Community Cooperation and Homicide Clearance: New Evidence from Chicago and Implications for Policy

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Partnership Appreciation

We extend our sincere gratitude to the leadership of the **Chicago Police Department Bureau of Detectives** for their collaboration, openness, and commitment to advancing homicide investigations through research–practice partnership.

We are equally grateful to the **Survivor Advisory Council** for their trust, wisdom, and willingness to share lived experience, which has fundamentally shaped how this work understands trauma, cooperation, and justice. This research would not be possible without these partnerships.

Ms. Bertha Purnell
1961-2025
Holding a painting of her son
Maurice Purnell
1989 - 2017

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Terminology

Homicide: "The willful (non-negligent) killing of one human being by another."

- Includes murder and non-negligent manslaughter

- Excludes negligent manslaughter, justifiable homicide, suicide, accidental deaths, and deaths caused by negligence
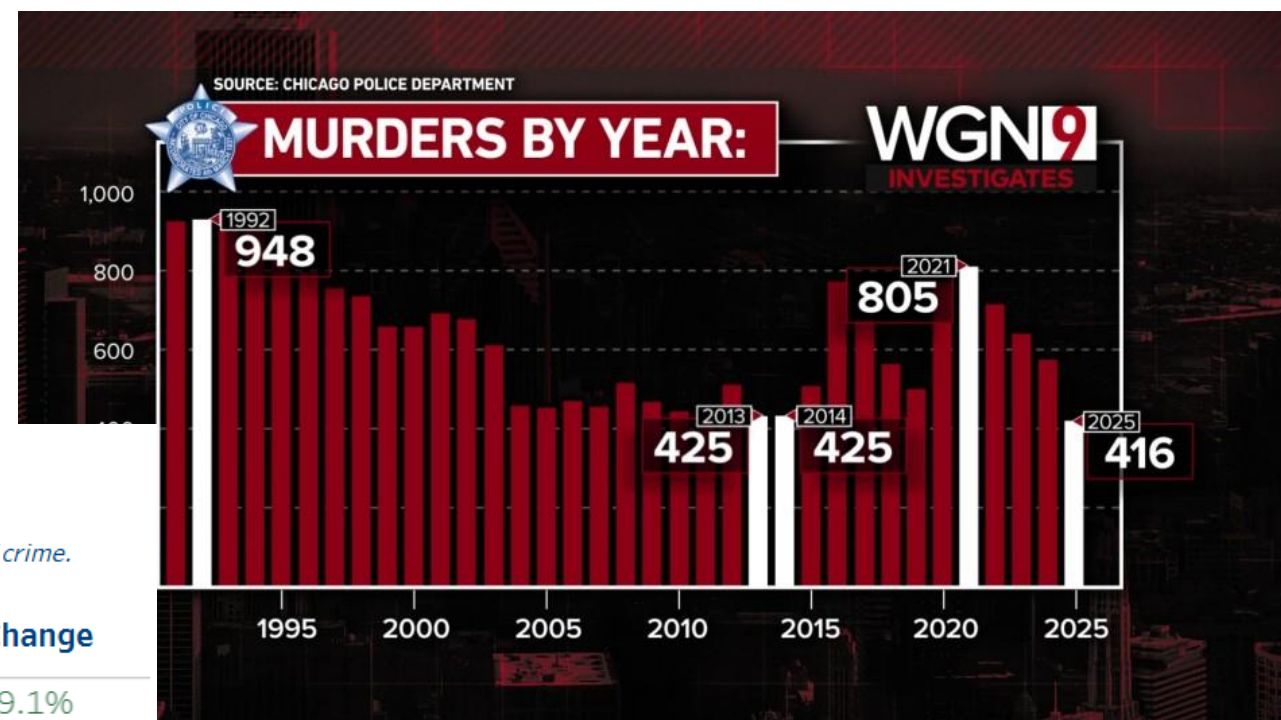
Homicide Clearance:

- **Cleared by Arrest (**Arrest a suspect, Charge them with the offense, Refer the case for prosecution)
  - **Important:** One arrest can clear multiple crimes, clearances may involve cases from prior years

