



# Solving Crime, Protecting Communities: A Blueprint for Safer Streets

By Jillian Snider

**At both the federal and state levels, policymakers are recognizing that clearance rates deserve legislative attention, not just in response to media scrutiny but also as part of a long-term strategy to rebuild law enforcement effectiveness and strengthen communities.**

## Executive Summary

Case clearance rates—the percentage of crimes that law enforcement solves—have steadily declined in the United States over the past several decades. In 2023, just under 51 percent of homicides and 41 percent of crimes against persons cases were cleared, continuing a troubling downward trend that leaves victims without justice and communities without answers.<sup>1</sup> As serious crimes increasingly go unsolved, public safety risks escalate, trust in law enforcement deteriorates, and long-term community stability weakens. The impact of violent crime ripples outward, contributing to heightened fear, restricted community activity, and lasting trauma among victims, witnesses, and neighbors.

This policy study examines the key drivers of declining clearance rates, including staffing shortages, technological and forensic bottlenecks, and the diminishing willingness of witnesses and victims to cooperate with investigations. It concludes with a set of strategic recommendations for lawmakers, law enforcement leaders, and public safety advocates to consider as they confront the clearance rate crisis. These recommendations

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1. Federal Bureau of Investigation, "Incidents Cleared by Offense Category, 2023," Crime Data Explorer, last accessed April 24, 2025. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp>.

are centered on improving investigative capacity, supporting victim-centered justice, and restoring clearance rates as a core component of effective, measurable public safety policy.

## Introduction

Clearance rates represent one of the most fundamental responsibilities of law enforcement: solving crimes. Yet across the United States, agencies are closing a declining percentage of serious offense cases, even as investigative technology, data systems, and forensic capabilities have advanced.<sup>2</sup> This trend is more than a statistical anomaly—it is a public safety failure with far-reaching consequences for victims, communities, and the long-term legitimacy of policing.

At one point in the mid-1960s, the national clearance rate for homicide exceeded 90 percent.<sup>3</sup> By 2023, however, that rate had dropped to just over 50 percent.<sup>4</sup> For other violent crimes, such as rape and robbery, recent clearance rates remain well below 40 percent, and property crimes like burglary and larceny have clearance rates in the single digits.<sup>5</sup> Although clearance statistics do not tell the whole story of police effectiveness, they serve as one of the most visible and consequential measures of whether a law enforcement agency is identifying offenders and securing justice.

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the United States' clearance rate trajectory and the operational, institutional, and societal factors influencing it. It explores key barriers to case clearance, including investigator workload, witness cooperation, evidence backlogs, and staffing shortages—challenges that disproportionately affect under-resourced agencies and urban departments.<sup>6</sup>

The study also identifies high-performing states and agencies that have maintained or improved their clearance rates, offering replicable practices that support solvability and strengthen public safety outcomes. These jurisdictions demonstrate that while clearance rates have declined nationally, targeted institutional strategies—ranging from better evidence management to community partnerships—can reverse that trend.<sup>7</sup>

Solving cases is about more than outcomes. It is about holding offenders accountable, restoring the promise of justice for victims, protecting communities from future harm, and reaffirming law enforcement's essential role in the public safety ecosystem. This paper aims to equip leaders, lawmakers, and public safety stakeholders with the tools to reverse



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2. Sean O'Driscoll, "Murders Are Getting Harder to Solve. Here's Why," *Newsweek*, Dec. 24, 2023. <https://www.newsweek.com/police-unsolved-murders-united-states-report-council-criminal-justice-fbi-1854556>.
3. Philip J. Cook and Ashley Mancik, "The Sixty-Year Trajectory of Homicide Clearance Rates: Toward a Better Understanding of the Great Decline," *Annual Review of Criminology* 7 (January 2024), pp. 59-83. <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-criminol-022422-122744>.
4. Ibid.
5. Federal Bureau of Investigation. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp>.
6. Thomas L. Scott et al., "Variability of Crime Clearance Among Police Agencies," *Police Quarterly* 22:1 (Sept. 10, 2018), pp. 82-111. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611118796597>.
7. "Saving Lives: Ten Essential Actions Cities Can Take to Reduce Violence Now," Council on Criminal Justice, January 2022. <https://counciloncj.org/10-essential-actions>.

the clearance rate decline and reestablish solvability as a core pillar of criminal justice strategy.

## Why Solving Crime Still Matters

Clearance rates are more than statistical benchmarks; they are foundational to the legitimacy of law enforcement and the perception of justice within communities. When cases are not cleared, offenders remain free, victims lack closure, and public confidence in the criminal justice system steadily erodes. The consequences are cumulative and corrosive: Declining solvability not only impairs public safety, but it also weakens the very mechanisms through which justice is expected to operate.<sup>8</sup>

Research shows that law enforcement's ability to solve crimes is a key driver of public safety.<sup>9</sup> When offenders perceive that there is a high likelihood of being caught and punished, they are less likely to engage in criminal behavior.<sup>10</sup> This aligns with long-established deterrence theory in criminology, which emphasizes that the certainty and swiftness of consequences—not their severity—are what most effectively prevent crime.<sup>11</sup> Clearance rates serve as a critical feedback mechanism—when rates are low, it undermines deterrence and emboldens repeat offenders.

Public sentiment reinforces these theoretical findings. One recent survey found that 62 percent of Americans believe that crime is a bigger problem today than it was only a few years ago, 73 percent say crime is impacting the way they live their daily lives, and 86 percent are more cautious about where they go based on safety concerns.<sup>12</sup> These findings likely—at least in part—reflect the visible consequences of unsolved crime and the corresponding collapse in the perceived certainty of justice.

Recent behavioral research supports this supposition. An evaluation of the HOPE (Hawaii Opportunity Probation with Enforcement) model found that participants under a system of consistent and swift sanctions had significantly lower rates of recidivism than those who were subjected to wavering and delayed supervision—a result attributed not to harsher penalties but to the predictability of enforcement.<sup>13</sup> These findings align with broader work in environmental criminology and routine activity theory and are the cornerstone of situational crime prevention, which posits that offenders respond rationally to the perceived risks of a given act of crime.<sup>14</sup>

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73 percent say crime is impacting the way they live their daily lives



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8. Nikki Pressley and Ross Jackson, "Ensuring Justice: Innovative Approaches to Improve Crime Clearance Rates," Right on Crime, December 2024. [https://rightoncrime.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-12-ROC-Crime-Clearance-Rates-PressleyJackson\\_FINAL.pdf](https://rightoncrime.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/2024-12-ROC-Crime-Clearance-Rates-PressleyJackson_FINAL.pdf).
9. Neil Gross, "The Myths Holding Back Police Reform," *Time*, Sept. 26, 2023. <https://time.com/6316258/myths-police-reform>.
10. Daniel S. Nagin, "Deterrence in the Twenty-First Century," in *Crime and Justice in America: 1975-2025* (University of Chicago Press, 2013). <https://doi.org/10.1086/670398>.
11. Ibid.
12. Ron Faucheux, "Perception matters: Fear of crime is changing how Americans live," *The Hill*, Nov. 2, 2024. <https://thehill.com/opinion/campaign/4962584-poll-crime-trends-survey>.
13. April Pattavina et al., "Revisiting the effectiveness of HOPE/swift-certain-fair supervision programs: A meta-analytic review," *Criminology & Public Policy* 23:1 (February 2024), pp. 45-76. <https://globcci.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Criminology-Public-Policy-2023-Pattavina-Revisiting-the-effectiveness-of-HOPE-swift%E2%80%90fair-supervision-3.pdf>.
14. "What is situational crime prevention?," College of Policing, Jan. 19, 2022. <https://www.college.police.uk/guidance/neighbourhood-crime/what-situational-crime-prevention>.

When clearance rates fall, the perceived certainty of justice collapses—especially in communities that are already disproportionately impacted by violence. In cities like Chicago and Philadelphia, for example, the clearance rate for nonfatal shootings has fallen below 25 percent—even under 10 percent in some neighborhoods.<sup>15</sup>

In these environments, retaliatory violence becomes normalized, witness cooperation diminishes, and law enforcement agencies are viewed less as a source of safety and more as passive observers.<sup>16</sup> This feedback loop of unsolved crime and community disengagement is particularly damaging in cases involving interpersonal violence, where victim cooperation is essential to securing arrests and convictions.<sup>17</sup>

Clearance rates also have institutional consequences. Agencies with low clearance rates may face reduced access to competitive grant funding, difficulties with recruitment and retention, and weakened interagency trust.<sup>18</sup> Jurors may be more skeptical of circumstantial evidence when they know the agency involved rarely solves crimes.<sup>19</sup> Even internally, investigators are more prone to burnout and professional disengagement when their efforts repeatedly fail to produce results.<sup>20</sup>

While it is true that not all crimes can be solved, particularly in property offenses with limited evidence, chronic underperformance in violent crime clearance especially undermines public safety.<sup>21</sup> It also exacerbates the underreporting of crime, as victims and witnesses lose faith that their cooperation will lead to meaningful outcomes.<sup>22</sup> This “dark figure” of crime, long acknowledged in criminology, is compounded when the visible justice system fails to deliver convictions for reported offenses.<sup>23</sup>

Although clearance rates should not be the sole measure of police performance, they remain one of the most tangible, comparable, and public-facing indicators of whether a department is fulfilling its core mission.



