Texas Eviction Case Dashboard
Introduction, Methodology, and Discussion

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Introduction

In the early stages of the COVID-19 crisis, all levels of government came together to slow and halt evictions and protect low-income renters from the threat of being displaced from housing during a global pandemic. From emergency rental assistance distributed by federal, state, and local governments to eviction moratoria in the courts, we have seen that our leadership can come together to protect tenants from the health and socioeconomic costs of eviction. But now eviction moratoria in the courts have mostly ended and rent relief funding is close to drying up.

Amid this challenging moment of transition, we have indication that evictions are on the rise again in Texas. But how do we know how many evictions are happening in the state? The Texas Housers Eviction Case Dashboard visualizes what we know about the state of evictions in Texas, based on eviction case numbers reported to the Texas Office of Court Administration by local Justice of the Peace courts in the state. While no complete tool or strategy for tracking all evictions that occur in the state currently exists, this dashboard is intended to fill in some of the blanks about eviction cases in all of Texas' 254 counties, particularly in counties outside of the state's major metro areas, some of which are tracked elsewhere using other methods.

Methodology

The Eviction Case Dashboard uses information provided by the State of Texas Office of Court Administration (OCA). Texas Justices of the Peace are required by law to submit case counts, activity, and dispositions on a monthly basis to the OCA.

Landlord-Tenant Dispute Cases vs. Eviction Cases

Since 2011, the OCA has aggregated eviction cases and "repair and remedy" cases into a single case category called "landlord-tenant disputes." This dashboard reflects the OCA landlord-tenant dispute data. We conducted two tests with two different methodologies to assess the relationship between the number of eviction cases and the number of landlord-tenant disputes.

Test 1: We compared the number of cases in Texas courts reported prior to and after the OCA began aggregating cases into the broader landlord-tenant dispute category. The OCA

reported eviction case counts as a stand-alone category up until a change made in 2011. This change went into effect in 2014. An analysis of variance between total annual cases in 2010-2013 (years before the change went into effect with available data) and 2014-2019 (after the change went into effect but before the Covid-19 pandemic's effect on eviction case numbers) shows no statistically significant difference between number of cases before and after the change (p-value=0.1713). The pre-change average annual eviction cases is 227,598 (n=4) and the post change average annual landlord-tenant disputes is 239,675 (n=6). If there were a significant variance after the change to aggregated landlord-tenant disputes, we would expect that annual case numbers after the change would be higher. However, we find that five of the six years after the change are lower than the highest pre-change year (2013), and three of six years after the change are lower than the lowest pre-change year (2011). This test shows us that there is no significant growth in cases after the rule change to aggregate evictions into the landlord-tenant dispute category. However, this does not count out the possibility that eviction cases simply went down after the rule change, and it does not provide a clear picture of what (small) percentage of total landlord-tenant disputes are non-eviction cases. To attempt to assess this we ran a second test.

Test 2: We then used another strategy to attempt to assess what percentage of landlord-tenant disputes are eviction cases. We selected three counties in Texas that are tracked using docket scraping by Princeton's Eviction Lab and their partners, for which we also had complete reporting to the OCA, for the 12 months of 2020: Harris, Tarrant, and Travis.[1] Comparing Eviction Lab's downloadable case counts for these three counties to the OCA's totals for these counties for the same time period allowed us to assess the delta between the two. The results of this comparison were surprising:

County	OCA Overcount
Harris	-5.2%
Tarrant	-28.1%
Travis	3.9%

The Travis County comparison yielded the results we would have expected: The number of cases reported to the OCA during this time period was, on average, 3.9% higher than the number reported by Eviction Lab using docket scraping. This would indicate that of the total landlord-tenant disputes, 96.1% were eviction cases and 3.9% were repair and remedy cases.

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[1] Although Dallas County is tracked by Eviction Lab, it was not used for this test because it had some missing OCA reporting for this time period.

The other two counties yielded counter-intuitive results: Harris County's counts were similar between Eviction Lab and OCA, but the Eviction Lab counts were in fact, on average, higher than the OCA numbers. In other words, there were more eviction cases recorded by Eviction Lab than there were landlord-tenant disputes reported to the OCA. This phenomenon was even more exaggerated in Tarrant County, where the landlord-tenant dispute case numbers reported to the OCA were, on average, 28.1% lower than the eviction case numbers recorded by Eviction Lab.

