



Justice Center

THE COUNCIL OF STATE GOVERNMENTS

The Growing Challenge of Unsolved Violent Crime in Washington

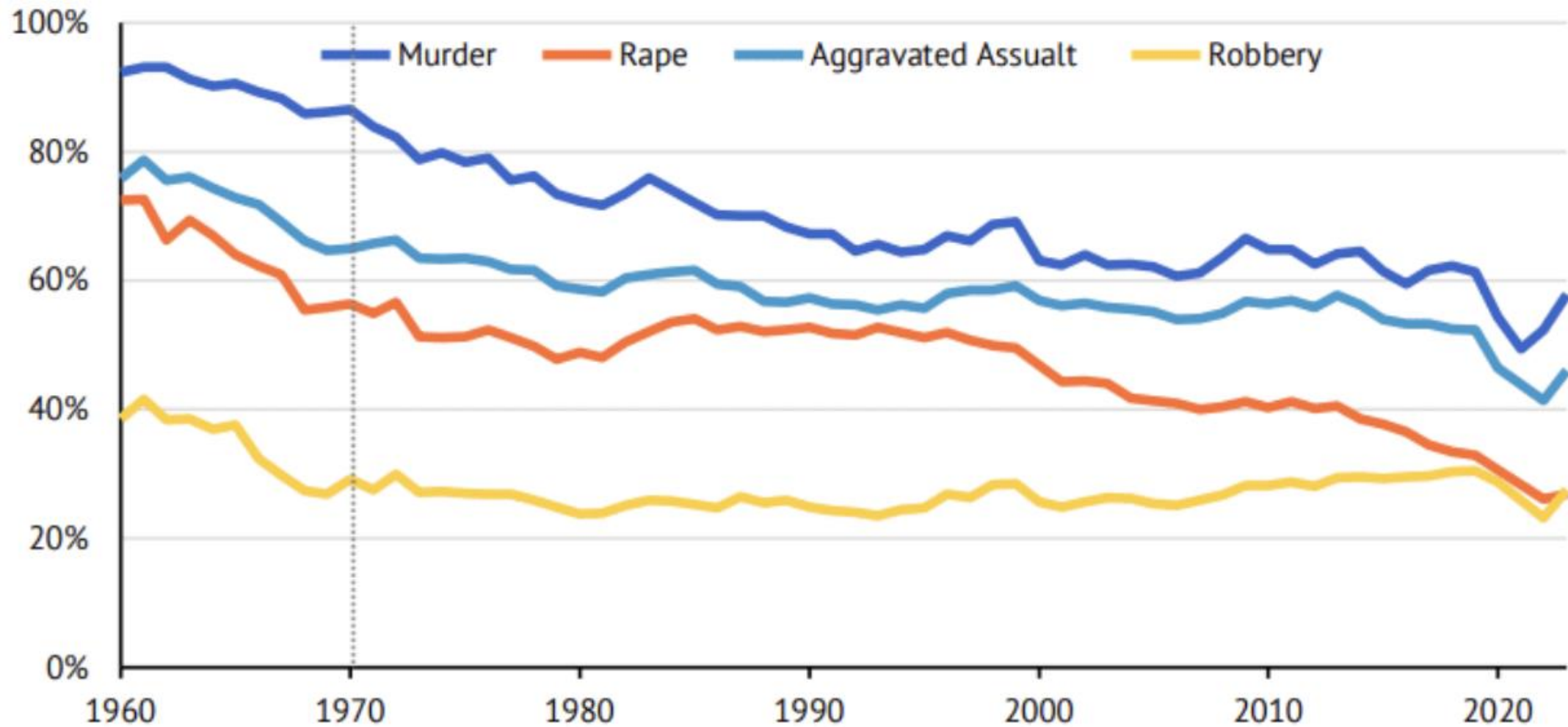
Marshall Clement

DIRECTOR

- I. How well are violent crimes being solved in Washington?
- II. How did we get here?
- III. What can state leaders do about it?

Why does solving violent crime matter?

