



U.S. Department of Justice
National Drug Intelligence Center



West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



Drug Market Analysis 2011

Source Summary Statement

The National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) has high confidence in this drug market analysis as it is based on multiple sources of information that have proved highly reliable in prior NDIC, law enforcement, and intelligence community reporting. Quantitative data, including seizure, eradication, and arrest statistics, were drawn from data sets maintained by federal, state, or local government agencies. Discussions of the prevalence and consequences of drug abuse are based on published reports from U.S. Government agencies and interviews with public health officials deemed reliable because of their expertise in the diagnosis and treatment of drug abuse. Trends and patterns related to drug production, trafficking, and abuse were identified through detailed analysis of coordinated counterdrug agency reporting and information. NDIC intelligence analysts and field intelligence officers obtained this information through numerous interviews with law enforcement and public health officials (federal, state, and local) in whom NDIC has a high level of confidence based on previous contact and reporting, their recognized expertise, and their professional standing and reputation within the U.S. counterdrug community. This report was reviewed and corroborated by law enforcement officials who have jurisdiction in the West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area and possess an expert knowledge of its drug situation.



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This assessment is an outgrowth of a partnership between the NDIC and HIDTA Program for preparation of annual assessments depicting drug trafficking trends and developments in HIDTA Program areas. The report has been coordinated with the HIDTA, is limited in scope to HIDTA jurisdictional boundaries, and draws upon a wide variety of sources within those boundaries.

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Executive Summary

The drug threat to the West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) region has changed somewhat over the past year, resulting in several areas of concern for law enforcement officials. A number of indicators suggest that the Sinaloa Cartel is gaining more influence over drug smuggling into the region from Mexico, having gained greater dominance in the Juárez Valley and pushing most of the Juárez Cartel's operations to Juárez.¹ Cocaine is the foremost drug threat to the HIDTA region because of high levels of availability and abuse and the drug's overall negative societal impact. The amount of marijuana seized in the West Texas HIDTA region is greater than any other drug and it is the most frequently seized.² Other drug threats consistently mentioned by law enforcement officials in the HIDTA region during recent interviews and reflected in the National Drug Intelligence Center (NDIC) National Drug Threat Survey (NDTS) data compiled in early 2011^a include high levels of availability and abuse of Mexican black tar and brown powder heroin, methamphetamine, and MDMA (3,4-methylenedioxymethamphetamine, also known as ecstasy).

Key issues identified in the West Texas HIDTA region include:

- The Sinaloa Cartel is increasing its influence over lucrative drug smuggling routes from Mexico into the West Texas HIDTA region through the El Paso/Juárez plaza.
- Barrio Azteca poses the most pervasive gang threat in the West Texas HIDTA region. It has increased its violent criminal activity, particularly in Juárez, and is a significant law enforcement concern in the region.
- Violence in Juárez has caused many businesses and citizens to relocate to El Paso, impacting community services in the West Texas HIDTA region.
- Increased law enforcement presence in El Paso and violence in Juárez have prompted drug traffickers to alter transportation routes and methods used to smuggle drugs into and through the West Texas HIDTA region.

a. The NDTS is conducted annually by NDIC to solicit information from a representative sample of state and local law enforcement agencies. NDIC uses this information to produce national, regional, and state estimates of various aspects of drug trafficking activities. NDTS data reflects agencies' perceptions based on their analysis of criminal activities that occurred within their jurisdictions during the past year. NDTS 2011 data cited in this report are raw, unweighted responses from federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies solicited through either NDIC or the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) HIDTA program as of February 24, 2011.

- Cocaine availability decreased in the West Texas HIDTA region from 2009 to 2010; however, recent seizures at the El Paso port of entry (POE) and law enforcement reporting in early 2011 indicate that the Sinaloa Cartel's greater prominence in the El Paso/Juárez plaza^b may be increasing the flow of cocaine into the region.
- Methamphetamine availability is increasing in the West Texas HIDTA region, primarily because of increased production in Mexico and within the region.
- MDMA availability and abuse have increased in the El Paso area as local young adults who previously traveled to Juárez to abuse the drug are avoiding the high levels of violence there.

Key Issues^c

The Sinaloa Cartel is increasing its influence over lucrative drug smuggling routes from Mexico into the West Texas HIDTA region through the El Paso/Juárez plaza.

The Juárez and Sinaloa Cartels have been battling for control of lucrative drug corridors through the El Paso/Juárez plaza since 2007.³ The plaza is sought after by these traffickers because it contains 4 of the 7 official border crossings leading into the West Texas HIDTA region—the Bridge of the Americas, Paso Del Norte Bridge, Stanton Street Bridge, and Ysleta International Bridge crossings (all part of the El Paso POE).⁴ (See Map A1 in Appendix A.) Over the past year several indicators suggest that the Sinaloa Cartel may be winning this battle, having greater influence over smuggling through the Juárez Valley, and pushing much of the Juárez Cartel's operations into Juárez.⁵ The Sinaloa Cartel now dominates drug smuggling operations conducted through many small towns along the Rio Grande River once controlled by the Juárez Cartel.⁶ For instance, law enforcement officials in the Fort Hancock area report that the Sinaloa Cartel dominates drug transportation throughout the Juárez Valley, including in the cities of Guadalupe and Por Venir.⁷ Rival Juárez Cartel members have abandoned these areas, and as a result, violence there has decreased.⁸ Both the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels operate in Juárez; however, most of the Juárez Cartel's operations have been pushed into the city by the Sinaloa Cartel.⁹ The Sinaloa Cartel is proactively looking for any opportunity to gain dominance over the Juárez Cartel in the city while the Juárez Cartel is defending its territory and trying to neutralize losses to its operations that are caused by the Sinaloa Cartel.¹⁰

The Juárez Cartel has thus far been able to retain dominance of drug smuggling through the city of Juárez because of its connections to Barrio Azteca (a gang known as Los Aztecas in Mexico)—which serves as the primary enforcer on the streets of Juárez—and La Linea—the cartel's enforcement arm.¹¹ However, the deaths of several key Juárez Cartel members and the arrests of others by Mexican Federal Police have weakened its operations in Juárez,¹² presenting the Sinaloa Cartel with an opportunity to supplant the Juárez Cartel in the city.¹³ (See text box on page 3.) Increased violence in Juárez in 2010 indicates that the Juárez Cartel's influence over the city may be waning.¹⁴ According to West Texas HIDTA officials, an increase in the number of violent attacks by the Sinaloa Cartel in the populated areas of Juárez occurred in 2010.¹⁵ Individuals aligned with the Sinaloa Cartel

b. The El Paso/Juárez plaza is a major drug smuggling corridor that extends from the "boot heel" of New Mexico to the eastern boundary of Big Bend National Park and includes the El Paso, Fabens, and Presidio POEs in Texas and the Columbus and Santa Teresa POEs in New Mexico. (See Map A1 in Appendix A.)