- **Cleared by Exceptional Circumstances:** A crime may also be cleared without an arrest if police: Identify the offender, have enough evidence to make an arrest and charge, know where the offender is, are prevented from acting due to factors beyond their control
  - **Examples include:** Suspect is deceased, victim declines to participate, extradition is denied

FBI-indicated formula for annual homicide clearance rate =

# of homicide cases cleared by police in year X / # of homicides in year X

Source: Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2019). *Clearances*. In *Crime in the United States 2019*. U.S. Department of Justice. https://ucr.fbi.gov/crime-in-the-u.s/2019/crime-in-the-u.s.-2019/topic-pages/clearances

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What the Numbers Actually Show About Chicago

SOURCE: CHICAGO POLICE DEPARTMENT
MURDERS BY YEAR: WGN9 INVESTIGATES

Victim Counts and Comparison in All Community Areas, January 1 - December 31

This chart compares the number of victimizations in the selected period to the prior year for different types of crime.

	2024	2025	% Change
Homicide Victimizations	587	416	-29.1%
Fatal Shooting Victimizations	517	348	-32.7%
Non-Shooting Homicide Victimizations	70	68	-2.9%
All Shooting Victimizations	2,853	1,869	-34.5%
Fatal Shooting Victimizations	517	348	-32.7%
Non-Fatal Shooting Victimizations	2,336	1,521	-34.9%
Criminal Sexual Assault Victimizations	1,994	1,997	+0.2%
Robbery Victimizations	9,489	6,107	-35.6%
Vehicular Hijacking Victimizations	1,148	571	-50.3%
Aggravated Battery Victimizations	7,319	6,674	-8.8%
Aggravated Assault Victimizations	9,905	8,025	-19.0%
Human Trafficking Victimizations	32	22	-31.3%
All Violent Crime Victimizations	32,701	25,281	-22.7%
Multi-Victim Shooting Incidents	395	254	-35.7%
ShotSpotter Alerts	30,284	0	-100.0%

**Chicago Police Department
2025 Homicide Clearance Rate =
71%**
(296 Homicides Cleared)

City of Chicago. (n.d.). *Violence Reduction Dashboard.*
https://www.chicago.gov/city/en/sites/vrd/home.html

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" We have a caseload of ONE"

What does it take to clear a homicide case?

What the evidence shows…

- **Case characteristics matter**: Certain incident features (e.g., victim–offender relationship, location, weapon type) are associated with higher or lower clearance likelihood.
- **Early investigative actions are critical**: Faster response times, adequate staffing, and timely forensic processing are linked to higher clearance rates.
- **Community trust shapes cooperation**: Historical and ongoing distrust of law enforcement in Black and Latinx communities affects witness participation and information sharing.
- **Psychological Impact of Loss**: May limit families' and witnesses' ability to interact with investigators