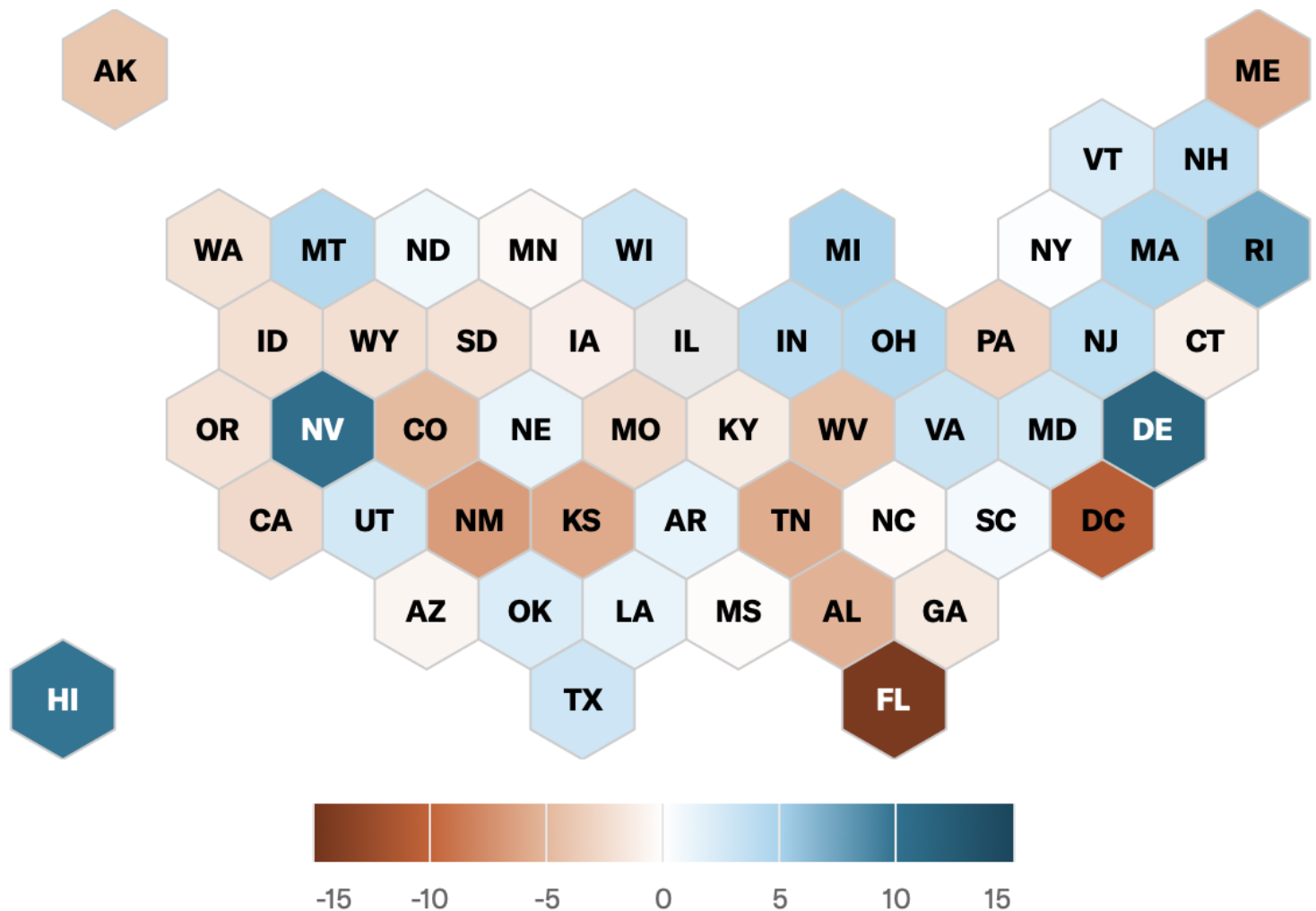
Solve rate of certain violent crimes in the United States, 1960-2023



Source: FBI; Jeff Asher (2025)