c. For a general overview of the drug threat in the West Texas HIDTA region, see Appendix A.

are routinely targeting Juárez Cartel members, instigating retaliation.¹⁶ For example, in September 2010, the Sinaloa Cartel kidnapped the child of a Juárez Cartel member and threatened to kill him.¹⁷ In retaliation, the Juárez Cartel killed 22 Sinaloa Cartel members in a single day.¹⁸ Increased violence in the area is also being fueled by the perception on the part of the Juárez Cartel that the Government of Mexico is supporting the Sinaloa Cartel.¹⁹ The Juárez Cartel is responding by targeting Mexican federal, state, and local law enforcement and military officers they believe are aligned with the Sinaloa Cartel.²⁰ The Sinaloa Cartel has also targeted Mexican officials it believes are supporting the Juárez Cartel.²¹ (See text box.)

As a result of the unrest in the El Paso/Juárez Plaza, drug smuggling from Mexico into the West Texas HIDTA region has decreased overall since 2006.²² In particular, seizure amounts for cocaine (75% decrease), heroin (69% decrease), and marijuana (55% decrease) at the El Paso POE declined significantly overall during the past 5 years. During this period, cocaine and heroin seizures increased from 2008 to 2009, before declining again 2010.²³ Cocaine seizure amounts, however, began to increase again in early 2011, indicating that some stability is returning to the plaza. Conversely, methamphetamine seizure amounts at the El Paso POE increased during the 5-year period, which may be a result of the Sinaloa Cartel’s capacity to produce methamphetamine in Mexico and their increased influence in the El Paso/Juárez plaza.²⁴ (See Key Issues regarding cocaine and methamphetamine for further information.)

Table 1. Drug Seizures at the El Paso POE, 2006–2010, in Kilograms

Drug	Year				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Cocaine	1,153	957	291	766	289
Heroin	48	8	7	38	15
Marijuana	60,671	109,595	73,991	42,078	27,136
Methamphetamine	0	0	3	23	41

Source: National Seizure System, as of January 31, 2011.

Mexican Officials Targeted in Juárez

In July 2010, La Linea remotely detonated an improvised explosive device (IED) in a car while Mexican federal agents responded to reports of a dead body located inside the vehicle.²⁵ The IED attack killed two federal agents, one municipal police officer, and an emergency medical technician and wounded nine bystanders.²⁶ Shortly after this event, La Linea threatened to deploy an IED containing 100 kilograms of explosives if the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation did not investigate the chief of the Chihuahua State Police Intelligence Unit who reportedly worked for the Sinaloa Cartel.²⁷ Their demands were not met by U.S. law enforcement authorities and La Linea did not follow through with their threat.²⁸ However, in September 2010, a similar incident occurred where a La Linea member hid an IED in a car near another vehicle that contained a dead body.²⁹ As law enforcement responded to reports of the dead body, the IED malfunctioned and did not detonate.³⁰ The IED reportedly contained 16 kilograms of Tovex, a gel-based explosive, and was eight times more powerful than the IED in the July 2010 incident.³¹

Source: Open Source Center.

Recent High-Profile Drug Trafficker Arrests and Deaths Impacting the West Texas HIDTA Region

(July 24, 2010) **Luis Carlos Vazquez**, the financial operator and one of the three leaders of La Linea, was arrested by Mexican Federal Police in Juárez. He is believed to be the individual responsible for detonating the car bomb which killed three individuals in Ciudad Juárez on July 15, 2010.³²

(July 29, 2010) **Ignacio Coronel-Villarreal**, a former leader in the Sinaloa Cartel, was killed during an operation conducted by SEDENA forces in Zapopán, Jalisco, Mexico. He was responsible for trafficking multiton quantities of cocaine into the United States.³³

(November 26, 2010) **Arturo Gallegos Castrellón**, a leader of the Barrio Azteca (Los Aztecas) gang in Juárez, was arrested by Mexican Federal Police in Juárez. He was allegedly responsible for having ordered the attacks on U.S. consulate employees in March 2010 and for ordering hundreds of other murders in the city.³⁴

(February 22, 2011) **Luis Humberto Peralta Hernandez**, a leader in the Juárez Cartel, was killed in a shootout with Mexican Federal Police in the City of Chihuahua. He was allegedly responsible for at least 96 murders and was one of Mexico's most-wanted men.³⁵ Peralta Hernandez was a Mexican state police officer until 2009 when he resigned and became a high-ranking member of the Juárez Cartel.³⁶

Source: U.S. State Department, *2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report*; Open Source Center.

Barrio Azteca poses the most pervasive gang threat in the West Texas HIDTA region. It has increased its violent criminal activity, particularly in Juárez, and is a significant law enforcement concern in the region.

Barrio Azteca members display extreme levels of violence and rank among the most dangerous criminals in the West Texas HIDTA region.³⁷ Law enforcement agencies have documented incidents of violent criminal acts committed by Barrio Azteca members on both sides of the West Texas–Mexico border.³⁸ Barrio Azteca routinely uses violence—including assault, kidnapping, murder, and intimidation—to maintain control of their criminal operations and to fend off rival gang and drug trafficking organization (DTO) members.³⁹ (See text box on page 5.) The commonplace use of violence by Barrio Azteca members has increased law enforcement focus on the gang on both sides of the border.⁴⁰ The murders of three individuals with ties to the U.S. Consulate brought additional attention to the gang by U.S. and Mexican law enforcement in 2010.⁴¹ Increased U.S. law enforcement scrutiny of Barrio Azteca prompted the gang to shift leadership and operational control from El Paso to Juárez.⁴² Barrio Azteca has also changed some of its methods of operation because of increased law enforcement focus on the gang. For example, the gang has recruited University of Texas at El Paso students of unknown citizenship to smuggle weapons into Mexico, believing that U.S. and Mexican law enforcement are less likely to search their vehicles because they cross into Mexico on a daily basis.⁴³ Moreover, according to the West Texas HIDTA, Barrio Azteca is purging its membership of all sex offenders because they believe such members will bring unwanted law enforcement attention to the gang.⁴⁴ In addition, Barrio Azteca is reportedly reinstating ex-members residing in the United States if they are willing to cross into Juárez and commit crimes on the gang's behalf including gang-sanctioned murders.⁴⁵

