



Law Enforcement
Management Institute of Texas

New Police Chiefs in Texas

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Summary Information About New Chiefs and Reasons Why Their Predecessors Departed

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Introduction

The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas (LEMIT) is responsible for delivering the state-mandated, 40-hour professional development course to new police chiefs in Texas. This course is known as the New Chief Development Program (NCDP). In recent years the LEMIT Executive Director, Dr. Rita Watkins, has observed an increasing number of participants in NCDP classes and the need to offer more NCDP classes. These trends led her to become interested in learning more about NCDP participants and police chief turnover in the state. Informal discussions with police chiefs attending LEMIT programs showed they were also interested in this topic. The LEMIT Research Division created a study in late 2014 to collect data that would provide basic information about new police chiefs and their predecessors. The purpose of this report is to present basic, descriptive information obtained through surveys administered to NCDP participants. Future reports will provide additional information, including patterns of relationships between variables.

Methodology

All chiefs who attended NCDP sessions at LEMIT during a two-year period were invited to participate. Chiefs who are leading a police agency in Texas for the first time are required to complete this 40-hour educational program within two years of their appointment as chief. Data collection started with the NCDP in March 2015 and ended with the NCDP in February 2017. NCDP participants were asked to complete a brief paper and pencil survey that asked about their current position and asked for some information about their predecessor. There were 354 new chiefs who attended the NCDP program during the two-year period, 349 participants returned completed surveys. This represents a 98.6% response rate. In some instances, the current chief was unable to, or simply declined to provide information about their predecessor.

Results

The results presented here provide basic information about new chiefs and their predecessors, including the agency type, the path the current chief took to the position, and information about why their predecessors left the position. Few studies have examined police chief turnover so these descriptive results begin to fill this knowledge gap.

Table 1 presents demographic information about new chiefs who attended NCDP between March 2015 and February 2017. Responses indicate the average age of a new chief is approximately 47 years old, with ages ranging from 21 to above 66 years of age. Forty-five percent of new chiefs are under age 46. Large portions of new chiefs are male and white. A large majority of the newly appointed police chiefs have pursued advanced degrees beyond a high school diploma. Nearly 18% of new chiefs possess some form of a graduate degree.

Table 1: New Chief Demographics

Characteristics	Percentage (Count)	Average
Age	(349)	
21-45 years	45.3% (158)	46.8
46-55 years	38.1% (133)	
56-65 years	14.6% (51)	
66 + years	2.0% (7)	
Gender	(349)	
Male	96.6% (337)	-
Female	3.4% (12)	
Race	(349)	
White	75.1% (262)	-
Non-white	24.9% (87)	
Education	(347)	
High School	11.2% (39)	-
Some College	38.6% (134)	
Associates	10.4% (36)	
Bachelors	21.9% (76)	
Masters +	17.9% (62)	

Table 2: New Chief Law Enforcement Experience

Experience	Percentage (Count)	Average
Years as chief in current agency	(349)	
<1	74.2% (259)	<1
1 to 2 years	24.9% (87)	
3 + years	0.9% (3)	
Years employed by current agency	(348)	
0-5 years	70.7% (246)	5.5
6-15 years	16.1% (56)	
16-25 years	8.9% (31)	
26 + years	4.3% (15)	
Years employed in law enforcement	(349)	
0-5 years	6.9% (24)	20.9
6-15 years	22.3% (78)	
16-25 years	38.7% (135)	
26 + years	32.1% (112)	
Worked for predecessor	(347)	
Yes	49.9% (173)	-
No	50.1% (174)	

Table 2 depicts the current level of law enforcement experience among new chiefs. Approximately 70% of the new chiefs have at least 16 years of law enforcement experience. Seventy percent of the respondents have worked for their current agency for five or fewer years and half of the new chiefs did *not* work for their predecessor. Nearly a quarter of the participants work for an agency attached to an educational institution, such as a university or independent school district. Overall, a majority (76.5 %) of the government structures overseeing the law enforcement agencies are comprised of either a council directed by a manager or mayor.

Table 3: Pathway to the Chief Position

Career Path	Percentage (Count)
Rose through the ranks	45.0% (157)
Came from another agency and was appointed chief	37.5% (131)
Federal/ military path	10.3% (36)
Other (new agency, etc.)	4.6% (16)
Non L.E. path	1.4% (5)
Served multiple agencies	1.1% (4)

Table 3 shows that 45% of new chiefs rose through the ranks in the organization and nearly 48% obtained the chief position by coming from another law enforcement, military, or federal agency.

Table 4 (opposite) presents the previous chief’s demographic information collected from NCDP participants who completed a survey. Previous chiefs had on average 25 years of law enforcement experience. Approximately 78% of the previous chiefs spent 15 or fewer years at the current department, including 45% who spent 5 or fewer years in the agency.

Table 5 (see page 4) illustrates the specific reasons chiefs left their positions in Texas. Over one-third indicated their predecessor left involuntarily and a quarter of new chiefs indicated their predecessor voluntarily retired. The most common reason for involuntary turnover is being dismissed (11%) followed by a labor struggle or vote of no confidence (6.1%). New chiefs who indicated there were *other* reasons the previous police chief left the department reported a variety of reasons., including the fact that the agency was new and there was no predecessor, the previous chief transferred to another position within the city government (city manager, administrator, etc.), and the unexpected death of the previous chief.

