

Despite increasing vehicles miles traveled – more cars and more drivers – automotive fatality rates have been in decline for decades. However, in 2020, amidst a global pandemic and widespread societal lockdowns, driving behaviors changed dramatically. Reports emerged as early as mid-summer and were later reaffirmed by the National Highway Safety Administration: the number of automotive collisions in 2020 had decreased from previous years, but the number of fatal crashes held steady – or even increased. I validate these observations for the State of Texas and provide a closer examination of the spatial and temporal trends underlying the increased fatality rates. The analysis utilizes four years of official crash records from the state of Texas, where the fatal crash rate from the year 2020 is compared to earlier year-records using a statistical difference of proportions test. Overall, fatal crash rates increased across the state, but these increases were primarily associated with highly urbanized areas (rural areas enjoyed a slight decrease in fatal crash rates). Although fatality rates peaked in April 2020, the fatality rate remained unusually high throughout the year.