

Leadership Agenda Needed to Address Violence

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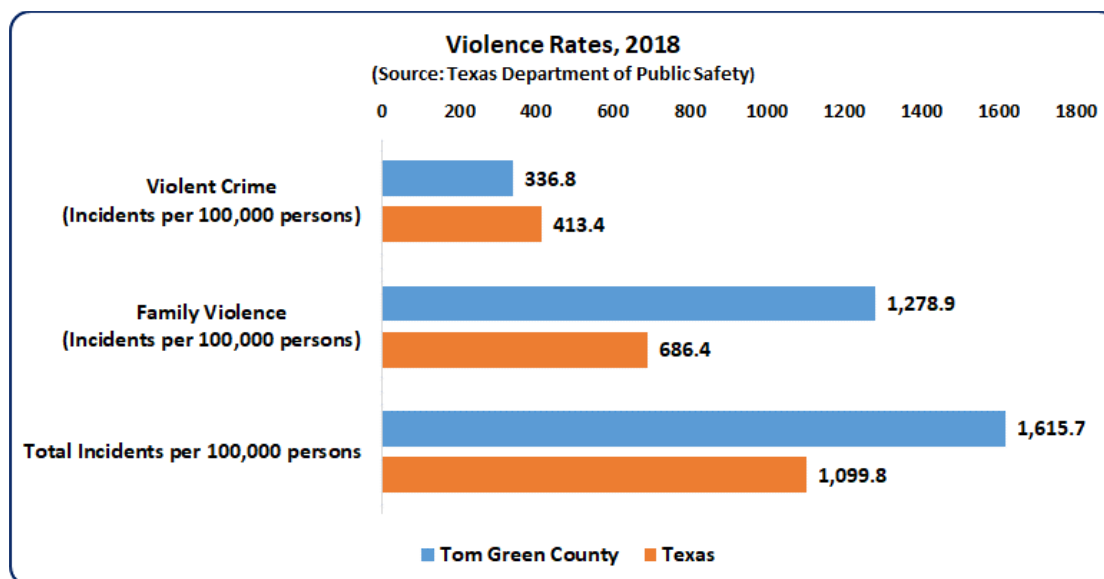
Texas is among the 20 most violent places in the country according to the FBI's crime index. In its most recent statistics for 2018, the FBI reported nearly 118,000 violent crimes known to police officials in the state. This translates to 410.9 incidents per 100,000 Texans. The Texas Department of Public Safety (TDPS) tabs the rate slightly higher at 413.4 per 100,000. Nevertheless, either number places Texas as the 17th most violent U.S. state.

According to TDPS calculations, Tom Green County's rate of 336.8 violent crimes per 100,000 in 2018 was lower than both the statewide level and the national rate of 380.6. Our local fortunes change, however, when we widen the lens to include other types of violence.

The wider lens

The FBI's new crime database, the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS), yields one wider lens view showing the local community's higher level of violence. The FBI's traditional crime index, the one used for many years to see if violence is high or low, up or down, is based on just four crimes: murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault. The new NIBRS data is being developed by the FBI to provide a more comprehensive view of crime and violence in America.

One shortcoming of NIBRS is that it does not cover the entire population of the state or nation at its current stage of development. In fact, 2018 NIBRS data includes only about 42% of 28.7 million Texans and 36% of 327.2 million Americans. Still, the available information provides insight about local violence.



Beyond the four crimes (murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault) in the traditional FBI violent crime index, NIBRS data records a full range of violent crimes against persons that encompass all types of assaults, homicides, human trafficking, kidnapping, abduction, and sex offenses. San Angelo Police reported 2,765 crimes against persons in 2018. Serving a city of 101,084 people, that number computes a rate of 2,735 per 100,000. This wider lens on violence

not only indicates a much higher level of local violence compared to the traditional FBI crime index, it also suggests that San Angelo's violence problem may be twice the level of the 1,355 rate of crime against persons in both Texas and the U.S.

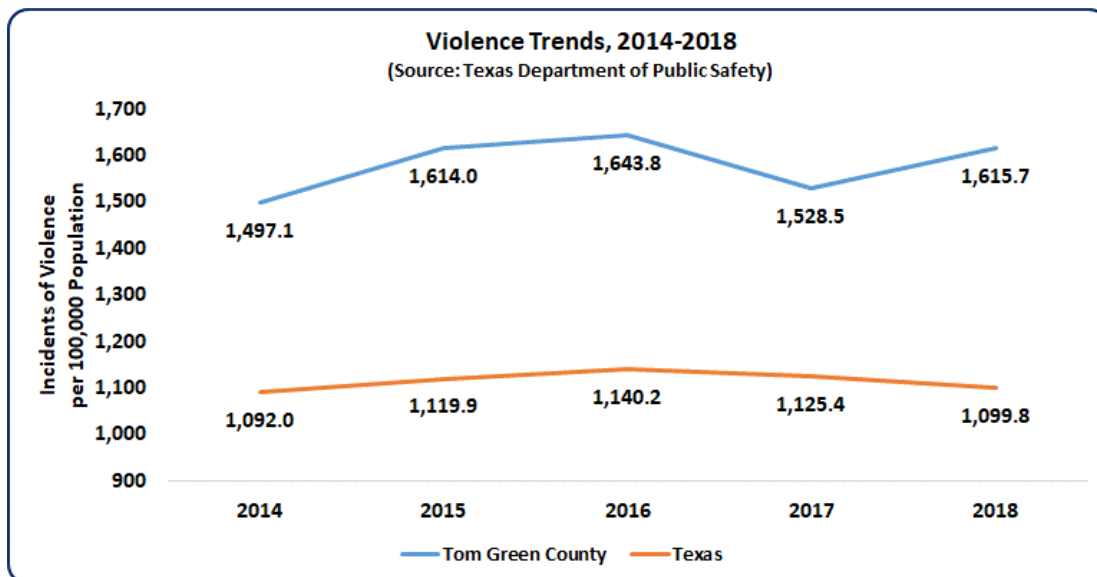
Available data from TDPS has the advantage of providing a wider lens similar to NIBRS while also covering crime incidents among virtually the entire population of Texas. As previously noted, TDPS data indicates a lower local violent crime rate (336.8/100,000) than the state (380.6/100,000) using only the traditional FBI four-crime tracking of murder, rape, robbery, and aggravated assault.

