

Animal Cruelty in El Paso, Texas: Trends and Offender Patterns

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Overview

This study summarizes official reports of animal cruelty offenses reported by the El Paso Police Department from 2021 through 2024. All data represent animal cruelty offenses reported to the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

Background

Laws governing the mistreatment of animals are often grouped under the name “animal cruelty”. In the state of Texas, the state penal code contains more than five statutes outlawing the mistreatment of animals (see section 42.09-42.107).¹ These statutes protect both livestock and non-livestock animals and represent at least Class A misdemeanor offenses; several of the statutes can be considered a state jail felony if a person already holds a previous conviction.

What is considered animal cruelty?

The statutes in Chapter 42 rely on the definition of *cruel manner*, which “includes a manner that causes or permits unjustified or unwarranted pain or suffering.”

Treating an animal in a cruel manner is not necessarily limited to violent acts, such as

kicking or hitting the animal. The law recognizes broader patterns of behavior that are associated with mistreatment. For example, a person commits an offense if they intentionally or knowingly fail to provide food, water, or care for an animal in their custody. Overworking a livestock animal, such as a horse, would also meet the offense, as described in section 42.09. Additionally, using or training an animal to fight other animals may also be considered an offense.

Data

Data were drawn from the National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS). The time period for this report spans from the years 2021 to 2024 and includes offenses classified under Group A “Animal Cruelty”. All offenses were reported by the El Paso Police Department during the four year time period. Incidents that were reported by other surrounding agencies in the region were not included in this study.

Information regarding the date and time of the incident was used to generate counts by day, month, and year. Information about offenders and arrestees was also included, providing demographic information such as sex and age. In this study, **offenders** are individuals identified in an incident report as having allegedly committed

¹ Texas statutes on animal cruelty are available [online](#).

or been involved in the animal cruelty offense. Being identified as an offender does not mean that the individual was arrested. **Arrestees** are individuals who were arrested in connection with an animal cruelty incident. Thus, the two groups are not equivalent: an individual may be identified as an offender without being arrested, while arrestees represent only those individuals for whom an arrest was recorded.

Results

Annual Trends in Reported Animal Cruelty

Figure 1 shows the total number of incidents of animal cruelty that were reported by the El Paso Police Department. Between 2021 to 2024, there were a total of 520 reported incidents of animal cruelty. In 2021, there were 149 incidents, representing the highest number during the observation period. Incidents declined by about 17% the following year. The total increased by about 7% from 2022 to 2023 and then fell to 116 total incidents (-12.1%) in the year 2024.

Figure 2 provides a more granular view of animal cruelty trends over time. The gray line represents the total number of animal cruelty incidents reported to the EPPD each week, while the blue line represents the 52-week moving average

across the four-year period. Weekly reports varied considerably, with some weeks recording no incidents and as many as eight incidents reported in a single week during mid-2021. In 2024, the highest number reported in a single week was six. Overall, the moving average suggests that the EPPD reports approximately two to three animal cruelty incidents each week.

FIGURE 1

Annual Incidents of Animal Cruelty Reported to the El Paso Police Department

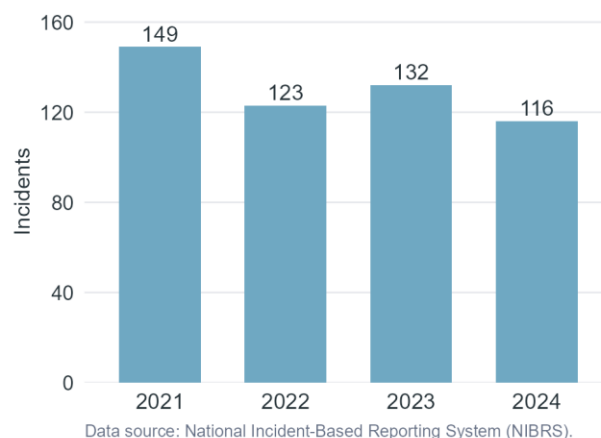
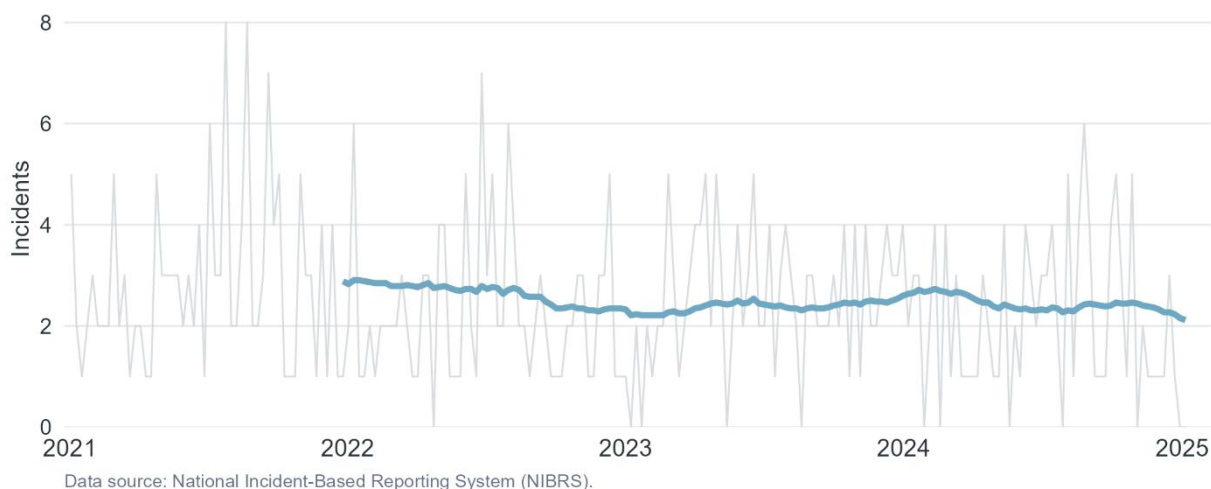