Barrio Azteca

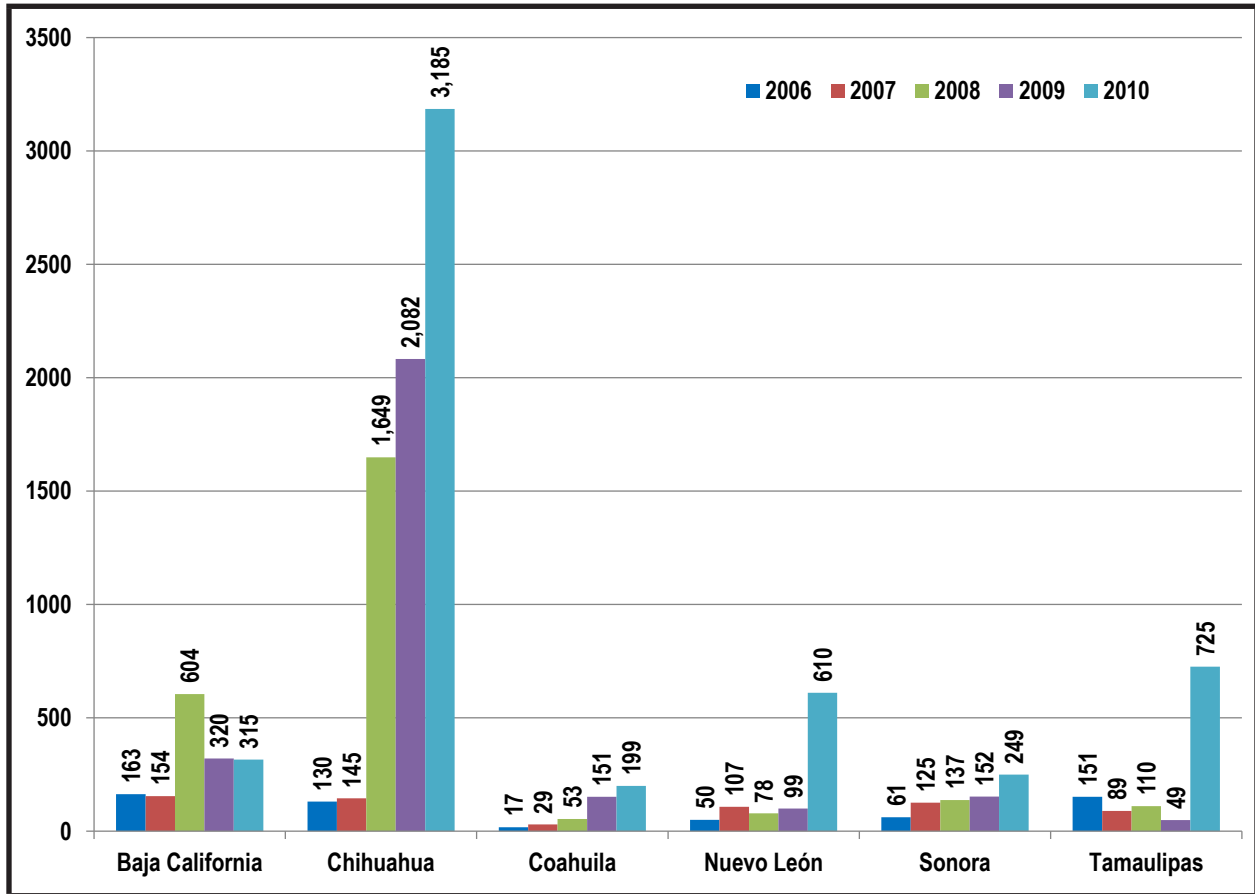
Barrio Azteca is one of the most violent prison gangs operating in Texas and poses the most significant gang threat to the West Texas HIDTA region.⁴⁶ The gang began in the late 1980s as a violent prison gang and has transformed into a transnational criminal organization.⁴⁷ Barrio Azteca, known as Los Aztecas in Mexico, is primarily based in West Texas and Juárez, Mexico, and has a presence throughout state and federal prisons in the United States and Mexico.⁴⁸ The gang operates with a military command structure that includes captains, lieutenants, sergeants, and soldiers—all with the purpose of maintaining power and enriching its members and associates through drug trafficking, money laundering, extortion, intimidation, violence, threats of violence, and murder.⁴⁹ In order to increase its power and influence, Barrio Azteca formed an alliance with the Juárez Cartel in Mexico.⁵⁰ The Juárez Cartel initiated this alliance with Barrio Azteca; this relationship is loose and the DEA El Paso Field Division believes the relationship is semiautonomous.⁵¹ The role of Barrio Azteca in this alliance is to conduct enforcement operations against Juárez Cartel rivals—in return, the Juárez Cartel provides heroin, cocaine, and marijuana to the gang at discounted prices.⁵² Barrio Azteca smuggles these drugs into El Paso, where they control most retail drug distribution.⁵³ Barrio Azteca members and associates charge a “street tax,” or “*cuota*,” on businesses and criminals operating on their turf. They use these funds to purchase drugs, guns, and ammunition. They also use the funds to support members in prison by funneling money into prison commissary accounts of gang leaders and to pay for defense lawyers or fines.⁵⁴ According to the DEA El Paso Field Division, Barrio Azteca is also trying to gain control over retail drug distribution in Juárez, where there are over 2,000 distribution points that generate over \$3 million per day in drug proceeds.⁵⁵ The gang routinely uses violence to defend itself from rivals and law enforcement. For example, in August 2010 the Barrio Azteca members kidnapped the wife, parents, and stepdaughter of one of their members whom they believed was cooperating with U.S. law enforcement.⁵⁶

Source: U.S. Department of Justice; Texas Department of Public Safety.

Violence in Juárez has caused many Juárez businesses and citizens to relocate to El Paso, impacting community services.

Violence in Juárez, primarily manifested in drug-related murders, has increased dramatically over the past 3 years. According to the University of San Diego Trans-Border Institute, the number of cartel-related killings in the State of Chihuahua far exceeds that of any other Mexican state bordering the United States; most of these deaths occurred in Juárez,⁵⁷ and are related to the conflict between and within the Sinaloa and Juárez Cartels, between the cartels and Mexican officials, and between gangs.⁵⁸ (See Figure 1 on page 6 and Table 2 on page 7.) According to the DEA El Paso Field Division, opportunists—individuals not involved with any one cartel who have taken advantage of the lawlessness for their own personal gain—have also significantly added to the homicide rate in Juárez.⁵⁹ Furthermore, because their drug trafficking operations have been weakened, the Juárez Cartel has diversified its criminal operations to include other activities such as kidnapping and extortion.⁶⁰

Figure 1. Cartel-Related Killings in Mexican States That Border the United States, 2006–2010



Source: University of San Diego, Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, Trans-Border Institute.

