

# *The National Registry* *of* **EXONERATIONS**

## **THE FIRST 1,600 EXONERATIONS**

### **1. Background**

The [National Registry of Exonerations](#) is a project of the University of Michigan Law School. It was launched in May 2012. At that time the Registry listed 891 cases.

Three years later, the Registry includes more than 1,600 exonerations, an increase of more than 700, or about 80%.

The Registry changes constantly. We add exonerations every week. We have removed a few cases after learning that they do not in fact meet our criteria. And we constantly update summaries of cases that are already listed to add missing data and correct errors, based on our own research and on information from others.

We also prepare periodic reports on the cases in the Registry. Given the nature of our work, each such report is a snapshot of the data on a particular date. For current information on any case and to view the most recent cases, patterns and summaries, please consult the [Registry website](#).

The first was released when the Registry was launched in May 2012: [Exonerations in the United States, 1989-2012](#) (the *Exoneration Report*). It describes the 873 exonerations that we had identified and coded by March 1, 2012. That report also includes a description of 12 “group exonerations” – sets of cases in which corrupt police officers systematically framed innocent defendants for non-existent crimes, mostly possession of illegal drugs or guns. Those group exonerations included at least 1,100 additional exonerated criminal defendants who are not listed in the Registry itself.

This is our fourth report summarizing all of the cases in the Registry at a particular point in time. In April 2013 we released a [2012 Update](#) that described the status of the Registry as of the end of 2012; in February 2014 we released [Exonerations in 2013](#) which included a description of the status of the Registry as of the end of 2013.<sup>1</sup> This report fills the same function for the first 1,600 exonerations in the Registry, those posted as of May 18, 2015. We plan to continue to issue these reports in years to come.

---

<sup>1</sup> In January 2015 we released a report entitled [Exonerations in 2014](#), but it was limited to a description of known exonerations that occurred in calendar year 2014.

## 2. The First 1,600 Exonerations in the Registry

### A. Who's Been Exonerated, and by What Process

Of the 1,600 individual exonerations from January 1989 through May 18, 2015:

- 91% were men (1,461/1,600) and 9% were women (147/1,600).<sup>2</sup>
- By race:
  - 47% were black (750/1,600),
  - 40% were white (641/1,600),
  - 11% were Hispanic (181/1,600), and
  - 2% were Native American, Asian or Other (28/1,600).
- 13% pled guilty (209/1,600) and the rest were convicted at trial, 79% by juries (1,262/1,600) and 7% by judges (114/1,600). In 1% (15/1,600), we don't know whether the trial conviction was by a jury or judge.
- 25% were cleared at least in part with the help of DNA evidence (398/1,600).
- 75% were cleared without DNA evidence (1,202/1,600).
- Almost all had been in prison for years; most for more than 7 years.
- As a group, the defendants have spent more than 14,750 years in prison for crimes for which they should not have been convicted – an average of 9 years and 3 months each.<sup>3</sup>

As a procedural matter, these exonerations occurred in several ways. (Some defendants were exonerated more than once, in different ways – for example by a dismissal in 1998, followed by a pardon in 2003.):

**Pardons:** In 112 cases, governors (or in some states, other government officers or bodies) issued pardons based on evidence of the defendants' innocence, including 43 cases of defendants whose charges had previously been dismissed, and three who had been acquitted on retrial by a jury or a judge.<sup>4</sup>

**Dismissals:** In 1,240 cases, criminal charges were dismissed by courts, generally on motion by the prosecution, after new evidence of innocence emerged (this is not counting dismissals in which the defendant was later pardoned or received a certificate of innocence).

---

<sup>2</sup> Because of this lopsided distribution, we generally refer to exonerated defendants using male pronouns.

<sup>3</sup> This is a conservative estimate of the direct consequences of these wrongful convictions. We have not counted time spent in custody before conviction. Nor have we included time spent on probation or parole, or time on bail or other forms of supervised release pending trial, retrial, or dismissal, even though all of these conditions involve restrictions on liberty – some mild, some onerous.

<sup>4</sup> Under the Texas Wrongful Imprisonment Act (the “Tim Cole Act”), for example, an exonerated defendant may need a pardon even after a dismissal or an acquittal in order to be eligible for compensation for wrongful incarceration. *See* TEX. CIV. PRAC. & REM. CODE ANN. § 103.001 (2011).

**Acquittals:** In 201 cases, the defendants whose convictions were vacated on review were acquitted on retrial on the basis of newly presented evidence of innocence, mostly by juries (181 cases), occasionally by judges (20 cases).

**Certificates of Innocence:** In a small but growing number of cases – 49 to date – courts have issued “certificates of innocence,” “declarations of wrongful imprisonment,” or similar judgments of innocence.<sup>5</sup> (In one case, the defendant also received an executive pardon.)