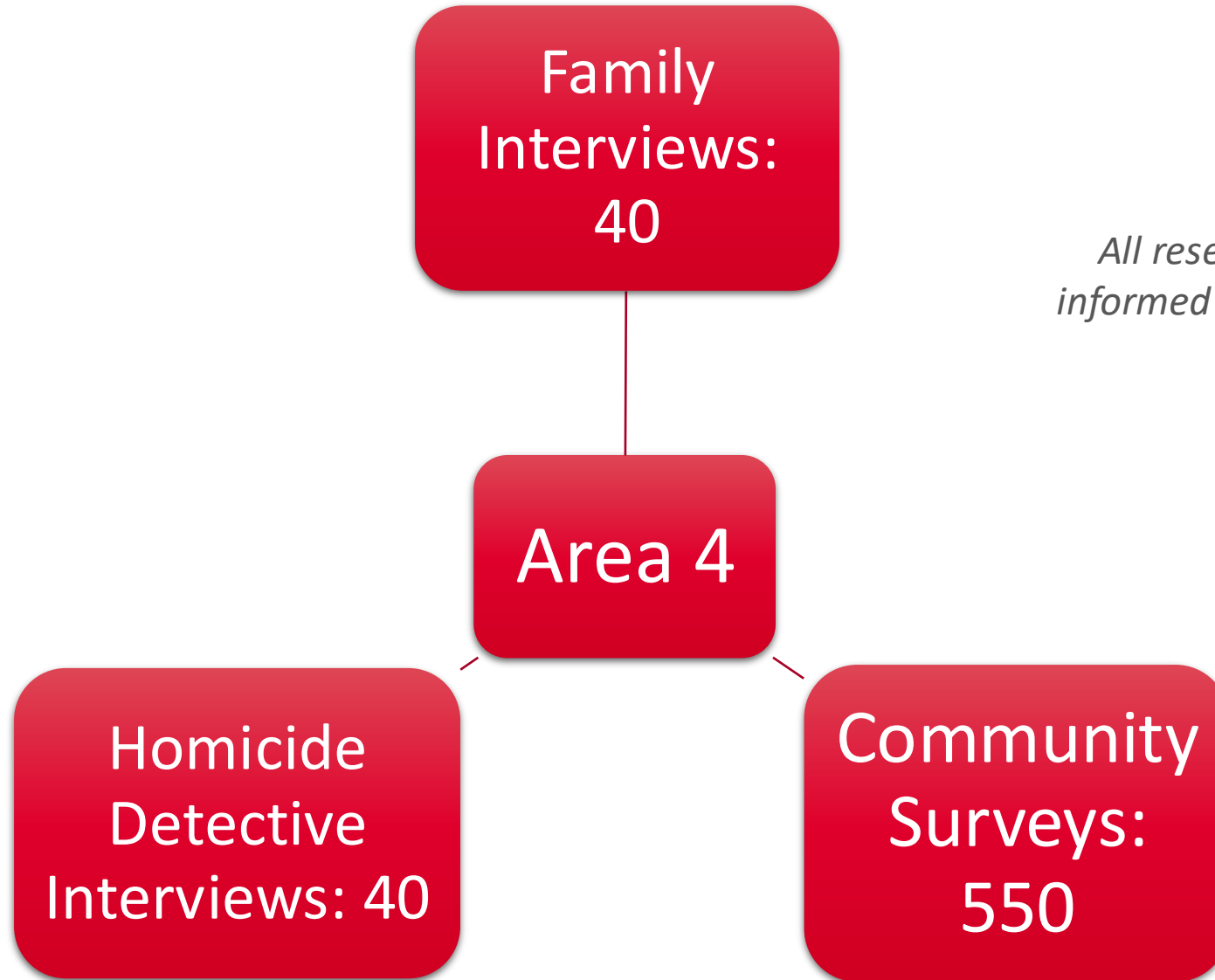## What (until now) has remained unclear…

- **Why families and community members choose not to cooperate** in homicide investigations, and how those decisions vary across contexts.
- **How broader social and political conditions** shape detectives' capacity to clear cases.
- **Which forms of police–community engagement** most effectively increase clearance likelihood.
- **How family trauma influences engagement over time** during the investigative process.

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"Life After Death: A Survivor-Centered Examination of Homicide Investigative Practice"

Identify best practices to improve the process and outcome of homicide investigations through centering the experiences of surviving family members in conjunction with the community perspectives and homicide detectives' experiences.

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Apples-to-Apples

Family Interviews: 40

Area 4

Homicide Detective Interviews: 40

Community Surveys: 550

All research activities were informed by a Survivor Advisory Council

All research activities were conducted with the approval of UIC's IRB and CPD's Legal Department

"You don't want to be painted with a broad brush- neither do I"

- Chicago Police Department Homicide Investigator

Detective Data

Time Frame: February – July 2022

Development of Interview Guide

Interview Questions:

- Path to/ motivation behind homicide investigative work

- Experiences engaging **families of homicide victims** and **community members**

- Discussion of factors that facilitate the "clearance" of a case

- Discussion of the personal and professional impact of homicide investigative work

Family Data

Time Frame: February 2022- February 2023

Development of Interview Guide

Experiences of Loss and Trauma
How families understand and cope with violent loss and its ongoing impact.