The threat of extortion and kidnapping in Juárez has caused many business owners to cease operations in the city and a number of businesses and citizens to relocate to the El Paso area.⁶¹ According to the Juárez Chamber of Commerce, at least 6,000 businesses in Juárez closed in 2010.⁶² Additionally, membership in “La Red,” or “The Net”—an organization representing Mexican business owners that have relocated from Juárez to El Paso—grew from 9 in February 2010 to 280 in December 2010.⁶³ Moreover, The Mexican Citizen’s Institute for Studies on Insecurity (ICESI)^d estimated that 135,000 Juárez citizens relocated to El Paso from 2008 through 2010,⁶⁴ placing an increased demand on many community services in El Paso.⁶⁵ For example, rising costs for patient treatment and care at the University Medical Center in El Paso have been attributed to an increase in the number of uninsured patients from Mexico.⁶⁶ The El Paso Independent School District (EPISD) has also noted an increase in the number of enrolled students from Mexico.⁶⁷ Many of these students claim to be under “federal protection.”⁶⁸ The EPISD only requires that students have a local address to attend school; most students commonly use the addresses of relatives or friends to fulfill this requirement.⁶⁹

d. The Citizen’s Institute for Studies on Insecurity is a nonprofit civil association that was created in response to public insecurity in Mexico; the institute’s objective is to have a nongovernmental agency that generates and distributes statistical information on public insecurity.

Table 2. Organized Crime Killings Resulting From Specific Conflicts Among Drug Trafficking Organizations, 2006–2010

Organizations in Conflict	Number of Killings
Sinaloa Cartel vs. Juárez Cartel	8,236
Sinaloa Cartel vs. Beltrán-Leyva Organization	5,864
Sinaloa Cartel vs. Gulf Cartel/Los Zetas	3,199
Sinaloa Cartel vs. Tijuana Cartel	1,798
La Familia vs. Los Zetas	1,744
Gulf Cartel vs. Los Zetas	1,328
Other	12,442
Total Organized Crime Killings	34,611

Source: University of San Diego, Joan B. Kroc School of Peace Studies, Trans-Border Institute.

Increased law enforcement presence in El Paso and violence in Juárez have prompted drug traffickers to alter transportation routes and methods used to smuggle drugs into and through the West Texas HIDTA region.

Increased border security and heightened violence in Juárez caused drug traffickers to smuggle fewer and/or smaller drug shipments through the El Paso POE in 2010.⁷⁰ National Seizure System (NSS) data indicate that total seizures of cocaine, heroin, and marijuana (the primary drugs smuggled through the POE) decreased significantly from 2009 to 2010. (See Table 1 on page 3.) Some alternative smuggling methods used by traffickers to transport drugs into the West Texas HIDTA region in 2010 include the following:

- Traffickers constructed the first drug smuggling tunnel ever discovered in the West Texas HIDTA region to avoid increased law enforcement operations at the El Paso POE.⁷¹ (See text box on page 8.)
- Traffickers are smuggling smaller marijuana loads, approximately 8 to 10 pounds per shipment, through the POE to avoid losing large quantities of the drug to law enforcement seizure. They are also using vehicles and drivers without prior entry records to avoid law enforcement suspicion.⁷²
- Traffickers are more frequently using trains to smuggle drugs into and through the HIDTA region.⁷³ For example, traffickers are smuggling marijuana into the United States concealed inside empty molasses cars returning from Mexico.⁷⁴ Traffickers used this method to smuggle marijuana shipments through the El Paso and Nogales POEs.⁷⁵ Additionally, 560 pounds of marijuana was seized in Los Angeles from a railcar that entered the United States in El Paso.⁷⁶ The shipment was wrapped in lead packing in order to defeat the x-ray scans at the POE.⁷⁷
- Ultralight aircraft are reportedly being used to smuggle drugs into the West Texas HIDTA near Presidio.⁷⁸ Ultralight activity in West Texas is not as prominent as in Arizona, New Mexico, and California, and indicates that law enforcement operations are impeding traffickers' overland smuggling methods.⁷⁹

Once drug shipments arrive in the HIDTA region, traffickers use additional methods to avoid law enforcement seizure. Implementation of heavier enforcement initiatives on interstate highways—including I-10, I-20, I-27, and I-40—have caused traffickers to increasingly use alternative routes including state highways and other rural routes to transport drug loads through the HIDTA region.⁸⁰ Additionally, marijuana backpackers, who smuggle the drug into the eastern portion of the HIDTA region, formerly placed markers on highways to indicate the location of drug shipments that were ready for pickup. These traffickers are no longer using this method out of fear that law enforcement will seize the marijuana.⁸¹

First Drug Smuggling Tunnel Discovered in El Paso

On June 25, 2010, U.S. Border Patrol discovered a tunnel near the Bridge of the Americas in El Paso running under the concrete-lined Rio Grande River after an agent became suspicious of noises in the area and used an electronic device to locate the source.⁸² The tunnel was approximately 2 feet high, 2 feet wide, and 130 feet long and was located 2 to 3 feet under the river.⁸³ The tunnel openings were concealed inside storm drains.⁸⁴ The tunnel was very crude, dark, and unventilated, but large enough for someone to crawl from the Mexican side of the border into the United States carrying drugs.⁸⁵ A 17-year-old male was found near the entrance to the tunnel on the U.S. side and 200 pounds of marijuana was found inside the tunnel.⁸⁶ This is the first time a tunnel has been discovered in the El Paso area.⁸⁷ Law enforcement authorities determined the tunnel had been under construction for approximately 1 year, but was operational for only 5 weeks.⁸⁸ It had been built by juveniles paid by Barrio Azteca under direction from La Linea.⁸⁹

