

Rollback of Federal Investment in Research and Data Collection Jeopardizes Public Safety

The Trump administration's abrupt termination of funding for criminal justice data and research will upend years of progress toward building safer communities.



Josephine Wonsun Hahn



Ames Grawert



Jinmook Kang

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Criminal Justice

April 2025's abrupt funding cuts at the Department of Justice set back vital research into criminal justice initiatives, investments that state and local policymakers, regardless of political affiliation, have long valued and depended on. Terminated grant awards initially valued at [\\$63 million](#) [\[link-1\]](#)

covered studies of innovative approaches to policing, prosecution, and corrections. Many of these programs seek to address underlying community needs, such as [health and economic issues](#) [\[link-2\]](#), that can lead to criminal justice system involvement.

Cuts to criminal justice research and data collection are a concern for all. Republicans and Democrats alike recognize that the criminal justice system can do more to achieve safety and fairness. They share an interest in implementing proven policies and in applying the latest research from other jurisdictions to improve their own approaches to common problems. The Trump administration's departure from long-standing bipartisan support for criminal justice research and data could

Federal Role in Criminal Justice Data Collection and Research

The DOJ plays an outsize role in coordinating criminal justice data from around the country. It serves as a clearinghouse that helps collect, analyze, and standardize information across all levels of the

undermine that work and, by extension, public safety.

This analysis is part of a Brennan Center [series](#) ^[link-3] exploring the effects of federal funding cuts on public safety. This brief explores the pressing need for criminal justice data and research and explains how curtailing federal support for them impedes our ability to prevent crime, improve the criminal justice system, and keep communities safe.

criminal justice system, including more than [18,000 law enforcement agencies](#) ^[link-4]. That work is essential for policymakers and the public, who turn to DOJ resources to understand everything from arrest trends to the best evidence for crime prevention strategies.

PART OF



[\[link-5\]](#)

Effects of Federal Funding Cuts on Public Safety ▶

[\[link-6\]](#)

MORE ON

Accurate Crime Data

[\[link-7\]](#)

Some of this work documents the basic functioning of the criminal justice system, offering a clear picture of the problems and resource constraints faced by policymakers around the country. For example, the DOJ's [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) [\[link-8\]](#) is the [lead agency](#) [\[link-9\]](#) on federal criminal

justice data, collecting information on topics such as the number of [victims of crime](#) [\[link-10\]](#) each year and [prison and jail populations](#) [\[link-11\]](#). The bureau's work is supplemented by other agencies, such as the FBI, which collects the nation's [most commonly referenced data](#) [\[link-12\]](#) on crime.

Through grantmaking, the DOJ also funds research into effective strategies for preventing crime and improving the criminal justice system, and policymakers around the country rely on this expertise. Most of these efforts are overseen by the [National Institute of Justice](#) [\[link-13\]](#), which primarily invests in research and evaluation, and the [Bureau of Justice Assistance](#) [\[link-14\]](#), which provides funding and resources to bolster data infrastructure and implement data-driven strategies in state and local jurisdictions. For decades,

these agencies have worked in coordination to fund efforts that

Halting Progress to Close the Gap Between Research and Policy

The Trump administration's funding cuts have undermined both the collection of data on the criminal justice system and research on how to improve it. The DOJ's [April 2025 grant terminations](#) [\[link-15\]](#) interrupted or ended ongoing research into policy solutions that could improve the safety and well-being of all Americans. Doing so will make it harder for policymakers of all political stripes to fix shared problems.

Worse, creating policy without data and research can lead to missed opportunities and unintended consequences. Government-

aim to reduce crime and strengthen communities.

supported research can defray those risks. Two examples highlighted below in [criminal justice fines and fees](#) [\[link-16\]](#) and [community violence initiatives](#) [\[link-17\]](#) exemplify how research–practice partnerships can identify solutions to crime and poverty, as well as the impact of halting such critical work.

Fines and Fees Research

One example of a policy area that has benefited from such research–practice partnerships concerns the use of criminal justice debt, such as traffic fines or charges levied for court dates. Some of these charges are meant to penalize people for committing crimes, while others exist to raise revenue. For years, [research](#) [\[link-18\]](#) has helped to

build consensus that fines and fees serve neither objective. Reforming these practices is a long-running goal shared by many government officials and criminal justice practitioners across the political spectrum.

To the extent that fines and fees are meant to punish and disincentivize crime, researchers have shown that the opposite often occurs.

According to [one privately funded study](#) [\[link-19\]](#) in Alabama, for example, nearly 40 percent of surveyed residents committed new crimes to pay off their debt, most commonly selling drugs and stealing. More than 80 percent skipped paying rent, medical bills, child support, or transportation costs to pay off their debt.