Change in percentage of violent crime solved, 2019–2024

Percentage point change in rate of solved violent crimes from 2019 to 2024

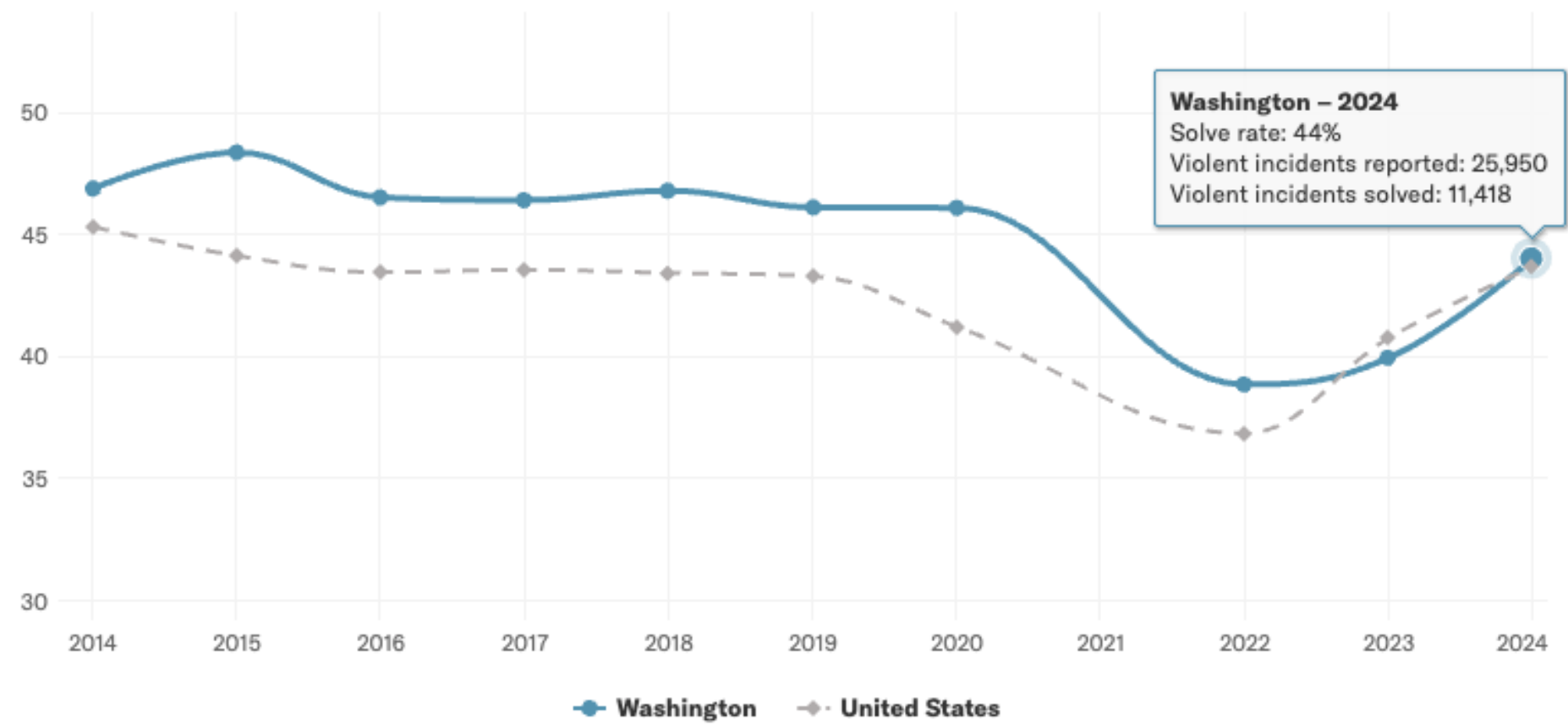


▼ 26 states

▲ 24 states

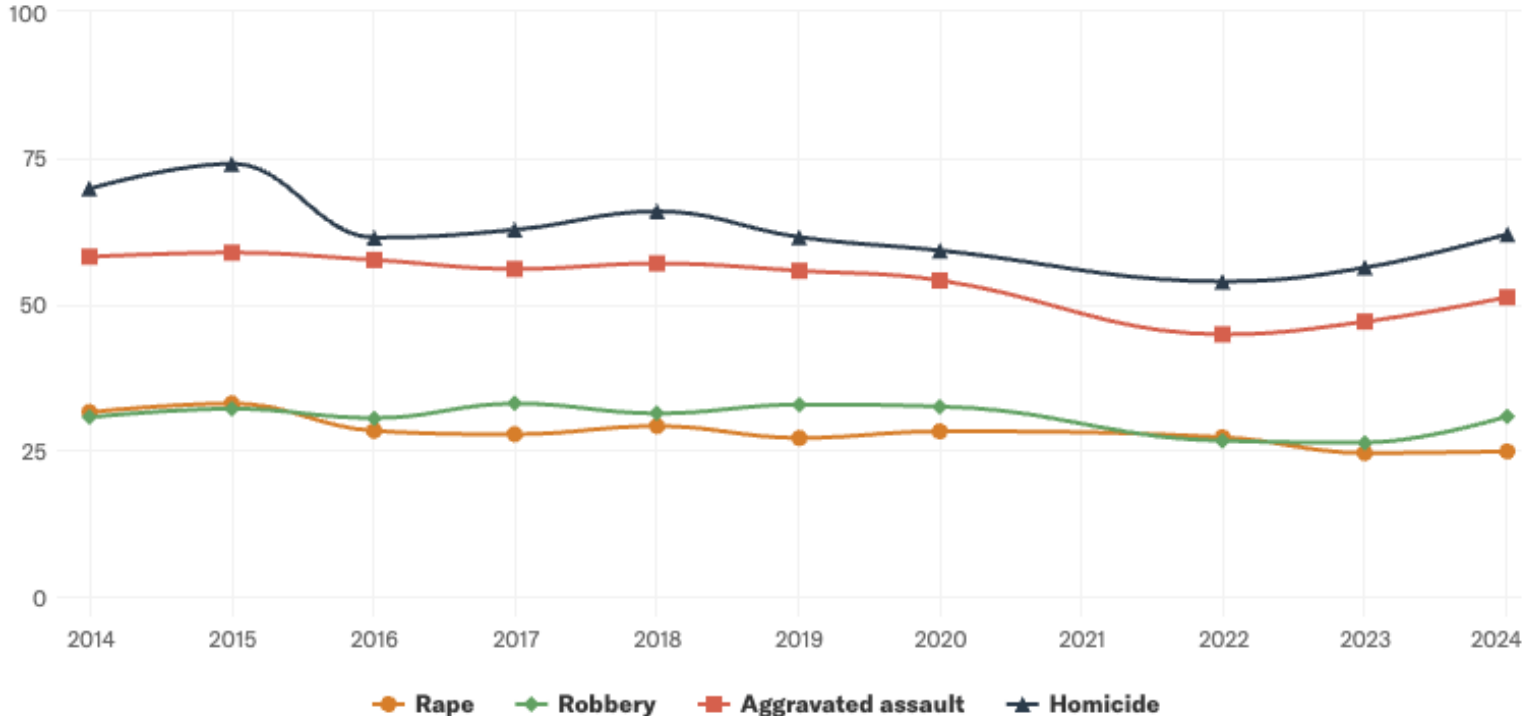
Solve rates for violent crimes reached record lows in 2022-2024.

Solve rate of violent crime in Washington State



Since 2022, over 49,000 violent crimes remain unsolved in Washington State.

Solve rate of violent crime in Washington State



FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program
Aggregated from SRS agency-level Offenses Known reports

62%
of homicides

51%
of aggravated
assaults

25%
of rapes

31%
of robberies

Unsolved over
the past 3 years:

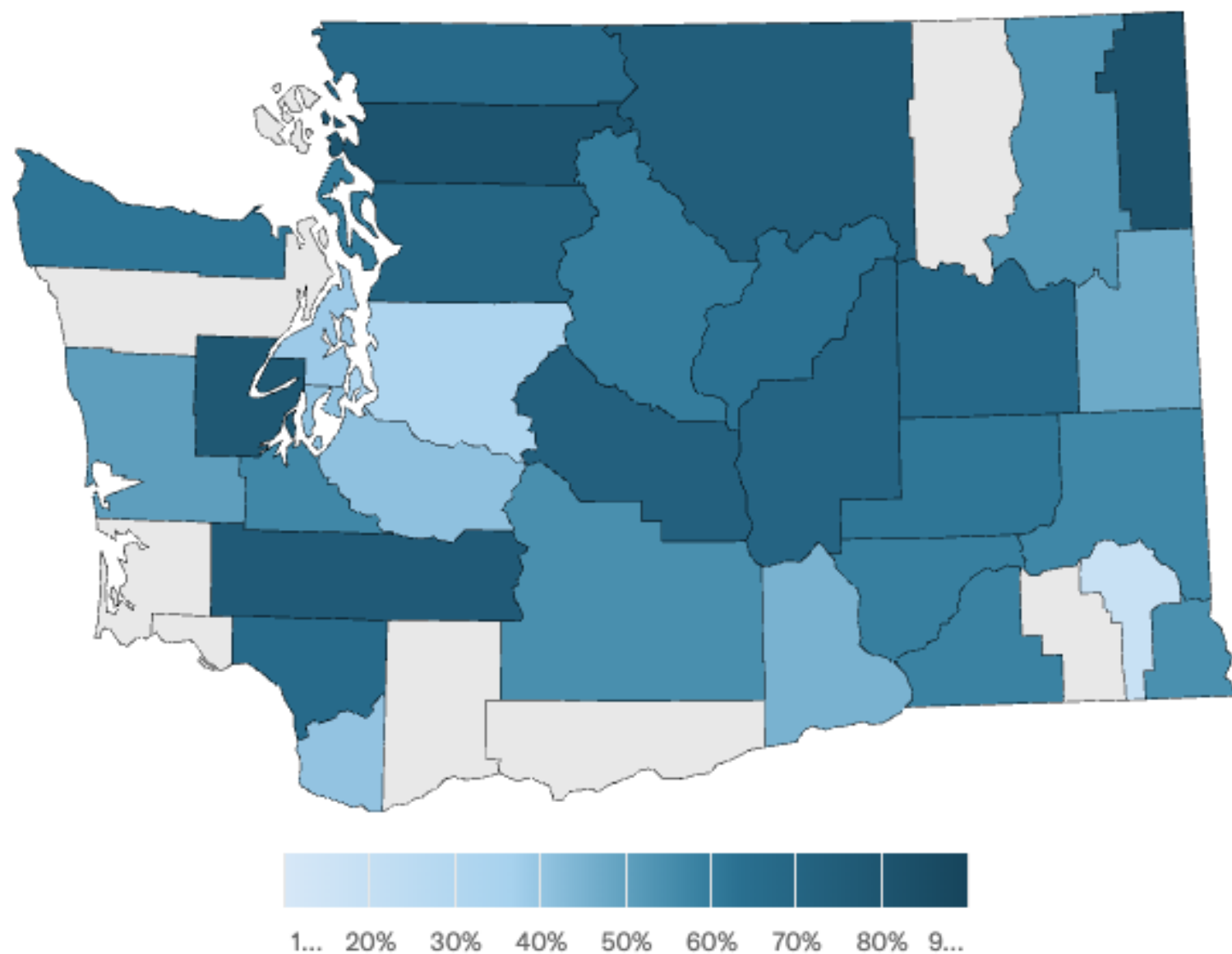
405 homicides

28,708
aggravated
assaults

6,955 rapes

13,412
robberies

Violent crime solve rate, 2024



Solved violent crime by agency in Washington

Agency	JURISDICTION POPULATION	VIOLENT INCIDENTS PER 100K (2024)	VIOLENT INCIDENTS REPORTED (2024)	SOLVE RATE (2024)	PERCENTAGE POINT CHANGE IN SOLVE RATE (2019 TO 2024)
Seattle Police Department	760,058	775	5,894	32%	-3
Tacoma Police Department	223,980	1,063	2,381	32%	-6
Spokane Police Department	229,529	677	1,555	42%	+5
Pierce County Sheriff's Office	451,266	265	1,194	53%	-5
Vancouver Police Department	198,194	584	1,157	38%	+0
Kent Police Department	132,324	490	648	22%	-14
Federal Way Police Department	96,631	545	527	38%	-2
Yakima Police Department	96,646	545	527	45%	-9
Kitsap County Sheriff's Office	181,172	273	495	32%	-7
King County Sheriff's Office	266,681	184	491	43%	-4
Auburn Police Department	82,838	544	451	21%	-4

Solving less violent crime leads to...

Less safety for victims and communities

More risk of retaliatory violence.

Less justice for victims and their families who have been harmed

Less deterrence, punishment, and rehabilitation from the criminal justice system as a whole

People committing violence feel emboldened & free to commit further violence

Less trust in the justice system's ability to protect & respond

Less will to aid investigations

Good news: We can solve more violent crime.



Boston boosted its homicide clearance rate **from 47 to 66%** after focusing on staff resources, training, use of best practices, and leadership and prioritization.



