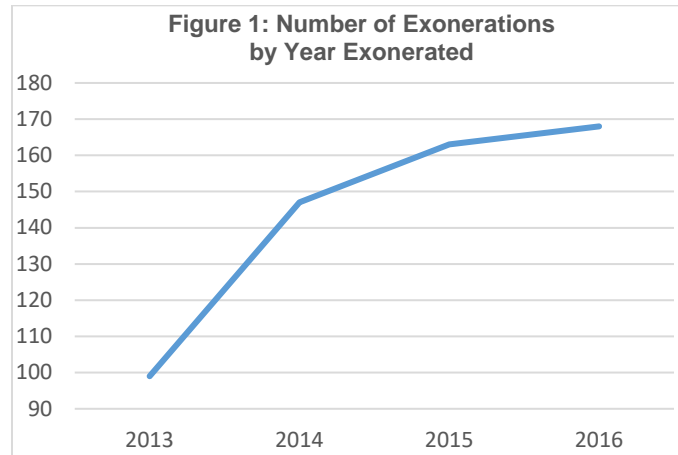
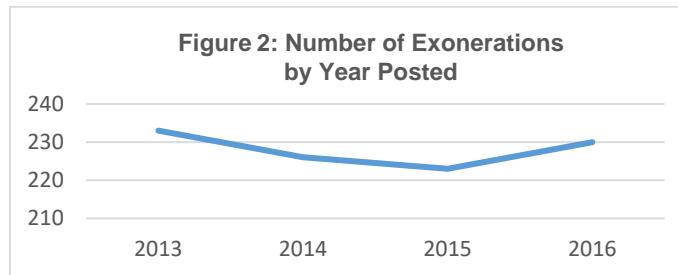


### Conviction Integrity Units, Innocence Organizations and the Time it takes the Registry to List Exonerations

The most conspicuous change reported by the Registry in that past several years is the rapid increase in the number of new exonerations we have added, from 99 that occurred in 2013 to 168 in 2016. See Figure 1.



But we also add previously unknown exonerations that happened in prior years. Unlike the number of exonerations that occur in a given year, the pace at which we post all cases is quite stable. Since 2013 the total number of exonerations posted per year has ranged from 223 in 2015, to 233 in 2013. See Figure 2.

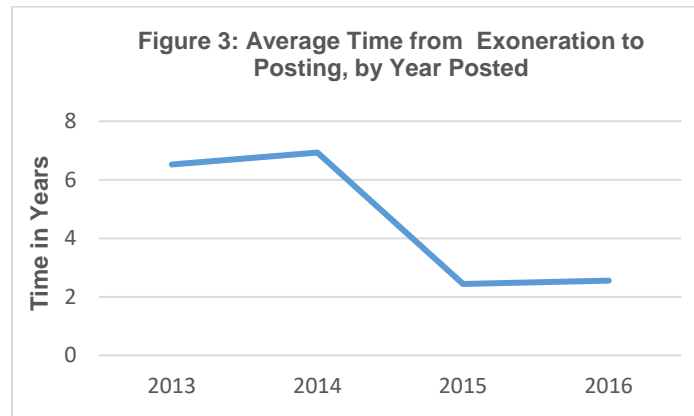


This rate reflects resource constraints: We only have the personnel and time to process about 220 to 235 cases a year.

The Registry posts exonerations as we learn about them, whether they took place [the day before](#), or [decades earlier](#). We learn about exonerations by various means: directly from people involved, from others who know about them (including exonerees themselves), from current media reports, and from various avenues of research that uncover past cases.

An increasing majority of the exonerations the Registry lists for 2013 through 2016 were posted in the calendar year in which they occurred, often within weeks or days of when they happened, in part because we learn about most new exonerations close to the time they happen. At the same time, as the number of current exonerations has increased, we have had less time for the painstaking work it takes to find exonerations that occurred years ago but went unnoticed.

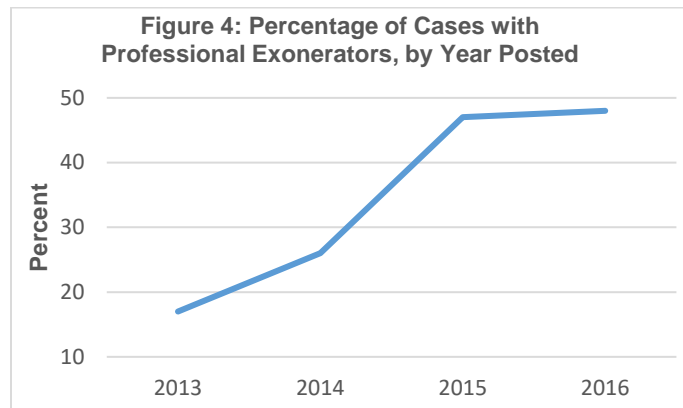
Inevitably, as the proportion of current cases and the speed of spotting them have both increased, the average time from exoneration to posting has dropped sharply, from more than 6.5 years for cases posted in 2013-14 to about 2.5 years for those posted in 2015-16. See Figure 3:



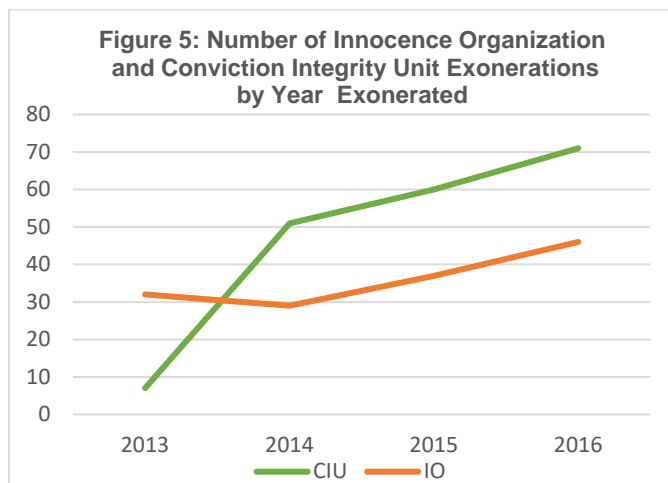
One reason for the increase in the number of exoneration that we learn about contemporaneously is the growing role “professional exonerators”—Innocence Organizations (IOs) that represent exonerated defendants, and the Conviction Integrity Units (CIUs) that have sprung up in dozens of local prosecutorial offices and work to correct wrongful convictions in the counties they serve.

