RIGHT ON CRIME

ENSURING JUSTICE:
INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO IMPROVE CRIME CLEARANCE RATES

WRITTEN BY
Nikki Pressley and Ross Jackson
December 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ENSURING JUSTICE: INNOVATIVE APPROACHES TO IMPROVE CRIME CLEARANCE RATES

WRITTEN BY **Nikki Pressley and Ross Jackson**

KEY POINTS

- **Following national trends,** violent crime and property crime rates have significantly declined in Texas since the early 1990s when crime in the United States peaked.

- **Law enforcement** has been solving fewer crimes each year, despite the decline in crime rates.

- **In 2023,** only 53% of homicides were solved in Texas.

- **Potential causes of declining clearance rates** include law enforcement staffing challenges, technology challenges, funding gaps, overcriminalization, and a lack of prioritization of cases.

- **To increase clearance rates,** law enforcement departments need additional resources for crime staff and training, new policies and procedures that target crime ridden areas, increased transparency and accountability mechanisms, and a renewed focus on restoring victims and their families.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Recent reports released by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) indicate that law enforcement departments across the country are solving fewer crimes than ever before (Asher, 2023a). According to the FBI, clearance rates are the rates at which law enforcement agencies can clear or close cases either through arrest or exceptional means (meaning the offender was identified, evidence was gathered, but the offender cannot be arrested, charged, or prosecuted under current circumstances) (FBI, 2018). Clearance rates are calculated using ratios of the number of cases closed to the number of cases opened by law enforcement in a given year (FBI, 2018). Cases closed were not necessarily opened in the same year, meaning if a case from 2016 was not closed until 2024, it would still count toward the 2024 clearance rate. In the 1960s, when the FBI began reporting clearance rates, the US average crime-solving rate was at nearly 90% (Asher, 2023a). In 2022, police departments closed an average of about 37% of violent crimes (Asher, 2023a). These alarmingly low clearance rates sow public distrust in law enforcement, deny justice to victims, and do not effectively deter criminal behavior.

Law enforcement recruitment and retention rates are likely some of the most important contributors to declining clearance rates. This is not isolated to patrol officers alone, but crime analysts and other support staff as well. In 2020, after months of controversy surrounding law enforcement, retirements increased dramatically and hiring rates declined as crime rates hit highs not seen in years (McEvoy, 2021). Technology has presented many challenges to law enforcement departments, as officers struggle to integrate new and emerging technological resources with traditional police practices and procedures (Lum et al., 2016). Police response times to crimes have also increased in major cities around the U.S. with some close to doubling, which can at least be partially attributed

to staffing issues (Asher, 2023a). Due to overcriminalization (or the creation of excessive laws), which penalizes acts not typically thought of as crimes, law enforcement is forced to spread already limited resources more thinly. Lastly, many departments still neglect to prioritize violent crimes over nonviolent ones, expending resources that could be used to better ensure public safety.

Solutions to address record low clearance include investing state and local resources into better law enforcement training, allocating more funding for crime analysts, implementing better law enforcement practices and procedures (including hotspot police), ethical use of artificial intelligence (AI) technology, and creation of alternative co-response units where law enforcement departments partner with trained professionals to respond to lower-level crimes and increase bandwidth. Additionally, improved data tracking and reporting and increased victim support will ensure long-term collaboration between the public and law enforcement, in addition to rebuilding and maintaining better community trust. With these solutions in mind, lawmakers and law enforcement agencies can work together to make our communities safer by deterring crime, creating and preserving community trust, and bringing justice to victims.

HISTORICAL CRIME TRENDS
National Crime Estimates
The FBI Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program reports yearly data on estimated crime rates in the United States, based on the Summary Reporting System and National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), which are two voluntary reports submitted by law enforcement. Many law enforcement agencies do not submit reports because they are not mandatory. In 2022, the national crime statistics were based on reports from 83% of law enforcement agencies. The current reporting rate, however, is higher than in the past. In 1993, only 72% of law enforcement agencies reported data to the FBI UCR program (FBI, 2023).

From 1993 to 2022, the UCR program reported that the United States' violent crime rate dropped from 747.1 to 380.7 per 100,000 people (FBI, 2023). Property crime has also declined during the same period, dropping from 4,740 to 1,954.4 per 100,000 people (FBI, 2023).

The Bureau of Justice Statistics also conducts the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which is an annual report on estimated criminal victimization in the United States (BJS, 2024a). In contrast to data collected from law enforcement on crime rates, the NCVS collects information on reported and unreported victimization to law enforcement. The data are collected through a sample survey based on a representative sample of the entire population and then weighted to represent the population of interest (BJS, 2024a).

The most recent NCVS report found that the estimated rate of violent victimizations from 1993 to 2022 dropped from 79.8 per 1,000 individuals to 23.5 per 1,000 for individuals aged 12 and older (BJS, 2024b). Property victimization has also declined, dropping from 351.8 per 1,000 to 101.9 per 1,000 households (BJS, 2024b).

Generally, the estimated rate of violent victimizations reported to law enforcement has remained relatively consistent, going from 42.4% in 1993 to 41.5% in 2022 (BJS, 2024b). In 2010, the United States saw the highest rate of reporting at 51.1% (BJS, 2024b). Property crimes have historically shown even lower levels of estimated reporting, with 31.8% in both 1993 and 2022, hitting the peak level in 2008 at 40.2% (BJS, 2024b).

As shown in **Figure 1**, there is a large disparity between the UCR violent crime rates and NCVS victimization rates. However, it is important to note that one crime reported via the UCR can contain multiple victims. **Figure 2** shows the percentage of violent victims reporting crimes to police, revealing that the reporting rate of victimization is around half of crime that actually occurs in the United States.

Figure 1

FBI UCR Rates vs. NCVS Violent Crime Rates Per 1,000 People (1993-2022)

FBI vs. NCVS Violent Crime Rates Per 1,000 People (1993-2022)
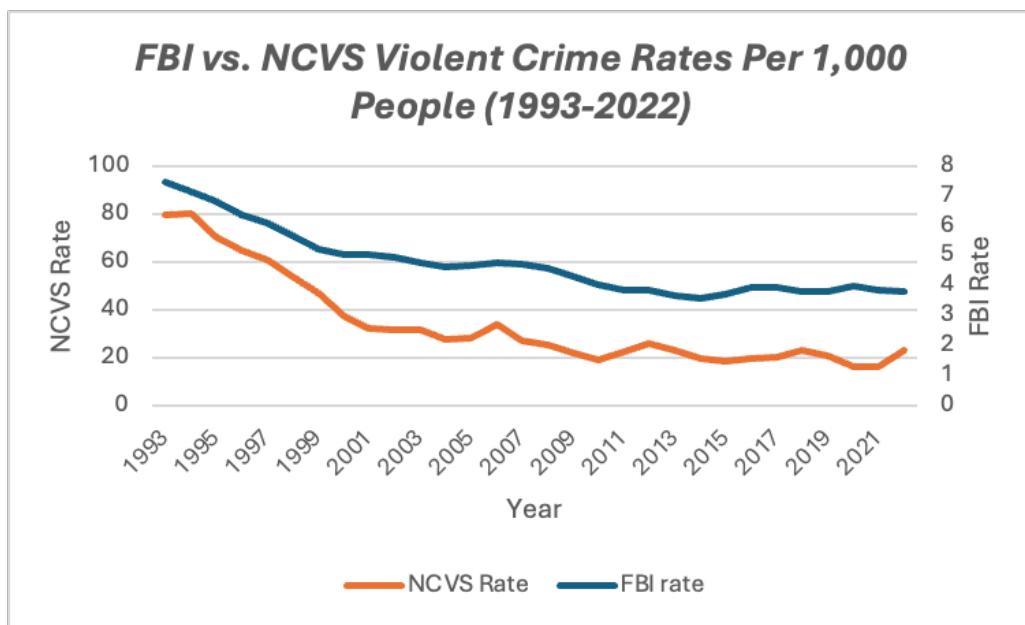
Source: BJS, 2024b; FBI, 2023.

Figure 2

Percent of Violent Victimizations by Reporting to the Police (1993-2022)

Percent of Violent Victimizations by Reporting to the Police (1993-2022)
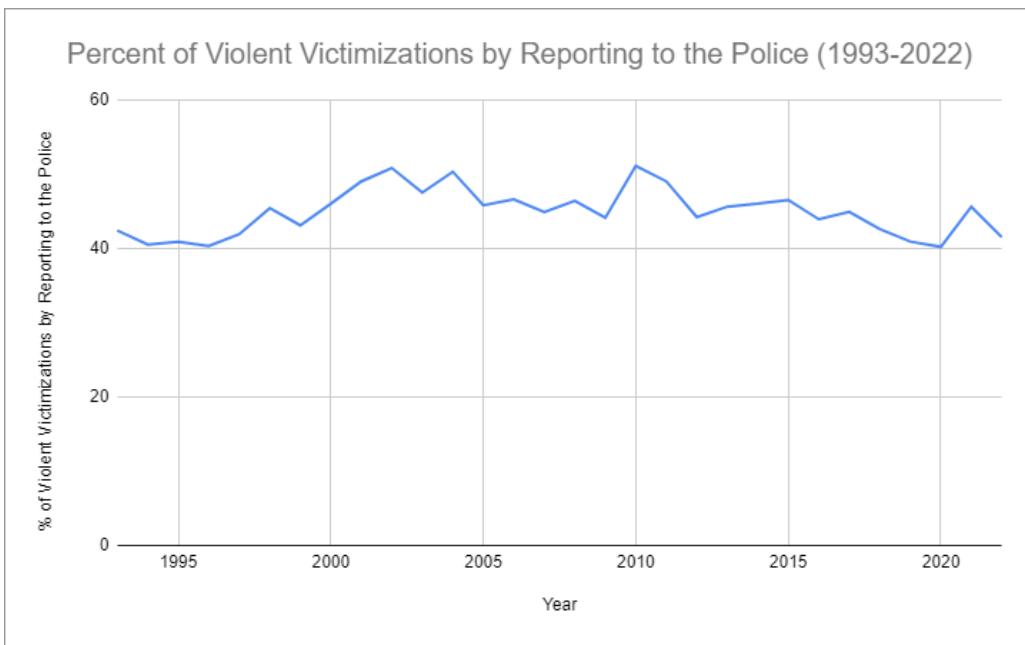
Source: BJS, 2024b.