Interactions With Homicide Investigators
Families' experiences communicating with detectives and navigating the investigative process.

Decisions About Cooperation
Factors shaping whether, when, and how families choose to engage with law enforcement.

Perceptions of Clearance and Justice
Families' beliefs about what it takes to identify, arrest, and hold responsible the person(s) involved.

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The Case for a Community-Based Examination

**3 Year Average Homicide Rates
between 2019 - 2021**

City of Chicago = 25.55 per 100,00 residents

- Community Area 1 = 71.81

- **Community Area 2 = 191.21**

- Community Area 3 = 121.72

- Community Area 4 = 103.47

- Community Area 5 = 26.63

(calculated = Average Homicide Rates were calculated by taking the total number of first-degree murder cases occurring within the specified community, dividing this number by the community area population (of that specific year, based on Chicago Data Portal information), and multiplying it by 100,000)

**3 Year Average Homicide Clearance Rates
between 2019 - 2021**

City of Chicago = 49.8%

- Community Area 1 = 36.3%

- Community Area 2 = 33.7%

- Community Area 3 = 18.3%

- Community Area 4 = 24.0%

- **Community Area 5 = 16.3%**

(Community Area Homicide Clearance Rates were calculated by taking the total number of first degree murder cases *resulting in an arrest* (as recorded by the Chicago Police Department) that occurred within the specified community area between the time of the incident and September 2024, and dividing this number by the total number of first degree murder cases that occurred within the specified community area in the specified time period (2019-2021)

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Community-Based Examination of Homicide Investigative Practices and Outcomes

Community-driven design: A novel survey on homicide investigations and clearance was co-designed with surviving family members, reviewed by CPD, and refined with input from the Chief of Detectives.

Trusted data collectors: Research assistants lived and worked in the study neighborhoods, supporting trust and cultural congruence.

Deep community outreach: Data were collected through door-to-door engagement and in everyday community spaces (e.g., laundromats, corner stores, bus stops, parks, barbershops).

Representative sampling: The sample was stratified by age, gender, and race to reflect each neighborhood's population, with weekly checks to monitor data quality and representation.

Reaching the hard to reach: Twenty percent of surveys were reserved for individuals typically missed in research (e.g., limited housing stability, limited system contact, inconsistent phone or internet access) to be *inclusive of individuals with the greatest proximity to violence and victimization,* often excluded from traditional survey-based research

No convenience sampling: Less than 20% of surveys came from service agencies; we avoided typical convenience sites (e.g., bingo nights, Bible studies).

Equitable access: Surveys were paper-based, offered in two languages, administered by bilingual Ras, with options for verbal or written responses and $20 cash compensation.