**Posthumous Exonerations:** Thirteen defendants received posthumous exonerations; three of them also received judicial declarations of innocence, and one of those three received an executive pardon as well.

Overall, 32% of known exonerations in the United States since 1989 included **cooperation by police or prosecutors** or both (515/1,600). As we have mentioned in previous reports, the number and proportion of such cases appears to be increasing over time.<sup>6</sup>

## B. Exonerations by Crime

The great majority of known exonerations in the first 1,600 exonerations are homicide cases—44% (708/1,600)—and sexual assault cases—28% (449/1,600) (including both child sex abuse and adult sexual assaults). But the proportion of exonerations in cases that do not involve homicide, rape or child sex abuse continues to climb as we learn about more exonerations. It was 4% in the most comprehensive national report on exonerations published before the advent of the Registry,<sup>7</sup> in 2005; 17% in the Exoneration Report; and 28% in this report. See Table 1 for a complete breakdown of exonerations by crime.

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., 735 ILL. COMP. STAT. 5/2-702 (2012) (detailing Illinois’s procedure for filing a petition for a certificate of innocence).

<sup>6</sup> The numbers of exonerations by year and official cooperation are tabulated below:

	Exonerations with Prosecutor or Police Cooperation (PPC) Over Time																											
	'89	'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	TOTAL
PPC cases	8	7	8	10	8	7	11	9	7	7	7	20	20	21	17	15	18	19	22	26	25	21	14	52	36	68	33	516
All Cases	22	27	38	35	34	31	36	46	46	33	50	73	86	57	77	57	60	63	70	63	89	71	70	92	91	128	55	1,600
% PPC	36%	26%	21%	29%	24%	23%	31%	20%	15%	21%	14%	27%	23%	37%	22%	26%	30%	30%	31%	41%	28%	30%	20%	57%	40%	53%	60%	32%

<sup>7</sup> Samuel R. Gross et al., *Exonerations in the United States, 1989 Through 2003*, 95 J. CRIM. L. & CRIMINOLOGY 523 at 529 Table 1 (2005).

**Table 1: Exonerations by Crime, 1989 – 2015**

**CRIME**

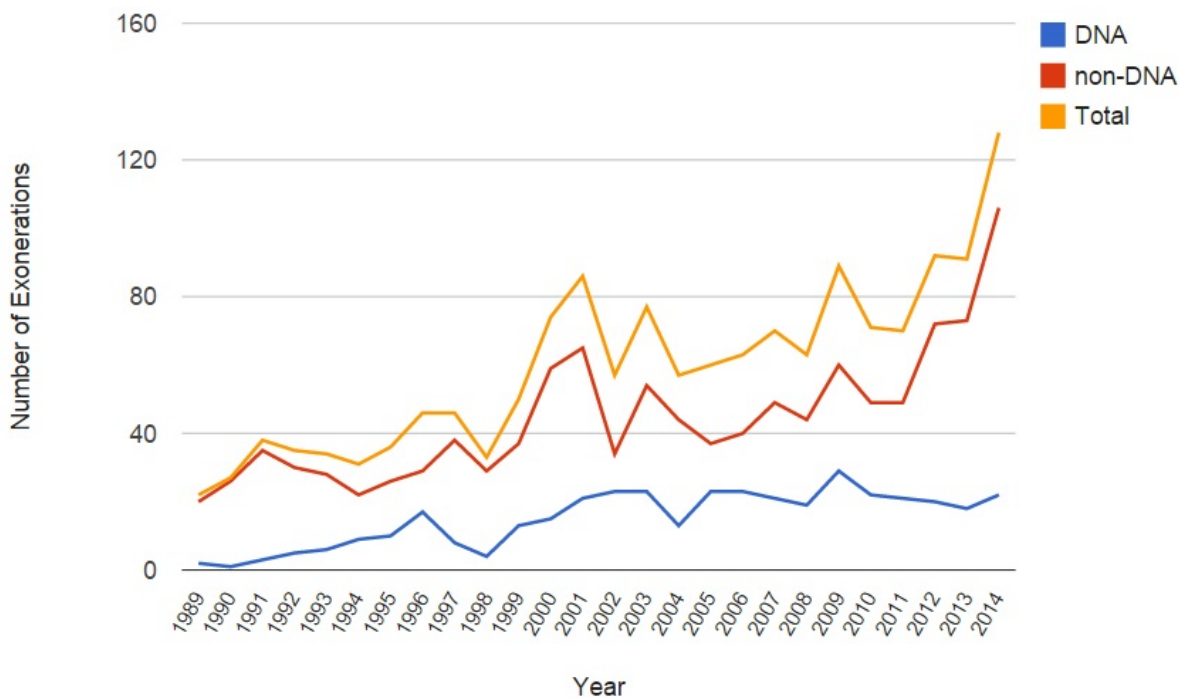
<b>Homicide</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>(709)</b>
<b>Murder</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>(675)</b>
Death sentences	7%	(111)
Other murder convictions	35%	(564)
<b>Manslaughter</b>	<b>2%</b>	<b>(34)</b>
<b>Sexual Assaults</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>(449)</b>
Sexual assault on an adult	17%	(272)
Child sex abuse	11%	(177)
<b>Other Crimes of Violence</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>(214)</b>
Robbery	6%	(92)
Attempted murder	2%	(32)
Assault	3%	(51)
Arson	0.8%	(13)
Kidnapping	0.6%	(10)
Child & Dependent Adult Abuse	0.4%	(7)
<i>Other Violent Felonies</i>	0.6%	(9)
<b>Non-Violent Crimes</b>	<b>14%</b>	<b>(228)</b>
Drug crimes	8%	(126)
Tax/Fraud/Bribery & Corruption	2%	(27)
Gun Possession	0.6%	(10)
Theft/Stolen Property	0.7%	(11)
Solicitation/Conspiracy	0.8%	(13)
Sex Offender Registration	0.4%	(7)
Burglary/Unlawful Entry	0.5%	(8)
Immigration	0.3%	(4)
<i>Miscellaneous</i>	0.1%	(22)
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>(1,600)</b>