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15. Andy Grimm et al., “‘Where’s my justice?’ Only 6% of Chicago shootings lead to arrests, Sun-Times finds,” *Chicago Sun-Times*, March 14, 2025. <https://chicago.suntimes.com/the-watchdogs/2025/03/14/non-fatal-shootings-clearance-rate-chicago-police-cpd-statistics>; “National Case Closed Project: Tracking Nonfatal Shootings and Other Violent Gun Crimes in Your Law Enforcement Agency,” RTI International, last accessed April 24, 2025. [https://nationalcaseclosed.org/toolkit/docs/NCCP\\_TrackingNonfatalShootings.pdf](https://nationalcaseclosed.org/toolkit/docs/NCCP_TrackingNonfatalShootings.pdf).
16. Greg Newburn, “Police should solve murders. Congress can help,” Niskanen Center, Feb. 8, 2024. <https://www.niskanencenter.org/police-should-solve-murders-congress-can-help>.
17. Andrew D. Leipold, “The Puzzle of Clearance Rates, and What They Can Tell Us About Crime, Police Reform, and Criminal Justice,” *Wake Forest Law Review* 56:47 (2021), pp. 47-95. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID3863404\\_code138118.pdf?abstractid=3863404&mirid=1&type=2](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID3863404_code138118.pdf?abstractid=3863404&mirid=1&type=2).
18. Office of Justice Programs, “OJP Grant Application Resource Guide,” U.S. Department of Justice, last accessed April 25, 2025. <https://www.ojp.gov/funding/apply/ojp-grant-application-resource-guide>; “The State of Recruitment: A Crisis for Law Enforcement,” International Association of Chiefs of Police, last accessed April 25, 2025. [https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416\\_IACP\\_RecruitmentBR\\_HR\\_0.pdf](https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/239416_IACP_RecruitmentBR_HR_0.pdf); Bureau of Justice Assistance and Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, “Recruitment and Retention for the Modern Law Enforcement Agency,” U.S. Department of Justice, 2023. <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/Home.aspx?item=cops-r1136>.
19. Besiki L. Kutateladze et al., “Reject or Dismiss? A Prosecutor’s Dilemma,” *Safety and Justice Challenges*, July 2022. <https://safetyandjusticechallenge.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/RejectOrDismissAProsecutorsDilemma.pdf>; Ethan Singer, “When Police Mess Up: The Lack of a Defense to Inadequate Police Investigations,” *Columbia Human Rights Law Review* 54:3 (Aug. 2, 2023), pp. 1168-1224. <https://hrilr.law.columbia.edu/hrilr-online/when-police-mess-up-the-lack-of-a-defense-to-inadequate-police-investigations>.
20. Richard R. Johnson, “Improving Case Clearance Rates in Criminal Investigations,” Dolan Consulting Group, April 2018. [https://www.dolanconsultinggroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Brief\\_Clearance-Rates1.pdf](https://www.dolanconsultinggroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Brief_Clearance-Rates1.pdf).
21. “The Crime Perception Gap: The truth behind crime trends and police clearance rates,” Pinkerton, July 12, 2024. <https://pinkerton.com/our-insights/blog/the-crime-perception-gap-the-truth-behind-crime-trends-and-police-clearance-rates>.
22. Sophie Stewart et al., “‘I thought I’m better off just trying to put this behind me’—a contemporary approach to understanding why women decide not to report sexual violence,” *The Journal of Forensic Psychiatry & Psychology* 35:1 (2024), pp. 85-101. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14789949.2023.2292103?scroll=top&needAccess=true#d1e413>.
23. Wesley G. Skogan, “Dimensions of the Dark Figure of Unreported Crime,” *Crime and Delinquency* 23:1 (January 1977), pp. 42-50. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/00111287702300104>.

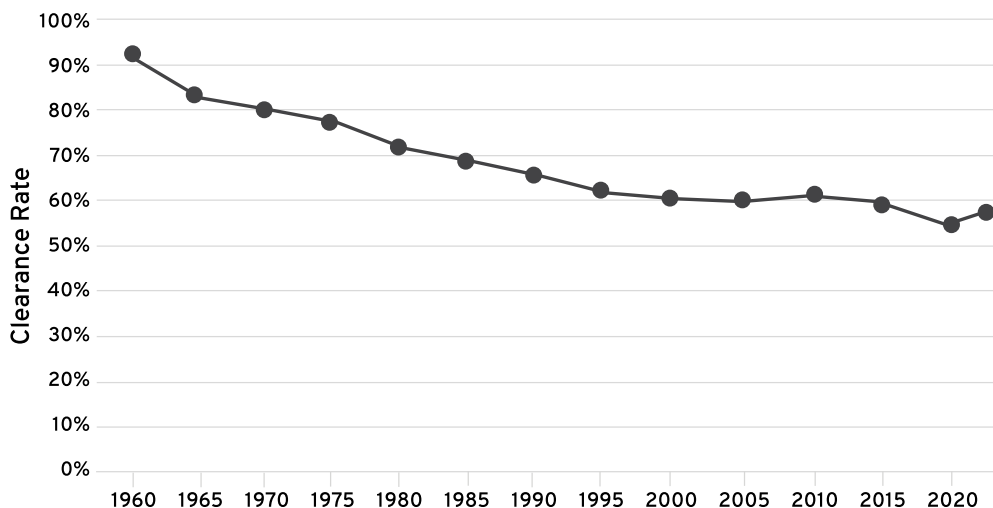


Thus, improving clearance rates is not simply about boosting numbers—it is about demonstrating competence, restoring accountability, and protecting the public from repeat victimization.

## The Long Slide: America's Clearance Decline

The downward trajectory of case clearance rates in the United States is not a recent development. It represents a slow but steady erosion that has been occurring for more than half a century. According to a comprehensive longitudinal analysis, the national homicide clearance rate fell from over 90 percent in the mid-1960s to roughly 64 percent by the mid-1990s, dropping even further to just 50.6 percent by 2023 (Figure 1).<sup>24</sup> The same trend holds for other violent offenses like aggravated assault, robbery, and sexual crimes, with sex-offense clearance rates now falling below 25 percent nationwide.<sup>25</sup>

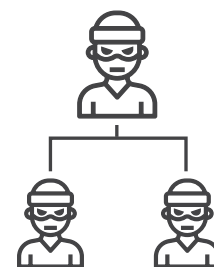
**Figure 1: U.S. Homicide Clearance Rates, 1960 to 2023**



Source: Data for 1960 from the Offenses Known and Cleared by Arrest section of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Reporting Program, last accessed May 27, 2025; Data for 1965-2023 from the Murder Accountability Project, last accessed May 27, 2025.

Several criminological and structural explanations account for this multi-decade decline. One factor is the changing nature of crime itself. In the past, most homicides occurred between individuals who knew one another—family members, acquaintances, or domestic partners.<sup>26</sup> Today, a higher percentage of homicides and assaults occur between strangers, within criminal networks, or in public spaces, making them more difficult to solve.<sup>27</sup>

In parallel, the decentralization of policing in the United States—where more than 18,000 local law enforcement agencies operate with vastly different levels of resources—has contributed to significant disparities in case solvability.<sup>28</sup> For example, many smaller agencies do not have



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24. Cook and Mancik. <https://www.annualreviews.org/content/journals/10.1146/annurev-criminol-022422-122744>.

25. Federal Bureau of Investigation. <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp>.

26. Alexia Cooper and Erica L. Smith, "Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008," U.S. Department of Justice, November 2011. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/htus8008.pdf>.

27. "Trends in Homicide: What You Need to Know," Council on Criminal Justice, December 2023. <https://counciloncj.org/homicide-trends-report>.

28. Scott et al. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611118796597>.

dedicated homicide or violent crime units or the forensic tools or personnel to handle complex investigations.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, as crime has become more mobile and digitally complex, local investigators are often expected to manage sophisticated cases without the modern training and technology needed to keep pace.<sup>30</sup> Technological advances, including the increased use of surveillance cameras and DNA databases, were expected to boost clearance rates. However, the opposite has often occurred because of the overwhelming demand placed on crime labs, digital forensics units, and public defenders, creating backlogs that delay or prevent prosecution.<sup>31</sup> Across the country, thousands of rape kits remain untested, and digital forensic analysis in many jurisdictions can take months to process.<sup>32</sup>

Furthermore, cultural and political dynamics have shaped investigative priorities and community engagement. As departments have shifted resources toward community policing, special operations, and contemporary initiatives, investigative divisions have often been deprioritized, particularly in jurisdictions facing fiscal constraints.<sup>33</sup> These reallocations have created capacity gaps that directly impact solvability.

Ultimately, the clearance rate decline is not the result of a single cause, but of intersecting pressures on a decentralized law enforcement system. Understanding that historical context is critical to shaping modern, evidence-based strategies to reverse the trend and restore solvability as a primary focus of American policing.

## Barriers to Clearing Cases

The sharp decline in clearance rates is not simply a product of shifting crime patterns or long-term societal trends. It reflects a series of acute, often overlooked operational challenges that hinder law enforcement's ability to investigate and solve crimes effectively. Across jurisdictions large and small, agencies are grappling with compounding problems such as shrinking personnel, overwhelming caseloads, inconsistent training standards, eroding victim/witness cooperation, technological delays, and structural fragmentation.<sup>34</sup> These barriers disproportionately impact departments with limited resources and few specialized supports, but they also reveal broader systemic gaps that cut across the entire policing landscape. Without targeted investments in staffing, investigative infrastructure, training, and interagency collaboration, clearance rates are unlikely to improve, regardless of broader crime fluctuations.<sup>35</sup>

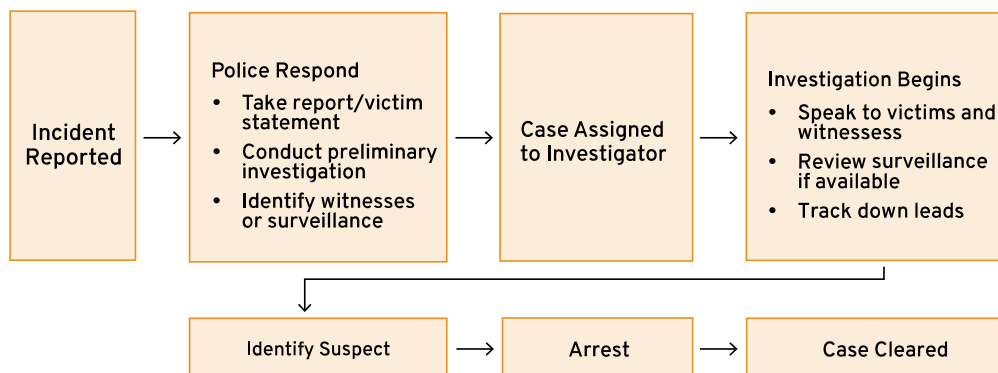


Without targeted investments in staffing, investigative infrastructure, training, and interagency collaboration, clearance rates are unlikely to improve, regardless of broader crime fluctuations.