Denver created a special unit to solve nonfatal shootings, applying the same level of effort and resources as for solving homicides. Within 7 months, solve rates went **from 39 to 65 percent**.



Omaha's solve rate for homicide went from **32 percent in 2010 to 100 percent in 2023** through a comprehensive, community-driven violence-reduction effort.

**A growing majority of violent crime
is now going unsolved.**

**We know how to solve more
violent crime – and doing so could
improve trust, safety, and fairness.**

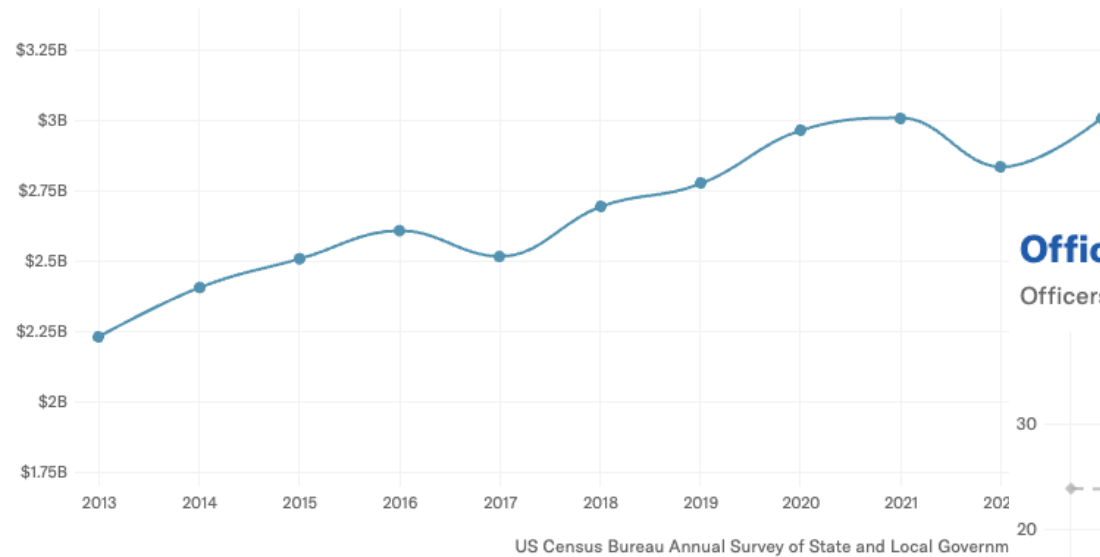
**State leaders need a strategy to
focus attention, investment, and
results to improve justice and
accountability.**

How did we get here?

In Washington, law enforcement expenditures increased 35%, but saw no increase in officers per capita, from 2013 – 2023.

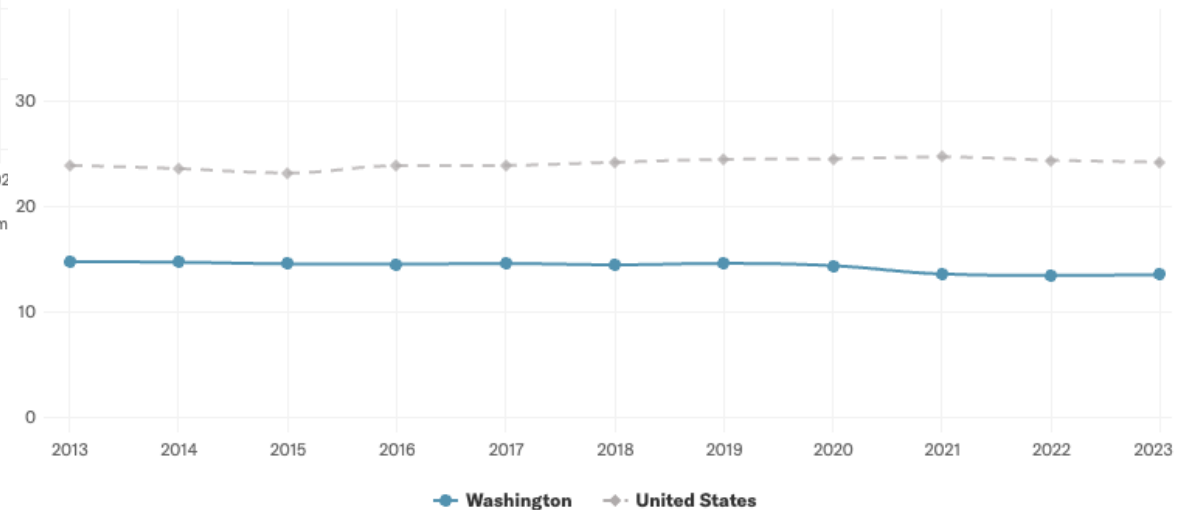
Law enforcement expenditures in Washington