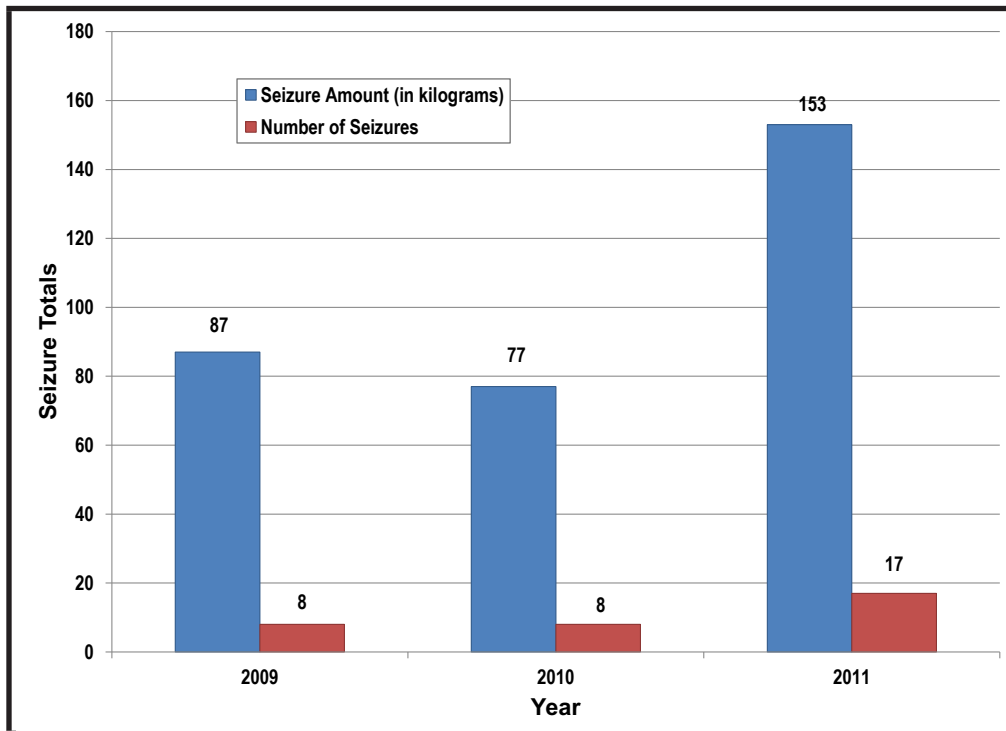
Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Cocaine availability decreased in the West Texas HIDTA region from 2009 to 2010; however, recent seizures at the El Paso POE and law enforcement reporting in early 2011 indicate that the Sinaloa Cartel's greater prominence in the El Paso/Juárez plaza may be increasing the flow of cocaine into the region.

Recent law enforcement seizures and reporting indicate that cocaine availability may be increasing in the HIDTA region in 2011.⁹⁰ The battle for control of the El Paso/Juárez plaza between the Sinaloa and Juárez Cartels during 2010 impacted the flow of cocaine from Mexico into the HIDTA region, resulting in DTOs utilizing other corridors (i.e., South Texas, Arizona, or California/Tijuana) to smuggle cocaine into the United States.⁹¹ Consequently, according to El Paso Intelligence Center (EPIC) NSS data, cocaine seizures at the El Paso POE decreased 62 percent in 2010 compared with 2009, and cocaine seizures in HIDTA counties decreased 49 percent during the same time period.⁹² (See Table 1 on page 3 and Table 3 on page 10.) As a result, wholesale powder cocaine prices increased from year-end 2008 (\$11,000-\$22,500 per kg) to midyear 2009 (\$14,000-\$22,500 per kg) and remained high through midyear 2010 (\$18,000-\$24,000 per kg).⁹³ However, recent seizures at the El Paso POE suggest that more cocaine is being smuggled into the HIDTA region from Mexico. Cocaine seizure amounts and the number of seizures more than doubled at the El Paso POE during the first 4 months of 2011 compared with the period in 2010.⁹⁴ (See Figure 2 on page 9.) For example, in January 2011, U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) officers working at the El Paso POE arrested a 68-year-old woman attempting to smuggle 39 pounds of cocaine valued at over \$1.2 million into the United States.⁹⁵ Furthermore, the DEA reports that cocaine shortages in the region from 2008 through

2010 have diminished and cocaine availability is returning to normal levels in 2011, though prices still remain high.⁹⁶ Increased cocaine availability in the region indicates that stability in the El Paso/Juárez Plaza is increasing as the Sinaloa Cartel establishes greater dominance in the area.

Figure 2. Cocaine Seizures at the El Paso POE, January–April 2009, 2010, and 2011



Source: El Paso Intelligence Center, National Seizure System.

Methamphetamine availability is increasing in the West Texas HIDTA region, primarily because of increased production in Mexico and within the region.

Mexican DTOs, primarily associated with the Sinaloa Cartel, are smuggling more methamphetamine into the West Texas HIDTA region, resulting in increased availability and seizures of the drug in the region.⁹⁷ According to NSS data, more methamphetamine was seized in the West Texas HIDTA region in 2010 (85 kg) than in the previous 4 years combined (69 kg).⁹⁸ (See Table 3 on page 10.) Increased availability of methamphetamine in the region is largely attributed to increased production in Mexico. In 2007, the Mexican Government announced a prohibition on ephedrine and pseudoephedrine imports into Mexico for 2008 and a ban on the use of both chemicals by 2009. By mid- to late-2008, Mexican DTOs had adapted their production operations by finding new sources of ephedrine and pseudoephedrine precursors and by increasing their implementation of non-ephedrine-based methods of methamphetamine production in Mexico.⁹⁹ To illustrate, the U.S. State Department’s *2011 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report* states that 217 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in Mexico in 2009, compared with 57 seizures in 2008.¹⁰⁰ As of May 20, 2010, 63 methamphetamine laboratories were seized in Mexico (latest data available). The Sinaloa Cartel’s increased smuggling activity into the HIDTA region and its history of large-scale methamphetamine production and trafficking in Mexico are likely

contributing to increased methamphetamine smuggling and availability in the region.¹⁰¹ Despite increased methamphetamine seizures and availability, prices for the drug increased slightly from year-end 2009 (\$14,000-\$20,000 per kg) to midyear 2010 (\$18,000-\$24,000 per kg).¹⁰² Increased prices for methamphetamine indicate that, although methamphetamine availability is increasing, it is not meeting current demand for the drug.

Recent arrests and anecdotal law enforcement reporting indicate that local methamphetamine production may also be increasing in the West Texas HIDTA region in 2011. According to DEA, local distributors are learning how to manufacture methamphetamine themselves to increase their profits from sales of the drug.¹⁰³ For example, in March 2011, several El Paso area residents were charged with conspiring to manufacture methamphetamine.¹⁰⁴ (See text box below.) Additionally, local methamphetamine producers are increasingly employing methamphetamine abusers to acquire pseudoephedrine through smurfing^e operations in the HIDTA region, in exchange for money or finished methamphetamine.¹⁰⁵

Table 3. Drug Seizures in the West Texas HIDTA Region, in Kilograms, 2006–2010

Drug	Year				
	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Cocaine	2,232	1,334	522	1,379	705
Heroin	112	16	17	62	20
Marijuana	134,221	188,486	119,858	80,076	73,206
Methamphetamine	4	23	9	33	85

Source: National Seizure System.