Many new chiefs entered into a situation in which the predecessor worked in a stable political environment and had positive working relationships with stakeholders. Table 6 (see page 4) presents the perceived stability of the political environment and quality of relationships with stakeholders when the previous chief left the department. Nearly 69% of the respondents indicated the overall political environment was at least somewhat stable when the previous chief left the department. This is further supported by the pattern that shows almost 72% of respondents indicated that relationships with political officials was neutral, good, or excellent. Yet seemingly large proportions of new chiefs report their predecessors had poor or very poor relationships with hiring authorities (31%), police department employees (29%), and political officials (28%).

Table 4: Predecessor’s Demographics

Demographics	Percentage (Count)	Average
Years predecessor was in the department	(283)	
0-5 years	44.9% (127)	10.2
6-15 years	32.5% (92)	
16-25 years	12.4% (35)	
26 + years	10.2% (29)	
Years of law enforcement experience	(212)	
0-5 years	3.8% (8)	25.7
6-15 years	12.7% (27)	
16-25 years	34.4% (73)	
26 + years	49.1% (104)	
Predecessor’s age when leaving	(247)	
21 to 45 years	25.1% (62)	53.6
46 to 55 years	31.2% (77)	
56 to 65 years	33.6% (83)	
66 + years	10.1% (25)	

Table 5: Reasons Predecessors Left the Position

Reasons Predecessor Left	Percentage (Count)
Voluntary	48.0% (165)
Retirement	25.3% (87)
Leave the profession	10.5% (36)
Take a better L.E. position	7.0% (24)
Family health / family issues	2.9% (10)
Health difficulties	2.3% (8)
Involuntary	34.3% (118)
Dismissed or fired	11.0% (38)
Labor struggle	6.1% (21)
Political struggle	5.5% (19)
Civil/criminal wrongdoing	4.4 % (15)
Lack of governmental support	3.8% (13)
Demoted to a lower rank	2.0% (7)
Unrealistic expectations by city	1.2% (4)
Negative community event	0.3% (1)
Other (new department, etc.)	17.7% (61)

Table 6: Current Chief’s Perception of the Predecessor’s Political Environment and Relationships with Stakeholders

Environmental Factors	Unstable	Somewhat Unstable	Somewhat Stable	Stable	
Political Environment (335)	12.2% (41)	19.1% (64)	25.1% (84)	43.6% (146)	
Relationship with Stakeholders	Very Poor	Poor	Neutral	Good	Excellent
Hiring Authorities (325)	10.2% (33)	21.2% (69)	25.2% (82)	30.8% (100)	12.6% (41)
Political Officials (324)	7.4% (24)	21.0% (68)	29.0% (94)	31.5% (102)	11.1% (36)
Community Groups(324)	7.7% (25)	15.7% (51)	33.6% (109)	30.6% (99)	12.3% (40)
Police Department Employees (324)	9.3% (30)	19.4% (63)	29.9% (97)	28.7% (93)	12.7% (41)
Other Justice Executives (323)	6.2% (20)	20.7% (67)	33.4% (108)	26.9% (87)	12.7% (41)
The Media (324)	8.3% (27)	12.7% (41)	41.0% (133)	27.8% (90)	10.2% (33)

Table 7: Chief’s Perception of Stakeholders’ Influence on Predecessor’s Departure

Stakeholder Influence in Prior Chief Leaving	Very Little	Little	Neutral	Some	Very Much
City Manager or Mayor (312)	23.4% (73)	9.3% (29)	12.2% (38)	19.2% (60)	35.9% (112)
City Council (307)	22.8% (70)	7.2% (22)	18.9% (58)	23.5% (72)	27.7% (85)
Key Organizational Members (306)	29.4% (90)	11.1% (34)	29.7% (91)	20.9% (64)	8.8% (27)
The Media (309)	52.8% (163)	14.9% (46)	23.6% (73)	5.2% (16)	3.6% (11)
Interest Groups (308)	48.7% (150)	14.6% (45)	25.0% (77)	8.1% (25)	3.6% (11)
Members of other C.J. Agencies (310)	47.4% (147)	10.6% (33)	22.3% (69)	11.0% (34)	8.7% (27)

Table 7 shows the current chief’s perception of the influence stakeholders had on the predecessor leaving the department. The city manager or mayor had the most influence, with 55% indicating these individuals had at least some influence on the predecessor’s departure. The influence of city councils held a similar pattern to the leading role of the city manager or mayor, with 52% of the responses indicating at least a somewhat influential role. The media in relation to other stakeholders had the least amount of influence on the previous chief leaving the department.

Discussion

These results provide some new insights into the nature of police chief turnover. While new chiefs have substantial policing experience, they are, as a group, relatively new to their agencies. Seventy percent of the respondents have worked for their current agency for five or fewer years and half of the new chiefs did not work for their predecessors. This suggests new chiefs will not only be adapting to a new role, but lack extensive experience in their local work environments. Probably the most thought-provoking finding is that over 35% of chiefs indicated

their predecessor left the chief position involuntarily (see Table 6). Respondents indicated that, among all chiefs who left their position, local political officials most commonly played a significant role (Table 7). Future research and training should focus on understanding and addressing professional pitfalls encountered by chiefs. A study recently launched by LEMIT is collecting survey data, over time, from a sample of newly appointed chiefs to better understand changes in their levels of stress and the sources of that stress. These new data may help shed light on aspects of turnover.

See also:

Li, Y. (2016). *Correlates of police chief turnover in Texas*. Doctoral Dissertation: Sam Houston State University.

Li, Y. (2017). *Executive summary: Police chief turnover in Texas*. Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas.

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