Inflation-adjusted law enforcement expenditures, 2013–2023



Officers per capita in Washington

Officers per 10k residents, 2013–2023

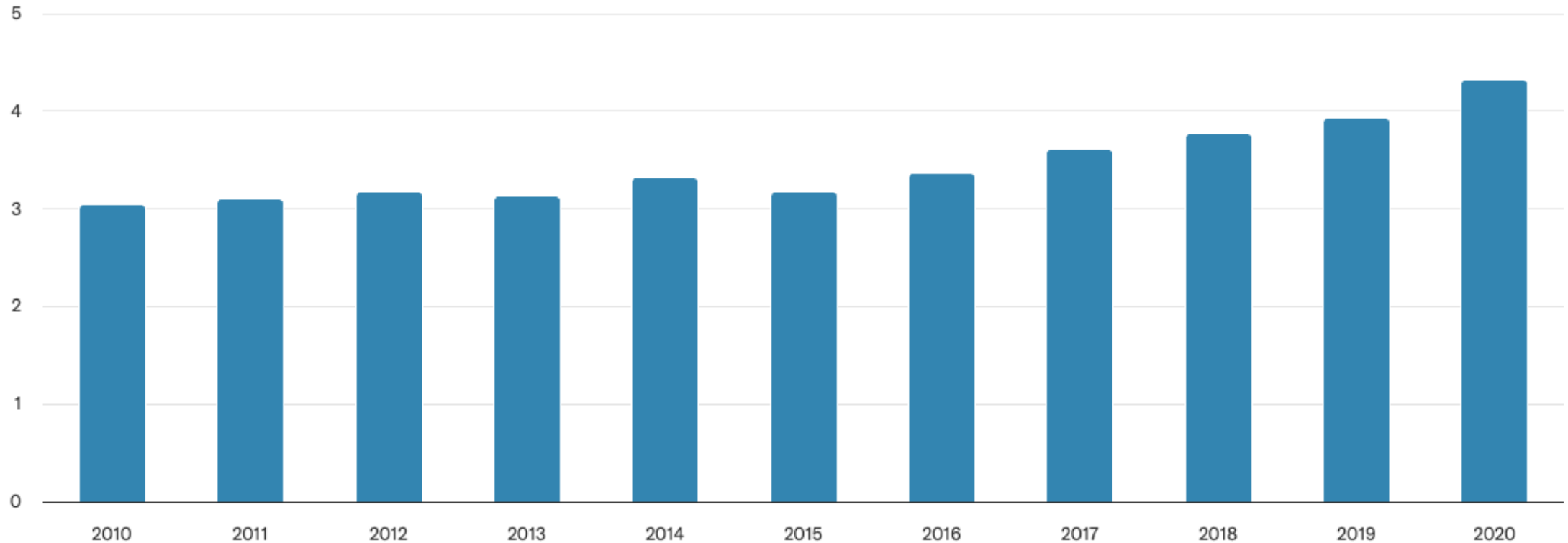


FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program SRS state estimates
FBI Uniform Crime Reporting Program Police Employee Data

In Washington, people in state prison are serving longer terms of incarceration.