29. Mark R. Leipnik et al., "Jurisdictional boundaries and crime analysis: policy and practice," *Regional Science Policy & Practice* 5:1 (March 2013), pp. 45-66. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1757780223006194>.
30. Cynthia Lum et al., "Understanding the Limits of Technology's Impact on Police Effectiveness," *Policing Quarterly* 20:2 (2016), pp. 136-163. <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/lumkopercs.pdf>.
31. Lum et al. <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/lumkopercs.pdf>.
32. Tricia L. Nadolny et al., "America tested 100,000 forgotten rape kits. But justice remains elusive," *USA Today*, March 10, 2025. <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/investigations/2024/09/19/doj-rape-kit-testing-program-results/74589312007>; Johnson. [https://www.dolanconsultinggroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Brief\\_Clearance-Rates1.pdf](https://www.dolanconsultinggroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Brief_Clearance-Rates1.pdf).
33. Jillian Snider, "A New Era of American Policing," *National Affairs* 63 (Fall 2023). <https://www.nationalaffairs.com/publications/detail/a-new-era-of-american-policing>.
34. Logan Seacrest and Jillian Snider, "Rebuilding the Force: Solving Policing's Workforce Emergency," *R Street Policy Study* No. 318, March 2025. <https://www.rstreet.org/research/rebuilding-the-force-solving-policings-workforce-emergency>; Lum et al. <https://bja.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh186/files/media/document/lumkopercs.pdf>.
35. Johnson. [https://www.dolanconsultinggroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Brief\\_Clearance-Rates1.pdf](https://www.dolanconsultinggroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/Research-Brief_Clearance-Rates1.pdf).

The investigation process itself is complex and often nonlinear, requiring careful coordination from the moment a crime is reported through to arrest and case resolution. **Figure 2** shows the typical steps investigators must navigate, and understanding these steps can help contextualize the operational challenges outlined in the following sections.

**Figure 2: Typical Steps of the Investigative Process**



## Too Few Cops, Too Many Cases

A serious contributor to falling clearance rates is the significant reduction in sworn officers and the inability of agencies to recruit and retain qualified personnel.<sup>36</sup> The United States faces a troubling law enforcement workforce crisis, with resignations and retirements increasing by over 45 percent in major departments between 2020 and 2022.<sup>37</sup> Many agencies have experienced attrition in specialized investigative units, where cases are most likely to be complex and time-intensive.<sup>38</sup> Fewer detectives handling more cases results in less time per case and fewer investigative leads pursued, directly undermining solvability.<sup>39</sup>

Recent national surveys highlight the severity of the problem: Over 70 percent of agencies report greater difficulty hiring compared to five years ago, and departments in cities like New Orleans and Minneapolis have seen staffing reductions of up to 40 percent, critically weakening their investigative capacity.<sup>40</sup>

As a result, detective caseloads frequently exceed ideal thresholds. It is recommended that a detective should lead, on average, four to six new homicide cases and approximately 72 to 96 total cases per year, but in some jurisdictions, investigators are seeing caseloads of 500 to 600 or more.<sup>41</sup>



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36. Ibid.

37. Ibid.

38. Tina Moore, "NYPD brain drain: NYC detectives retiring in droves sparks fear of 'chaotic' crime crisis," *New York Post*, March 8, 2025. <https://nypost.com/2025/03/08/us-news/nypd-detectives-retiring-in-droves-sparks-fears-of-nyc-chaotic-crime-crisis>.

39. Cynthia Lum et al., "Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis, Case Studies, and Investigative Data," George Mason University, May 2018. <https://cebcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LumWellfordInvestigationsProjectFINAL.pdf>.

40. Lum et al., "Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis, Case Studies, and Investigative Data." <https://cebcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LumWellfordInvestigationsProjectFINAL.pdf>.

41. "How do we raise the homicide clearance rate?," Police Executive Research Forum, Jan. 21, 2023. <https://www.policeforum.org/trending21jan23>; William Prummell, "Allocation of Personnel: Investigations," End Violence Against Women International, last accessed April 24, 2025. [https://evawintl.org/resource\\_library/allocation-of-personnel-investigations](https://evawintl.org/resource_library/allocation-of-personnel-investigations); Moore. <https://nypost.com/2025/03/08/us-news/nypd-detectives-retiring-in-droves-sparks-fears-of-nyc-chaotic-crime-crisis>.

This investigative time deficit translates to lower victim engagement, fewer follow-ups, and diminished clearance rates.

### Burnt Out and Backlogged

Another often overlooked factor contributing to unsolved cases is investigative burnout. Detectives managing dozens of active investigations at a time must triage their caseloads, often focusing on the most solvable cases—those with cooperative witnesses, clear evidence, or immediate threats to public safety. While triaging is operationally necessary, it results in many low-priority cases receiving minimal follow-up, particularly if leads fail to materialize quickly.<sup>42</sup> Over time, this creates a backlog of unresolved cases, each representing a victim left without closure and a suspect who remains unaccountable.<sup>43</sup>

The cumulative effect of deprioritized cases compounds clearance problems across agencies. As open cases accumulate, investigators experience heightened administrative burdens, divided attention, and competing priorities that further erode their ability to concentrate on any single investigation. Case overload also increases the likelihood of missed investigative steps, lapses in evidence preservation, and diminished engagement with victims and witnesses.<sup>44</sup> The psychological toll of managing a large number of unresolved cases contributes to emotional exhaustion, cynicism, and professional disengagement—key dimensions of investigative burnout.<sup>45</sup>

Experts posit that when certain cases are not pursued with urgency within the first 48 to 72 hours, the likelihood of successful closure diminishes significantly.<sup>46</sup> Critical leads are most likely to surface in the immediate aftermath of an offense when witnesses' memories are fresh and physical evidence is still recoverable. Delayed responses in investigations not only reduce solvability but also send a message to victims and communities that their cases are not important, further undermining trust in law enforcement.<sup>47</sup>

With insufficient staffing and structural support, the triage burden placed on detectives becomes overwhelming, fueling a self-perpetuating cycle. As investigators are forced to focus on only the most immediately solvable cases, a growing share of crimes are left largely unattended, allowing offenders to re-offend and fueling broader cycles of community victimization.<sup>48</sup> Investigative burnout is thus not simply a matter of officer wellness—it is an operational barrier that directly impacts clearance rates and public safety outcomes.<sup>49</sup>



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42. Leipold. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN\\_ID3863404\\_code138118.pdf?abstractid=3863404&mirid=1&type=2](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/Delivery.cfm/SSRN_ID3863404_code138118.pdf?abstractid=3863404&mirid=1&type=2).

43. William P. McCarty et al., “Burnout in Blue: An Analysis of the Extent and Primary Predictors of Burnout Among Law Enforcement Officers in the United States,” *Police Quarterly* 22:3 (Feb. 22, 2019), pp. 278-304. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1098611119828038>.

44. Lum et al., “Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis, Case Studies, and Investigative Data.” <https://cebcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LumWellfordInvestigationsProjectFINAL.pdf>.

45. McCarty et al. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1098611119828038>.

46. Julia Jacobo, “Why the first 72 hours in a missing persons investigation are the most critical, according to criminology experts,” *Good Morning America*, Oct. 8, 2018. <https://www.goodmorningamerica.com/news/story/72-hours-missing-persons-investigation-critical-criminology-experts-58292638>.

47. Robert C. Davis et al., “Cold-Case Investigations: An Analysis of Current Practices and Factors Associated with Successful Outcomes,” RAND Corporation, Oct. 19, 2011. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/cold-case-investigations-analysis-current-practices-and-factors>.

48. Lum et al., “Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis, Case Studies, and Investigative Data.” <https://cebcp.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LumWellfordInvestigationsProjectFINAL.pdf>.