Local Methamphetamine Production in El Paso

In March 2011, DEA agents and El Paso police officers arrested 11 El Paso area residents for conspiring to manufacture methamphetamine.¹⁰⁶ The defendants were charged in two separate indictments returned by the federal grand jury in El Paso.¹⁰⁷ One indictment charged three of the defendants with conspiracy to manufacture methamphetamine and conspiracy to possess a listed chemical with intent to manufacture methamphetamine.¹⁰⁸ The indictment alleged that from October 2, 2006, to August 30, 2010, the three conspired to purchase pseudoephedrine products from various local pharmacies and use it to produce methamphetamine for distribution.¹⁰⁹ The second indictment charged the remaining defendants with conspiracies to manufacture methamphetamine and to possess pseudoephedrine with the intent to manufacture from September 10, 2005, to March 14, 2010.¹¹⁰ One of the defendants allegedly produced methamphetamine using pseudoephedrine products that the other defendants purchased at local pharmacies.¹¹¹

Source: U.S. Attorney Western District of Texas.

e. Smurfing is a method used by some methamphetamine and precursor chemical traffickers to acquire large quantities of pseudoephedrine for methamphetamine production. Individuals purchase pseudoephedrine in quantities at or below legal thresholds from multiple retail locations. Traffickers often enlist the assistance of several associated in smurfing operations to increase the speed with which chemicals are acquired.

MDMA availability and abuse have increased in the El Paso area as local young adults who previously traveled to Juárez to abuse the drug are avoiding the high levels of violence there.

The ongoing violence in Ciudad Juárez and an increasing number of young adult and adolescent “rave parties” are contributing to higher MDMA availability in the HIDTA region.¹¹² Increased violence in Juárez has resulted in many young adults staying in the region to party and abuse MDMA rather than risk participating in the nightlife in Juárez.^{f, 113} Increased availability of MDMA in the El Paso area is further supported by significant seizures, decreased prices, and law enforcement and treatment provider reporting. For example, in April 2011, the El Paso County Sheriff’s Office launched an investigation into MDMA and other drug distribution in area schools.¹¹⁴ During the investigation, authorities arrested eight teenagers for selling MDMA pills near Franklin High School. Further, in August 2010, CBP seized more than 2,000 MDMA pills from an individual at the El Paso POE.¹¹⁵ (See text box below.) With increased availability, wholesale prices for MDMA in El Paso decreased from year-end 2009 (\$5-\$20 per tablet) to midyear 2010 (\$5-\$10 per tablet).¹¹⁶ In 2010, local treatment providers reported that MDMA availability in El Paso was high, indicating that the drug is easily obtained by abusers.¹¹⁷

CBP Officers Arrest Body Carrier with MDMA

In August 2010, CBP officers arrested a 22-year old male attempting to smuggle MDMA into the United States through the pedestrian lanes at the Bridge of the Americas international crossing.¹¹⁸ A CBP officer working the primary inspection station noticed an unexplained bulge in the groin area of the man and initiated an inspection.¹¹⁹ A further examination revealed a tape-wrapped bundle that contained 2,017 MDMA pills.¹²⁰ The individual was turned over to U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement and charged with the importation of a controlled substance and possession with intent to distribute a controlled substance.¹²¹

Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection.

Outlook

NDIC assesses with high confidence^g that the high level of violence in Juárez will not subside in the near future. Violence may increase if the Sinaloa Cartel is able to further curtail the Juárez Cartel’s drug smuggling operations. If Juárez Cartel drug smuggling is reduced, the cartel could be further compelled to engage in other criminal activities for profit such as extortion and kidnapping.¹²² Mexican military and law enforcement operations that target the violence caused by DTOs fighting for control of the El Paso/Juárez plaza have further aggravated the situation and will likely cause the violence to further increase.¹²³ Opportunists in the Juárez area will continue to take advantage of the lawlessness in the area for their own personal gain.¹²⁴

f. Prior to the increase in violence in Juárez, young adults in El Paso frequently crossed the Southwest Border to engage in the nightlife in Juárez, where they could more easily obtain and use MDMA.

g. **High Confidence** generally indicates that the judgments are based on high-quality information or that the nature of the issue makes it possible to render a solid judgment. **Medium Confidence** generally means that the information is credibly sourced and plausible but can be interpreted in various ways, or is not of sufficient quality or corroborated sufficiently to warrant a higher level of confidence. **Low Confidence** generally means that the information is too fragmented or poorly corroborated to make a solid analytic inference, or that there are significant concerns or problems with the sources.

NDIC assesses with high confidence that the recent arrests of Barrio Azteca members are not likely to impact the gang in the long term. Past law enforcement investigations have led to arrests of key gang leaders; however, Barrio Azteca has demonstrated that it is able to quickly replace those arrested, making it difficult to achieve long-term disruption of the gang's activities.¹²⁵ Further, the shift of Barrio Azteca's leadership and operational control from El Paso to Juárez will make it more difficult for U.S. law enforcement to infiltrate the gang and arrest high-ranking members.¹²⁶ However, Barrio Azteca's ability to smuggle drugs into the West Texas HIDTA region could be significantly hindered as the Sinaloa Cartel increases its dominance of smuggling corridors in the Juárez area.

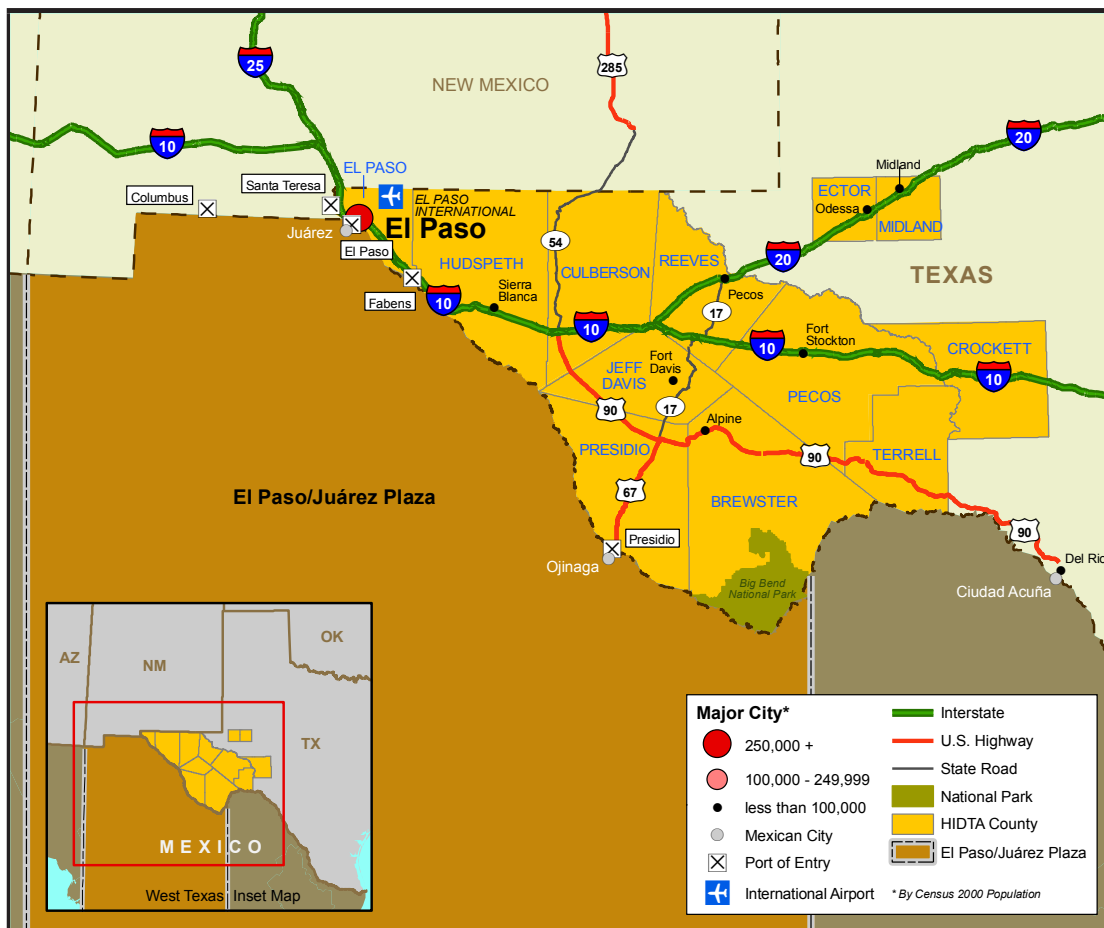
NDIC assesses with high confidence that the number of Juárez businesses and individuals relocating to the El Paso area will increase unless violence stabilizes or declines in Juárez, placing an additional strain on social services in the HIDTA region in the long term.