### C. Exonerations over Time

There was a rapid increase in the annual total of known exonerations at the beginning of the period we cover, from 22 in 1989 to 73 in 2000. After that we see an uneven plateau through 2011, with annual totals from 57 through 86, followed by three record high years since 2012, including a sharp spike up to 128 in 2014. Since 1989, known exonerations have averaged 61 a year. From 2000 through 2014 the annual total has averaged 76.

Since 2005, the number of DNA exonerations has been essentially flat, averaging 22 a year, while the number of non-DNA exonerations has nearly tripled and averages 58 a year. Overall, the proportion of exonerations based on DNA has dropped from 37% of those known on March 1, 2012 to 25% of the 1,600 exonerations in the Registry.<sup>8</sup> See Figure 1.

**Figure 1: Number of DNA and Non-DNA Exonerations by Year**



<sup>8</sup> The actual numbers of exonerations by year and basis are tabulated below:

BASIS	'89	'90	'91	'92	'93	'94	'95	'96	'97	'98	'99	'00	'01	'02	'03	'04	'05	'06	'07	'08	'09	'10	'11	'12	'13	'14	'15	TOTAL	
DNA	2	1	3	5	6	9	10	17	8	4	13	15	21	23	23	13	23	23	21	19	29	22	21	20	18	22	7	<b>398</b>	<b>25%</b>
Other	20	26	35	30	28	22	26	29	38	29	37	58	65	34	54	44	37	40	49	44	60	49	49	72	73	106	48	<b>1,202</b>	<b>75%</b>
TOTAL	22	27	38	35	34	31	36	46	46	33	50	73	86	57	77	57	60	63	70	63	89	71	70	92	91	128	55	<b>1,600</b>	<b>100%</b>

## D. DNA and Non-DNA Cases, and Time to Exoneration

DNA is present in 69% of sexual assault exoneration with adult victims. Consequently, nearly half of all DNA exoneration – 47% – are adult sexual assault cases (189/398). As we have noted previously, the proportion of DNA cases has dropped since March 2012 as we continue to identify other less well known exoneration. This drop has occurred across all categories of crime, but has been particularly sharp for sexual assaults on adults, where the proportion of exoneration with DNA evidence dropped from 84% to 69%. See Table 2.<sup>9</sup> One important reason is that in recent years DNA testing in rape cases is routinely done *before* trial. As a result, 78% of rape exonerees *convicted before 2000* were *exonerated by DNA* evidence (180/232), but 80% of rape exonerees *convicted after 2000* were *exonerated without DNA* (32/40).

