

Town of Highland Park Court

January 1 through December 31, 2020



This particular analysis constitutes an annual review of the Town of Highland Park Court and its administration of justice, which has been in place during the past few years. The current review is focused on the data from January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020. The objective in collecting and analyzing the data is to determine the patterns and practices of the municipal court in Highland Park, in its administration of justice. Although the data poses limitations it is substantive enough in order to reach conclusions on trends related to the patterns and practices of the court.

The analysis of the 2020 annual data produced relevant findings and results. Overall, the significant majority of cases filed related to White defendants. This was followed by Hispanics and Blacks, in that order. Of the cases filed, most (in all racial and ethnic categories) were “disposed”. Of the cases filed in 2020 that were disposed, Whites (73%) and Asians (69%) had the most significant percentages. This was followed by Hispanics (65%) and Blacks (47%). Based on the data reviewed, it is clear that among the cases disposed, the most significant percentages, other than Whites, are of individuals belonging to protected classes (i.e., Asians, Hispanics and African Americans). **Related to the disposition of cases, the annual data being examined here shows that the court does not favor a particular racial or ethnic group in its disposition of cases. However, it is interesting to note and worth of further analysis, that the least significant percentage of cases disposed involved Blacks.** This is important to further examine in an effort to determine the nature of Black dispositions and the reasons that would explain why they constituted the lowest percentage of cases disposed among those filed in 2020.

When analyzing the dispositions for this particular year, the data shows that of the 1,187 cases with court appearances, 699 of them involved White defendants. The second (but distant) most significant number (201) related to Hispanic defendants. This was followed by Blacks

(153) and Asians (35). It is also evident that Native Americans constituted the group with the least number of court appearances (17). Of the cases involving White defendants, a significant number (3,449) were closed with no court appearance. The second most significant number of cases closed without any court appearance pertained to Hispanics (1,043). One would expect this given the fact that Hispanics constituted the second largest number of defendants, after Whites. The third most significant number of dispositions without a court appearance (730) pertained to Blacks.

Of the cases with fines paid to the clerk, the majority of them involved White defendants (189); this was followed by Asians (10) and Blacks (8). It should also be noted that the majority of cases dismissed through the completion of deferment was led by Whites (273); then followed by Asians (10) and Hispanics (6). This seemed to be the same trend across the board with White defendants. That is, the majority of the cases deferred by the judge and the prosecutor, involved Whites. This was followed, in both instances, by Blacks.

When considering the number of cases deferred by the clerk, a similar trend was identified. That is, the majority of cases dismissed by the clerk involved Whites (83); this was followed by cases involving Hispanics (25), and Blacks (8) in that order. Relative to gender, most of these cases deferred by the prosecutor seemed to be predominant among males. The data also showed that the most significant percentage of cases involving Whites, Blacks, Hispanics and Asians were disposed at the window.

Summary of Findings

Although the data is limited in nature, it does present a profile regarding the disposition of cases. The importance related to the manner in which the cases are processed through the Highland Park Municipal Court, goes without saying. It should be noted, that during the time this data was recorded, the nation and the State were particularly affected by the COVID-19 Pandemic. Thus, much of the trend captured here and discussed in the analysis, is representative of the restrictive movement of individuals throughout their communities. A careful review of the data shows the following:

- a) The cases filed are mostly related to White defendants; this was followed by Hispanics and Blacks, respectively.
- b) The cases that were closed by the court, dismissed by the prosecutor and dismissed by the judge, seem to be unevenly distributed among Whites, Hispanics and Asians. Given that most of the cases involved Whites, this trend seems to be consistent with the proportionality of racial/ethnic distributions.
- c) The cases dismissed at the window and those dismissed via U.S. Mail also seemed to be proportionally distributed among all races and ethnic groups.
- d) A significant percentage of cases by all races/ethnicities were disposed through the payment of fines to the clerk. This, in my view, is an indicator that defendants took advantage of the convenience of resolving their cases before their court date. The race and ethnicity of the defendant did not seem to make a difference in their ability to dispose of the citation through the mail or window.

e) The data also shows that there were various methods of disposing cases by all racial and ethnic groups. Even though there no specific pattern was identified, it is clear that disposition of cases ranged from the completion of driving courses to paying fines and providing proof of insurance. It is recommended that a follow up and “deeper dive” on the disposition of cases while controlling for race/ethnicity, is considered.

It is my expert opinion with over 23 years of analyzing data specific to racial and ethnic disparities in the criminal justice system, and after having reviewed the data analyzed in this report, that the Highland Park Municipal Court seems to engage in a fair and Constitutional process as measured through the availability of options on disposition of cases. There is very little doubt that the analysis of additional data over the next few years will reveal, with some degree of certainty, if the pattern on the distribution of cases and disposition of these, continues.

