is not the case. When asked about who is responsible for crime in their neighborhood, more than 75% of the respondents claimed that Laredo residents were responsible for the crime (see Table 3).

We asked about the efficacy of several of the law enforcement agencies located on the border including the Laredo Police Department, the United States Border Patrol, United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement, and the United States National Guard. Respondents were asked if the agencies performed their duties well. As shown in Table 4, all agencies generally were rated somewhat neutral. There was little deviation in the scores for Laredo Police and Webb County Sheriff's deputies. The Border Patrol, U.S. Customs, and the National Guard were all rated in a similar manner. The implication of this is that each agency may be seen as performing their mission; however, no specific agency is seen as being more efficient than another agency. This may also mean that the general public is unsure about the specific missions of each agency.

Table 2
Descriptive statistics of safety variables (*N* = 274).

Variables	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Personal Safety	273	2.91	.67	1.00	4.00
Safety of Household	274	3.26	.64	1.00	4.00
Safety of Neighborhood	274	3.04	.69	1.00	4.00
Safety of Laredo	273	2.52	.69	1.00	4.00
Safety of Nuevo Laredo (MX)	271	1.52	.69	1.00	4.00

Note: 1 = not safe at all, 2 = not very safe, 3 = fairly safe, and 4 = very safe.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of responsibility for crime (*N* = 246).

Responsibility for crime	<i>N</i>	%
People who live here (in this neighborhood)	64	26.00
People from other neighborhoods in Laredo	122	49.60
People from cities other than Laredo in the U.S.	18	7.30
Non-U.S. residents from Mexico	41	16.70
People who are not from Mexico	1	.40

Note: Number of observation is 246 after listwise deletion.

Table 4
Descriptive statistics of efficacy of law enforcement agencies (*N* = 274).

Efficacy	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD	Min	Max
The police and deputies do good job	269	3.21	.99	1.00	5.00
DEA do good job to control illicit drugs	272	3.21	1.14	1.00	5.00
CBP do good job to keep border security	273	3.71	1.07	1.00	5.00
NG do good job in supporting our federal law enforcement on the border	268	3.37	1.08	1.00	5.00

Note: 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = undecided, 4 = agree, 5 = strongly agree.

DEA = Drug Enforcement Administration, BP = U.S. Border Patrol, NG = National Guard.

Table 1
Descriptive statistics.

	<i>N</i>	%	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Age			41.15	15.31	18.00	82.00
Race/Ethnicity						
Hispanic	245	91.10				
White	17	6.30				
Other (Asian, Black, Other)	6	2.24				
Education (number of years in school)			13.58	4.29	0	28.00
Marital status						
Married	148	54.41				
Single	79	29.04				
Divorced/Widowed/Separated	45	16.54				
Employment (1 = Yes)	184	67.65				
Religion						
Catholic	219	81.41				
Protestant	10	3.72				
Other	38	14.13				
Social class						
Lower class	18	6.79				
Working class	97	36.60				
Middle class	105	39.62				
Upper middle class	38	14.34				
Upper class	7	2.64				
Household income ^a			6.67	2.85	1.00	11.00

^a 1 = Under \$5000 this year, 2 = between \$5001 and \$10,000, 3 = between \$10,001 and \$19,000, 4 = between \$19,001 and \$28,000, 5 = between \$28,001 and \$36,000, 6 = between \$36,001 and \$45,000, 7 = between \$45,001 and \$60,000, 8 = between \$60,001 and \$75,000, 9 = between \$75,001 and \$90,000, 10 = between \$90,001 and \$110,000, and 11 = more than \$110,000.

Table 5

The results from OLS regression analyses.

	Safety of Laredo			Safety of Nuevo Laredo		
	<i>b</i>	Std. <i>E</i>	β	<i>b</i>	Std. <i>E</i>	β
Police and deputies good job	-.11*	.05	-.15	-.13**	.05	-.20
BP good job	-.03	.07	-.05	.14**	.05	.25
Customs good job	-.08	.07	-.13	.04**	.02	.18
NG good job	.09	.05	.15	.14	.07	.14
Household income	.04*	.02	.16	-.06	.07	-.11
Personal safety	.41**	.07	.39	.03	.07	.05
Constant	1.77**	.26		3.02**	.27	
	$R^2 = .24, p < .01$			$R^2 = .12, p < .01$		

* $p \leq .05$.** $p \leq .01$.