49. McCarty et al. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1098611119828038>.



## Training Shortfalls and Missing Blueprints

While major cases like homicides, shootings, and sexual assaults are often handled by specialized detectives, there is wide inconsistency across agencies in how investigative standards are taught, reinforced, and measured.<sup>50</sup> Many departments, particularly small and mid-sized ones, lack formalized training programs or standardized investigative protocols. Instead, investigators are often left to rely on personal experience, informal mentorship, or agency-specific practices, which may not consistently align with national best practices or evolving forensic standards.<sup>51</sup>

Research indicates that the absence of structured investigative procedures increases the risk of missing critical early steps—such as canvassing for witnesses, collecting time-sensitive surveillance footage, and preserving digital evidence.<sup>52</sup> These inconsistencies are compounded by the realities of modern policing, where first-responding patrol officers, not detectives, are often the first to interact with witnesses, secure scenes, and preserve evidence in the immediate aftermath of a crime.<sup>53</sup> In many jurisdictions, investigators may not arrive on scene until hours after the crime has occurred, by which time crucial physical or testimonial evidence may already be compromised or lost.<sup>54</sup>

Without standardized training that spans both initial response and follow-up investigations, agencies face wide disparities in case quality, even within their own ranks.<sup>55</sup> Variability in initial scene management, evidence handling, and early investigative decision-making can substantially impact a case's solvability potential.<sup>56</sup> Departments with higher turnover rates are particularly vulnerable, as institutional knowledge erodes quickly when departing officers have relied more on informal learning than formalized instruction.<sup>57</sup>

The lack of consistent investigative frameworks also creates systemic inequities across jurisdictions. Well-resourced departments with access to formal training academies and dedicated investigative divisions may consistently outperform smaller or underfunded agencies, where investigative practices can vary sharply based on who is assigned to a case.<sup>58</sup> This unevenness not only impacts clearance rates but also contributes to broader disparities in victim outcomes, public trust, and prosecutorial success rates across regions.<sup>59</sup>



Many departments, particularly small and mid-sized ones, lack formalized training programs or standardized investigative protocols. Instead, investigators are often left to rely on personal experience, informal mentorship, or agency-specific practices.

50. Ibid.

51. Ibid.

52. Ibid.

53. "The Workforce Crisis, and What Police Agencies Are Doing About It," Police Executive Research Forum, September 2019. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

54. National Institute of Justice, "Crime Scene Investigation: A Guide for Law Enforcement," U.S. Department of Justice, January 2000. <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/178280.pdf>.

55. Lum et al., "Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis, Case Studies, and Investigative Data." <https://cebc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LumWellfordInvestigationsProjectFINAL.pdf>.

56. Police Executive Research Forum. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

57. Ibid.

58. Lum et al., "Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis, Case Studies, and Investigative Data." <https://cebc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LumWellfordInvestigationsProjectFINAL.pdf>.

59. Police Executive Research Forum. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/WorkforceCrisis.pdf>.

## When Witnesses Go Silent

Another major obstacle to successful investigations is the increasing difficulty in securing witness cooperation. In communities with historically strained relationships with law enforcement, fear of retaliation, distrust of the criminal justice system, and a lack of visible case resolution deter witnesses from coming forward.<sup>60</sup> In some urban areas, police departments report that witnesses refuse to provide information in more than half of all shootings or homicides.<sup>61</sup>

This erosion of cooperation is not only a symptom of broader societal divisions—it is also the result of a feedback loop. As more crimes go unsolved, communities lose faith in the police, and as that trust declines, cooperation falls further.<sup>62</sup> Witness reluctance is particularly acute in violent crime cases, where the risks of retaliation seem high and the perceived protections for cooperating witnesses are often weakest.<sup>63</sup>

Cultural factors also exacerbate the problem. In many neighborhoods, longstanding “no snitching” norms discourage community members from engaging with law enforcement, regardless of the severity of the crime.<sup>64</sup> The rise of social media has amplified these pressures, with witnesses sometimes facing public exposure or reputational threats for cooperating.<sup>65</sup> Additionally, in areas where clearance rates are chronically low, witnesses may rationally conclude that providing information carries personal risk without a corresponding likelihood of justice being served.<sup>66</sup>

Victim cooperation follows a similar pattern. Victims who perceive the system as ineffective or unresponsive are less likely to maintain engagement with investigators, particularly in cases where arrests are delayed or initial leads falter.<sup>67</sup> Over time, this cycle of distrust undermines the perceived legitimacy of law enforcement and weakens the broader community’s willingness to report crimes, identify suspects, or testify in court.<sup>68</sup>

The operational consequences for investigative units are severe. Without cooperative witnesses or victims, cases often stall in their earliest stages, forcing detectives to rely solely on physical evidence or circumstantial information. Clearance rates inevitably suffer, particularly in crimes involving interpersonal violence where testimonial evidence is



Victims who perceive the system as ineffective or unresponsive are less likely to maintain engagement with investigators, particularly in cases where arrests are delayed or initial leads falter.

60. Andrew Eichen, “Broken Trust: The Pervasive Role of Deceit in American Policing,” Cato Institute, Policy Analysis No. 979, Sept. 12, 2024. <https://www.cato.org/policy-analysis/broken-trust>.
61. Rod K. Brunson and Brian A. Wade, “Oh hell no, we don’t talk to police,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 18:3 (2019), pp. 623–648. <https://ccjs.umd.edu/sites/ccjs.umd.edu/files/pubs/Criminology>.
62. Ibid.
63. “In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence,” Giffords Law Center, Sept. 9, 2021. <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/in-pursuit-of-peace-building-police-community-trust-to-break-the-cycle-of-violence>.
64. Police Executive Research Forum, “The Stop Snitching Phenomenon: Breaking the Code of Silence,” U.S. Department of Justice, February 2009. <https://portal.cops.usdoj.gov/resourcecenter/RIC/Publications/cops-p158-pub.pdf>.
65. Jennifer Mitsch and Karen Rumsey, “Empowering Witnesses Through Support,” Cincinnati Police Department, last accessed April 25, 2025. <https://popcenter.asu.edu/sites/default/files/17-08.pdf>.
66. Brunson and Wade. <https://ccjs.umd.edu/sites/ccjs.umd.edu/files/pubs/Criminology>.
67. Karen Friedman Agnifilo, “Treat Every Shooting Like a Homicide,” *Vital City*, Sept. 27, 2023. <https://www.vitalcitynyc.org/articles/treat-every-shooting-like-a-homicide>.
68. “In Pursuit of Peace: Building Police-Community Trust to Break the Cycle of Violence.” <https://giffords.org/lawcenter/report/in-pursuit-of-peace-building-police-community-trust-to-break-the-cycle-of-violence>.

critical. As the gap between reported crimes and solved cases widens, communities increasingly view the justice system as distant, ineffective, or even indifferent to their experiences.<sup>69</sup>

## Forensics in the Slow Lane

Contrary to public perception shaped by media portrayals of crime-solving, technological advances do not always lead to faster case resolution.<sup>70</sup> In reality, crime labs across the United States face growing backlogs in testing DNA, digital evidence, and ballistics, which can significantly delay investigative progress.<sup>71</sup> Some states take more than a year to process complex DNA profiles, and digital forensics labs have seen exponential growth in data volume without a corresponding increase in personnel or infrastructure.<sup>72</sup>

For instance, the Houston Forensic Science Center reported delays of nine months to a year for DNA tests and 12 to 14 months for ballistics analysis, substantially slowing down case progress.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation's firearms evidence backlog stretched to 71 weeks as of March 2025, despite efforts to reduce processing times.<sup>74</sup>

The bottleneck in forensic analysis reduces an investigator's ability to act on leads in a timely manner, and these time delays not only affect prosecutions but also weaken victim engagement and witness memory—factors critical to securing confessions or identifications.<sup>75</sup> Departments with limited funding often rely on overburdened state labs, creating further delays in jurisdictions that cannot afford independent forensic capacity.<sup>76</sup>

Digital forensic units are also grappling with backlogs resulting from an increasing volume of data. Practitioners have reported that insufficient triage tools and manual prioritization processes contribute significantly to delays, with many labs facing challenges in analyzing multiple devices per case.<sup>77</sup> These cumulative delays not only hinder the timely administration of justice but also erode public confidence in the justice system.



Some states take more than a year to process complex DNA profiles, and digital forensics labs have seen exponential growth in data volume without a corresponding increase in personnel or infrastructure.

69. Brunson and Wade. <https://ccjs.umd.edu/sites/ccjs.umd.edu/files/pubs/Criminology>.

70. Gordon Eatley, "A Meta-Analysis of the CSI Effect: The Impact of Popular Media on Jurors' Perception of Forensic Evidence," *Politics, Bureaucracy, and Justice* 5:2 (2016), pp. 1-10. <https://www.wtamu.edu/webres/File/Academics/College>.

71. John M. Collins, "A Reality Check on Crime Lab Backlogs," *Michigan Bar Journal* (October 2012), pp. 37-38. <https://criticalvictories.com/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/2012-1001-Reality-Check-on-Crime-Lab-Backlogs.pdf>.

72. Ibid., p. 5; Jennifer Leros, "Beyond the Evidence: Leveraging Decision Intelligence to Drive Better Outcomes in Digital Forensics," Cognyte, May 2, 2024. <https://www.cognyte.com/blog/digital-forensics>.

73. Monroe Trombly, "Houston forensic crime lab seeks funding boost to help tackle evidence backlog," *Houston Landing*, March 22, 2024. <https://houstonlanding.org/houston-forensic-crime-lab-seeks-funding-boost-to-help-tackle-evidence-backlog>.

74. Hannah McDonald, "TBI adds dozens of forensic experts, yet gun evidence still faces year-long delays. What's behind the wait?," *NewsChannel 5 Nashville*, April 24, 2025. <https://www.newschannel5.com/news/tbi-adds-dozens-of-forensic-experts-yet-gun-evidence-still-faces-year-long-delays-whats-behind-the-wait>.

75. Pedro M. Paz-Alonso and Gail S. Goodman, "Trauma and memory: effects of post-event misinformation, retrieval order, and retention interval," *Memory* 16:1 (January 2008), pp. 58-75. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17852727>.

76. Connor Brooks, "Publicly Funded Forensic Crime Laboratories, 2020," U.S. Department of Justice, December 2023. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/publicly-funded-forensic-crime-laboratories-2020>.