FIGURE 2

Weekly Trends in Reported Incidents of Animal Cruelty to the El Paso Police Department



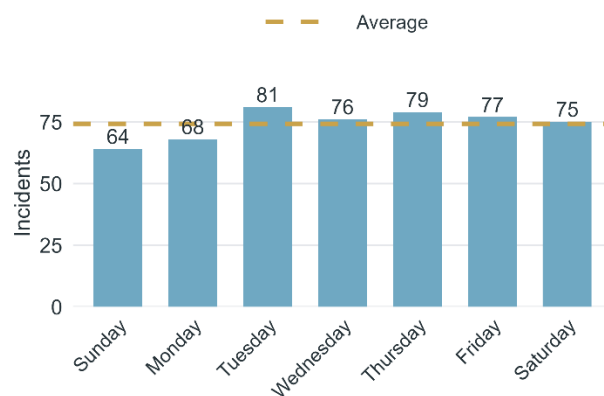
Temporal Patterns in Reporting Incidents

Figure 3 shows the average number of animal cruelty incidents reported on each day of the week across the four-year period. The horizontal line represents the average of averages and helps identify which days show lower or higher counts. Overall, the data suggests similar reporting patterns across the days of the week, with Sunday and Monday exhibiting about 20% fewer reports, on average, compared to Tuesday.

Figure 4 uses the same technique but instead focuses on the average total incidents reported by month of the year. On average, reported **incidents of animal cruelty increase by nearly 50% from May to July**. One explanation for this increase is that the hot temperatures during the summer months is more likely to cause serious injury to animals. Residents who are aware of this fact may be more inclined to report unattended animals. This would also explain why the majority of incidents appear to be reported between 12pm and 5pm, typically the hottest hours of the day (see Appendix).

FIGURE 3

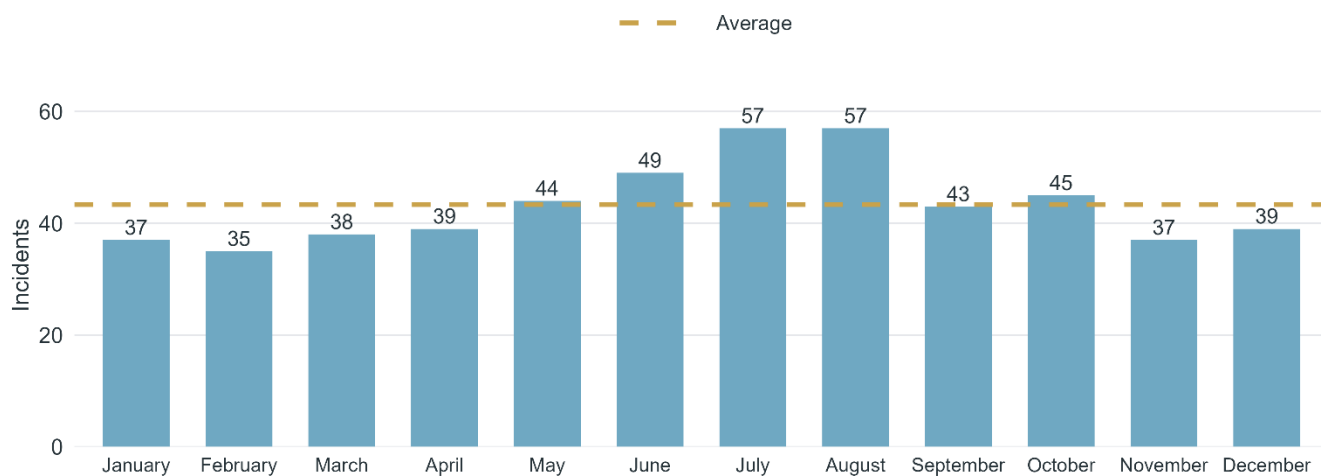
Average Reported Incidents of Animal Cruelty By Day of Week, 2021-2024



Data source: National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

FIGURE 4

Average Reported Incidents of Animal Cruelty by Month of Year, 2021- 2024



Data source: National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

Comparing People Accused to People who were Arrested

Among the 520 animal cruelty incidents identified from 2021–2024, 88 incidents involved at least one person being arrested, resulting in 92 arrestee records. A total of 481 records represent people identified as accused in animal cruelty incidents who were not arrested.² [Table 1](#) compares these two group across age and gender.