Average length of stay (years) of people exiting prison

Washington, Prison terms for violent offenses



BJS National Corrections Reporting Program

**We have a low accountability,
high punishment,
high-cost response to crime.**

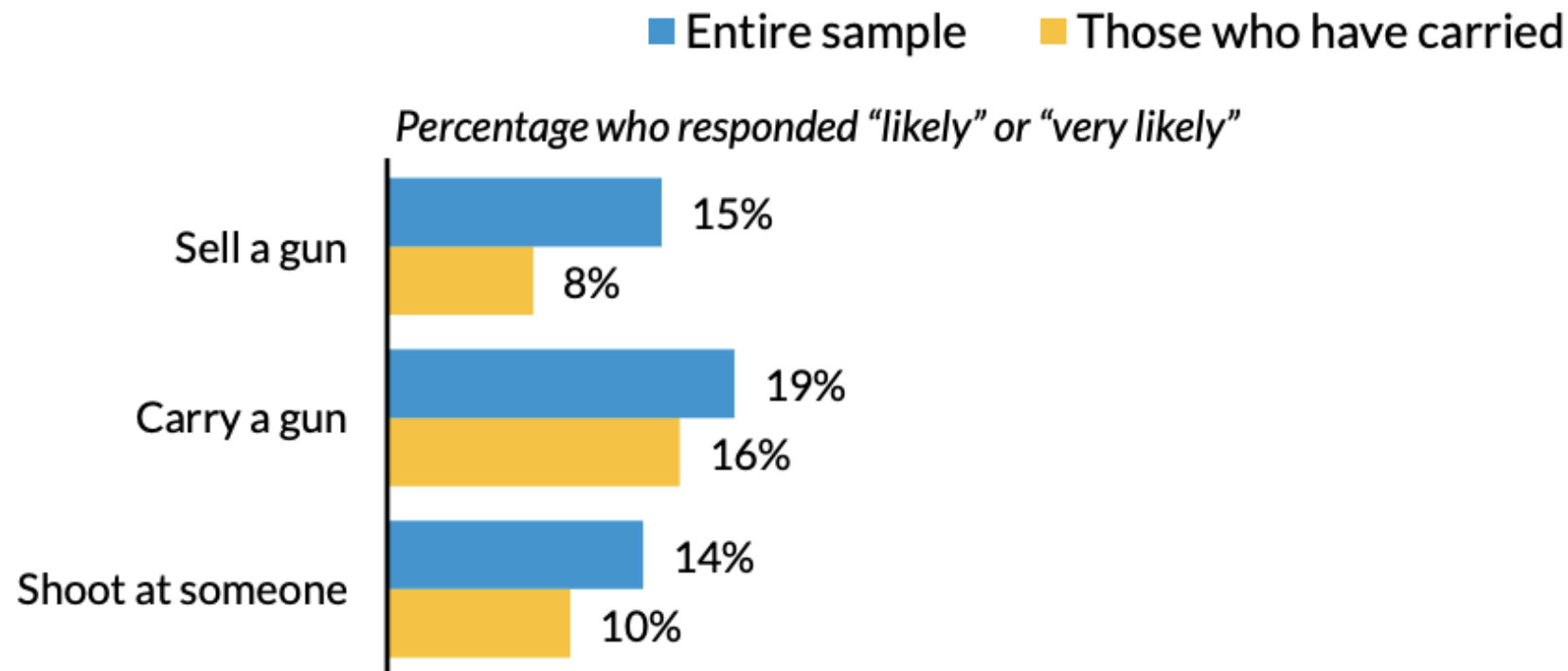
Accountability vs. Punishment



- Been speeding?
 - Gotten caught?
 - What about when you see law enforcement?
 - **Behavior depends on likelihood of accountability.**
-
- Know the punishment?
 - Why not?
 - When would it matter?
 - **Punishment matters only if accountability is very likely.**

Perceived Risk of Apprehension

How likely is someone to get caught if they...



URBAN INSTITUTE

Source: Urban analysis of survey of residents in Chicago, Illinois.

Notes: Valid $n = 344$ (entire sample); 109 (gun carriers). Responses ranged from 1 (very unlikely) to 5 (very likely).

How state leaders can help solve more violent crime

State legislators play an important role in solving violent crime.

- 1. Bring leaders together & set a goal**
- 2. Create policy to improve data collection and reporting**
- 3. Strengthen state support for investigations**
- 4. Support people who witness and experience violent crime**

Key questions to ask

1. What is an acceptable solve rate for violent crime?
What should be the goal in Washington State, by when?
2. Who is responsible for reporting solve rates & convictions
to track progress in holding people accountable for violent crime?
3. What stakeholders need to be at the table to coordinate and
commit to focusing on improving investigations and prosecutions?
4. How well are people who witness and experience violent crime
being supported in the process?



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Link to State Data on Violent
Crime & Solve Rates