77. Graham Little, "Revolutionizing Digital Forensics: How Rapid Triage is Addressing Industry Challenges," *Cycomb*, Jan. 16, 2025. <https://www.cycomb.com/resources/news/2025/january/revolutionizing-digital-forensics-how-rapid-triage-is-addressing-industry-challenges>.

## Silos, Not Solutions

The fragmented structure of American policing contributes to disjointed crime data, investigative resources, and jurisdictional authority.<sup>78</sup> Agencies operating in adjacent areas often lack real-time data sharing or common case management platforms, resulting in missed connections between related crimes or suspects.<sup>79</sup> This is especially true in multijurisdictional crimes such as serial burglaries, gang-related shootings, or vehicle thefts.<sup>80</sup>

Fragmentation is rooted not only in the sheer number of independent law enforcement agencies, but also in the wide variation in agency size, technological capacity, and investigative protocols.<sup>81</sup> Even when crimes cross city or county lines, there is often no standardized mechanism for agencies to alert one another to emerging patterns, active suspects, or forensic leads.<sup>82</sup> Jurisdictional boundaries are often invisible to the public but can severely hinder the flow of investigative information, creating artificial barriers to solving crimes that span multiple regions.<sup>83</sup>

The absence of interoperable case management systems or shared criminal intelligence networks further compounds investigative challenges. In many regions, detectives must manually coordinate with neighboring agencies through informal phone calls, ad hoc meetings, or outdated paper record exchanges.<sup>84</sup> This lack of standardized processes delays critical investigative steps and increases the risk of duplicative efforts, missed witnesses, or conflicting suspect identifications.

Structural fragmentation is especially detrimental in complex, evolving crime patterns such as organized retail theft, human trafficking, or intercity gang violence, where rapid, multiagency coordination is essential.<sup>85</sup> Without consistent, institutionalized communication pathways, individual investigators are often left to navigate bureaucratic hurdles that have little to do with investigative skill and everything to do with systemic inefficiency.

The operational consequences are significant. Cases that could benefit from pooled resources, shared intelligence, and coordinated suspect apprehensions often instead stagnate, leaving offenders free to continue victimizing communities across multiple jurisdictions.<sup>86</sup> Over time, the inability to connect related crimes or share investigative momentum across



Structural fragmentation is especially detrimental in complex, evolving crime patterns such as organized retail theft, human trafficking, or intercity gang violence, where rapid, multiagency coordination is essential.

78. Leipnik et al. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1577780223006194>; Lum et al., “Identifying Effective Investigative Practices: A National Study Using Trajectory Analysis, Case Studies, and Investigative Data,” <https://cebc.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/LumWellfordInvestigationsProjectFINAL.pdf>.

79. Tim Dees, “The evolution of data-sharing in law enforcement,” Police1, Nov. 2, 2023. <https://www.police1.com/data-sharing-law-enforcement/the-evolution-of-data-sharing-in-law-enforcement>.

80. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms, and Explosives, “Justice Department Launches Carjacking Task Forces in Targeted Areas Across the Country,” Department of Justice, April 17, 2024. <https://www.atf.gov/news/press-releases/justice-department-launches-carjacking-task-forces-targeted-areas-across-country>.

81. Maria Ponomarenko, “Our Fragmented Approach to Public Safety,” *American Criminal Law Review* 59:4 (2022), pp. 1665-1679. <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/american-criminal-law-review/in-print/volume-59-number-4-fall-2022/our-fragmented-approach-to-public-safety>.

82. Brenna Swanson, “Interagency data sharing: Overcoming barriers to drive collaboration,” Peregrine, Jan. 13, 2025. <https://www.peregrine.io/resources/interagency-data-sharing-overcoming-barriers-to-drive-collaboration>.

83. Leipnik et al. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1577780223006194>.

84. Joel Stemarie and Erik Maness, “Information Sharing for Law Enforcement Databases,” SoundThinking, June 3, 2022. <https://www.soundthinking.com/blog/information-sharing-for-law-enforcement-databases>.

85. Mark Massop, “Data Fusion as a Strategy for Law Enforcement,” Cognate, July 22, 2024. <https://www.cognate.com/blog/data-fusion-strategy>.

86. Leipnik et al. <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1577780223006194>.



agencies erodes public trust not just in one department, but in the broader criminal justice system’s capacity to deliver justice effectively.<sup>87</sup>

## State-Level Contrasts

While national clearance rates offer a broad view of solvability trends, they mask stark differences among states and local jurisdictions. Some states have implemented proactive strategies to bolster investigative capacity and community engagement, whereas others continue to struggle with clearance rates well below the national average.

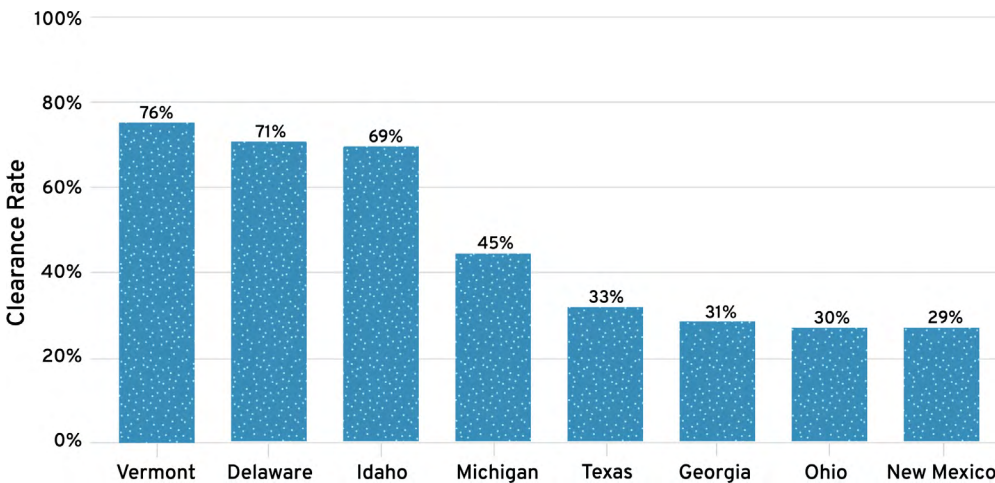
**Figure 3** shows that states like Delaware, Idaho, and Vermont have consistently maintained higher-than-average clearance rates for violent crimes (71, 69, and 76 percent, respectively).<sup>88</sup> These jurisdictions often benefit from several interrelated factors:

- Smaller populations and lower overall crime rates<sup>89</sup>
- Higher levels of witness cooperation and community engagement<sup>90</sup>
- Integrated state lab services and shorter forensic turnaround times<sup>91</sup>
- Strong interagency coordination, particularly in rural regions<sup>92</sup>



Some states have implemented proactive strategies to bolster investigative capacity and community engagement, whereas others continue to struggle with clearance rates well below the national average.

**Figure 3: Violent Crime Case Clearance Rates in Select States, 2023**



Source: “50-State Crime Data, Trends in Violent Crime and Accountability, Solved violent crime, 2023,” Council of State Governments, last accessed May 20, 2025. <https://projects.csjusticecenter.org/tools-for-states-to-address-crime/50-state-crime-data>.

Over the last decade, the number of officers per 1,000 crimes committed in Delaware has increased by approximately 16 percent, and these additional resources may have allowed for a more appropriate allocation to solve

87. Ponomarenko. <https://www.law.georgetown.edu/american-criminal-law-review/in-print/volume-59-number-4-fall-2022/our-fragmented-approach-to-public-safety>.  
88. “50-State Crime Data: Trends in Violent Crime and Accountability,” Council of State Governments Justice Center, last accessed April 24, 2025. <https://projects.csjusticecenter.org/tools-for-states-to-address-crime/50-state-crime-data>.  
89. “Evidence-Based Crime Reduction Strategies for Small, Rural, and Tribal Agencies,” International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2021. [https://www.ruraljusticecollaborative.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/71785/EB-Crime-Reduction-Tribal-Agencies.pdf](https://www.ruraljusticecollaborative.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/71785/EB-Crime-Reduction-Tribal-Agencies.pdf).  
90. “National Case Closed Project: Summarizing the State of the Evidence on Effective Shooting Investigations,” U.S. Department of Justice, May 18, 2023. [https://nationalcaseclosed.org/toolkit/docs/14876\\_NCCP\\_Translational\\_Brief\\_State\\_of\\_Evidence\\_5-17-23.pdf](https://nationalcaseclosed.org/toolkit/docs/14876_NCCP_Translational_Brief_State_of_Evidence_5-17-23.pdf).  
91. National Institute of Justice, “Comprehensive Needs Assessment of Forensic Laboratories and Medical Examiner/Coroner Offices Points to Solutions for a System Under Stress,” U.S. Department of Justice, May 27, 2020. <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/comprehensive-needs-assessment-forensic-laboratories-and-medical-examiner-coroner>.  
92. International Association of Chiefs of Police. [https://www.ruraljusticecollaborative.org/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0028/71785/EB-Crime-Reduction-Tribal-Agencies.pdf](https://www.ruraljusticecollaborative.org/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/71785/EB-Crime-Reduction-Tribal-Agencies.pdf).

crime.<sup>93</sup> Vermont has leveraged a centralized intelligence center that is overseen by its state police to collect, analyze, and disseminate information by working in partnership with local, state, and federal entities.<sup>94</sup> South Dakota's centralized crime lab and consistent investment in detective training have also played a role in maintaining high clearance rates despite limited staffing.<sup>95</sup>

In contrast, Georgia, Ohio, Michigan, New Mexico, and Texas illustrate the solvability challenges facing larger and more decentralized law enforcement systems.<sup>96</sup> These states have clearance rates of 31, 30, 45, 29, and 33 percent, respectively (Figure 3).<sup>97</sup>

Georgia has continued to see a steady worsening of overall clearance rates, and even with violent crime rates slowly restabilizing since 2021, Atlanta, specifically, has seen an approximately 20-point decline in violent crime case clearance rates since 2010.<sup>98</sup> Similarly, Ohio was ranked as one of the worst states when it comes to solving violent crime, with certain law enforcement agencies in Cleveland, Columbus, and Delaware County having uncleared case rates exceeding 80 percent.<sup>99</sup>

Michigan has also experienced solvability challenges, especially in Ann Arbor, where clearance rates for violent crimes have fallen approximately 20 percentage points since 2015.<sup>100</sup> However, the Michigan House recently passed bipartisan legislation to implement a Public Safety and Violence Prevention Fund to better support local law enforcement agencies and community violence intervention groups around the state.<sup>101</sup>

Even with increased state government funding for law enforcement, New Mexico continues to have low case clearance rates for violent crimes.<sup>102</sup> Lawmakers have pointed to issues with drug cartels and vandalism in cities like Albuquerque and Santa Fe and have suggested that solutions beyond additional funding are needed.<sup>103</sup> Chief among such solutions is increased data sharing between law enforcement agencies to improve case resolutions.<sup>104</sup>



Larger and more decentralized law enforcement systems are increasingly facing solvability challenges.