Like NIBRS, however, the state's wider lens data reveals a higher level of violence in San Angelo and Tom Green County than in Texas overall. The wider lens includes family violence comprising all types of assault, homicide, kidnapping, abduction, and sex offenses that take place between members of the same household. In 2018, more than 1,500 domestic events in Tom Green County converted to family violence rate of 1,278.9 incidents per 100,000 population.

The local rate of domestic or family violence was 86% higher than the overall Texas level of 686.4 incidents per 100,000 people. Altogether, 1,919 FBI index violent crimes and family violence incidents racked the county in 2018. This yielded a total rate of 1,615.7 violent events per 100,000 county residents. It was 47% higher than the total statewide rate of 1,099.8 per 100,000 Texans.

The violence trend

The ability to analyze trends of violence is another advantage of using TDPS data. Over three years between 2014 and 2016, the combined rate of violent crime and family violence in Tom Green County soared by 9.7% from 1,497.1 to 1,643.8 incidents per 100,000 residents. The lower rate for Texas also grew by 4.4% for 1,092.0 to 1,140.2 per 100,000 Texans.



As both rates turned downward after 2016, the fall was especially dramatic in the local community as the rate of violent crime and family violence dropped by 7.0% to 1,528.5 per 100,000 for 2017. After that, however, it boomeranged back by to the 2018 rate of 1,615.7 for 2018. Meantime, the statewide rate of violent crime and domestic violence continued on a

downward path. Overall, violence in San Angelo and Tom Green County spiked by 7.9% between 2014 and 2018. The increase for Texas was less than 1.0% over the same period.

Our culture of violence

Lieutenant Governor Dan Patrick stepped out on a Sunday morning talk show in May of 2018, just two days after 10 students and teachers were gunned down in the Santa Fe Texas school shooting. It was intriguing that Patrick's rhetoric connected violence to a culture that devalues life. "We have devalued life," Patrick claimed, "whether it's through abortion, whether it's the breakup of families, through violent movies, and particularly violent video games, which now outsell movies and music."

It is a good thing that Patrick admits a culture of violence is afoot. However, the refusal of leaders like Patrick to recognize gun control as a topic for violence prevention reveals that their talk of a culture of violence is little more than divisive fear mongering. Indeed, Patrick immediately dismissed the topic in his TV appearance by insisting, "'We cannot sit back and say it's the gun . . . we take the guns out of society -- if you or anyone else thinks that makes us safer, then . . . I'm sad to say that you're mistaken."

Today, under his leadership of the Texas Senate, a Select Committee is exploring the personal, family, and community impacts of mass shootings. Patrick's influence on the committee is unmistakable. The role of digital media and dark web networks, research linking violent video games to mass shooting, and examination of the fraying culture dominate the agenda. Examination of whether stranger-to-stranger gun sales should be subject to background checks is the only item that even hints at a new gun control measure for Texas.

With little daylight between them, current state and national leaders dominating policymaking for violence prevention want us to believe our problems are rooted in a small, mentally unstable, population that grows up obsessed with violent video games in broken homes and comes to fraternize in the darkest corners of social media and the internet to radicalize and glorify senseless acts of violence. The cherry picking used to limit meaningful exploration of policy options is deeply frustrating and obstructive.

A leadership agenda

State and national leaders seriously interested in prevention should be clamoring for comprehensive studies on the pervasive violence patterns in our communities and society. On gun violence alone, they should demand knowing why the latest Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) statistics show that nearly 40,000 Americans died in firearm incidents. They should also demand answers on why more than 3,500 of the dead were Texans, and why Texans died in gun violence more often than residents of any other state.

They should see pervasive patterns to explore in people's use of guns to kill themselves in most suicides, and to kill their intimate partners and children in the majority of fatal domestic violence episodes. They should be alarmed by recent CDC data showing more children and teens being killed in gun violence than in motor vehicle crashes. They should be yelling-out-loud for explanations from President Trump on why, just two months after Congress passed a bill committing \$25 million to gun violence research, his proposed budget for the government cuts all funding for that purpose.

One of the most alarming recent news items to serious state and national violence prevention leaders should be a Washington Post study reporting that Trump's racist, xenophobic, and

inflammatory language has contaminated schools across America where bullies now target children reflecting the president's list of enemy groups by mimicking his insults and cruelty toward them.

Political analysts say that some Trump supporters do not like the president's lies and abusive behavior, but they love the economic outcomes they are seeing. That is not a good enough reason from a violence prevention perspective. We are in for a rough and tumble election this year. Given the signal from Republican senators in the recent impeachment trial that they will not check Trump's behavior in any way, it could be a violent election.

The truth is that demagogues like Dan Patrick are not much help for prevention of violence in communities. Leaders like Donald Trump who preach violence, beget violence.