Texas Crime Rates

In Texas, violent crime peaked in 1991 (at a victim-ization rate of 800 per 100,000 people) and has seen a downward trend since then. However, over the past ten years, this has started to plateau, similar to the rest of the nation. Texas again experienced high levels of violent crime in 2021 with a rate of 453 per 100,000 people, as seen in **Figure 3** (FBI, 2023). According to the Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS), the violent crime rate was 440.03 per 100,000

Figure 3
Rate of Violent Crime Offenses by Population
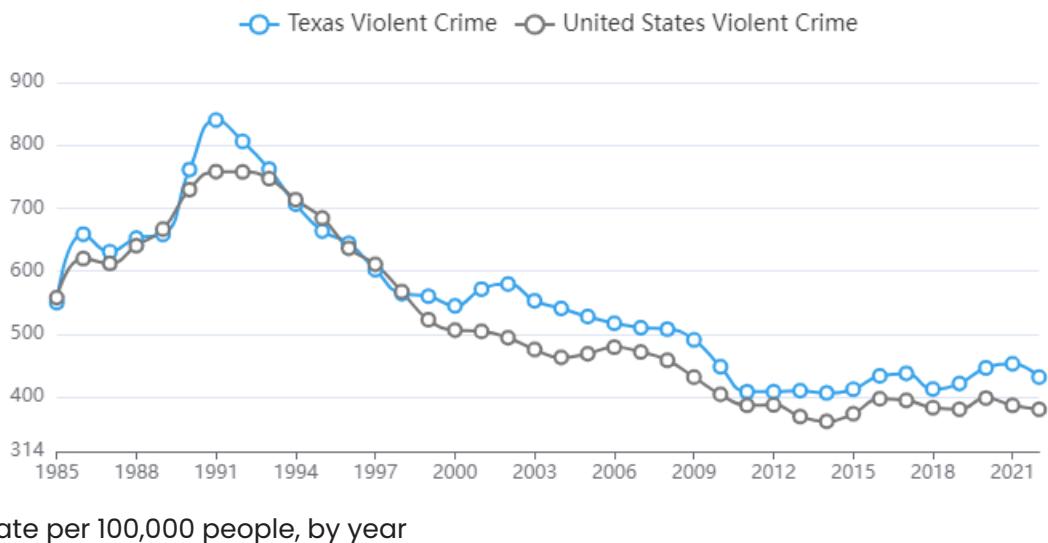
Rate per 100,000 people, by year

Source: FBI, 2023.

people in 2021 (Texas DPS, 2022). DPS uses different reporting levels and metrics than the FBI, so the actual rate of violent crime likely falls somewhere at or between those two data points (Texas DPS, 2022).

Similar to violent crime, property crimes have mostly trended downwards following their peak in 1988 (FBI, 2023). There is one exception from 2021 to 2022 when property crime saw a very slight uptick, raising from 2,171.9 per 100,000 people to 2,299.99 per 100,000, an increase of 0.12% (FBI, 2023). However, it did not reach the same levels of property crime in recent years, such as in 2019, with 2,405 per 100,000 people (FBI, 2023). Just like violent crime, Texas property crime rates have also been on track with national trends, as seen in **Figure 4**.

Looking more closely at the past five years, violent crime has seen an increase of 3.54%, hitting its peak in 2020, while property crime has decreased 3.40%. More specifically, murder and motor vehicle theft have seen dramatic increases since 2018. **Table 1** shows crime rates by offense from 2018-2022.

NATIONAL CLEARANCE RATES

A clearance rate is law enforcement's rate of resolving or closing cases. The FBI further defines a clearance rate as the percentage of offenses known to law enforcement that were cleared by either arrest or by exceptional means (FBI, 2018). Texas DPS provides further context to the definition, clarifying that a single arrest could clear multiple crimes, while multiple arrests could clear a single crime (Texas DPS, 2022, p. 3). Importantly, this illustrates how the arrest rates in a state are not a barometer for the actual number of crimes being solved.

Further complicating the idea of clearance rates, DPS defines different types of "exceptional means" that could lead to the clearance of a crime: "(1) confirming the offender's identity, (2) having sufficient evidence for arrest and court procedures, (3) knowing the offender's immediate location for custody, and (4) encountering factors beyond law enforcement control that hinder the arrest, charging, and prosecution of the offender" (Texas DPS, 2022, p. 3).

Figure 4
Rate of Property Crime Offenses by Population
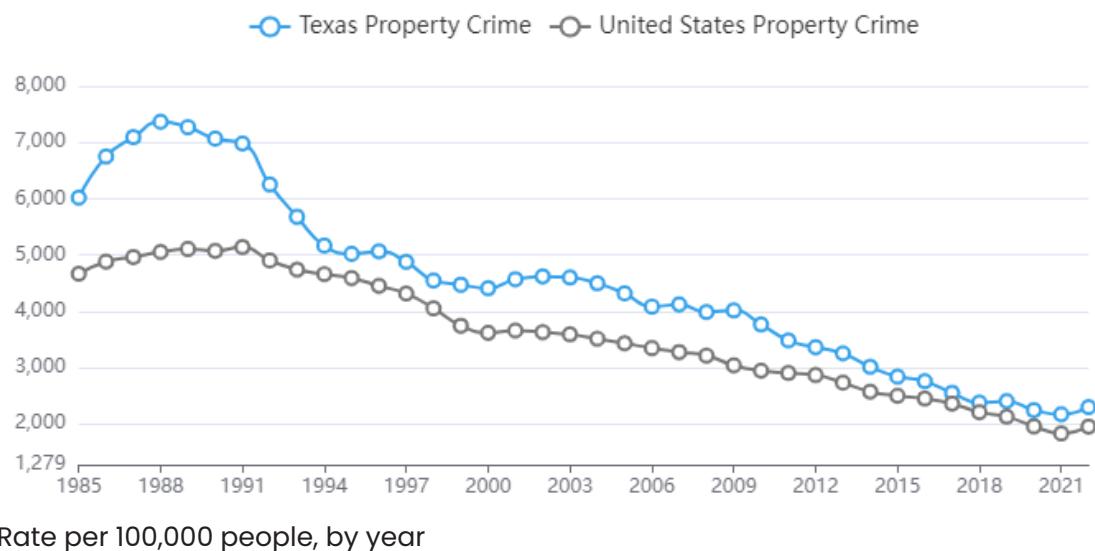
Rate per 100,000 people, by year

Source: FBI, 2023.

Table 1
Crime Rate by Offense – 5 Year

Offense	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2021-2022 % Change	2018-2022 % Change
Aggravated Assault	258.40	260.70	299.80	307.80	302.23	-1.81%	16.96%
Robbery	98.50	99.50	91.10	75.60	70.34	-6.96%	-28.59%
Rape	51.90	50.50	45.40	49.70	48.75	-1.91%	-6.04%
Murder	4.60	4.80	6.60	7.00	6.72	-4.05%	45.61%
Violent Crime Total	413.40	415.60	442.88	440.03	428.04	-2.73%	3.54%
Larceny-Theft	1,710.80	1,711.50	1,571.60	1,501.30	1,620.24	7.92%	-5.29%
Burglary	409.40	387.70	367.90	324.40	334.01	2.96%	-18.42%
Motor Vehicle Theft	242.90	264.50	284.40	297.00	328.53	10.61%	35.23%
Property Crime Total	2,363.16	2,363.68	2,223.85	2,122.80	2,282.78	7.54%	-3.40%
Family Violence	664.90	679.10	728.40	783.00	846.96	8.17%	27.37%
Sexual Assault	70.00	66.50	57.80	62.40	62.09	-0.50%	-11.36%
Hate Crime	1.30	1.40	1.90	1.70	1.87	10.09%	41.36%
State Mandatory Reporting Total	736.32	746.96	788.11	847.15	910.92	7.53%	23.71%

Source: Texas DPS, 2023.

The FBI began tracking clearance rates in the 1960s. As with most crime data, national clearance rate data is incomplete due to the inconsistencies in agency and state reporting. Some law enforcement departments may report over 100% clearance rates in some years. This can occur when a department clears cases that occurred in years past but were not cleared until that current year. Although it can still be used as an estimate to track historical trends, "the FBI discourages ranking locations or making comparisons as a way of measuring law enforcement effectiveness. Some of this data may not be comparable to previous years because of differing levels of participation over time" (FBI, 2023).

Table 2
NIBRS Participation and Clearance Rates of Five Most Populated States, 2022

State	NIBRS Certified Population	Total Clearance Rate
California	52.6%	25.4%
Texas	98.8%	23.2%
Florida	31.8%	26.3%
New York	23.4%	26.3%
Pennsylvania	40.5%	26.6%

Source: BJS, 2021.

For example, **Table 2** above shows the total clearance rates and NIBRS participation (the percentage of population served by NIBRS certified law enforcement) of the five most populated states in the nation. Comparing the clearance rates of these states would not be an accurate reflection of law enforcement effectiveness.

Nevertheless, national clearance rate estimates can be used as approximations to follow historical trends. As shown in **Figure 5**, clearance rates have been historically decreasing over time, specifically seeing a sharp decline after 2019 (Asher, 2023a). Since the FBI began tracking law enforcement clearance rates in 1960, clearance rates have plummeted (Asher, 2023a). The solving of murder cases recently reached an all-time low in 2022 (Asher, 2023a). Theorized causes of the decline will be discussed in subsequent sections.