The discrepancy between the OCA landlord-tenant dispute case counts and the Eviction Lab eviction case counts for Tarrant and Harris Counties is interesting and worth further investigation into causes and impacts. However, for the purposes of the Eviction Case Dashboard, it is enough to note that the landlord-tenant dispute numbers reported to the OCA at least do not appear to be a significant overcount of eviction numbers reported using other means. In fact, the counts from Tarrant and Harris Counties suggest that the landlord-tenant dispute case numbers reported to the OCA may in fact be an undercount of actual eviction cases, at least in some counties in the state.

By combining the results of these two tests, we conclude that it is reasonable to use the OCA's landlord-tenant dispute case counts as a stand in for a preliminary assessment of eviction case counts in the state until better data is available. These tests suggest that the vast majority of landlord-tenant disputes - over 95% - are eviction cases. Due to the number of Justice of the Peace courts that regularly fail to report their case data to the state, the state-level case numbers reported here are almost certainly an undercount, and potentially a sizable undercount. They are useful in indicating trends in eviction case counts and as a "floor" indicating at least how many new eviction cases are being filed in the state.

New Cases vs. Dispositions

This dashboard uses "New Cases Filed" rather than disposition data as its basis. This is because disposition data does not line up neatly with whether or not a tenant was actually evicted. For example, an "agreed judgement" may result in a tenant staying in place or being displaced from their home. Princeton Eviction Lab's gold standard Eviction Tracking System uses the same standard of new cases filed rather than evictions.

Analysis

We take the data provided by the OCA and summarize and analyze it in the following ways:
- Summarize new case counts by county
- Identify a case rate by county. We define the case rate as the number of new cases divided by the number of total renter households in the county. We use ACS 2019 5-year data to identify the number of renter households in Texas counties.

- Sum the number of courts in each county that did and did not report data to the OCA for the current month. Calculate the percentage of courts per county that did not report data to the OCA for the most current month.
- Establish a trend line of eviction case numbers by county going back to January 2020 by adding each new month's case counts to prior months' data

Update Frequency and Timeliness

Courts are required to report data to the OCA for a given month by the end of the following month. That data is processed and cleaned by the OCA and available to the public typically within about 10 days of that deadline. For example, data for the month of January will be submitted to the OCA by the last day of February, and will then be available to the public by approximately March 10th.

Texas Housers aims to analyze these data on a monthly basis, in a timely manner after we receive it from the OCA. We anticipate that dashboard updates will typically occur around the 15th of each month, approximately 45 days after the "reporting" month.

Additional Resources and Methods for Tracking Eviction Cases in Texas

As discussed above, Eviction Lab and their partners use a different approach in order to track new eviction cases up to the most recent week, in Dallas, Harris, Tarrant, and Travis Counties, but not in the state of Texas as a whole.

Some of Eviction Lab's Texas-based partners also have their own eviction case trackers:
- January Advisors tracks Harris County cases
- The Child Poverty Action Lab tracks eviction cases in four counties in the Dallas-Ft. Worth metro area
- BASTA tracks eviction cases in Travis County

It is our intention that the Texas Housers Eviction Case Dashboard should supplement the data provided by these organizations. It is our hope that by using all of these tools together, we can grow our understanding of evictions in Texas.

Ideas for Reform

Clearly, the state of eviction tracking in Texas is unacceptable. More complete, accurate, and timely information about case counts and actual eviction outcomes is desperately needed in order to identify where eviction hot spots are occurring and to make evictions rare and fair in

Texas. Here are a few resources that lay out needed reforms to eviction data collection and distribution:

- [U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Office of Policy Development and Research's Report to Congress on the Feasibility of Creating a National Evictions Database](#)
- [New America's resource, "Why is Eviction Data so Bad? Recommendations for Improving the Local and National Landscape"](#) and ["Recommendations for Creating National and Local Eviction Data Systems"](#)
- [The Conference of State Court Administrators and the National Center for State Courts' "National Open Court Data Standards (NODS)"](#)