93. "Delaware data on violent crime and arrests," Council of State Governments Justice Center, last accessed April 25, 2025. <https://projects.csgjusticecenter.org/tools-for-states-to-address-crime/50-state-crime-data/?state=DE>.
94. Department of Public Safety, "Vermont Intelligence Center," Vermont State Police, last accessed April 25, 2025. <https://vsp.vermont.gov/divisions/criminal/bci/vic>.
95. "South Dakota Forensic Lab," South Dakota Office of Attorney General, last accessed April 25, 2025. <https://atg.sd.gov/LawEnforcement/Forensics/default.aspx#gsc>.
96. "50-State Crime Data: Trends in Violent Crime and Accountability." <https://projects.csgjusticecenter.org/tools-for-states-to-address-crime/50-state-crime-data>.
97. Ibid.
98. "Gun Violence Assessment: Atlanta, Georgia," National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, June 2022. [https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Atlanta-GVA\\_061022.pdf](https://nicjr.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/Atlanta-GVA_061022.pdf)
99. Matt Rascon, "Ohio among worst states in US when it comes to solving violent crimes, according to report," WKYC3 Studios, Aug. 27, 2024. <https://www.wkyc.com/article/news/crime/ohio-among-worst-states-solving-violent-crimes-report>.
100. Emma Spring, "AAPD sees steady decline in crime clearance rates over last decade," *The Michigan Daily*, March 12, 2025. <https://www.michigandaily.com/news/public-safety/aapd-sees-steady-decline-in-crime-clearance-rates-over-last-decade>.
101. Anna Liz Nichols, "Michigan House passes bipartisan Public Safety and Violence Prevention Fund," *Michigan Advance*, April 22, 2025. <https://michiganadvance.com/briefs/michigan-house-passes-bipartisan-public-safety-and-violence-prevention-fund>.
102. "50-State Crime Data: Trends in Violent Crime and Accountability." <https://projects.csgjusticecenter.org/tools-for-states-to-address-crime/50-state-crime-data>; Dan Boyd, "Legislative report finds state's sagging crime clearance rate holds back public safety initiatives," *Albuquerque Journal*, Nov. 20, 2024. [https://www.abqjournal.com/news/article\\_f368bbc8-a76d-11ef-abab-3bbe578f9137.html](https://www.abqjournal.com/news/article_f368bbc8-a76d-11ef-abab-3bbe578f9137.html).
103. Boyd. [https://www.abqjournal.com/news/article\\_f368bbc8-a76d-11ef-abab-3bbe578f9137.html](https://www.abqjournal.com/news/article_f368bbc8-a76d-11ef-abab-3bbe578f9137.html).
104. Ibid.

Texas has its own set of unique challenges as well. Although cities like Houston and El Paso have made notable gains, clearance rates across the state continue to sit well below the national average.<sup>105</sup> Contributing factors include large geographic coverage areas, wide disparities in agency size and resourcing, and a persistent shortage of investigators. Although the state has introduced bills to strengthen law enforcement’s ability to solve violent and sexual crimes, many agencies continue to report unsustainable workloads and limited analytic support.<sup>106</sup>

## Strategies for Clearing Cases

Although clearance rates have considerably worsened on a national level, several jurisdictions—both large and small—have demonstrated that meaningful improvements in case solvability are possible with targeted investment, operational innovation, and policy alignment. These best practices offer evidence-based models for agencies seeking to strengthen investigative outcomes.<sup>107</sup>

### Cold-Case and Shooting Squads

One of the most effective strategies employed by high-performing agencies is the creation of specialized units focused exclusively on unsolved homicides and shootings.<sup>108</sup> These units are staffed by experienced detectives, forensic analysts, and sometimes prosecutors, and they are designed to follow up on leads long after a case goes cold.

After years of worsening shooting clearance rates in Philadelphia, the creation of a dedicated nonfatal shooting unit has contributed to a modest but sustained increase in clearance rates.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, in Milwaukee, the police department’s Homicide Review Commission tracks unsolved homicides in real time to allocate investigative resources and assess procedural gaps. As this approach expanded to more agencies across the state, homicide clearance rates in Wisconsin increased more than 20 percentage points.<sup>110</sup>

These initiatives are most effective when adequately supported by grant funding, cross-agency task forces, and legislative mandates that encourage multiyear tracking and follow-through.

### Gun Traces that Get Results

Linking firearms to suspects through shell casings and ballistics imaging has become a core strategy in solving both fatal and nonfatal shootings.



One of the most effective strategies employed by high-performing agencies is the creation of specialized units focused exclusively on unsolved homicides and shootings.

105. Jillian Snider, “HB 3577 and SB 2177: Strengthening Texas Law Enforcement to Solve Violent and Sexual Crimes,” R Street Institute, April 11, 2025. <https://www.rstreet.org/commentary/hb-3577-and-sb-2177-strengthening-texas-law-enforcement-to-solve-violent-and-sexual-crimes>.

106. Ibid.

107. Police Executive Research Forum, “Promising Strategies for Strengthening Homicide Investigations: Findings and Recommendations from the Bureau of Justice Assistance’s Homicide Investigations Enhancement Training and Technical Assistance Project,” U.S. Department of Justice, October 2018. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/homicideinvestigations.pdf>.

108. Ibid.

109. “100 Shooting Review Committee Report,” Philadelphia District Attorney’s Office, January 2022. [https://data.philadao.com/100\\_shooting\\_review.html](https://data.philadao.com/100_shooting_review.html).

110. Police Executive Research Forum. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/homicideinvestigations.pdf>; “Homicide review commission: Milwaukee, WI,” Results for America, Nov. 29, 2021. <https://catalog.results4america.org/case-studies/homicide-review-milwaukee>.

Agencies that have adopted the Crime Gun Intelligence Center (CGIC) model and deployed National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) technology—and paired them with timely forensic analysis—have significantly improved clearance outcomes for gun crimes.<sup>111</sup>

Departments in Denver, Milwaukee, and Chicago have implemented these types of strategies to enhance their investigative processes by focusing on immediate collection, management, and analysis of gun evidence to identify shooters, disrupt criminal activity, and prevent future violence.<sup>112</sup> While specific metrics vary, evaluations have shown that the CGIC operations in Milwaukee and Denver have led to improved coordination, faster lead generation, and increased arrests related to gun crimes.<sup>113</sup> In Chicago, focused gun training and intelligence-sharing efforts have contributed to strengthened investigative capabilities, although clearance rate gains have been uneven across districts.<sup>114</sup>

Recent case study evidence confirms that agencies prioritizing forensic coordination, including rapid gun tracing and shell casing analysis, are more likely to achieve higher long-term clearance rates.<sup>115</sup> Study results showed that high-performing agencies systematically integrated forensic, ballistic, and intelligence resources into their investigative workflows, improving lead generation and case progression.<sup>116</sup>



Recent case study evidence confirms that agencies prioritizing forensic coordination, including rapid gun tracing and shell casing analysis, are more likely to achieve higher long-term clearance rates.