Figure 5
U.S. Crime Solving Rates Fell After 2019
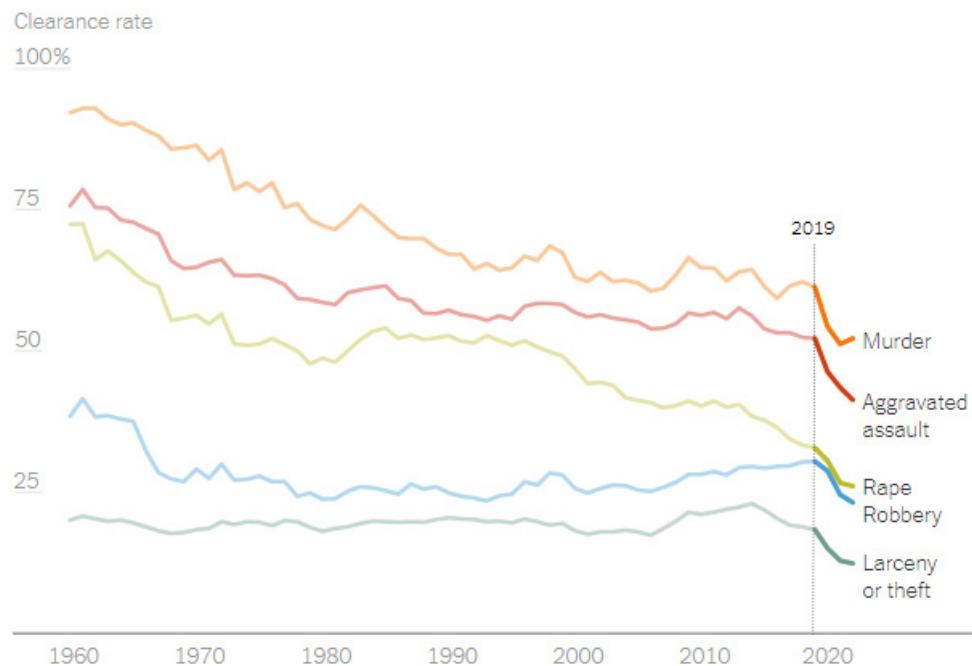
Source: Asher, 2023a.

Table 3
Texas Crime and Clearance Rates, 2018 vs. 2022

Crime	Cleared in 2018	Cleared in 2022	Percentage Change in Clearance Rates since 2018	Percentage Change in Crime Rate since 2018
Murder	58.84%	50.92%	−7.92%	+45.61%
Rape	27.63%	17.67%	−9.96%	−6.04%
Human Trafficking	27.11%	40.96%	+13.85%	+0.75%
Aggravated Assault	42.98%	35.09%	−7.89%	+16.96%
Robbery	20.10%	19.55%	−0.55%	−28.59%
Arson	18.18%	22.22%	+4.04%	+0.28
Burglary	9.65%	7.9%	−1.75%	−18.42%
Cargo Theft	7.61%	6.72%	−0.89%	+2.03
Larceny-Theft	14.28%	8.45%	−5.83%	−5.29%
Motor Vehicle Theft	12.16%	8.36%	−3.8%	+35.23%
Sexual Assault	n/a	8.18%	n/a	−11.36%
Family Violence	n/a	45.36%	n/a	+27.37%
Hate Crime	n/a	18.71%	n/a	+41.36%

Source: Texas DPS, 2022.

TEXAS CLEARANCE RATES

Although many law enforcement departments do not report to NIBRS, departments in Texas have among the highest participation rates at 98.8% in 2022. Additionally, Texas DPS has robust data that breaks down clearance rates by individual agency (Texas DPS, 2024).

Table 3 shows the clearance rates by offense type, the change in clearance rates from 2018-2022, and the change in crime rate from 2018-2022. Since 2018, four types of crime (rape, robbery, burglary, and larceny-theft) have seen stable or lower incident rates across the state. However, their clearance rates have failed to improve and have lowered. Among the 23.1% of total crimes cleared in 2022, FBI data show 20.0% were cleared through arrest and 3.1% cleared through exceptional means (BJS, 2021).

Homicide Clearance Rates

Focusing on homicide (murder and non-negligent manslaughter) clearance rates, historical data from Project Cold Case (**Figure 6**) shows that between 2000 and 2022, about 68% of homicide cases in Texas have been solved (Project Cold Case, 2024). In raw numbers, that leaves an estimated 10,000 homicide cases left unsolved from 2000 to 2022.

Figure 7 shows the number of homicides cleared from 2018-2023. However, it is important to note that the number of homicides increased significantly beginning in 2020, which likely contributed to the sharp decline in clearances beginning that same year. Explanations for the uptick in homicides in 2020 will be explored in subsequent sections.

Figure 6

Uniform Crime Report for Homicides: 1965-2022
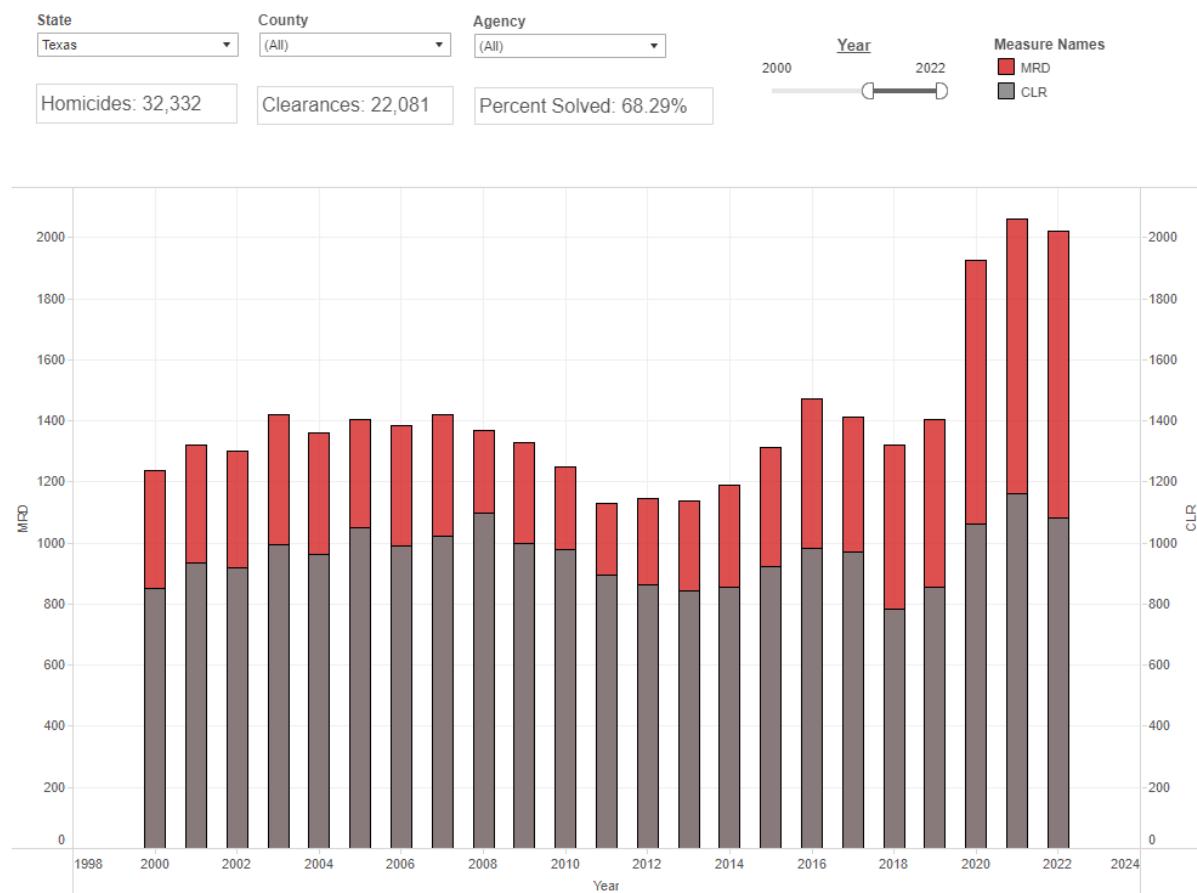
Source: Project Cold Case, 2024.

Figure 7

Texas Homicide Incidents and Clearances (2018-2023)
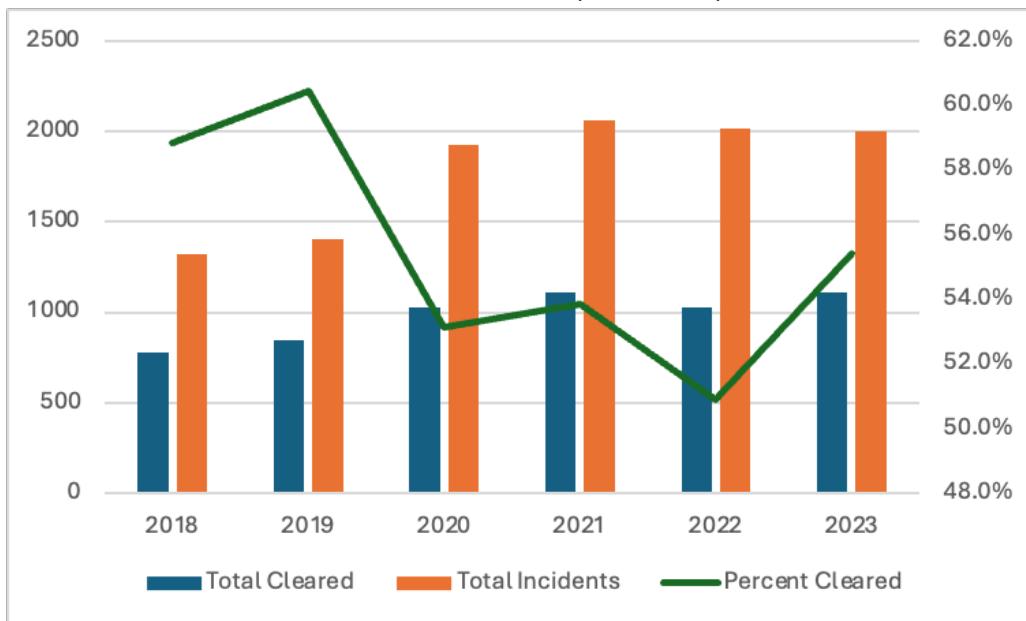
Sources: Texas DPS, 2022; Texas DPS, n.d.

Table 4

Homicide Clearance Rates in Texas Cities (2018-2023)

| City	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Dallas PD	35.2%	59.5%	54.4%	55.7%	47.6%	47.4%
Houston PD	52.0%	51.8%	52.3%	52.7%	56.9%	46.5%
Austin PD[1]	X	72.1%	82.7%	78.7%	93.3%	91.5%
San Antonio PD	X	X	48.0%	32.6%	32.3%	25.1%
El Paso[2] PD	X	270.0%	130.8%	80.6%	77.8%	69.7%
Lubbock PD	35.7%	28.6%	23.7%	19.0%	25.0%	47.8%
Fort Worth PD	76.8%	75.4%	71.8%	62.7%	77.0%	68.7%

1   It is unclear what has caused significantly higher clearance within Austin PD.
2   El Paso data shows over 100% of cases cleared likely due to closing cases from previous years.