NDIC assesses with high confidence that cocaine, methamphetamine, and MDMA availability will continue to increase in the West Texas HIDTA region. If the Sinaloa Cartel can gain more influence over the El Paso/Juárez plaza, it will increase the amounts of cocaine and methamphetamine it smuggles into the HIDTA region. MDMA availability will continue to rise in the El Paso area should high levels of violence persist in Juárez, discouraging local abusers from traveling to clubs in Mexico. Because MDMA is being distributed in schools within the HIDTA region, MDMA abuse among local high school students will trend upward.

Appendix A. West Texas HIDTA Region Overview

The West Texas HIDTA region lies along a 520-mile section of the U.S.–Mexico border in Southwest Texas and encompasses 12 counties. (See Map A1 below.) The HIDTA region is used by Mexican DTOs as a principal smuggling corridor and staging area for drug transportation to markets in San Francisco (CA), Denver (CO), Atlanta (GA), Miami (FL), Chicago (IL), New York (NY), Dallas/Fort Worth and Houston (TX), St. Louis (MO), Indianapolis (IN), Philadelphia (PA), and many other major U.S. cities.

Map A1. West Texas High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area



Most drugs smuggled into and through the region pass through the El Paso/Juárez plaza, a major drug smuggling corridor that extends from the “boot heel” of New Mexico to the eastern boundary of Big Bend National Park and includes the El Paso, Fabens, and Presidio POEs in Texas and the Columbus and Santa Teresa POEs in New Mexico. Mexican DTOs use El Paso, the most populous metropolitan area in West Texas, as a principal staging area, transshipment point, and distribution center for illicit drugs destined for drug markets throughout the nation. El Paso is located on I-10, a major drug trafficking route that links the HIDTA region to many national-level drug markets, generally through connections to I-20 and I-25.

Mexican DTOs exploit the robust, legitimate, cross-border economic activity and social interaction between El Paso and its sister city, Ciudad Juárez. On a smaller scale, they also exploit locations between Presidio and Ciudad Ojinaga, Mexico, to conduct their smuggling activities. The thriving maquiladora^h industry is a major contributor to increased cross-border pedestrian, passenger vehicle, and commercial truck traffic—more than 200,000 U.S. and Mexican citizens traverse the border daily between these sister cities—creating ideal conditions for smuggling illicit drugs into the United States and returning drug proceeds to Mexico. Moreover, DTOs frequently arrange their smuggling activities to coincide with periods of high traffic, reducing the likelihood that their vehicles will be inspected. Mexican DTOs also use the sparsely populated, arid desert and semiarid mountains and canyons of the West Texas HIDTA region as well as numerous low-level water crossings along the Rio Grande River to conceal their smuggling activities. Big Bend National Park, which encompasses over 800,000 acres along the U.S.–Mexico border in West Texas, is exploited by these traffickers, who take advantage of the remote areas and limited law enforcement presence in the park to smuggle drugs into the HIDTA region.

The violent struggle among Mexican DTOs for control of drug smuggling as well as between these DTOs and Mexican military and law enforcement in the El Paso/Juárez plaza substantiates the West Texas HIDTA region’s strategic importance to Mexican traffickers. Moreover, the region’s location along the U.S.–Mexico border poses national security and law enforcement issues for the region, such as alien smuggling, weapons transportation, and terrorist entry into the United States through and between POEs.

The smuggling and transshipment of multiton quantities of marijuana and multikilogram quantities of powder cocaine are the principal drug problems in the West Texas HIDTA region.¹²⁷ Cocaine and marijuana smuggled through the HIDTA region are distributed in drug markets throughout the country. Heroin, methamphetamine, other dangerous drugs (ODDs), controlled prescription drugs, and precursor chemicals are also smuggled into and transshipped from the West Texas HIDTA region, but the quantities seized in this region are well below those seized in other areas along the Southwest Border. Methamphetamine and MDMA, however, are increasingly seized in the HIDTA region.

Despite decreased availability of cocaine, the drug continues to be the greatest drug threat to the region. According to the NDTs 2011, 6 of the 8 responding law enforcement agencies reported that powder or crack cocaine was the greatest drug threat in their areas. All law enforcement agencies that responded to the NDTs 2011 report that powder cocaine availability is high and 4 of the 8 responding agencies reported crack cocaine availability is high. (See [Table A1](#) and [Table A2](#) in [Appendix A](#).) Treatment admissions for cocaine were the highest among drug-related treatment admissions in the HIDTA region, with 455 individuals admitted to treatment facilities for cocaine abuse in 2010. (See [Figure A1](#) in [Appendix A](#).)

Marijuana availability and abuse are high in the West Texas HIDTA. All law enforcement agencies that responded to the NDTs 2011 reported that marijuana availability is high in their areas and the El Paso Police Department reported that marijuana was the greatest drug threat in their jurisdiction. (See [Table A1](#) and [Table A2](#) in [Appendix A](#).) Marijuana-related treatment

h. Maquiladoras are factories that obtain duty-free materials and components from foreign suppliers, including U.S. suppliers, and use them to manufacture finished products, such as textiles, in Mexico and return the products to the foreign suppliers.

admissions are the third-highest among drug-related treatment admissions in the West Texas HIDTA region. (See Figure A1 in Appendix A.) Although marijuana is readily available, marijuana seizures decreased 9 percent in 2010 compared with 2009. (See Table 3 on page 10.)