**Table 2: Proportion of Exonerations Based on DNA, by Category of Crime**

<b>Homicide</b>	<b>23%</b> (163/709)
<b>All Sexual Assaults</b>	<b>48%</b> (216/449)
Sexual Assault on an adult	69% (189/272)
Child sex abuse	15% (26/177)
<b>Other Crimes of Violence</b>	<b>9%</b> (19/214)
<b>Drug and Property Crimes</b>	<b>0%</b> (1/228)
<b>ALL CASES</b>	<b>25%</b> (398/1,600)

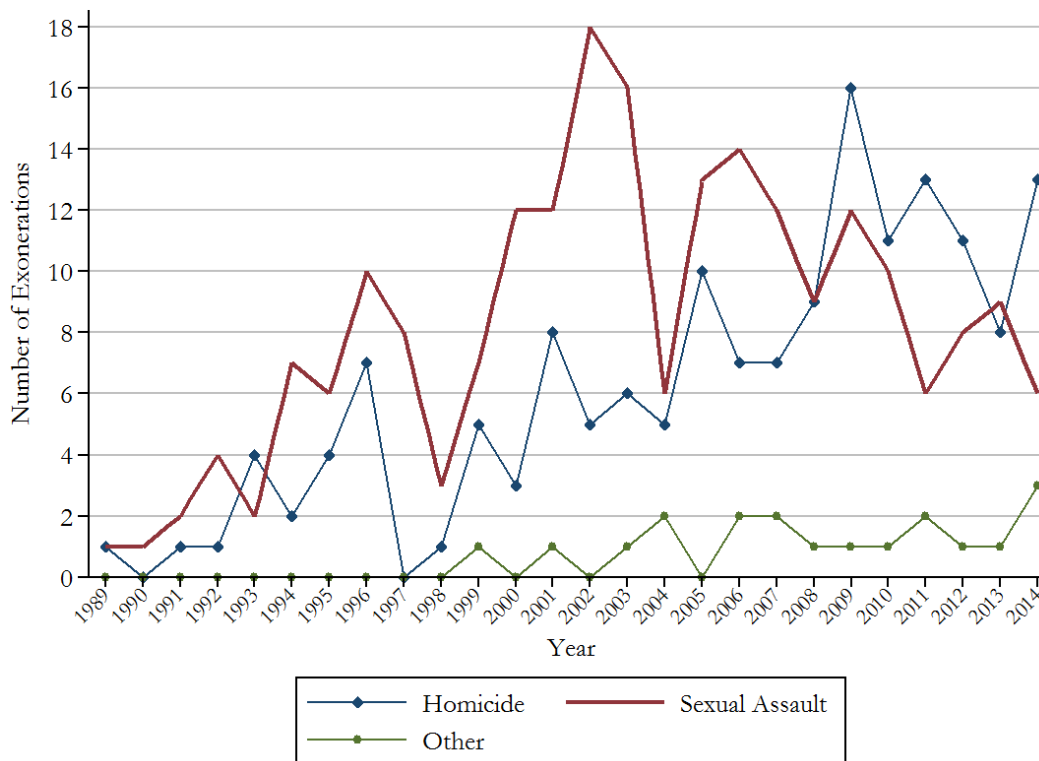
For exoneration in the past few years, the number of DNA exoneration in murder cases has exceeded the number in rape cases. From 1989 through 2007, 65% of DNA exoneration were rape cases (155/240); since 2008, that proportion has dropped to 38% (61/158). See Figure 2.

<sup>9</sup> For comparison, here is the same table as it appeared in the Exoneration Report that was released in May 2012:

**Proportion of Exonerations Based on DNA, by Category of Crime**

<b>Homicide</b>	<b>30%</b> (123/416)
<b>All Sexual Assaults</b>	<b>63%</b> (193/305)
Sexual Assault on an adult	84% (170/203)
Child sex abuse	23% (23/102)
<b>Other Crimes of Violence</b>	<b>10%</b> (9/94)
<b>Drug and Property Crimes</b>	<b>0%</b> (0/58)
<b>ALL CASES</b>	<b>37%</b> (325/873)