Source: Texas DPS, n.d.

Figure 8

Texas Rape Incidents and Clearances (2018-2022)
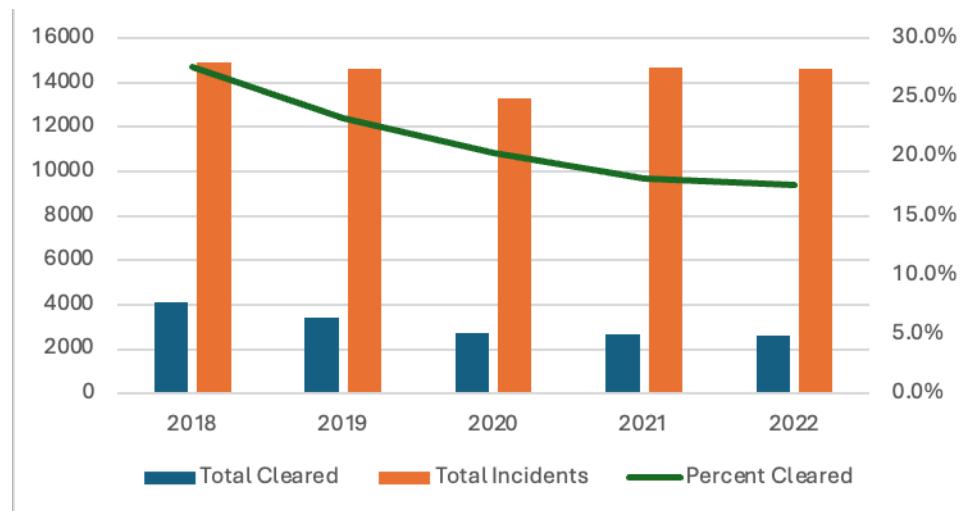
Source: Texas DPS, 2022.

Looking at larger, urban areas, clearance rates vary year over year and by department (**Table 4**).

Sex Offense Clearance Rates

Rape clearance rates have declined only 10% since 2018, hitting a low in 2022 at 17.67%. This is despite the crime rate for rape[1] per year staying fairly consistent and the sexual assault kit backlog drastically declining from over 20,000 in 2013 to less than 4,000 in 2023 (Grissom, 2013; Texas DPS, 2023). Looking at the raw numbers in **Figure 8**, over 56,000 incidents of rape have gone unsolved in Texas from 2018 to 2022.

---

1   Rape is defined as "The penetration, no matter how slight, of the vagina or anus with any body part or object, or oral penetration by a sex organ of another person, without the consent of the victim, including instances where the victim is incapable of giving consent because of his/her age or because of his/her temporary or permanent mental or physical incapacity" (Texas DPS, 2022, p. 60).

Table 5

Sex Offense Clearance Rates in Texas Cities (2018-2023)

City	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Dallas PD	15.5%	19.9%	12.3%	14.7%	17.0%	15.5%
Houston PD	30.5%	34.3%	30.9%	25.9%	19.2%	10.2%
Austin PD	X	16.9%	20.3%	19.0%	22.0%	20.7%
San Antonio PD	X	X	12.4%	7.4%	7.5%	3.6%
El Paso PD	X	15.8%	13.5%	13.6%	9.3%	8.7%
Lubbock PD	9.7%	5.4%	3.4%	9.4%	6.4%	9.5%
Fort Worth PD	19.5%	29.2%	26.3%	25.3%	22.3%	16.9%

Source: Texas DPS, n.d.

Figure 9

Texas Aggravated Assault Incidents and Clearances (2018-2022)
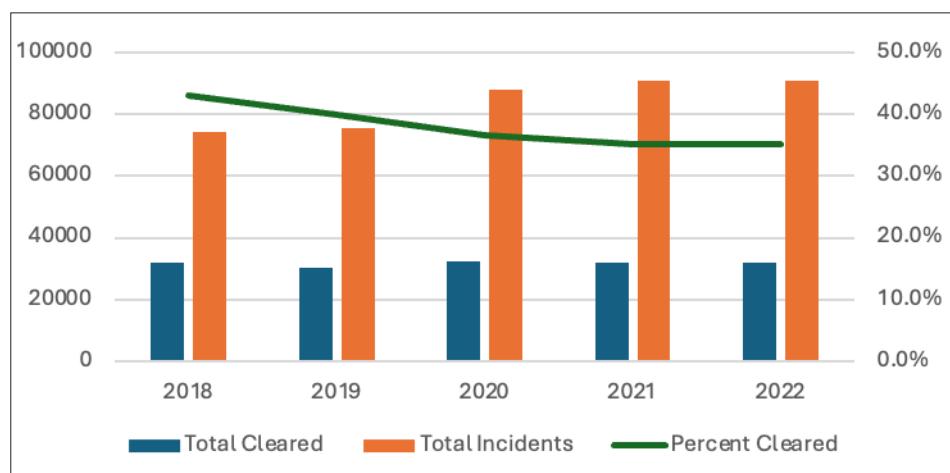
Source: Texas DPS, 2022.

At the department level, the Texas DPS UCR NIBRS data has two offense categories for sex offenses: "sex offenses" and "sex offenses, non-forcible" (Texas DPS, n.d.). However, many departments are reporting "0" for non-forcible sex offenses, which leads the public to believe departments are reporting all sex offenses, whether forcible or non-forcible, under the general offense category of "sex offenses." For this reason, only a department-level data table on the broader "sex offense" category are included above in **Table 5**.

Assault Offense Clearance Rates

Aggravated assault[2] clearance rates across the state have also seen a downward trend, although they have remained fairly steady following the larger dip that occurred in 2020. Additionally, as shown in **Figure 9**, the number of incidents of aggravated assault have increased over the past five years, likely exacerbating the clearance rate decline. There were an estimated 261,000 aggravated assaults that went uncleared 2018-2022.

---

2   Aggravated assault is defined as "an unlawful attack by one person upon another to inflict severe or aggravated bodily injury. This type of assault is usually accompanied by using a weapon or by means likely to produce death or serious bodily harm. Statistics for aggravated assault include attempts to commit aggravated assault" (Texas DPS, 2022, p. 15).

Table 6

Assault Clearance Rates in Texas Cities (2018-2023)

City	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Dallas PD	29.6%	29.7%	31.2%	32.9%	32.0%	31.1%
Houston PD	39.7%	38.6%	33.8%	30.6%	27.4%	25.4%
Austin PD	X	29.0%	28.0%	28.9%	32.3%	38.0%
San Antonio PD	X	X	29.7%	27.6%	28.3%	24.4%
El Paso PD	X	52.3%	51.9%	45.9%	43.1%	41.7%
Lubbock PD	27.5%	25.3%	23.1%	22.5%	25.2%	33.3%
Fort Worth PD	53.8%	51.1%	46.0%	45.5%	50.3%	52.7%

Source: Texas DPS, n.d.

Department level data do not distinguish between simple assaults[3] and aggravated assaults. Above are the combined clearance rates for all assaults in larger, urban police departments.

Robbery Clearance Rates

Robbery [4] clearance rates have remained relatively consistent since 2018, maintaining around a 20% clearance rate. However, as **Figure 10** shows, while clearance rates have shown consistency, incidents of robbery have declined significantly. There were an estimated 119,000 robberies that went unsolved in Texas from 2018-2023.

Department level data varies, with some departments (such as Dallas) having drastically lower clearance rates than the state average. Alternatively, Austin has considerably higher clearance rates for robbery.

POTENTIAL CAUSES OF CLEARANCE RATE DECLINE

Many factors contribute to low clearance rates throughout the United States. Research points to different theories that include but are not limited to:

law enforcement hiring decline coinciding with an increase in resignations and retirements; insufficient amount of law enforcement investigators; technological hurdles; overcriminalization; and resource and personnel prioritization.

Challenges in Law Enforcement

The year 2020 presented unprecedented challenges to law enforcement. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest in U.S. cities, the homicide rate rose by 30%—the largest single-year increase in the murder rate since 1905 (Gramlich, 2021). As a consequence of nationwide protests urging police reform and increased responsibility and public scrutiny of law enforcement officers, it was widely publicized that agencies and departments around the nation endured severe declines in employment applications for officers and faced increases in retirements and resignations (McEvoy, 2021). For example, between 2020 and 2021, Louisville, Kentucky, reported 190 law enforcement resignations; Portland, Oregon, experienced a loss of 115 officers; and New York reported more than 5,300 officers (nearly 15% of its total force) leaving (McEvoy, 2021).

---

3   Simple assault is defined as "an unlawful physical attack by one person upon another where neither the offender displays a weapon (other than personal weapon), nor the victim suffers obvious severe or aggravated bodily injury involving apparent broken bones, loss of teeth, possible internal injury, severe laceration, or loss of consciousness" (Texas DPS, 2022, p. 59).

4   "Robbery is defined as the taking or attempting to take anything of value from the care, custody, or control of a person or persons by force, threat of force, or violence or by putting the victim in fear" (Texas DPS, 2022, p. 17).

