



**Texas Center for
Justice & Equity**
SOLUTIONS FOR SAFE, HEALTHY,
JUST COMMUNITIES

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**Analysis of Austin-Area Drug Possession Arrest Data Shows Place-Based Policing
Is Tied to Social Vulnerability**

Data Visualization Continues Report Series Highlighting Harmful, Ineffective Drug War in Travis County

(AUSTIN, TX) – Today, the Texas Center for Justice and Equity (TCJE) released a data visualization on drug possession arrests in Travis County. The data story, created with January Advisors, maps 2,900 cases for possession of a controlled substance (POCS) of less than one gram, a state jail felony. The project is called “Digging Deeper into Drug Enforcement Data: Over-policing and the impact on community resiliency” and is available online [here](#). The release will be accompanied by a [webinar](#) at 6:00pm on Monday, 10/18.

In 2018, TCJE (then the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition) partnered with Grassroots Leadership, Texas Harm Reduction Alliance, and the Civil Rights Clinic at the University of Texas School of Law to study rising drug possession arrests in Travis County. The groups released [key findings](#) and a [report](#) on the dataset, in addition to hosting a [forum](#) for District Attorney candidates. The recommendations from this work contributed to [policy changes](#), including fewer arrests and prosecutions for low-level drug possession in Travis County.

After the conclusion of that project, the TCJE team decided to dig deeper into the data to explore the impact of drug enforcement on the resiliency of communities impacted by high arrest levels. By overlaying arrest location data with Travis County neighborhood boundaries, they found that most POCS arrests were clustered in certain neighborhoods, that the vast majority of people arrested lived outside of those neighborhoods, and that those same areas were heavily policed, leading to more arrests for low-level criminalized behaviors for residents. Key data is available below.

“It’s clear that police saturation does not make us safer; in fact, communities that are overpoliced also tend to face other social vulnerability factors,” said **Sarah Reyes, TCJE Policy Analyst**. “We found that in ‘hot spots’ where police are focused, residents often lack economic opportunity and social supports, which makes it more likely they’ll enter the system and more difficult for them to escape the cycle of criminalization and poverty. The people living in a certain neighborhood may not be the ones buying drugs, but they will face the consequences of the war on drugs.”

Higher police presence corresponds to higher numbers of arrests for minor offenses, degrades economic resiliency, and puts more people at risk of violence while causing mistrust. Instead of focusing police presence in already undeserved neighborhoods, the advocates recommend solutions that address the root causes of crime so that drug markets will ultimately be eliminated instead of simply moved. Efforts to increase economic resilience will be most effective in reducing crime.

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In addition to the release of the data story, TCJE will host a webinar featuring advocates from Texas Harm Reduction Alliance and Grassroots Leadership, as well as the data story's creator from January Advisors. The webinar will address drug war policing in Travis County and walk participants through the new tool. This event is free to members of the public and press; [register here](#).

Key data:

- More than 50% of POCS arrests occurred in just 15 of 100 Travis County neighborhoods. Furthermore, 90% of people arrested for POCS were arrested outside of their home neighborhood.
- The top 25% of neighborhoods with the most POCS arrests had fewer jobs, lower education levels, and more than twice as many residents lacking health insurance. On average, 62% of households in the top arresting neighborhoods are renters compared with just 36% in neighborhoods with the fewest POCS arrests.
- In the 'hot spots' neighborhoods where police are focused and most POCS arrests take place, there are two to eight times as many arrests for low-level offenses like criminal trespass, shoplifting, DWI, misdemeanor possession of marijuana, and possession of drug paraphernalia.

Read the full data story: "[Digging Deeper into Drug Enforcement Data](#)."

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The Texas Center for Justice and Equity (formerly the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition) advances solutions and builds coalitions to end mass incarceration and foster safer Texas communities.