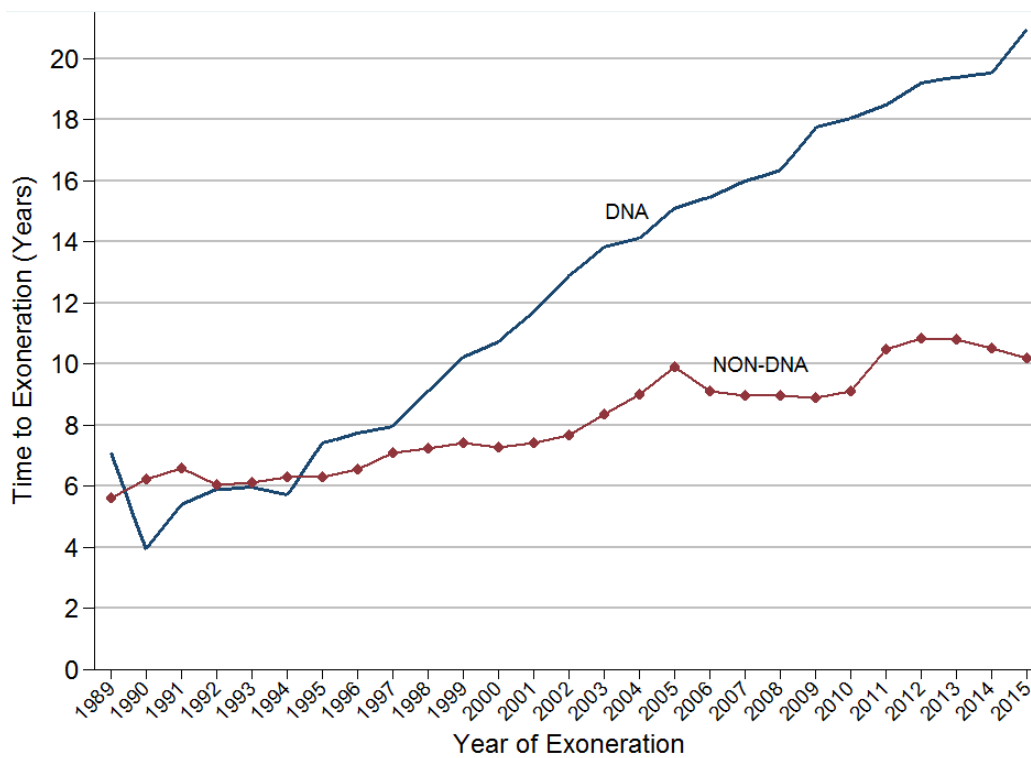
**Figure 2: DNA Exonerations by Crime, Over Time**



The exonerations in the Registry are classified by the most serious crime for which the defendant was convicted and later exonerated. By this measure, rape standing alone has not been the most common crime for DNA exonerations over the past several years. But rape remains as an element in almost two thirds of DNA exonerations. In 44% of the DNA *homicide* exonerations in our data (72/162), the defendant was also convicted of a sexual assault, and in another 19% there was a rape for which the defendant was not convicted, usually because it was not charged (30/162). In other words, DNA exonerations are increasingly about rape-murder rather than rape alone.

The main reason for this shift is probably the aging pool of potential DNA exonerations. The average time from conviction to exoneration by DNA has increased from 6 years in 1993 to more than 20 years in 2015. See Figure 3. This should be no surprise. Nowadays, 26 years after the first DNA exonerations, probative DNA evidence in a major felony prosecution is generally tested *before* trial. This has become increasingly true over the past 20 years. As a result, DNA exonerations are increasingly dominated by defendants who were convicted 20 to 30 years ago or longer. There are no doubt many innocent rape defendants who were convicted 20 years ago or longer, but unless they were convicted of murder as well as rape, almost all were released from prison years or decades ago. Murder defendants are far more likely to remain in prison decades after conviction and they and their supporters are more likely to continue to press for their release.

**Figure 3: Time to Exoneration by Factual Basis (Five-Year Moving Average<sup>10</sup>)**



DNA has been used in a handful of robbery and attempted murder exoneration. In the past several years, a lot of attention has focused on the potential of DNA as an investigative tool for property crimes, from burglary to auto theft. While DNA may be gaining a foothold in pretrial investigations of such cases, it seems to have had little impact on reinvestigating property crimes after conviction, at least so far.

### **E. Exonerations by Race and Sex**

Black defendants continue to be over-represented among exonerees, particularly in sexual assault, robbery and drug cases. (The proportion of black exonerees is also high in attempted murder cases(72%), but there are only 32 such cases in the data.) Overall, the proportion of black exonerees has dropped a bit from the Exoneration Report, from 50% to 47%, with corresponding drops across most crime categories. See Table 3.

<sup>10</sup> A “moving average” is a technique for smoothing a graph with values that go up and down a great deal in the short run. In this case, the “five-year moving average” means that each point on the graph is the average of the value for the year indicated and the preceding four years (except in the first four years, 1989-92, when it is the average of the indicated year and however many earlier years are included in the data).



**Table 3. Exonerations by Race Of Defendant and Type of Crime\***

	White	Black	Hispanic	Other	TOTAL
<b>Homicide (709)</b>	39%	48%	12%	1%	100%
<b>Sexual Assault (272)</b>	32%	<u>61%</u>	6%	0%	100%
<b>Child Sex Abuse (177)</b>	<u>63%</u>	24%	11%	2%	100%
<b>Attempted Murder (32)</b>	13%	<u>72%</u>	13%	3%	100%
<b>Robbery (92)</b>	22%	<u>60%</u>	15%	3%	100%
<b>Other Violent Crimes (90)</b>	48%	31%	13%	8%	100%
<b>Drug Crime (126)</b>	31%	<u>52%</u>	16%	2%	100%
<b>Other Non-Violent Crimes (102)</b>	<u>62%</u>	25%	12%	1%	100%
<b>ALL CRIMES (1,600)</b>	40%	47%	11%	2%	100%

It's no surprise that black defendants are heavily overrepresented among exonerees: they are heavily overrepresented among those arrested and imprisoned for violent crimes and drug crimes. For some crimes, however, the disproportions we see are greater than what one would expect.