Figure 10
Texas Robbery Incidents and Clearances (2018-2023)
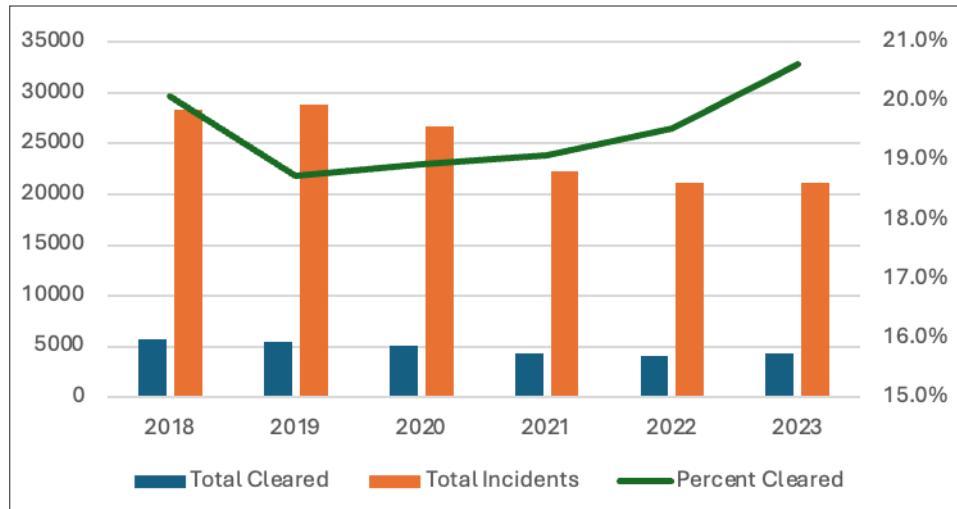
Table 7
Robbery Clearance Rates in Texas Cities (2018-2023)

City	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Dallas PD	8.9%	9.6%	11.4%	14.7%	10.2%	11.4%
Houston PD	12.6%	14.8%	14.9%	13.4%	13.9%	14.6%
Austin PD	X	34.2%	26.7%	40.0%	45.2%	53.2%
San Antonio PD	X	X	10.5%	15.2%	14.1%	14.0%
El Paso PD	X	41.7%	36.8%	49.0%	37.6%	28.6%
Lubbock PD	17.7%	15.5%	16.0%	14.9%	13.7%	20.8%
Fort Worth PD	21.0%	25.4%	28.2%	33.4%	33.5%	29.5%

Even before the events of 2020, police departments had existing staffing challenges (PERF, 2019). The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) conducted a 2019 survey of law enforcement agencies and 63% of respondents reported that employment applications for officers had declined over the past five years (PERF, 2019). Police departments in Texas have been unable to hire enough officers to keep up with population growth. **Figure 11** shows law enforcement officers per capita in Texas from 1995 to 2019 (FBI, 2020).

From April 2020 to March 2021, larger agencies (with 250 or more officers) saw the biggest decreases in hiring (PERF, 2021). Agencies with 500 or more officers experienced, on average, a 36% reduction in their force (PERF, 2021). Meanwhile, agencies with less than 250 officers reported the most retirements; those with 50-249 officers reported an average 59% increase in their retirement rate (PERF, 2021). By 2023, PERF continued to report staffing losses, with the number of sworn officers decreasing from 83,497 in January 2020 to 79,464 in January 2023 (PERF, 2023). PERF also reported in 2023 that many departments around the country were losing more officers than they could find replacements for (PERF, 2023).

Many Texas law enforcement agencies and departments have inadequate investigator and crime analyst staffing for the caseloads given. In 2021,

Figure 11
Law Enforcement Officers Per Capita in Texas
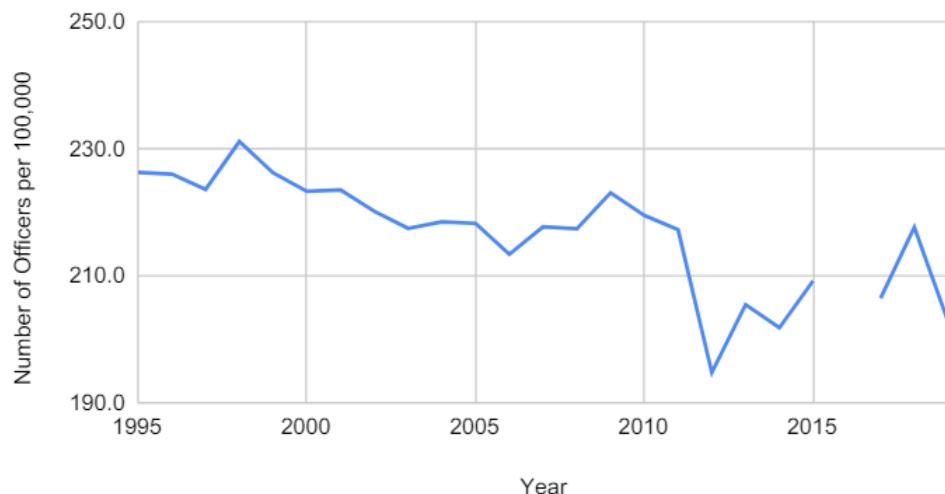
Note: 2016 was omitted to maintain consistency; the FBI data did not include Table 77 from the law enforcement reporting for 2016.

Source: FBI, 2020.

the Cold Case and Missing Persons Unit within the Office of the Attorney General sent a survey to law enforcement agencies and departments across the state (Office of the Attorney General, 2021). One of the survey questions asked about resources that departments lacked that would potentially help with cold case investigations (Office of the Attorney General, 2021). Seventy-four percent of departments reported lacking sufficient investigators and 56% said they lacked enough crime analysts and support staff resources (Office of the Attorney General, 2021). County District Attorneys, like Houston's Kim Ogg, have recognized that issues like DNA testing back-logs can be attributed to a lack of adequate inves-tigator and crime analyst resources, and as a result, have called for increased funding for crime labs and outsourcing of testing (Ozebek & Rafique, 2023).

In theory, technology should improve the capabil-ities of law enforcement officers and make them more effective in deterring and solving crime. However, technology is complex and necessitates changes to traditional police practices which are not easily implemented (Lum et al., 2016). The stan-dard model of policing in the United States has historically been reactive instead of proactive. Offi-cers typically respond to crime rather than deter and prevent crimes from occurring. A shift in general reactive approach to policing presents a new hurdle for departments, especially those already struggling with heavy caseloads and staffing shortages (Lum et al., 2016).

Technology has been effective—albeit marginally—in other respects. The emergence of public surveil-lance cameras seemed like a promising solution to declining clearance rates. A study in Dallas showed that clearance rates improved after the city installed cameras, but the rates only went up by about 2% and the improvements were largely limited to theft clearance rates, not violent crimes (Jung & Wheeler, 2021). The researchers in the Dallas study speculated that the surveillance cameras (as currently used) are likely not worth their price tag, and that a more targeted installation in high-crime areas may prove to be more cost-effective (Jung & Wheeler, 2021).

Police response times have also presented chal-lenges to law enforcement, which can largely be attributed to staffing issues (Asher, 2023a). Longer

responses allow perpetrators to escape and potential witnesses to walk away, taking their clues with them (Asher, 2023a). An analysis of Calls for Service data in 15 major U.S. cities and metro areas revealed overall increased response times between 2019 and 2022 (Asher, 2023b). New Orleans Police Department, for example, had a response time of about 51 minutes in 2019 and a response time of 146 minutes in 2022 (Asher, 2023b).

Dallas, Texas, has experienced an increased homicide rate coinciding with increased police response time. The Dallas Police Chief in 2022 reported that the average number of Priority 1 calls (e.g., shootings and stabbings) had increased by 50% since 2012, while police staffing has decreased by 10% in the same time frame (Lopez, 2022). The response time for Priority 1 calls increased from almost eight minutes to almost nine minutes, while the response time for Priority 2 calls (e.g., major disturbances) increased from nearly 28 minutes to over 48 minutes (Lopez, 2022). The Dallas response situation has become so overwhelmed that the police department announced that it will no longer be responding to certain minor calls, such as harassing calls unrelated to family violence, identity theft, graffiti, theft and shoplifting under $2,500; instead, the department will have residents fill out an online police report to save officers for more serious emergencies (Smith, 2023). In order to free up officers for true emergencies, some departments in Texas (like Fort Worth) have created alternative response units that will be discussed later in this paper.

Overcriminalization
Overcriminalization refers to the overabundance of legally enforceable rules and regulations, particularly those that criminalize acts not typically thought of as criminal (Copland & Mangual, 2018). Many states have incredibly large criminal codes. For instance, Oklahoma has the highest number of sections (1,232) in their state criminal code (Copland & Mangual, 2018). This inflated number of crimes presents challenges to law enforcement as they struggle to prioritize and target violent crime. Additionally,

overcriminalization has led to individuals being arrested, prosecuted, and sometimes incarcerated for crimes that have no victims and are seen by many as harmless. One example is from Oklahoma in 2016 where a bartender was arrested for serving vodka infused with bacon and pickles that violated a state statute (Copland & Mangual, 2018). Another comes from North Carolina in 2011 where a man was jailed for selling hot dogs outside of a medical center without a permit (Copland & Mangual, 2018). These overly punitive and unnecessary penalties are a waste of police departments' time and resources. Overcriminalization exacerbates the strains on an already overworked profession and fails to make communities safer, reduce crime, or improve clearance rates.

Prioritization
As the number of law enforcement officers decrease and the number of crimes increase, prioritizing what officers spend their time on presents a significant challenge. A recent survey shows that 85% of Texas voters support shifting law enforcement resources to solving and preventing violent crimes. This suggests communities across the state believe departments should be prioritizing violent crimes (e.g., homicides, violent assaults, sexual assaults) over nonviolent offenses where the immediate consequences are not posing an active threat to an individual's physical safety. Additionally, external circumstances, such as the ongoing immigration crisis, pose additional prioritization challenges. In 2021, Texas Governor Greg Abbott launched Operation Lone Star, which utilizes resources and personnel from the state's Department of Public Safety and the Texas National Guard to help address the ongoing immigration crisis at Texas's southern border (Office of the Texas Governor, 2024). The diversion of resources from across the state limits law enforcement's impact in other jurisdictions.

In summary, the cause of declining clearance rates cannot be attributed to one problem, but rather is the result of many factors. To improve clearance rates, these underlying causes must be addressed. Law

enforcement departments must improve recruitment and retention numbers, hire more investigators and crime analysts, and properly harness technology so that law enforcement departments are helped and not hindered by it. Additionally, there should be an increased emphasis on the prioritization of investigating and solving violent crimes.

SOLUTIONS TO IMPROVE CLEARANCE RATES

The preceding section outlined some of the hypothesized root causes of the recent decline in clearance rates throughout the country. This section will propose several different solutions that will help address underlying issues responsible for low clearance rates in Texas. The overarching solutions include increasing resources for departments to recruit, train, and retain officers; changes in law enforcement policies and procedures; additional accountability mechanisms, including data tracking and reporting; and victims' rights improvements.

Training and Funding

Required training for law enforcement varies significantly from state to state and from city to city (NCSL, 2024). Most states have a minimum required training for all law enforcement officers. Some states have enacted unique legislation to train officers for dealing with certain subsets of the population. For example, in Louisiana, officers are required to have training on face-to-face communication with people who are deaf or heard of hearing (NCSL, 2024). The variance in required training and departmental resources will lead to different outcomes in each state and city. Every state and city will vary in both needs and resource capabilities.