Heroin availability and abuse are high in the West Texas HIDTA. Law enforcement agencies that responded to the NDTs 2011 report that heroin availability is moderate or high and the Pecos Police Department indicated that it is the greatest drug threat to its area. (See Table A1 and Table A2 in Appendix A.) Treatment admissions for heroin were second highest among drug-related treatment admissions in the HIDTA region, surpassed only by those for cocaine. (See Figure A1 in Appendix A.) Despite high availability and abuse, heroin seizure amounts are much lower than those of cocaine, marijuana, and methamphetamine. The amount of heroin seized in the West Texas HIDTA also decreased from 2009 to 2010. (See Table 3 on page 10.)

Methamphetamine availability is increasing in the HIDTA region and the drug is becoming an increasing concern for law enforcement. Methamphetamine seizures increased 158 percent in 2010 compared with 2009, indicating the drug is becoming increasingly available in the West Texas HIDTA region. (See Table 3 on page 10.) Methamphetamine-related treatment admissions remain lower than those for cocaine, heroin, and marijuana. (See Figure A1 in Appendix A.)

MDMA availability is increasing in the HIDTA region. Significant seizures and decreased prices of MDMA, along with law enforcement and treatment provider reporting, indicate availability of the drug is increasing, particularly in the El Paso area. Young adults no longer travel to Mexico because of the high levels of violence there, and because MDMA distribution in El Paso area schools has increased.

Table A1. Drug Availability in the West Texas HIDTA, National Drug Threat Survey 2011

Agency	Cocaine		Heroin	Methamphetamine		Marijuana	MDMA
	Powder	Crack		Powder	Ice		
Ector County Sheriff's Office	High	Moderate	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	Low
El Paso County Sheriff's Office	High	Low	Moderate	NA	Moderate	High	Moderate
El Paso Police Department	High	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
Horizon City Police Department	High	Low	Moderate	Low	Low	High	Moderate
Midland County Sheriff's Office	High	High	NA	Moderate	Moderate	High	Low
Midland Police Department	High	High	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	Moderate
Odessa Police Department	High	High	High	Moderate	Moderate	High	Moderate
Pecos Police Department	High	Low	High	Low	Low	High	NA

Source: NDIC National Drug Threat Survey 2011.

NA—Not available

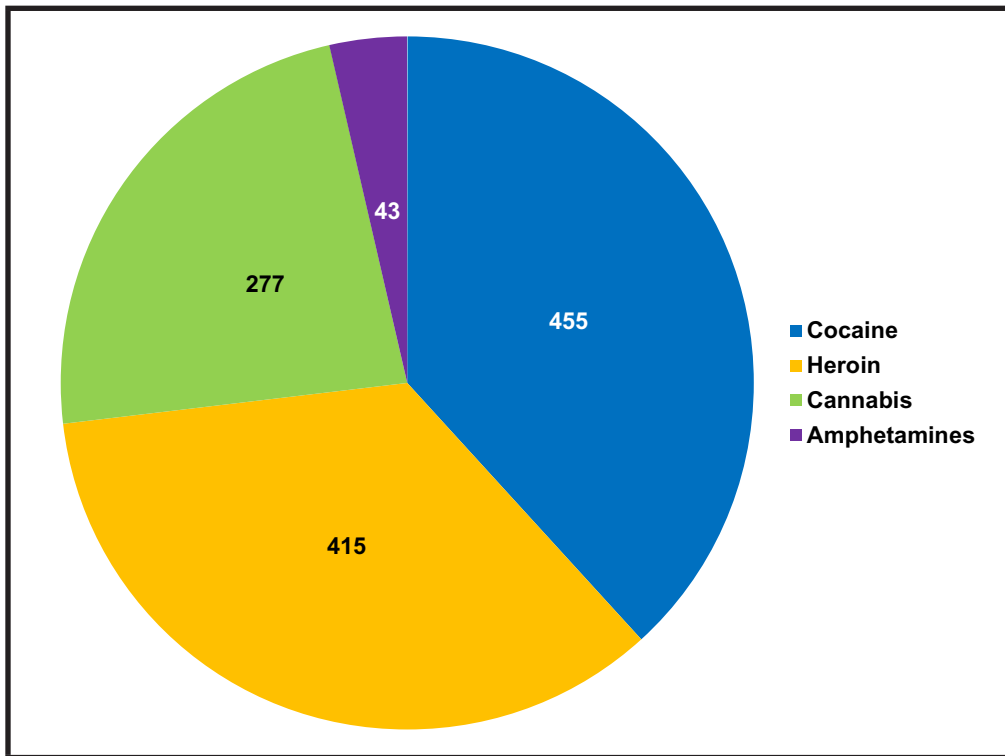
Table A2. Greatest Drug Threat in the West Texas HIDTA Region, 2010–2011

Agency	Year	
	2010	2011
Ector County Sheriff's Office	Powder Cocaine	Powder Cocaine
El Paso County Sheriff's Office	Marijuana	Powder Cocaine
El Paso Police Department	Marijuana	Marijuana
Horizon City Police Department	*	Powder Cocaine
Midland County Sheriff's Office	Crack Cocaine	Powder Cocaine
Midland Police Department	Powder Cocaine	Powder Cocaine
Odessa Police Department	Crack Cocaine	Crack Cocaine
Pecos Police Department	Powder Cocaine	Heroin

Source: NDIC National Drug Threat Survey 2011.

*Horizon City Police Department did not participate in the 2010 NDTS survey.

Figure A1. Treatment Admissions in the West Texas HIDTA, 2010



Source: Texas Department of State Health Services.

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Horizon City Police Department
Hudspeth County Constable's Office
Midland County Sheriff's Office
Midland Police Department
Odessa Police Department
Pecos Police Department
State of Texas
 Texas Department of Public Safety
 Texas Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse
Union Pacific Railroad Police

Federal

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 Office of National Drug Control Policy
 High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area
 West Texas
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
 U.S. Customs and Border Patrol
 Office of Border Patrol
 El Paso Sector
 Marfa Sector
 U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
 Office of Investigations
 El Paso Field Office
U.S. Department of Justice
 U.S. Attorneys Office
 Western District of Texas
 Drug Enforcement Administration
 El Paso Intelligence Center
 National Seizure System
 Federal Bureau of Investigation
 El Paso Division
 Office of Public Affairs
U.S. Department of State
 U.S. Embassy
 Mexico

Other

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New Beginnings
Open Source Center

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