We learn about IO and CIU cases immediately or soon after they occur because innocence organizations and conviction integrity units alike almost always actively call attention to exoneration in which they play a role. For other exoneration, there may be no one who is interested in seeking attention or effective at doing so. As a result, the average time to posting for CIU and IO exoneration since the beginning of 2013 is a about two *months*, while the average time gap for non-CIU non-IO exoneration is more than six and half *years*, about 30 times longer.

The number of exoneration in which CIUs or IOs played a role has increased rapidly, from 40 in 2013 to 110 in 2016. Figure 4 displays the percentage of exoneration with professional exonerators by year; together with Figure 3, it shows that as the proportion of cases with professional exonerators nearly tripled from 2013 to 2016, the time lag to posting exoneration on the Registry decreased by about the same factor.



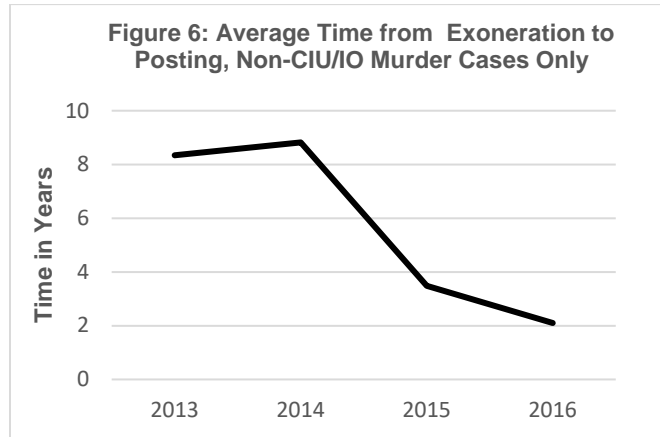
CIU and IO exonerations both increased in this period, but not at the same rate. See Figure 5. While the number of exonerations by innocence organizations (orange line) increased by about 50%, from 32 of the exonerations that occurred in 2013 to 46 of those in 2016, the number of exonerations by conviction integrity units (green line) went from 7 in 2013 to 71 in 2016, a tenfold increase. (Less than 10% of the CIU and IO exonerations in these four years included participation by both types of organizations.)



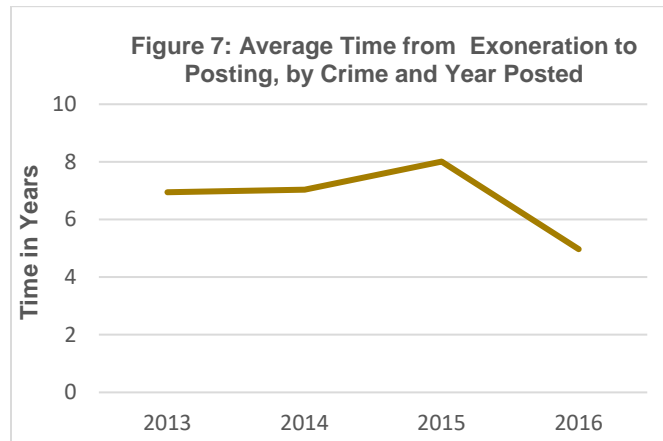
More than three quarters of the IO exonerations in this period were for the most serious violent crime: 60% were murders (87/144) and another 17% were sexual assaults (25/144). By contrast, 70% of the CIU exonerations were drug cases (132/189), and 22% were murders (42/189).

All but 5 of the CIU drug crime exonerations are cases from [Harris County, Texas](#), in which defendants who pled guilty to drug possession were exonerated after post-plea drug testing by crime labs found that the seized materials contained no controlled substances. There were no CIU drug exonerations in Harris County 2013, 31 in 2014, 44 in 2015 and 53 in 2016. That bulge appears to be passing; through early September, there have only been seven such cases in 2017.

The increase in the proportion of CIU and IO exonerations is not the only reason that we have been learning about exonerations more quickly over the past few years. In particular, there has also been a steep drop in the time to posting for *non-CIU and non-IO* murder exonerations, from about 8.5 years in 2013-14, to 2.1 in 2016. See Figure 6. One reason for this decrease is that we have become more skillful at identifying murder exonerations soon after they happen. In addition, however, we get the clear impression that over time, a higher proportion of these cases received substantial media coverage when they occurred. Perhaps the increase in media coverage feeds on itself: it may lead more parties in murder exonerations to publicize to their cases, and more media to notice and respond.



The change in time to posting has been uneven across crime categories. For child sex abuse cases especially, the time average time from exoneration to posting has declined only modestly, from about 7 years in 2013 to 5 in 2016. See Figure 7.



Undoubtedly, part of the reason is that comparatively few child sex abuse exoneration involve CIUs or IOs, ranging from 7% for cases posted in 2013 to 24% for those posted in 2016. (By contrast, 59% of murder exonerations posted in 2016 included professional exonerators, as did 83% of drug crime exonerations.) At the same time, it also seems to us that those involved in child sex abuse exonerations, regardless of who they are, do less to publicize them than their counterparts in exonerations for other violent crimes.

- Samuel Gross, 11 September 2017