One established funding stream aimed to address law enforcement resource needs is the Paul Coverdell Federal Grant program. This program provides congressionally appropriated funds to the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), which awards grants to states, counties, and cities throughout the country (Office of the Texas Governor, 2023a). The Texas Governor's Office regularly applies for Paul Coverdell funding, and awards it to state agencies and local governments that operate crime and forensic labs (Office of the Texas Governor, 2023a). For Fiscal Year 2025, the Governor's Office announced $2 million in grant funding available for Texas county and city crime analysis labs (Office of the Texas Governor, 2023a). Since its first authorization in the 86th Texas Legislature, the Sexual Assault Evidence Testing Grant Program has solicited applications from district attorney's offices for costs associated with the forensic analysis of physical evidence (Office of the Texas Governor, 2023b). This program is run through the Public Safety Office (PSO) and historically has been given $1,000,000 to distribute annually (Office of the Texas Governor, 2023b).

DNA testing backlogs at the 37 Texas active and accredited crime labs have been highly publicized for over a decade (Aaronson, 2011). In 2011, Houston, Dallas, and San Antonio alone reportedly had a combined 22,000 untested sexual assault DNA kits (Aaronson, 2011). Since then, the number of untested kits has declined but remained substantial. In response, the Texas Legislature passed HB 8 (also known as the Lavinia Masters Act) in 2019 to establish strict timelines for DPS labs to test sexual assault DNA kits (90 days from receipt) (HB 8, 2019). In 2022, the Dallas City Council approved $2.3 million in funding to reduce the number of sexual assault kits in possession of the city's law enforcement. Some of the City of Dallas kits were contracted out to a Virginia-based lab and paid for with federal grant funding (Coverdell), while other kits were tested locally (Dearmore, 2023).

State governments and the federal government have put forth legislation that would award grant funding intended to help law enforcement solve violent crimes. In 2024, U.S. Senators John N. Kennedy and Cory Booker introduced the Violent Incident Clearance and Technological

Investigative Methods (VICTIM) Act, which would provide grants to law enforcement agencies who must then report expenditures to the DOJ (S.3763, 2024). The funds may be used to train detectives and police personnel, hire new detectives and investigative staff, invest in new technology, train police on homicide victims' and victims' families' needs, and provide victims and families with resources. In 2022, the Tennessee Legislature passed a bill creating the Violent Crime Intervention Fund, which awards $100 million in grant funding to agencies throughout the state (Sher, 2022). Tennessee agencies can use the funding to create and implement evidence-based crime intervention models, hire and train specialized violent crime units, purchase new technology and equipment to assist in crime prevention and solving, and create partnerships with community organizations to disrupt and prevent violent crime (Sher, 2022). In 2023, the Arkansas Legislature passed SB 469, which established the Violent Crime Clearance Grant Fund to specifically address the record low clearance rates, citing the 39% clearance rate in 2021 for violent crimes committed in the state that year (SB 469, 2023). The fund identifies and encourages law enforcement to institute strategies backed by research to reduce violent crime (SB 469, 2023). Law enforcement agencies that receive funding can spend it on improved investigation resources, technical assistance, training, equipment, contractual support, and criminal justice information system resources (SB 469, 2023). Funding can also be spent on victims' services, such as prevention and retention of victim-witness coordinators, increasing accessibility to services, increasing awareness of victimization, and partnering with local community providers to improve support and services to victims of violent crime (SB 469, 2023). The investments these states are making in their law enforcement agencies can yield improved clearance rates.

For example, the City of Houston experienced a record-low clearance rate in 2020 at 49% overall (deGrood, 2023). In response, Houston invested in law enforcement by hiring 20 new investigators and more support staff, requiring investigators go through more specialized training, investing in new technology, and providing additional funding to keep detectives with more experience in the department (deGrood, 2023). By 2022, Houston had a new clearance rate of 75% according to its measures (or 63% according to FBI metrics), which is a significant jump in two years (deGrood, 2023).

Law Enforcement Policies and Procedures
Local law enforcement departments can enact policies and procedures that would improve clearance rates. Some of these require additional funding; others are internal policy changes. Contracting out forensic testing, like the City of Dallas did with their sexual assault kits, would require additional funding but could impact the clearance rate of cases significantly (Dearmore, 2023). Examples of internal policy changes include prioritizing testing evidence for violent over nonviolent crimes and hot spot policing.

Hot spot policing focuses on violent crime hot spots and expending resources within targeted areas, rather than surveilling a larger geographic area that contains pockets of high and low criminal activity. To be effective, hot spot policing requires adequate police presence in specific parts of town that have criminal problems at certain times of day (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). When officers are assigned to lower crime areas, response times often increase because it will take them longer to arrive to the scene (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). High-visibility presence and apprehension of repeat offenders are more effective at increasing public safety and keeping violent criminals off the streets (Weisburd & Telep, 2014). The City of Dallas recently implemented a Violent Crime Reduction Plan, which was a city-wide strategic plan to reduce violent crime, including hot spot policing as a primary component (Dallas Police Department, 2021). Dallas police have focused on increasing police visibility in small locations where violent crime is concentrated, and have prioritized street-level deterrence and arrest of repeat offenders (Dallas Police Department, 2021). As an evidence-based strategy, the

emphasis is placed on police visibility and intelligence-led offender targeting (Dallas Police Department, 2021). Based on crime analysis and mapping, officers are assigned to violence-prone areas during times when violence is most reported (Dallas Police Department, 2021). During the first year of the plan's implementation, violent crime fell by 11% in targeted areas (Smith et al., 2024).

In addition to adequately training and funding law enforcement departments, some cities have created additional non-traditional units to help respond to crimes and increase bandwidth. The City of Fort Worth had a major policy change that allowed police officers in the city to focus on more urgent emergencies by establishing the Civilian Response Unit (CRU) (Fort Worth Police Department, n.d.). In 2021, the Fort Worth police department established CRU, which investigates calls, collects evidence, and writes police reports for incoming calls where a suspect is not on the scene or likely to return (Fort Worth Police Department, n.d.). Common calls that CRU responds to include assaults by threat, burglary, criminal mischief, fraud, harassment, info-only reports, and theft (Fort Worth Police Department, n.d.). Every day, CRU specialists answer about 80 calls and write up an average of 32 police reports, taking this administrative burden from officers who can then focus efforts on higher priority emergencies (Fort Worth Police Department, n.d.).

Similar to Fort Worth's CRU, the City of Albuquerque, New Mexico, created an alternative response department, the Albuquerque Community Safety (ACS) department. The ACS department employs approximately 50 trained professionals in the fields of mental and behavioral health and social services to respond to calls related to homelessness, mental health, and substance use. It has historically received a budget of nearly $20 million (Friedrich, 2024). From its establishment in 2021 to July 2024, ACS has responded to more than 72,000 emergencies, around 80% of which used alternative responses to police (Friedrich, 2024). This frees up officers significantly, giving them more time and energy to respond to and solve violent crimes (Friedrich, 2024).

While the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has presented law enforcement with new challenges, it also has the potential to drastically change policing as the world currently knows it. Facial recognition (FR) technology can help improve historically low clearance rate levels. The Assistant Chief of Police of the Miami Police Department, Art Acevedo, has testified before Congress on the benefits of FR AI technology and how it can be used ethically and effectively to solve and reduce crime in America (U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 2024). During the hearing, Assistant Chief of Police Acevedo claimed that a study by Florida International University found that AI helped improve the likelihood a case would be solved by 66% (U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary, 2024). Miami Police have AI guidelines to help employees navigate the technology ethically. When using the technology, employees must ensure the following:

- FR matches do not constitute probable cause to arrest.

- Matches are treated like anonymous tips.

- Any evidence gathered must be corroborated by physical, testimonial, or circumstantial evidence.

- FR may be used retrospectively.

- FR may not be used to identify people carrying out constitutionally protected activities (like peaceful protests).

- FR platform access is limited.

- FR use is disclosed to defense counsel in criminal cases.

- No substantial alterations or manipulations of probe photographs occur.

The Miami Police also outline five allowable uses of FR technology: 1) identifying suspects, victims, and witnesses in criminal investigations, 2) identifying principal officers or other persons involved in Internal

Affairs investigations, 3) identifying cognitively impaired persons, 4) identifying deceased persons, and 5) identifying lawfully detained persons whose identities cannot otherwise be established.

Lastly, police-community relations help establish firm relationships with community members based on trust and have been shown to improve clearance rates. Nationwide, police-community relations faced intense media scrutiny after the 2020 racial justice protests and civil unrest (McCarthy, 2023). Omaha, Nebraska, has been heralded as a model for improving community relations with law enforcement (McCarthy, 2023). Launching in 2009, Omaha 360 is a weekly public forum with law enforcement and community member participants (McCarthy, 2023). It has over 100 attendees weekly and their discussions emphasize crime prevention, intervention, enforcement, and reentry and support (McCarthy, 2023). Since the initiative was launched, gun violence has dropped dramatically.[5] Shooting victims dropped from 246 in 2009 to 121 in 2022, reaching an all-time low of 90 in 2017 (McCarthy, 2023). Additionally, homicide clearance rates in 2022 were 87%, which is higher than any major city in Texas (McCarthy, 2023).

Transparency and Accountability

Reporting agency activity to the public and elected officials keeps law enforcement accountable. By having reporting requirements, agencies and lawmakers can identify gaps in current law enforcement practices and improve public safety. Below are several changes that could be made to current reporting requirements to increase law enforcement transparency and accountability.

The FBI calculates clearance rates by putting the number of cases cleared (by arrest or exceptional means) over the number of cases opened each year (FBI, 2018). This calculation is flawed because it does not show how many cases were cleared that were open in the current year or previous years.

Calculations should be re-evaluated so that they present accurate public information about public safety, including data on the year over year number of open pending cases per crime. Additionally, the State of Texas should require DPS or the Attorney General's office to conduct a review of departments that have low clearance rates to increase safety in those communities.