## Smarter Analysts, Faster Leads

Departments that embed civilian criminal and forensic analysts within investigative units experience improvements in case resolution rates through better suspect identification, pattern recognition, and resource triage.<sup>117</sup> Crime analysts are adept at connecting otherwise unrelated incidents, prioritizing leads based on solvability factors, and flagging offender patterns.<sup>118</sup>

Agencies in Davenport, Iowa, Amarillo, Texas, and Salisbury, North Carolina, have adopted data analytics platforms that allow investigators to monitor clearance performance, manage caseloads, identify investigative hurdles, and track solvability metrics over time.<sup>119</sup> These systems have enabled departments to identify gaps earlier in investigations, allocate

111. Anthony A. Braga, “Improving Police Clearance Rates of Shootings: A Review of the Evidence,” Manhattan Institute, July 2021. <https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/improving-police-clearance-rates-shootings-review-evidence-AB.pdf>.
112. “The ‘Crime Gun Intelligence Center’ Model: Case Studies of the Denver, Milwaukee, and Chicago Approaches to Investigating Gun Crime,” Police Executive Research Forum, May 2017. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/crimegunintelligencecenter.pdf>.
113. Ibid.; Christopher Koper et al., “Evaluation of the Milwaukee Police Department’s Crime Gun Intelligence Center,” National Police Foundation, September 2019. [https://www.policinginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MPD-CGIC-Evaluation-2019\\_Final-Report.pdf](https://www.policinginstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/MPD-CGIC-Evaluation-2019_Final-Report.pdf).
114. City of Chicago, “Gun Trace Report,” Chicago Police Department, 2017. <https://www.chicago.gov/content/dam/city/depts/mayor/Press%20Room/Press%20Releases/2017/October/GTR2017.pdf>.
115. Cynthia Lum et al., “Differences Between High and Low Performing Police Agencies in Clearing Robberies, Aggravated Assaults, and Burglaries: Findings From an Eight-Agency Case Study,” *Police Quarterly* 27:2 (2024), pp. 135-157. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10986111231182728>.
116. Ibid.
117. Braga. <https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/improving-police-clearance-rates-shootings-review-evidence-AB.pdf>; Police Executive Research Forum. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/homicideinvestigations.pdf>.
118. John E. Eck and D. Kim Rossmo, “The new detective: Rethinking criminal investigations,” *Criminology & Public Policy* 18:3 (July 2019), pp. 601-622. [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334829283\\_The\\_new\\_detective\\_Rethinking\\_criminal\\_investigations](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/334829283_The_new_detective_Rethinking_criminal_investigations).
119. Jessica Herbert et al., “How Three Departments Turned Data into Change: The Chiefs’ Perspectives on Building Analytic Capacity,” *Police Chief Online*, Nov. 15, 2023. <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/how-three-departments-turned-data-into-change>.



resources more efficiently, and implement data-driven supervisory reviews to sustain case momentum.<sup>120</sup> By making investigative progress visible across command staff and operational teams, these systems reinforce accountability while improving both the speed and quality of investigative responses.<sup>121</sup>

A recent eight-agency clearance study found that departments that embedded crime analysts and forensic intelligence specialists within their investigative teams showed stronger case follow-up, faster investigative cycle times, and greater lead development compared to agencies that lacked dedicated analytic support.<sup>122</sup> Injecting this support into investigative divisions also alleviates some workload pressure from detectives, allowing sworn personnel to focus on fieldwork while civilian analysts handle complex data tasks.<sup>123</sup>

### **Keeping Victims and Witnesses Close**

Investing in victim services, whether through dedicated internal units or partnerships with advocacy organizations, has been shown to enhance witness cooperation and reduce victim attrition rates.<sup>124</sup> Such investments foster trust between law enforcement and the community, leading to more effective investigations and improved public safety outcomes.<sup>125</sup>

The Trumbull Police Department in Connecticut has expanded its victim-assistance efforts by embedding social work services directly within the department, which enables immediate support for individuals facing domestic violence.<sup>126</sup> The department reports that integrating social services into its policing model has improved victim engagement, increased service referrals, and strengthened case outcomes in incidents involving vulnerable populations.<sup>127</sup>

Similarly, the Grand Rapids Police Department as well as the Mecosta and Osceola County Sheriff's Offices in Michigan have established a Victim Services Unit (VSU) to support families coping with the loss of loved ones, violent crime victimization, and traumatic events.<sup>128</sup> The VSU bridges the gap between law enforcement and prosecutorial victim advocates, providing short-term crisis intervention, emotional support, and resource navigation. Volunteers, trained by the Michigan Sheriff's Association, serve



The Trumbull Police Department in Connecticut reports that integrating social services into its policing model has improved victim engagement, increased service referrals, and strengthened case outcomes in incidents involving vulnerable populations.

120. Ibid.

121. Ibid.; Police Executive Research Forum. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/homicideinvestigations.pdf>.

122. Lum et al., Differences Between High and Low Performing Police Agencies in Clearing Robberies, Aggravated Assaults, and Burglaries: Findings From an Eight-Agency Case Study." <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10986111231182728>.

123. Braga. <https://media4.manhattan-institute.org/sites/default/files/improving-police-clearance-rates-shootings-review-evidence-AB.pdf>; Police Executive Research Forum. <https://www.policeforum.org/assets/homicideinvestigations.pdf>.

124. "Enhancing Law Enforcement Response to Victims (ELERV)," International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2018. <https://www.theiacp.org/projects/enhancing-law-enforcement-response-to-victims-elerv>.

125. Emily Wright and Bree Boppre, "Enhancing and Professionalizing the Victim Services Field Should Be a National Priority," Urban Institute, March 2024. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Enhancing\\_and\\_Professionalizing\\_the\\_Victim\\_Services\\_Field\\_Should\\_Be\\_a\\_National\\_Priority.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Enhancing_and_Professionalizing_the_Victim_Services_Field_Should_Be_a_National_Priority.pdf).

126. Shaniece Holmes-Brown, "Trumbull police department's new social worker offers support in wake of domestic violence uptick," *CT Post*, Feb. 15, 2025. <https://www.ctpost.com/news/article/trumbull-police-department-domestic-violence-20051434.php>.

127. Ibid.

128. Cathie Crew, "Mecosta Osceola Victim Services Unit goes live," *Big Rapid News*, May 10, 2022. <https://www.bigrapidsnews.com/news/article/Mecosta-Osceola-Victim-Services-Unit-goes-live-17159247.php>; Adriana Doria, "GRPD's Victim Services Unit 'helps people navigate the system,'" *WoodTV.com*, April 4, 2025. <https://www.woodtv.com/news/grand-rapids/grpds-victim-services-unit-helps-people-navigate-the-system>.

multiple 12-hour shifts monthly and have contributed to improved follow-up engagement and increased witness participation during investigations.<sup>129</sup>

A multi-agency study showed that these types of structured, proactive victim and witness engagement strategies that included consistent follow-up communications and dedicated liaisons helped departments achieve higher clearance rates, particularly in cases requiring community cooperation.<sup>130</sup> Maintaining ongoing contact with victims, regardless of whether a case is active, demonstrates a department’s commitment to community concerns.<sup>131</sup> Consistent and sustained communication significantly enhances victim trust and cooperation, both of which are critical for successful investigations and prosecutions.<sup>132</sup> By prioritizing victim engagement from first response through case resolution, law enforcement agencies improve case solvability, reinforce procedural justice, and strengthen broader community relations.<sup>133</sup>

## Teaming Up to Solve More

Smaller agencies, in particular, benefit from forming regional investigative partnerships. In Massachusetts, state police detective units are embedded within each of the 11 district attorney offices across the state’s 14 counties, providing specialized homicide investigation support to smaller departments that lack dedicated units.<sup>134</sup> Although this model is not the standard, the state’s homicide clearance rate over the last five years is significantly higher than the national average—over 90 percent compared to the national norm of around 50 percent.<sup>135</sup>

Connecticut’s Hamden Police Department also exemplifies effective collaboration by working closely with neighboring agencies and federal partners to solve cold cases.<sup>136</sup> By combining resources and sharing information, these relationships have led to breakthroughs in long-unsolved cases.<sup>137</sup>

Such models enable resource scaling that would otherwise be unattainable at the local level, preserving investigative quality and improving timeliness.<sup>138</sup> Interagency partnerships facilitate broader intelligence-sharing, expedite suspect tracking across jurisdictions, and reduce the



In Massachusetts, state police detective units are embedded within each of the 11 district attorney offices across the state’s 14 counties, providing specialized homicide investigation support to smaller departments that lack dedicated units.

129. Cathie Crew, “Mescota, Osceola counties seek volunteers for Victim Services Unit,” *Big Rapid News*, Feb. 27, 2025. <https://www.bigrapidsnews.com/news/article/mecosta-osceola-counties-recruit-volunteers-20186963.php>; Doria. <https://www.woodtv.com/news/grand-rapids/grpds-victim-services-unit-helps-people-navigate-the-system>.
130. Lum et al., “Differences Between High and Low Performing Police Agencies in Clearing Robberies, Aggravated Assaults, and Burglaries: Findings From an Eight-Agency Case Study,” <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10986111231182728>.
131. International Association of Chiefs of Police, “Identifying and Incorporating Core Principles of Victim-Centered and Trauma-Informed Response: Practices for Law Enforcement,” U.S. Department of Justice, 2024. <https://navaa.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Training-Information.pdf>.
132. Wright and Boppre. [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Enhancing\\_and\\_Professionalizing\\_the\\_Victim\\_Services\\_Field\\_Should\\_Be\\_a\\_National\\_Priority.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/2024-03/Enhancing_and_Professionalizing_the_Victim_Services_Field_Should_Be_a_National_Priority.pdf).
133. International Association of Chiefs of Police. <https://www.theiacp.org/projects/enhancing-law-enforcement-response-to-victims-elerv>.
134. Glenn Jones, “Massachusetts has a unique system to investigate murder cases - but is it working?,” NBC Boston, Jan. 14, 2025. <https://www.nbcboston.com/investigations/mass-has-a-unique-system-to-investigate-murder-cases-but-is-it-working/3547809>.
135. Ibid.
136. Lianna Nela, “How Hamden police works with other agencies to crack cold cases and solve crime,” HQNN, Nov. 30, 2021. <https://hqnn.org/2021/11/30/how-hamden-police-works-with-other-agencies-to-crack-cold-cases-and-solve-crime>.
137. Ibid.
138. Jill Paccione-Frometa, “Strengthening public safety: How cross-agency data sharing helps identify regional crime trends,” Police1, Nov. 29, 2023. <https://www.police1.com/data-sharing-law-enforcement/strengthening-public-safety-how-cross-agency-data-sharing-helps-identify-regional-crime-trends>.

duplication of investigative efforts.<sup>139</sup> Furthermore, cross-agency data sharing has proven instrumental in identifying regional crime trends, which enables law enforcement agencies to proactively address emerging threats and allocate resources more effectively.<sup>140</sup>

