

Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice and Policy

Research, Grantmaking, Evidence-Based Policy, and Data Infrastructure

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine convened an expert committee to review and assess existing evidence on racial differences in crime and criminal justice involvement and make evidence-driven policy and research recommendations to reduce racial disparities in the criminal justice system. The expert committee authored the report, *Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice and Policy*, a comprehensive study to understand how racial inequality is perpetuated by the criminal justice system and interacts with broader societal forces, and what should be done about it.

The committee concluded that policymakers do not have to choose between public safety and racial equity because many of the policies designed to address racial inequalities also make communities safer. Instead, the committee identified two evidence-informed approaches designed to reduce racial inequities and advance public safety: (1) implementing policy reform at every stage of the criminal justice system itself—from policing and courts to corrections, and community supervision; and (2) investing in community-based and social reforms that improve public space, reduce neighborhood inequality, and alleviate concentrated poverty.

Evidence-based solutions for addressing racial disparities in the criminal justice system require strengthening research, improving data collection and infrastructure, and enhancing grantmaking.

EVIDENCE-BASED SOLUTIONS

Efforts to reduce inequality in the criminal justice system should be evidence-based. Research shows that a wide variety of measures—including judicial bans on unconstitutional policing and incarceration, drug sentencing reform, bail reform, and shrinking probation and parole—have already reduced the overall level of criminal justice contact, incarceration, and community supervision. However, there are several areas where additional action is needed to advance solutions:

Invest in alternative interventions aimed at reducing violence, criminal justice contact, and harm; improving victim restoration, community relations, and cross-system coordination with non-criminal-justice agencies; and addressing unmet needs.

Enable the development of evidence-based solutions by enhancing grantmaking structures, data systems, and research.

Coordinate with private foundations that provide incentives, explore promising new practices, seed innovation, and add value to efforts to accelerate systemic reform.

CONSISTENT REPORTING OF RACIAL AND ETHNIC DATA

Researchers must move beyond a Black/White racial and ethnic paradigm to reflect the increasing diversity of the U.S. population. Further, the inconsistent way racial and ethnic data are captured contributes to the difficulty in understanding racial and ethnic disparities. Such data are

not gathered in a standardized way across agencies and regions, making it difficult to get an accurate national picture of racial disparities. Many policies that may have a disparate impact on Black, Latino, and Native American people or low-income individuals (e.g., fees, fines, voter disenfranchisement) are not well documented in existing data collection efforts. Potential solutions to improve the reporting of racial and ethnic data include:

- Meeting current U.S. Census Bureau standards by collecting race and ethnicity data separately and allowing for a designation of more than one race. This would result in more descriptive and accurate subcategories, such as “non-Hispanic White”, “Hispanic Black”, and multi-racial categories.
- Allowing race and ethnicity data to be self-reported. Self-identification within provided categories is consistent with Census Bureau data collection standards.
- Listing Americans Indians and Pacific Islanders as distinct demographic groups, rather than as members of an “other” category.

DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

A 21st century data infrastructure with timely, accurate collection, validation, curation, and dissemination is needed to reduce racial and ethnic inequalities in the criminal justice system at all levels. Linking data outside of criminal justice system databases has the potential to deepen insight on racial and ethnic inequalities.

Data linkage also offers the opportunity of placing criminal justice involvement in a larger social context. For example, linking criminal justice records to the Census and many other federal data collections would greatly enrich the statistical portrait of criminal justice involvement. Such linked data would contribute not only to a more complete understanding of the socioeconomic status of people moving through the criminal justice system and the prevalence of criminal justice involvement in certain communities, it would further illustrate how various social policy issues intersect and contribute to the existing racial inequalities within our criminal justice system.

Such an infrastructure requires attention to three main pillars:

- Linked data across criminal justice and social welfare tracking systems to identify relationships and trends;
- Consistent reporting of racial and ethnic data; and
- Incentives for improving data quality and transparency.

Additionally, there is an immense data gap across stages of the criminal justice system itself. While data systems provide snapshots in time of distinct parts of the criminal justice apparatus, such data offer little insight into how individuals move through the system, let alone get released from it. The ability to follow persons from a police stop to arrest all the way to release is crucial to understanding racial and ethnic inequalities and bias in the criminal justice writ large.

GRANTMAKING STRUCTURES

Enhancing the grantmaking strategies will require addressing key features of the federal, state, and local grants process that hinder an effective use of resources. Solutions to improve grantmaking approaches include:

- Promoting model jurisdictions and programs that have effectively reduced racial and ethnic disparities.
- Partnering with researchers to implement an ongoing system of data collection and surveys that would provide data on the views of resident safety and develop reliable and valid measures of the full range of residents’ viewpoints.
- Exploring the expansion of community-driven pilot programs that are fielded in combination with strong evaluation strategies that also assess factors that can contribute to or impede effective and timely uptake and scalability of programs.
- Supporting research examining and evaluating tribal models of justice and other community-based programs.
- Studying the impact of language accessibility, including how language barriers for limited-English-proficient populations limit access to fair and just outcomes.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

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To read the full report, please visit
<http://www.nationalacademies.org/reducing-racial-inequality>

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