Timing matters: Data were collected at all hours, using safety protocols and precautions; approximately half of the surveys were completed between 5:00 PM and midnight.
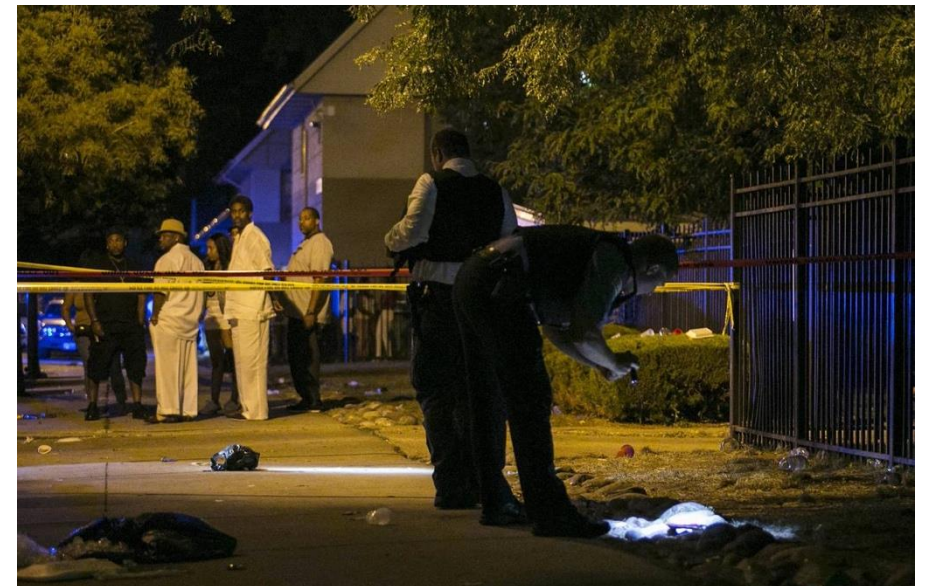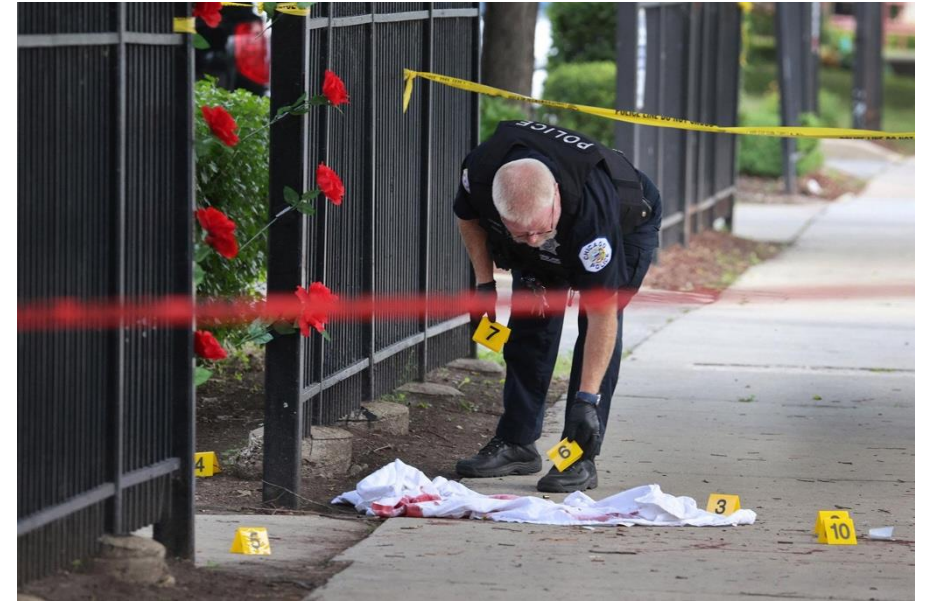
Survey Content

Community context & demographics: Neighborhood residence, length of time in the community, housing status, age, gender, race/ethnicity, nativity, and employment.

Exposure to violence: Perceptions of gun violence trends and personal or family experiences with shootings and homicides.

Perceptions of police response: Views on police respect, fairness across victim characteristics (race, age, perceived innocence), response time, and arrest likelihood in homicide cases.

Willingness to cooperate: Likelihood of calling police, sharing information, providing tips, and perceptions of community safety and witness protection.

Awareness of investigative tools: Knowledge of CPD outreach strategies (crime videos, anonymous tips, cash rewards) and beliefs about their effectiveness.

Variables Analyzed

Outcome Variables: Willingness to Cooperate

- **Likelihood of calling police** if witnessing a homicide
- **Likelihood of providing information** about a homicide suspect
  (coded as Likely, Neutral, Not Likely)

Key Independent Variables: Homicide Clearance

- **Actual community clearance rate:** Three-year average (2019–2021) of first-degree homicide arrests by community area, calculated from Chicago Data Portal records.
- **Perceived clearance rate:** Residents' beliefs about how often homicide suspects are arrested in their community (<10% to >50%).

Demographic & Socioeconomic Controls

- Age, race/ethnicity, gender, nativity
- Employment status, homeownership
- Length of residence in the community

Exposure to Violence & System Contact

- Direct victimization (shot in past year)
- Vicarious victimization (friend/family shot)
- Prior interaction with police after a homicide

Access & Reach Controls

- Indicator for "hard-to-reach" respondents
- Interview location (community-based vs. service-based setting)

Analytic Focus

Does actual police effectiveness matter?