The individuals deal with issues of security in several ways, such as avoiding certain places in the city, avoiding going out alone at night, and refusing to answer the door or talk to strangers. They may also take precautionary measures such as carrying a weapon or safeguarding their homes through the use of burglar alarms, dogs, guns or door locks. There are some who rely on neighbors or neighborhood organizations to help provide safety, while others look to the local police or sheriff to provide security. However, since September 11, 2001, many Americans now think of security from a national perspective. In particular, they are concerned about the potential foreign threats. These threats are significantly increased in Laredo due to the amount of trade and number of people crossing the five local Mexico/U.S. bridges. While it appears that individuals rank all of the policing agencies somewhat the same, OLS regression on variables related to respondents' perceptions of safety in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo yield a different response.

Table 5 shows that those rating Laredo as more dangerous are less likely to rate the local police and deputies as effective. Respondents rating Nuevo Laredo as the more dangerous of the two cities also give a low performance score to the local Laredo police and a higher performance score to the U.S. Border Patrol and U.S. Immigration and Custom Enforcement. We claim that for those fearing crime, this suggests a trend towards viewing the federal agencies as guardians of the local area, regardless of the types of crime they face. Some of this view point may come from a high degree of mistrust of the local government. When asked how much they trust the local government, 16% of respondents stated most of the time, 63% stated some of the time, and 21% claimed almost never. Regardless, the use of federal National Guard troops and other non-local policing agencies on the border may serve as an irritant to the traditional harmonious approach to solving problems through a bi-national border perspective.

Conclusion

In general, Laredoans feel safe in and around their homes and neighborhoods, with the majority of survey respondents now considering the Sister City of Nuevo Laredo "very unsafe." While the individuals residing across the border are not seen as criminal threats to the residents of Laredo, the impact of Nuevo Laredo becoming very unsafe has certain consequences, such as a decrease in free-flowing travel and cultural exchange-factors that once made this region wonderfully unique. In terms of guardianship at the border, local police are considered less effective than federal officers and security troops sent from Washington to protect the region. We argue that this reliance on providing security from federal agents such as U.S. Customs and Border Patrol rather than local police contributes to greater division in the once harmonious relationship between Laredo and Nuevo Laredo.

We recognize that there is a power dimension that stresses the relationship between the two cities and moves them towards greater inequality (see Grimson & Vila, 2002). The local relocation of businesses and the transfer of the base sites for cross-border commerce from Mexico to the U.S. side of the border is a serious threat that may result in the region moving from being defined as an integrated community, to a region of co-existing cities (Martinez, 1994).

While scholars such as Vila (2000) have discussed the social identity of Mexican American border residents as viewing both Anglos and Mexican nationals as "others," we cannot deny the significant level of commerce and bridge crossings that have taken place in this 'particular region.' In the short term, the Laredo economy may benefit from the perception that there is a serious threat in terms of the general spillover violence. There is a significant economic impact to having increased numbers of federal agents being transferred down to the region, the most important of which is the boost in local revenue. However, the long-term perception of being seen as a dangerous location may harm diversification in the economy in terms of the relocation of various corporations, the use by businesses of the port of Laredo, and the perception of the region as a safe site for conventions and vacations. The idea of having it both ways by being seen as a safe city, yet needing more federal agents may get lost in translation for most citizens, visitors, and potential business investors.

"Spillover violence," as a term, connotes that the violence belongs on one side of the border and does not belong on the other side of the border. If the fear of crime continues to be addressed by sending increasing numbers of federal troops and is not handled by local police, each sister city will be forced to retreat towards their own federal government for assistance in solving their problems. In terms of capable guardianship of the region, the historical relationship of the sister cities working together to solve their shared border community problems at a local level may become a thing of the past, as federal agencies have more accountability to the national governments in Washington D.C. and Mexico City, than to the local interests in Laredo and Nuevo Laredo. Additionally, federal actions from the United States on the border must be clarified, explained, and negotiated with federal government officials in Mexico City, which will result in significant delays. If this bureaucracy continues to become decentralized, then the once informal partnership of Los Dos Laredos may evolve into a significant division between the two cities.

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