## Rebuilding the Ranks

To address investigative burnout and skill gaps, law enforcement agencies are implementing training initiatives and expanding their workforces. The Houston police department has been actively recruiting qualified officer candidates to bolster its personnel needs, aiming to enhance its capacity to address violent crime concerns.<sup>141</sup> Over the past few years, the department has sought funding to hire new detectives specifically for violent crime units, citing a direct link between staffing levels and clearance rates.<sup>142</sup> They are also moving additional personnel to other investigative divisions that focus on crimes against persons to address staffing shortages.<sup>143</sup>

In New York, Governor Kathy Hochul announced nearly \$39 million in state funding for law enforcement agencies and community-based organizations in Monroe County.<sup>144</sup> This investment includes deploying up to 25 additional state police personnel to assist the City of Rochester Police Department, aiming to further reduce gun violence and crime in the area.<sup>145</sup>

California has also taken significant steps to enhance its law enforcement capabilities.<sup>146</sup> Recently, Governor Gavin Newsome announced the deployment of more than 100 new California Highway Patrol officers across the state, marking the successful completion of an intense, 26-week training program.<sup>147</sup> This initiative is part of the state's broader efforts to bolster public safety, combat organized retail crime, and improve case clearance rates.<sup>148</sup>

Research shows that agencies with appropriately staffed investigative units, particularly those that conduct staffing analyses based on case volume, achieve better clearance rates and have lower investigator burnout compared to departments that under-resource their investigative divisions.<sup>149</sup> This underscores the importance of investing in law



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139. Ibid.

140. Ibid.

141. Yilun Cheng, "Houston's record \$1 billion police budget still isn't enough to fix officer shortages, officials say," *Houston Chronicle*, May 22, 2023. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/politics/houston/article/houston-s-1b-police-budget-won-t-fill-staff-18108477.php>.

142. Ibid.

143. Matt deGrood, "HPD put investigators in each patrol division to solve crimes more effectively, acting chief says," *Houston Chronicle*, July 29, 2024. <https://www.houstonchronicle.com/news/houston-texas/crime/article/hpd-investigators-patrol-divisions-crime-solve-19597691>.

144. "Governor Hochul Highlights Nearly \$39 Million and Commits Additional State Police to Help Further Reduce Crime in Rochester and Monroe County," New York State, Sept. 9, 2024. <https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-hochul-highlights-nearly-39-million-and-commits-additional-state-police-help-further>.

145. Ibid.

146. "California deploys 125 new CHP officers across the state," Governor Gavin Newsom, March 21, 2025. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/2025/03/21/california-deploys-125-new-chp-officers-across-the-state>.

147. "125 New California Highway Patrol Officers Sworn In, Including Officer Assigned to Barstow," Victor Valley News Group, March 21, 2025. <https://www.vvng.com/125-new-california-highway-patrol-officers-sworn-in-including-officer-assigned-to-barstow>.

148. "Real Public Safety: A Plan to Fight and Prevent Crime in California," Governor Gavin Newsom, 2021. <https://www.gov.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/Real-Public-Safety-Plan-12.17.21.pdf>.

149. Lum et al., "Differences Between High and Low Performing Police Agencies in Clearing Robberies, Aggravated Assaults, and Burglaries: Findings From an Eight-Agency Case Study," <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1098611231182728>.

enforcement training and personnel expansion to improve investigative outcomes and public safety.

While the strategies described above showcase promising practices, not all agencies operate under the same conditions. **Table 1** shows a recent comparative analysis of high- and low-performing departments, which revealed key organizational, leadership, and resource differences that influence solvability. These contrasts underscore the structural modifications and support systems necessary to improve clearance rates across diverse agency types.

**Table 1: Comparisons of Case Clearances: High-Performing vs. Low-Performing Agencies**

	High-Performing	Low-Performing
<b>Organizational Structure</b>	Specialized investigative units	Generalist model
<b>Leadership</b>	Active support from leaders	Limited engagement of leaders
<b>Resources</b>	Experienced and well-trained personnel	High caseload for detectives
<b>Investigative Practices</b>	Systematic approaches to investigations	Ad hoc methods
<b>Crime Analysts</b>	In-house analytical capacity	No crime analysts
<b>Forensic Assistance</b>	Forensics and digital evidence support	Limited forensic support and partnerships

Source: Cynthia Lum et al., “Differences Between High and Low Performing Police Agencies in Clearing Robberies, Aggravated Assaults, and Burglaries: Findings from an Eight-Agency Case Study,” *Police Quarterly* 27:2 (2024), pp. 135-157. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/10986111231182728>.

## Key Recommendations

To reverse the nationwide decline in clearance rates and restore investigative solvability as a core measure of public safety performance, law enforcement agencies should focus on the following five core strategies informed by evidence-based best practices.

**Expand dedicated investigative units** by funding cold-case teams, fatal/nonfatal shooting teams, gun crime intelligence units, and embedded civilian crime and forensic analysts. Agencies should also adopt solvability benchmarks, standardize follow-up protocols, and report clearance rates as part of competitive grant eligibility.



**Support forensic turnaround-time improvements and technology upgrades** by making investments to reduce DNA, digital evidence, and ballistic backlogs; expanding regional forensic lab capacity (especially for under-resourced jurisdictions); and enhancing lab-to-detective communication (e.g., real-time access to forensic results).





**Institutionalize regional task forces and data-sharing** to support cross-jurisdictional investigation and real-time coordination. This should include the development of shared solvability dashboards and case-tracking platforms to improve transparency and reduce investigative fragmentation.



**Strengthen victim and witness support services** by improving trauma-informed interview practices, expanding relocation or intimidation-mitigation resources, and maintaining optimal victim contact throughout investigations.



**Fund workforce expansion and specialized training** to address burnout and resource shortfalls. Agencies should hire more detectives (especially for violent crime units), deploy supplemental investigative personnel to overwhelmed departments, and integrate investigative training into academy training and patrol cross-training.



## Conclusion

Clearance rates are more than numbers—they are a measure of whether justice is real or merely promised. When crimes go unsolved, it sends a dangerous message that accountability is optional, that victims are forgotten, and that violence is tolerated; but that should not be our reality. Across the country, some agencies are bucking the trend through smart staffing, better technology, victim-centered practices, and regional collaborations. At both the federal and state levels, policymakers are recognizing that clearance rates deserve legislative attention, not just in response to media scrutiny but also as part of a long-term strategy to rebuild law enforcement effectiveness and strengthen communities.

The evidence is clear: Low clearance rates embolden offenders, traumatize victims, and erode public confidence. The evidence is also promising and shows that sweeping overhauls or ideological crusades are not necessary to improve clearance rates. Doing so requires steady investment in the people, tools, and systems that help law enforcement solve cases. It means giving detectives time to investigate, victims reason to believe, and communities faith that justice will follow a crime—not simply vanish in its aftermath. The path to restoring solvability is not complicated. We must invest in policing fundamentals, hold the line of public safety, and prove that when crimes are committed, justice will answer—not someday, but now.



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## About the Author

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## Appendix A: Notable Federal Legislation Aimed at Increasing Case Clearance Rates, 2021 to 2025

In addition to departmental changes, federal legislation plays an important role in strengthening law enforcement’s capacity to solve violent crime. Over the past several years, Congress has introduced and advanced several bills aimed at increasing clearance rates through funding, training, forensic modernization, and cold case resolution. This table provides a summary of notable federal efforts introduced or enacted from 2021 to 2025 that seek to improve solvability through targeted investments and policy change.

Bill #	Title	Year Introduced	Summary	Status	Companion/Related Bills
<a href="#">H.R. 5768</a>	VICTIM Act of 2022	2021	Authorizes \$100 million annually through 2032 to fund grants for law enforcement agencies to improve clearance rates for homicides, shootings, and other violent crimes through enhanced staffing, investigative training, forensic technology, and victim services	Passed House	<a href="#">H.R. 1377</a> <a href="#">S. 4402</a>
<a href="#">H.R. 3359</a>	Homicide Victims' Families' Rights Act of 2021	2021	Allows cold case murder reviews upon request; aims to reduce backlog and improve clearance	Became law	<a href="#">S. 4549</a>
<a href="#">H.R. 6688</a>	Cold Case Modernization Act	2023	Expands eligibility for federal forensic grants to allow the identification of unidentified human remains regardless of homicide determination, supporting modern cold-case resolution	Introduced	N/A
<a href="#">H.R. 5721</a>	Rape Kit Backlog Progress Act of 2023	2023	Requires states to inventory, track, and report the status of sexual assault kits to qualify for DOJ funding, increasing transparency and supporting timely investigative and prosecutorial action	Introduced	N/A
<a href="#">H.R. 7308</a>	VICTIM Act of 2024	2024	Updated version of VICTIM Act of 2022 with expanded eligibility and oversight mechanisms; provides funding for detective hiring, cold-case units, digital tools, and victim support	Introduced	<a href="#">S. 3763</a>
<a href="#">S. 1079</a>	Restoring Law and Order Act of 2025	2025	Establishes a \$500 million DOJ-administered grant program to support law enforcement hiring, violent crime deterrence, forensic backlog reduction, and anti-trafficking initiatives through redirected federal funds	Introduced	N/A
<a href="#">H.R. 1353</a>	Justice for Murder Victims Act	2025	Removes any time limitation between a criminal act and the victim’s eventual death in federal homicide prosecutions, supporting cold-case viability and long-term justice outcomes	Introduced	<a href="#">S. 960</a>
<a href="#">H.R. 1010</a>	BADGES for Native Communities Act	2025	Requires reporting on missing/murdered Indigenous persons; aims to improve data and coordination	Introduced	<a href="#">S. 390</a>