Are community members more willing to cooperate in homicide investigations when police **successfully clear more homicide cases** in their community?

Do perceptions of effectiveness matter?

Are community members more willing to cooperate when they **believe police are effective** at identifying and arresting those responsible for homicides?

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Analytic Strategy

Approach: Multinomial logistic regression models examining willingness to cooperate with police in homicide investigations.

Outcomes: Two models, one for **calling police after witnessing a homicide** and one for **providing information about a suspect**.

Model 1 (Baseline): Examines associations with **actual** and **perceived homicide clearance rates** only.

Model 2 (Adjusted): Adds **demographic, socioeconomic, and violence-exposure covariates**.

Interpretation: Results are presented as **relative risk ratios**, comparing each response category to those **most willing to cooperate**.

Study Sample (N=550)

Community-based and representative:
- **94%** of surveys were collected in the community
- **22%** of respondents were classified as **hard to reach**, strengthening representation beyond typical survey samples.

Racially and ethnically diverse: The sample is majority **Black (49%) and Latinx (48%)**, with broad representation across adult age groups and neighborhoods.
- **18.01%** of survey respondents were **foreign born**

Socioeconomic context: 84% rent their homes and **64% are currently employed**, reflecting everyday economic realities of the communities studied.
- **Over 70% living in their community for 3+ years**, supporting neighborhood-level insight.

High proximity to violence:
- **72%** report a friend or family member was shot in the last year
- **28%** have interacted with police after a homicide
- **11%** were personally shot in the past year

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When a homicide occurs in your community, how often do you think the person responsible for the murder is arrested?

73.7% estimate arrests occur **30% of the time or less**

Only **9.4%** believe arrests occur **more than 50% of the time**

How likely would you be to call the police if you witnessed a homicide?

52.8% say they would be **very likely or likely**

14.0% report being **neutral**

33.3% say they would be **not very likely or not at all**

How likely would you be to help the police find someone suspected of a homicide by providing them with information?

40.4% say they would be **very likely or likely**

21.9% report being **neutral**

37.7% say they would be **not very likely or not at all**

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Clearance Rates and Willingness to Cooperate
(results for models including covariates)

Actual clearance rates matter for cooperation

- In the fully adjusted models, a **1-percentage-point increase in the actual homicide clearance rate** is associated with a:

  5% increase in the likelihood of being very likely/likely to share information with police
  (RRR = 1.05, p < .05)

  5% increase in the likelihood of being neutral toward sharing information
  (RRR = 1.05, p < .05)

Perceptions influence openness more than action

- Individuals who believe that **more than 50% of homicides are cleared** are:

  Three times more likely to be neutral rather than unwilling to share information
  (RRR = 3.01, p < .05)

- Perceived clearance rates were **less consistently associated with active cooperation** once controls were included.

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Who Is More (and Less) Willing to Cooperate in a Homicide Investigation

More willing to cooperate
- **Women** are significantly more likely than men to share information
  (*RRR = 3.02, p < .01*)
- Adults **age 60 and older** are substantially more willing than those ages 18–21
  (*RRR = 5.58, p < .01*)

Less willing to cooperate
- **Latinx respondents** are significantly less likely to share information than White respondents
  (*RRR = 0.47, p < .05*)
- Individuals **not classified a "hard to reach"** are less likely to be neutral toward cooperation than hard-to-reach respondents
  (*RRR = 0.42, p < .05*)