In 2008, for example, 38% of state and federal prisoners were black.<sup>11</sup> Using that as a benchmark, black exonerees, at 47%, are somewhat overrepresented among all exonerees – but this disparity is unevenly distributed. In 2008, 43% of homicide prisoners were black, only slightly fewer than the 48% of homicide exonerees who were black. For robbery, the difference is a bit greater: 52% of prisoners and 60% of exonerees were black; for drug crimes, 45% of prisoners and 52% of exonerees were black. Finally, for sexual assault, the difference is huge: 25% of prisoners, but 61% of exonerees were black. On the other hand, 63% of child sex abuse exoneration and 62% of exoneration for non-violent crimes other than drugs had white defendants.

Fewer than 9% of known exoneration involved female defendants (147/1,600). The crimes for which female exonerees were convicted were generally similar to those for male exonerees, with two conspicuous exceptions. Female exonerees were more likely than males to have been convicted of child sex abuse, 18% to 10%. At the same time, 19% of the men were convicted of adult sexual assault, but not a single woman. See Table 4.

<sup>11</sup> Heather C. West & William J. Sabol, Prisoners in 2009, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS BULLETIN (2010), available at <http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/index.cfm?ty=pbdetail&iid=2232>.

**Table 4: Exonerations by Gender and Crime**

<b>CRIME</b>	<b>MALE (1454)</b>	<b>FEMALE (147)</b>
<b>Homicide</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>41%</b>
<b>Sexual Assault</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>-</b>
<b>Child Sex Abuse</b>	<b>10%</b>	<b>18%</b>
<b>Child Abuse</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3%</b>
<b>Other Crimes of Violence</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>8%</b>
<b>Non-Violent Crimes</b>	<b>13%</b>	<b>29%</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

In general, women are heavily concentrated among exonerations in which the victims were children and in cases in which no crime was committed (as opposed to the great majority of cases, in which there was a crime but someone else did it). Overall, 64% of the female exonerees (94/147) were convicted of crimes that never occurred – mostly child sex abuse, homicide and drug crimes– but only 24% of the men were convicted in no-crime cases (343/1,454). Overall, 33% of female exonerees were convicted of violent crimes against children 11 years old or younger (48/146), mostly homicide and child sex abuse, compared to 13% of male exonerees (185/1,454).

## F. Causes of False Convictions

For all exonerations, the most common causal factors that we have identified are: perjury or false accusation (55%); official misconduct (45%); and mistaken eyewitness identification (34%). See Table 5.

**Table 5: Exonerations by Crime and Contributing Factors**  
(N=1,600)

	Mistaken Witness Identification	Perjury or False Accusation	False Confession	False or Misleading Forensic Evidence	Official Misconduct
<b>Homicide (709)</b>	24%	<u>67%</u>	21%	23%	<u>60%</u>
<b>Sexual Assault (272)</b>	<u>72%</u>	34%	8%	<u>32%</u>	23%
<b>Child Sex Abuse (177)</b>	17%	<u>80%</u>	7%	23%	44%
<b>Robbery (92)</b>	<u>83%</u>	22%	2%	5%	30%
<b>Other Violent Crimes (122)</b>	42%	<u>51%</u>	8%	12%	44%
<b>Non-Violent Crimes (228)</b>	6%	<u>41%</u>	3%	25%	36%
<b>ALL CASES (1,600)</b>	34%	<u>55%</u>	13%	23%	45%

The proportions in Table 5 are generally similar to those in the Exoneration Report in May 2012, except that the percentage of cases with mistaken witness identifications has decreased (from 43% to 34%), and the percentages of cases with perjury or false accusations and with official misconduct have increased (from 51% to 55% and from 42% to 45%, respectively.) In addition, the percentage of non-violent crimes with false or misleading forensic evidence has jumped from 3% to 25%, and official misconduct in those cases has dropped from 55% to 36%.

We noted in the [Exoneration Report](#) that the proportion of exonerations with mistaken eyewitness identifications is lower than previous reports, primarily because we have done a more careful job than before in separating eyewitness errors and eyewitness lies. That remains true.