Among individuals with a reported age, those who were arrested were younger on average (35.6 years) than those accused but not arrested (40.2 years). Arrestees were predominantly male (69.6%), while among those accused but not arrested, 43.9% were male, 26.0% were female, and 30.1% had no reported sex. These differences suggest that the characteristics of people arrested for animal cruelty differed from those identified as accused but not arrested.

TABLE 1
Comparing the Demographics of People Arrested and People Accused of Animal Cruelty

Characteristic	People Arrested	People Accused
Age, (Average)	(35.6)	(40.2)
Female, %	30.4	26.0
Male, %	69.6	43.9
Not reported, %	0.0	30.1

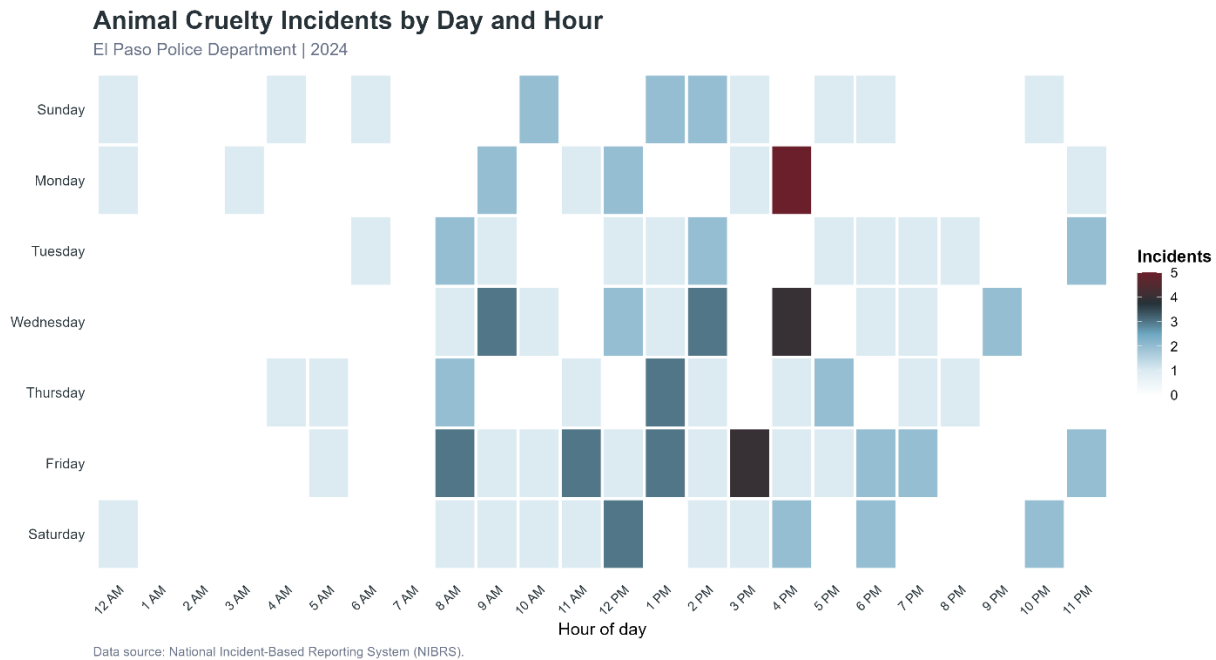
Conclusion

Overall, the data provide a descriptive picture of animal cruelty incidents reported by the El Paso Police Department from 2021 through 2024. The findings show that animal cruelty reports occurred throughout the year, with variation across months, days of the week, and individual weeks. The data also demonstrate that most individuals identified as offenders in incident reports were not arrested, highlighting an important distinction between being identified as an accused person and being arrested. Among those identified, arrestees were younger on average than accused individuals who were not arrested. These findings provide a clearer understanding of the frequency and characteristics of animal cruelty incidents reported to the EPPD and establish a baseline for future examination of reporting patterns and enforcement.

² This group is referred to as “offenders” in the NIBRS data. Offenders represent people in incident reports who were considered an offender. Arrestees, in contrast, are offenders who were formally arrested. There was no missing data for arrestee ages. Offenders did have missing ages and were thus removed to facilitate the comparison. Missing ages is typical for the offender group, as a police officer may not have the opportunity to identify an offender who a report was made about.

Appendix

The below figure shows a “heatmap” of total animal cruelty incidents reported to the El Paso Police Department in the year 2024. On the x-axis, all twenty-four hours in a day are represented; the y-axis shows the days of the week. Colors across each cell in the graph represent a reported incident of animal cruelty, with darker shades representing higher counts. Overall, the pattern shows a majority of incidents are reported during the day time (8AM-6PM), with the majority occurring around mid-day.



About the El Paso Crime Lab

This report was produced by the **El Paso Crime Lab**, an independent public safety research project focused on making local crime and public safety data more accessible in the borderland.

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