It should be noted that the Highland Park Municipal Court continues update all of its standing orders, provide easy access and information to all defendants through its web site, and ensures that the administration of justice in its court is implemented while adhering to the United States Constitution and the laws of the state of Texas.

Of interest in this particular analysis is the fact that Blacks seemed to show the least significant percentage of cases disposed. Therefore, a deeper dive was performed and the following data points were identified:

1) Of the total cases pending (440) on Blacks in 2020, 283 defendants did not make any attempt to call, mail or email the Court regarding their citations. A total of 149 individuals have cases pending to pay or plea while 8 are past due. Overall, then, in **64%** of the cases pertaining to **Blacks**, no attempt was made by the defendant to call, email or mail the Court regarding the citations issued.

2) Of the total cases pending (865) on Whites in 2020, 238 defendants did not make any attempt to call, mail or email the Court regarding their citations. A total of 612 individuals have cases pending to pay or plea while 15 are past due. Overall, then, in **28%** of the cases pertaining to **Whites**, no attempt was made by the defendant to call, email or mail the Court regarding the citations issued.

3) Of the total cases pending (412) on Hispanics in 2020, 179 defendants did not make any attempt to call, mail or email the Court regarding their citations. A total of 230 individuals have cases pending to pay or plea while 3 are past due. Overall, then, in **43%** of the cases pertaining to **Hispanics**, no attempt was made by the defendant to call, email or mail the Court regarding the citations issued.

4) Of the total cases pending (59) on Asians in 2020, 9 defendants did not make any attempt to call, mail or email the Court regarding their citations. A total of 50 individuals have cases pending to pay or plea. Overall, then, in **15%** of the cases pertaining to **Asians**, no attempt was made by the defendant to call, email or mail the Court regarding the citations issued.

5) Of the total cases pending (26) on Native Americans in 2020, 6 defendants did not make any attempt to call, mail or email the Court regarding their citations. A total of 20 individuals have cases pending to pay or plea. Overall, then, in **23%** of the cases pertaining to **Native Americans**, no attempt was made by the defendant to call, email or mail the Court regarding the citations issued.

Given these findings, it is recommended that the Court establish a protocol to improve its ability to reach out to all defendants in order to increase the “cases disposed rate”. It is also recommended that the Court translate some of its informative components to other languages in an effort to increase its ability to better inform defendants that are not native English speakers on court proceedings, expectations and rules. The Court should be commended for already taking the initiative native Spanish speakers.

Table 1. Profile of Cases (January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020)

Race/Ethnicity	Cases Filed	Cases Disposed	Outstanding Cases
White	3,187	2,322	2,306
Black	832	391	1,952
Hispanic	1,171	759	1,629
Asian	189	130	115
Middle Eastern	0	0	22
Unknown	0	0	11
Native American	80	11	45
Not Entered	472	80	169
Total	5,931	3,693	6,249

Table 2. Disposition of Cases with Court Appearances (January 1, 2020 through December 31, 2020)

Race/Ethnicity	Total Cases with Court Appearances	Cases Closed by the Court	Cases Dismissed Completion of Defensive Driving Course
White	699	184	109
Black	153	82	20
Hispanic	201	111	14
Asian	35	10	9
Middle Eastern	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0
Native American	17	3	5
Not Entered	82	54	0
Total	1,187	444	157

Table 3. Disposition of Cases with Court Appearances (cont.)

Race/Ethnicity	Cases Complied Dismissal (3J)	Cases Complied Dismissal (3P)	DA Dismissed/Deferred Completed	Cases DI/Dismiss (Proof Insurance)
White	17	14	16	1
Black	4	7	4	0
Hispanic	3	9	7	1
Asian	1	0	2	0
Middle Eastern	0	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0	0
Native American	2	0	1	1
Not Entered	0	0	0	0
Total	27	30	30	3

Table 4. Disposition of Cases with Court Appearances (cont.)

Race/Ethnicity	Cases Dismissed by Prosecutor	Cases Dismissed by Judge	Dr-Dismiss Theme In
White	221	19	62
Black	28	6	1
Hispanic	36	13	2
Asian	9	2	1
Middle Eastern	0	0	0
Unknown	0	0	0
Native American	3	2	0
Not Entered	24	3	0
Total	321	45	66

Table 5. Percentages of All Cases Dismissed by Judge and Prosecutor

Race/Ethnicity	Cases Dismissed by Judge (in percentages)	Cases Dismissed by Prosecutor (in percentages)
White	1.60	18.62
Black	.51	2.36
Hispanic	1.10	3.03
Asian	0.17	0.76
Middle Eastern	0	0
Unknown	0	0
Native American	.17	0.17
Not Entered	0.25	0.25