CJARS Executive Summary

The Criminal Justice Administrative Records System (CJARS) is a cutting-edge data platform seeking to fundamentally transform research and statistical reporting on the U.S. criminal justice system. The ultimate aim is to improve public administration through next generation evidence-based policy making.

CJARS is the first integrated national data repository that follows individual offenses from arrest to charge, from conviction to sanction. Data comes from different types of agencies and numerous jurisdictions, and is harmonized into a common schema at the University of Michigan. In partnership with the U.S. Census Bureau, CJARS data are linked at the person-level to confidential social, economic, and demographic data held by the federal government to produce novel empirical analysis of criminal justice caseloads and policy outcomes.

CJARS was founded in 2016, and has received start-up funding from the National Science Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Laura and John Arnold Foundation.

Why is CJARS critical for the future of American criminal justice policy?

Incomplete criminal justice data infrastructure limits performance measurement and which policy questions are asked

- Unlinked criminal justice processes leads to varying definitions of recidivism by agency.
- Lack of integration makes it difficult to identify effective policy levers.
- Failure to account for socioeconomic outcomes limits dynamic benefit-cost analyses of justice policies.

CJARS is a nationally integrated criminal justice data repository to support next-gen statistical reporting

- University of Michigan solicits longitudinal, multi-jurisdictional, person-level data from criminal justice agencies around the country representing all stages of the justice system.
- Disparately formatted source data are harmonized and integrated into a national schema, tracing the arc of a criminal episode through the justice system.
- Harmonized data are transferred securely to the Census Bureau where they can be linked to a wealth of socioeconomic survey and administrative records to evaluate outcomes in a broader context.

Data acquisition has been hugely successful

- Entrepreneurial approach to data collection makes use of data-use agreements, open records requests, and web scraping.
- Data on arrests, court proceedings, and periods of probation, incarceration, and parole covering:
  - 2+ billion records,
  - 133+ million criminal justice events,
  - 22 states, and
  - 30+ million unique individuals.
- Current holdings represent 40.5% of the U.S. population.

Built with acute focus on data security and confidentiality

- At both the University of Michigan and the Census Bureau, personally identifiable information is isolated from data users.
- CJARS IT infrastructure at the University of Michigan is in compliance with the FBI Criminal Justice Information Services Security Policy.

Incentive-compatible relationships among major CJARS stakeholders

- Criminal justice agencies receive statistical products using linked data to support public administration.
- Criminal justice scholars use CJARS to develop new research that supports evidence-based policymaking.
- Federal statistical system improves reporting on the criminal justice system and the justice-involved population at reduced costs and with higher quality.