The other main finding of the [Exoneration Report](#) in this regard was that, as best we can tell from known exonerations, false conviction is not one pathology with a single set of contributing risk factors but a set of several different problems with different causal structures depending on the crime. That remains true. For example:

- For homicide exonerations, the leading cause of false conviction is *perjury or false accusations*, mostly *deliberate false identifications*. Homicide cases also include a high rate of *official misconduct*, and 74% of all *false confessions* in the database.
- The great majority of sexual assault and robbery exonerations include *mistaken eyewitness identifications*, mostly by the victims. Many sexual assault cases also include *bad forensic evidence*.
- Child sex abuse exonerations, by contrast, primarily involve false testimony by victims who *fabricated crimes* that never occurred at all.

## F. Exonerations by Jurisdiction

The first 1,600 exonerations in the Registry come from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Guam, at least 26 federal districts and the military. In May 2012, we reported that the top ten states in numbers of exonerations were, in descending order: Illinois, New York, Texas, California, Michigan, Louisiana, Florida, Ohio, Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. Three reports later, these same ten states lead the count but their order has changed, and Wisconsin has been added as a tie for the tenth position. See Table 6.

**Table 6: Exonerations by State, Top Ten**

<u>Exoneration Report</u> January 1989–February 2011 (N = 873)		<u>First 1,600 Exonerations</u> January 1989–May18, 2015 (N =1,600)	
1. Illinois	101	1. Texas	205
2. New York	88	2. New York	189
3. Texas	84	3. California	153
4. California	79	4. Illinois	151
<i>[Federal</i>	<i>39]</i>	<i>[Federal</i>	<i>84]</i>
5. Michigan	35	5. Michigan	55
6. Louisiana	34	6. Florida	54
7. Florida	32	7. Ohio	53
8. Ohio	28	8. Pennsylvania	52
9. Massachusetts	27	9. Louisiana	45
10. Pennsylvania	27	10. Massachusetts (tie)	40
		10. Wisconsin (tie)	40

The top four states have not changed, but their order has been rearranged three times: (1) From the [first report](#) to the [second](#), California added 40 cases – 50% of its total – and went from fourth

place to first. (2) From the second report to the [third](#), New York added 48 cases, and also moved from fourth place to first.

These rapid changes do not reflect bumper crops of recent exonerations in California and New York. Only 5 of the 40 California exonerations added from March through December 2012 occurred in that time span, and only 8 of the 48 exonerations added in New York in 2013 occurred in that year.

The main reason for the rapid increases in the number exonerations in California and later in New York is the nature of the searches we have been conducting. In 2012, we concentrated our search for past exonerations on California because it is the most populous state in the union and had a comparatively low per capita exoneration rate, so we thought we might find many cases we did not know about. In 2013, we devoted more attention to New York.

(3) For this report, Texas added 73 cases and went from third place to first.

This change does reflect a very high number of recent exonerations in Texas, 40 in 2014 and 20 through May of 2015. Forty-eight of these cases were in Harris County (Houston) and all but one of them were exonerations of defendants who pled guilty to drug crimes and were later exonerated when laboratory tests performed on the substances seized from them found no illegal drugs. Almost all these exoneration were obtained by the Harris County District Attorney's Post Conviction Review Section; we discuss that program in detail in our last report, [Exonerations in 2014](#).

The numbers of exonerations in Table 6 are driven in part by population. The top four states – California, Texas, New York and Illinois – are, in that order, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 5th most populous; and the sixth ranked state in number of exonerations, Florida, is 4th in population.

Table 7 displays rates of exonerations per capita for the ten states with the largest numbers of exonerations; Table 8 lists the ten states with the highest per capita rates.<sup>12</sup> Three of the states in the top four on Table 7 make the list in Table 8. Illinois and New York are in the top three in exonerations per capita, as they were in prior reports, and Texas is ranked 8th. On the other hand, California, the most populous state, has a per capita rate of exonerations of 0.79, below the standardized national average of 1.

**Table 7: Number of Exonerations, Top Ten States**

STATE	Number of Exonerations	Rate per Capita, Standardized
1. Texas	205	1.52
2. New York	189	1.94
3. California	153	0.79
4. Illinois	151	2.34
5. Michigan	55	1.116
6. Florida	54	0.54
7. Ohio	53	0.93
8. Pennsylvania	52	0.81
9. Louisiana	45	1.93
10. Massachusetts (tie)	40	1.18
10. Wisconsin (tie)	40	1.38
<b>NATION</b>	<b>1,600</b>	<b>1.00</b>

**Table 8: Exonerations Per Capita, Top Ten States**

STATE	Rate per Capita, Standardized	Number of Exonerations
1. Illinois	2.34	151
2. Louisiana	1.93	45
3. New York	1.91	189
4. Texas	1.52	205
5. Oklahoma	1.44	28
6. Wisconsin	1.38	40
7. Massachusetts	1.18	40
8. Missouri	1.12	34
9. Michigan	1.11	55
10. Washington	1.04	37
<b>NATION</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1281</b>