Another way to increase accountability is to increase oversight and transparency by mandating the reporting of the number of suspended cases to the Texas Legislature. The City of Houston came under fire in 2024 when their police department reportedly suspended 4,017 sexual assault cases, allegedly because they did not have the staff capacity to handle them (Worthy, 2024).

Victim Rights

One way that local governments have taken action to assist victims and victims' families is the establishment of victim liaisons between the families and law enforcement. Albuquerque, New Mexico's police department, with help from local advocacy groups, established the Victim's Assistance Unit in 2022 (Friedrich, 2024; City of Albuquerque, 2022). This unit is charged with referring families and victims to community resources and public services, assisting in the application process for the New Mexico Victims Reparations Commission, helping victims navigate the criminal justice system from investigation until prosecution, and acting as an official liaison between victims and criminal justice entities (City of Albuquerque, 2022).

State governments have also acted to help victims and victims' families in the interest of justice. One example of such help is aiding local law enforcement to solve cold cases. In 2023, Illinois state legislators introduced HB 1210, which empowers victims' family members to request a new review of their family member's homicide case if it meets certain criteria (HB 1210, 2023). It must be three years since

---

5   Please note that the authors are not ascribing direct causation but are stating the data.

the murder has taken place, it must be a first- or second-degree murder charge, and all probative leads must have been exhausted and a perpetrator not identified. An immediate family member must fill out a written application, and the case must be reviewed by law enforcement staff that have not already reviewed the case (HB 1210, 2023). If the review finds that a full reinvestigation would result in probative investigative leads, then law enforcement is required to do so (HB 1210, 2023). This legislation promotes justice by empowering families with the tools needed to hold law enforcement accountable in homicide investigations.

In 2021, Texas established the Cold Case and Missing Persons Unit in the Attorney General's Office, which assists law enforcement departments statewide to help solve cases through investigation and prosecutorial recommendations (Office of the Attorney General, n.d.-a). The Cold Case and Missing Persons Advisory Committee consists of 14 members of the legal, law enforcement, and forensic science community (Office of the Attorney General, n.d.-a). This unit also includes the Retired Homicide Investigators Task Force, which consists of eight members who review cases referred by Texas local enforcement agencies, and make recommendations about possible investigation leads to the Cold Case and Missing Persons Unit (Office of the Attorney General, n.d.-b).

Similar to the Illinois bill, Texas could create an application for homicide victims' families to request a secondary review of their case by the OAG Retired Homicide Investigators Task Force or a similar task force or investigative entity, such as the Texas Rangers. The reviewer(s) would then determine if a full reinvestigation would result in probative investigative leads and therefore recommend further action by the locality. The review should be subject to the following guidelines:

- At least for the time being, only homicides should be eligible for review, allowing prioritization of murder victims. This also falls in line with the mission of the OAG's Cold Case and Missing Persons Unit.

- The cases should have gone cold for at least one year to become eligible for review, allowing local law enforcement to have fully investigated all evidentiary leads.

- Review by the unit should be completed between six months and one year.

- Local departments should decide who completes the reinvestigation if the review finds that the case should be investigated again. (There are pros to a new investigator reviewing a case, such as a new perspective in which to review the case and potentially mitigating poor relations between investigators and the victim's families. There are also cons, such as a new investigator not having as much familiarity with the case.)

The current task force may require expansion to take on this new caseload. Texas could potentially benefit from regional cold cases and missing persons task forces to address cold cases all over the state.

CONCLUSION

Clearance rates in most Texas cities—especially for violent crimes—are unacceptably low. When criminals are not pursued and victims are neglected, justice is not served, and our communities are not adequately safe. While law enforcement agencies struggle with staffing, technology, community trust, overcriminalization and prioritization, they need resources to better serve their communities.

The State of Texas has several possible solutions at its disposal. Texas can support law enforcement through training standards and funding for staff, technology, and the implementation of new law enforcement programs. Grant programs for law enforcement like the VICTIM Act proposed in Congress could prove effective in providing law enforcement agencies the staff and resources they need to improve clearance rates. Legislation has been introduced in both Tennessee and Arkansas to create grant programs that allocate money to local departments specifically to improve clearance rates; the Texas Legislature could create a similar

grant program. Several cities have become leading examples of how law enforcement can change their practices and community relationships to increase clearance rates. The City of Miami, Florida, has had success implementing the use of facial recognition technology to identify criminals. The City of Omaha, Nebraska, has invested resources in community relations which has boosted trust in law enforcement and led to record high clearance rates enjoyed by community members (McCarthy, 2023). Fort Worth, Texas, and Albuquerque, New Mexico, have had success in creating alternative response units where police officers are only deployed if it is absolutely necessary, thus better utilizing social workers and mental health specialists in appropriate situations.

While many cities in Texas are currently struggling with low clearance rates, solutions do exist, and the Texas Legislature can and should collaborate with local law enforcement agencies to equip our men and women in law enforcement to increase crime-solving rates, improve relationships between the public and law enforcement, make our communities safer, and ensure justice for crime victims. ■

REFERENCES

Aaronson, B. (2011). *Bill to test rape kits comes with big price tag*. The Texas Tribune. https://www.texastribune.org/2011/04/26/bill-to-test-rape-kits-comes-with-big-price-tag/

Asher, J. (2023a). *Police departments nationwide are struggling to solve crimes*. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/12/05/opinion/police-crime-data.html

Asher, J. (2023b). *Police are taking longer to respond*. Asher Analytics. https://jasher.substack.com/p/police-are-taking-longer-to-respond

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2024a). *National crime victimization survey data dashboard (N-DASH) user's guide*. https://ncvs.bjs.ojp.gov/methodology#accuracy

Bureau of Justice Statistics. (2024b). *NCVS dashboard - Violent victimization*. https://ncvs.bjs.ojp.gov/quick-graphics#quickgraphicstop

City of Albuquerque. (2019). *APD creates victim's assistance unit*. https://www.cabq.gov/police/news/apd-creates-victim2019s-assistance-unit

Copland, J., & Mangual, R. (2018, August 8). *Overcriminalizing America: An overview and model legislation for states*. Manhattan Institute. https://manhattan.institute/article/overcriminalizing-america-an-overview-and-model-legislation-for-states

Dearmore, K. (2023). *'One is too many': Rape kit backlog ss reduced in Dallas, but the work isn't complete*. Dallas Observer. https://www.dallasobserver.com/news/rape-kit-backlog-is-lower-in-dallas-but-the-work-isnt-complete-18182373

deGrood, M. (2023). *Houston police improve rate of homicide arrests after lower case clearances during pandemic*. Houston Chronicle. https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/crime/article/hpd-homicide-clearance-rate-18165980.php

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). (2018). *Clearances*. https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2018/crime-in-the-u.s.-2018/topic-pages/clearances

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). (2020). *Crime in the U.S. 2019*. https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019

Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). (2023). *Crime data explorer*. https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/explorer/crime/crime-trend

Fort Worth Police Department. (n.d.). *Civilian Response Unit (CRU)*. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from https://police.fortworthtexas.gov/Support/civilian-response-unit

Friedrich, M. (2024). *Albuquerque shows a way forward for cities struggling to solve homicides*. Arnold Ventures. https://www.arnoldventures.org/stories/albuquerque-shows-a-way-forward-for-cities-struggling-to-solve-homicides#:~:text=By%20investing%20in%20the%20police

Garcia, E. (2021). *Violent crime reduction plan*. Dallas Police Department. https://dallaspolice.net/Shared%20Documents/violent-crime-reduction-plan.pdf

Gramlich, J. (2021). *What we know about the increase in U.S. murders in 2020*. Pew Research Center. https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2021/10/27/what-we-know-about-the-increase-in-u-s-murders-in-2020/

Grissom, B. (2013, January 4). Testing state's huge backlog of rape evidence kits comes with hefty price tag. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/04/us/hefty-cost-to-testing-texas-huge-backlog-of-rape-evidence-kits.html

HB 8. 2019 Texas Legislative Session. Regular. (2019). https://capitol.texas.gov/tlodocs/86R/billtext/pdf/HB00008F.pdf#navpanes=0

HB 1210. 2023 Illinois Legislative Session. Regular. (2023). https://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocNum=1210&GAID=17&DocTypeID=HB&SessionID=112&GA=103

Jung, Y., & Wheeler, A. P. (2021). The effect of public surveillance cameras on crime clearance rates. *Journal of Experimental Criminology*, *19,* 143-164. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-021-09477-8

Lopez, R. (2022). *"We are going to have challenging times": Dallas homicide rate and police response times are up. Chief says he's taking action*. WFAA - ABC News. https://www.wfaa.com/article/news/local/dallas-homicide-rate-police-response-times-are-up-chief-taking-action/287-498340a9-3ae2-4c12-9455-6d1e1fa1f74b

Lum, C., Koper, C. S., & Willis, J. (2016). Understanding the limits of technology's impact on police effectiveness. *Police Quarterly*, *20*(2), 135–163. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611116667279

McCarthy, E. (2023). *How one city cut gun violence in half and may become a model around the country*. ABC News. https://abcnews.go.com/US/omaha-nebraska-cut-gun-violence-half-become-model/story?id=96799185

McEvoy, J. (2021). Historic police exodus in cities most impacted by racial justice unrest, new data shows. *Forbes*. https://www.forbes.com/sites/jemimamcevoy/2021/04/29/historic-police-exodus-in-cities-most-impacted-by-racial-justice-unrest-new-data-shows/

NCSL. (2024). *Database law enforcement training*. National Conference of State Legislatures. https://www.ncsl.org/civil-and-criminal-justice/law-enforcement-training

Office of the Attorney General. (2021). *Cold Case and Missing Persons Unit law enforcement survey*. https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/sites/default/files/files/divisions/cold-case/FullSurvey.pdf

Office of the Attorney General. (n.d.-a). *Cold Case and Missing Persons Unit*. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/criminal-justice/cold-case-and-missing-persons-unit

Office of the Attorney General. (n.d.-b). *Retired Homicide Investigators Task Force*. Retrieved July 24, 2024, from https://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/divisions/criminal-justice/cold-case-and-missing-persons-unit/retired-homicide-investigators-task-force

Office of the Texas Governor. (2023a). *Paul Coverdell Forensic Sciences Improvement Grant Program, FY2025*. eGrants. https://egrants.gov.texas.gov/fundingopp/paul-coverdell-forensic-sciences-improvement-grant-program-fy2025

