Data Collection and Analysis

Data quality, transparency, and accessibility are central to generating evidence-based policy solutions that make communities safer. However, the country's current data infrastructure constrains our ability to answer fundamental questions about how public safety interventions impact society. Despite its importance to the American public, policymakers receive far less — and less timely — information on crime incidence than almost any other aspect of public life, from employment to education to cost of living.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT OUR CURRENT DATA INFRASTRUCTURE

- **Timeliness:** National crime data are often reported a year or more later, hampering the ability of law enforcement and policymakers to identify emerging trends and develop interventions in response.

- **Accuracy:** Data regarding law enforcement operations, court proceedings, correctional supervision, and many other aspects of the criminal justice system are often incomplete, thwarting efforts to understand the criminal justice system's ability to deliver on its goal of improving public safety.

- **Integration:** Data are collected by government and non-government entities at the local, state, and federal levels, but standards and definitions vary widely, creating fragmented data repositories that are difficult to merge across agencies and jurisdictions and complicate efforts to identify big-picture trends. Unlinked data systems prevent us from understanding individual trajectories through the justice system, interaction with other public services, and the impact of justice policies on socioeconomic outcomes.

- **Transparency:** Many states and public safety agencies enforce barriers to data sharing and access, even when laws and regulation allow for making data available for research, limiting the ability to examine the impact of different policy levers and interventions on criminal justice outcomes.

WHAT POLICYMAKERS SHOULD FOCUS ON

- Requiring all state and local accredited law enforcement agencies to report and publish incident data monthly, consistent with the technical specifications required under the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).

- Ensuring adequate staffing at the state's Uniform Crime Reporting program to manage data submissions from agencies and reporting to the public and the FBI.

- Mandating researcher access to relevant criminal justice data and records.[1]

- Increasing funding for state and local data infrastructure and clearinghouses that improve data integration across agencies and systems, while maintaining important privacy and security standards.

- Encouraging state and local agencies to partner with non-governmental entities such as the Real-Time Crime Index, which produces monthly reports on state and national crime trends, and the Criminal Justice Administrative Records System, which collects, harmonizes, and integrates administrative criminal justice data from agencies nationwide and merges those data with socioeconomic statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau.[2]

ENDNOTES

1   See, e.g., American Legislative Exchange Council. (2025, August 11). *Researcher Access to Data Act.* Retrieved December 12, 2025, from https://alec.org/model-policy/researcher-access-to-data-act/ [alec.org].

2   AH Datalytics. (n.d.). *Real Time Crime Index.* Retrieved December 12, 2025, from https://realtimecrimeindex.com/; Criminal Justice Administrative Records System. (n.d.). *CJARS: Criminal Justice Administrative Records System.* Retrieved December 12, 2025, from https://cjars.org/.