<sup>12</sup> The rates of exonerations per capita reported in Tables 8 through 11 are standardized. The raw number is divided by the national average (0.502 per 100,000). Thus the standardized rate per capita for the nation as a whole is 1.00, by definition; the rate for Illinois, for example, means that Illinois had 2.34 times more exonerations per capita than the national average; and the rate for Florida means that Florida had 0.54 times the national average of exonerations per capita. All rankings are based on 2014 data from the United States Census Bureau, which reports a national population of 318,857,056. See [http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/download\\_data.html](http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/download_data.html).

Criminal prosecutions in the United States are almost always handled by county rather than state authorities. There are 3,143 counties in the United States; we know of exonerations in 478 of them. In Table 9 we display the top 10 counties in the country by number of exonerations. In Table 10 we show the top counties in exonerations per capita, for counties with populations over 300,000.<sup>13</sup> For the purpose of this analysis, we treat the District of Columbia as a county.

**Table 9: Number of Exonerations  
Top Ten Counties**

County	Number of Exonerations	Rate per Capita, Standardized
1. Cook, IL (Chicago)	115	4.37
2. Harris, TX (Houston)	75	3.37
3. Los Angeles, CA	56	1.10
4. Dallas, TX	52	4.11
5. Kings, NY (Brooklyn)	47	3.57
6. Bronx, NY	36	4.99
7. New York NY (Manhattan)	27	3.29
8. Wayne, MI (Detroit)	25	2.82
9. Kern, CA	24	5.47
10. Suffolk, MA (Boston)	22	5.71
<b>NATION</b>	<b>1,600</b>	<b>1.00</b>

**Table 10: Exonerations Per Capita, Top Ten  
Counties with Population over 300,000**

County	Rate per Capita, Standardized	Number of Exonerations
1. Orleans Parish, LA (New Orleans)	9.33	18
2. Suffolk, MA (Boston)	5.71	22
3. Kern, CA	5.47	24
4. Jefferson Parish, LA	5.03	11
5. Bronx, NY	4.99	36
6. District of Columbia	4.54	15
7. Cook, IL (Chicago)	4.37	115
8. Dallas, TX	4.11	52
9. Kings, NY (Brooklyn)	3.57	47
10. Harris, TX (Houston)	3.37	75
<b>NATION</b>	<b>1.00</b>	<b>1,600</b>

A few large and medium sized counties have exoneration rates per capita 5 to 10 times the national average: Orleans Parish, Louisiana; Suffolk County, Massachusetts; Kern County, California; and Jefferson Parish, Louisiana. The three most populous counties in the country – Cook County, Illinois; Harris County, Texas; and Los Angeles, California – have more exonerations each than all but a few states (although their order by population is the reverse of that by number of exonerations).

<sup>13</sup> If we included smaller counties, the list would consist entirely of counties with fewer than 100,000 people that happened to have a single exoneration or a group of several. See note 12, above, for a description the standardized rate of exonerations per capita. For the purpose of this analysis, we treat the District of Columbia as a county.

On the other hand, there are no known exonerations at all in nearly 90% of all counties in the United States, including some with large populations. Table 11 lists the 7 counties with more than 900,000 people but no known exonerations, or just one.

**Table 11: Counties with More than 900,000 People and No More than One Exoneration**

<b>County</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Number of Exonerations</b>
<b>San Bernardino, CA</b>	<b>2,112,619</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Fairfax, VA</b>	<b>1,137,538</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Wake, NC</b>	<b>998,691</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Honolulu, HI</b>	<b>991,788</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Pinellas, FL</b>	<b>938,098</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Bergen, NJ</b>	<b>933,572</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Prince George's, MD</b>	<b>904,430</b>	<b>1</b>

We believe these numbers reflect our ignorance of exonerations that have occurred. For example, in southern California, Orange County and San Diego County each with about 3 million people, have 12 and 14 known exonerations respectively – while the adjoining county of San Bernardino, with more than 2 million people, has no known exonerations. It’s possible that no exonerations have occurred in San Bernardino County over the past 26 years, but we think it’s more likely that there have been at least several that we have not yet learned about.

This pattern is changing. The Exoneration Report, based on data from March 2012, listed 16 large counties with no more than one exoneration. We’re now down to 7. Overall, the number of counties with known exonerations has increased by about 60%, from 301 in March of 2012 to 478. We expect that pattern to continue as we continue to learn about more cases from years past.

For current data, it is possible to sort exonerations by county on the [Summary View](#) page of our website and obtain the names of exonerees in each county.