	Willingness to Share Information with the Police About Someone Suspected of a Homicide		Willingness to Call if One Witnessed a Homicide	
	Likely Vs Not Likely	Neutral vs. Not Likely	Likely Vs Not Likely	Neutral vs. Not Likely
Actual Clearance Rate	1.05 (2.46)*	1.05 (2.08)*	1.08 (3.72)**	1.09 (3.34)**
Perceived Clearance Rate (reference category is 10% or less of the time)				
11 – 20%	1.05 (0.16)	0.93 (-0.19)	1.11 (0.34)	1.61 (1.14)
21 – 30%	1.26 (0.70)	1.14 (0.36)	1.73 (1.59)	2.08 (1.67)
31 – 50%	1.61 (1.24)	1.44 (0.85)	1.34 (0.75)	1.28 (0.48)
> 50%	2.50 (1.80)	3.01 (2.06)*	3.79 (2.39) *	1.07 (0.08)
Not Hard to Reach	0.68 (-1.18)	0.42 (-2.48)*	0.49 (-1.99)*	0.47 (-1.68)
Survey Setting (Community)	1.60 (0.96)	1.51 (0.79)	2.71 (2.06)*	4.85 (2.12)*
Gender (reference category Male)				
Female	3.02 (4.74) **	1.67 (1.92)	2.48 (3.68) **	1.96 (2.12)*
Race (reference category White)				
Black	0.49 (-0.91)	0.93 (-0.09)	0.17 (-2.08)*	1.33 (0.37)
Latinx	0.47 (-2.44)*	0.55 (-1.76)	0.58 (-1.65)	0.81 (-0.50)
Not Foreign Born	1.02 (0.05)	1.06 (0.14)	1.15 (0.35)	1.18 (0.33)
Age (reference category 18-21)				
22-29	1.19 (0.51)	1.13 (0.34)	1.86 (1.76)	1.13 (0.29)
30-39	0.83 (-0.45)	0.85 (-0.38)	1.12 (0.27)	0.68 (-0.78)
40-49	1.80 (1.65)	1.16 (0.36)	3.10 (2.99)**	0.99 (-0.02)
50-59	1.59 (1.18)	0.99 (-0.03)	2.46 (2.16)*	0.87 (-0.24)
60+	5.58 (2.86)**	1.07 (0.08)	7.88 (3.14)**	2.05 (0.82)
Not Victim of a Shooting	1.88 (1.55)	2.11 (1.63)	2.65 (2.38)*	2.70 (1.76)
No Police Homicide Exposure	1.22 (0.72)	0.98 (0.94)	1.06 (0.19)	0.75 (-0.73)
Vicarious Exposure to Shooting	1.31 (0.82)	0.88 (-0.34)	1.95 (2.00)*	0.76 (-0.62)

* denotes a p value < 0.05
** denotes a p value < 0.01
T-statistics in parentheses

Statistically significant predictors prioritized in table representation

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Implications

When *actual clearance rates and perceived clearance rates* increase, so does willingness to cooperate in homicide investigations, even once a full set of covariates is included.

Homicide investigations are distinct: This is the **first study** to examine cooperation specifically in the context of homicide investigations and to distinguish between **calling police** and **sharing suspect information**.

Community context is central: Willingness to cooperate is shaped by lived experiences in neighborhoods with high violence, long-standing exposure to unsolved homicides, and uneven investigative outcomes.

Unsolved cases have ripple effects: Findings align with ethnographic research showing that unresolved homicides can undermine trust, suppress cooperation, and potentially fuel cycles of retaliation.

The findings contribute to empirical literature examining **police efficacy, police legitimacy**, and the **relationship between community members and law enforcement** within the context of the most serious crime type: homicide.

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Policy and Practice Considerations

From Clearance Rates to Clearance Meaning

Perceptions of clearance are shaped by lived experience, not just official statistics.

- What community members see happen after a homicide
- How families are treated during investigations
- Which cases and places receive resolution

Clearance is interpreted relationally and locally.

- Trust grows through sustained relationships with investigators
- Communication and follow-through matter as much as outcomes
- Place-based patterns influence collective belief about justice

Law Enforcement Strategies

- **Relational:** Build sustained, trauma-informed relationships with families and community members beyond the initial investigation.

- **Situational:** Communicate investigative effort and progress in ways that acknowledge timing, trauma, and uncertainty.

- **Place-based:** Concentrate investigative resources and visible engagement in neighborhoods with repeated unsolved homicides,

For Victim Advocates

- **Center family experience:** Support families in understanding investigative steps and managing expectations over time.

- **Sustain engagement:** Help families remain connected to the process even when cases stall.

- **Reduce harm:** Mitigate retraumatization by coordinating communication and supporting family dignity throughout the investigation process.

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