Office of the Texas Governor. (2023b). *Sexual Assault Evidence Testing Grant Program, FY 2025*. eGrants. https://egrants.gov.texas.gov/fundingopp/sexual-assault-evidence-testing-grant-program-fy2025

Office of the Texas Governor. (2024). *Operation Lone Star holds the line to defend southern border* [Press release]. https://gov.texas.gov/news/post/operation-lone-star-holds-the-line-to-defend-southern-border

Ozebek, K., & Rafique, S. (2023, October 16). *13 Investigates Houston's forensics backlog as DA Ogg calls for more outsourcing.* ABC13 Houston. https://abc13.com/forensics-backlog-firearm-analysis-houston-forensic-science-center-harris-county-criminal-case/13924835/

Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). (2021). *Survey on police workforce trends*. https://www.policeforum.org/workforcesurveyjune2021

Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). (2023). *New PERF survey shows police agencies are losing officers faster than they can hire new ones*. https://www.policeforum.org/staffing2023

Police Executive Research Forum (PERF). (2019). *The workforce crisis, and what police agencies are doing about it*. https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf

Project Cold Case. (2024). *Cold case homicide statistics*. https://projectcoldcase.org/cold-case-homicide-stats/

S. 3763. VICTIM Act. 118th Congress. (2024). https://www.congress.gov/118/bills/s3763/BILLS-118s3763is.pdf

SB 469. 2023 Arkansas Legislative Session. Regular. (2023). https://www.arkleg.state.ar.us/Home/FTPDocument?path=%2FACTS%2F2023R%2FPublic%2FACT775.pdf

Sher, A. (2022). *Tennessee gov. touts public safety fund ahead of election*. Governing. https://www.governing.com/now/tennessee-gov-touts-public-safety-fund-ahead-of-election

Smith, K. (2023). *Dallas to require online reporting for some crimes instead of calling 911. The Dallas Morning News*. https://www.dallasnews.com/news/crime/2023/06/20/dallas-residents-must-soon-report-some-offenses-online-to-free-officers-for-serious-crimes/

Smith, M. R., Tillyer, R., & Tregle, B. (2024). Hot spots policing as part of a city-wide violent crime reduction strategy: Initial evidence from Dallas. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *90*, 102091. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2023.102091

Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). (2022). *Crime in Texas*. https://www.dps.texas.gov/sites/default/files/documents/crimereports/22/2022cit.pdf

Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). (2023). *Statewide electronic tracking system report*. https://txdpslabs.qualtraxcloud.com/showdocument.aspx?ID=163555

Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). (2024). *YTD Comparison Report*. https://txucr.nibrs.com/Report/YearToDate

Texas Department of Public Safety (DPS). (n.d.). *Crime data reports*. Retrieved August 1, 2024, from https://txucr.nibrs.com/PublishedReports/PublishReport

U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary. (2024). *AI in criminal investigations and prosecutions*. https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/committee-activity/hearings/ai-in-criminal-investigations-and-prosecutions

Weisburd, D., & Telep, C. W. (2014). Hot spots policing. *Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice*, *30*(2), 200–220. https://doi.org/10.1177/1043986214525083

Worthy, A. (2024). *Houston police confirm 4,000-plus suspended sexual assault cases; Finner vows to clear backlog*. Houston Public Media. https://www.houstonpublicmedia.org/articles/police/2024/02/22/478328/houston-police-confirm-4000-plus-suspended-sexual-assault-cases-finner-vows-to-clear-backlog/

Appendix B: Sex Offense Clearance Rates in Texas Cities, Cleared by Arrest (CA) vs. Cleared by Exceptional Means (CEM) (2018-2023)

Police Dept.	2018 CA	2018 CEM	2019 CA	2019 CEM	2020 CA	2020 CEM	2021 CA	2021 CEM	2022 CA	2022 CEM	2023 CA	2023 CEM
Dallas	15.50%	0%	19.70%	0.20%	12.30%	0.00%	14.70%	0.00%	17.00%	0.00%	15.70%	0.00%
Houston	12.80%	17.60%	18.00%	16.30%	16.30%	14.60%	13.30%	12.60%	9.90%	9.60%	5.70%	6.10%
Austin	X	X	15.90%	1.00%	20.00%	0.40%	18.80%	0.20%	22.00%	0.40%	22.10%	0.50%
San Antonio	X	X	X	X	3.60%	9.00%	2.70%	4.70%	2.90%	4.50%	2.90%	1.00%
El Paso	X	X	14.10%	1.60%	10.60%	2.90%	10.30%	3.30%	8.40%	1.00%	6.00%	2.70%
Lubbock	9.70%	5.40%	5.40%	0.00%	3.40%	0.00%	8.90%	<0.1%	4.40%	2.00%	6.00%	3.40%
Fort Worth	17.90%	1.70%	28.90%	0.10%	25.90%	0.10%	25.00%	1.00%	22.10%	0.50%	17.60%	1.00%

Appendix A: Homicide Clearance Rates in Texas Cities, Cleared by Arrest (CA) vs. Cleared by Exceptional Means (CEM) (2018-2023)

Police Dept.	2018 CA	2018 CEM	2019 CA	2019 CEM	2020 CA	2020 CEM	2021 CA	2021 CEM	2022 CA	2022 CEM	2023 CA	2023 CEM
Dallas	34.20%	0.60%	58.30%	1.50%	54.60%	0.00%	55.70%	0.00%	46.70%	0.10%	46.40%	1.90%
Houston	43.30%	8.80%	42.80%	9.70%	42.30%	11.20%	44.80%	8.50%	50.20%	7.70%	44.00%	4.00%
Austin	X	X	65.90%	6.80%	78.80%	3.80%	73.40%	5.30%	89.30%	4.00%	86.10%	11.10%
San Antonio	X	X	X	X	24.00%	24.00%	29.70%	2.70%	31.10%	1.00%	24.00%	1.10%
El Paso	X	X	260%	10%	92.30%	38.50%	75.00%	5.60%	74.10%	3.70%	69.70%	0.00%
Lubbock	35.70%	0.00%	28.60%	0.00%	23.70%	0.00%	19.50%	0.00%	25.00%	0.00%	45.80%	0.00%
Fort Worth	76.80%	0.00%	73.90%	1.40%	71.80%	0.00%	62.70%	0.00%	77.00%	0.00%	72.30%	1.20%

Appendix D: Robbery Clearance Rates in Texas Cities, Cleared by Arrest (CA) vs. Cleared by Exceptional Means (CEM) (2018–2023)

Police Dept.	2018 CA	2018 CEM	2019 CA	2019 CEM	2020 CA	2020 CEM	2021 CA	2021 CEM	2022 CA	2022 CEM	2023 CA	2023 CEM
Dallas	8.80%	0.10%	9.40%	0.20%	11.40%	0.00%	14.70%	0.00%	10.10%	<0.1%	11.70%	0.00%
Houston	9.20%	3.40%	11.20%	3.60%	11.90%	3.00%	10.80%	2.70%	12.10%	1.90%	13.40%	1.40%
Austin	X	X	33.40%	0.50%	26.50%	0.30%	40.00%	0.30%	44.10%	1.10%	53.70%	1.00%
San Antonio	X	X	X	X	8.30%	2.20%	12.20%	3.00%	12.50%	1.60%	13.50%	0.50%
El Paso	X	X	38.60%	3.00%	33.80%	3.00%	45.30%	3.70%	36.20%	1.50%	28%	1.00%
Lubbock	17.70%	0.00%	15.50%	0.00%	15.50%	<0.1%	14.60%	0.30%	11.70%	2.00%	18.30%	2.50%
Fort Worth	20.70%	0.40%	25.10%	0.30%	27.50%	1.00%	33.00%	0.40%	33.70%	0.10%	30.10%	0.30%

Appendix C: Assault Clearance Rates in Texas Cities, Cleared by Arrest (CA) vs. Cleared by Exceptional Means (CEM) (2018–2023)

Police Dept.	2018 CA	2018 CEM	2019 CA	2019 CEM	2020 CA	2020 CEM	2021 CA	2021 CEM	2022 CA	2022 CEM	2023 CA	2023 CEM
Dallas	29.50%	0.10%	29.70%	<0.1%	31.20%	<0.1%	32.80%	<0.1%	32.10%	<0.1%	31.30%	<0.1%
Houston	20.50%	19.50%	21.60%	17.10%	21.20%	12.70%	19.90%	10.90%	19.60%	8.20%	21.40%	4.50%
Austin	X	X	28.20%	1.00%	27.60%	0.40%	28.60%	0.20%	32.30%	<0.1%	38.10%	0.10%
San Antonio	X	X	X	X	18.00%	12.00%	19.20%	8.40%	21.00%	7.60%	22.10%	2.30%
El Paso	X	X	39.40%	12.80%	36.80%	15.00%	44.10%	1.80%	42.10%	1.00%	40.60%	1.10%
Lubbock	27.50%	0.00%	25.30%	0.00%	23.10%	0.00%	22.30%	0.20%	24.30%	0.10%	27.40%	5.90%
Fort Worth	52.80%	1.00%	50.40%	0.70%	45.10%	1.00%	44.90%	1.00%	50.10%	0.20%	53.10%	0.20%

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Nikki Pressley is the Texas state director and chief of staff for Right On Crime. Her work focuses on criminal justice and juvenile justice policy.

While pursuing her graduate degree, she started as an intern for the Foundation, working on child and family policy. She earned a role as a policy analyst, focusing on various policy issues including child welfare, human trafficking, and juvenile justice.

Pressley graduated from the University of North Texas with an MS in educational psychology with a concentration in family policy and program administration and a BS in human development and family science with a concentration in family and community.

Ross Jackson is a policy analyst for Right On Crime at the Texas Public Policy Foundation. He started at the Foundation as an intern and worked as a research assistant while he completed graduate school. His previous work for the Foundation has focused on criminal justice issues including human trafficking and diversion and mitigation programs. Jackson has a Master of Public Administration with a concentration in nonprofit policy advocacy and a Bachelor of Science in political science from The Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University. Before working for TPPF, Jackson interned on Capitol Hill for Former Congressman Kevin Brady working on family and worker support legislation. Outside of work and school, Jackson enjoys road-tripping, hiking, and spending time with family and friends.