[Research](#) [\[link-20\]](#) consistently reveals that fines and fees are inefficient sources of government revenue and [disproportionately burden](#) [\[link-21\]](#) low-income people

and communities of color.

Jurisdictions across liberal and conservative lines are working to address unintended consequences of fines and fees. Oklahoma, for example, [recently eliminated](#) [\[link-22\]](#) several fees following its own research into collection costs, with bipartisan support.

That makes the DOJ's decision to cancel its own fines and fees work all the more surprising. The Bureau of Justice Assistance's [Price of Justice](#) [\[link-23\]](#) data-driven initiative brought the federal government's national perspective to fines and fees. Because of significant discrepancies in how different localities and states operate, understanding the effects of fines and fees calls for broad investment and thoughtful coordination across jurisdictions. The grant initiative aimed to track fines and fees and provided cost-benefit analyses to take account of

high rates of nonpayment and costly debt collection. It also included assessments from judges, prosecutors, public defenders, and community members to identify both consequences and viable approaches, such as payment plans, community service, or debt reductions.

Ending this work not only makes it harder for state policymakers to design fair and effective solutions but also erodes faith in the criminal justice system. As one researcher involved pointed out, “Abruptly terminating the project forced us to violate trust. We collected all this incredible data, at a financial cost to both the U.S. government and an emotional cost to the people who shared their stories with us, and now there is no place for it to be put to use.”

Crime Prevention and Violence Research

Community violence interventions use comprehensive and coordinated services to [prevent violence](#) [\[link-24\]](#) via de-escalation and mediation, as well to provide access to jobs, mentorship, and training. Federal money helped seed community violence intervention programs around the country and encouraged partnerships across local nonprofits, law enforcement, social workers, and hospital and health providers.

Despite [promising results](#) [\[link-25\]](#) in existing research on such programs over the years, much more research is needed to understand how these models can be improved. This is easier said than done, as approaches to community violence interventions are complex and tightly tailored to their communities, often resting on precise knowledge of local problems and the people and organizations who can help solve them.

In recent years, additional federal investments have sought to build on this work, including two key grant programs. One, the Bureau of Justice Assistance's [Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative](#) [\[link-26\]](#), would have helped develop and expand such strategies. Another, the National Institute of Justice's [Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative](#) [\[link-27\]](#): Research and Evaluation, would have provided research and evaluation to document what works.

Both were among [\\$145 million](#) [\[link-28\]](#) in grant awards for community violence intervention

programs canceled by the DOJ, including \$8.6 million in research and evaluation. In response to the cuts, law enforcement leaders signed a [letter](#) [\[link-29\]](#) calling on the DOJ to reinstate funding for “life-saving” work on community violence interventions, citing declines in homicides and violence in their jurisdictions. Federal funding cuts to these bipartisan efforts essentially turn the DOJ against its own investments and leave in the lurch the cities and states looking to launch, sustain, or expand these programs. Worse, the loss of these programs might make it harder for local leaders to address violent crime and other public safety challenges.

Rebuilding Support for Criminal Justice Research and Data Collection

Crime prevention and community safety depend on valid and dependable data. Nancy La Vigne, the former director of the National Institute of Justice and current dean of Rutgers School of Criminal Justice, explained that without that foundation, “we lose the ability to do even basic research to understand how systems and individuals operate, as well as strengths and unintended consequences of programs and policies. Reducing staff and organizations also inhibits creativity, partnerships, and new solutions.”

Federal support is difficult to replace. Few organizations can match the size and scope of federal investments, especially amid

strained state and local budgets. Further, the federal government can more readily access leading researchers and leverage their expertise to assist state and local jurisdictions. Without federal support, the field cannot — and will not — advance, adapt, or react to new challenges as quickly.

Policymakers should act to prevent further erosion of the nation’s already-limited capacity for criminal justice research and data collection — and take the opportunity to build stronger infrastructure to support work that is critical to public safety. Lawmakers in both parties have a stake in these funding decisions. Many of the grants detailed here supported, studied, or, at minimum, would have informed work in rural and urban jurisdictions. Grant terminations also affect people across the criminal justice system. Members of law enforcement and corrections who find themselves without necessary data, for

example, can be valuable partners in advocating for restored funding. That advocacy should start with the shared goal of reversing the DOJ's grant terminations and ensuring that future research grant solicitations are released. As of publication, no [National Institute of Justice](#) [link-30] or [Bureau of Justice Statistics](#) [link-31] solicitations for 2025 have been released.

Building capacity for research and data collection must also be a priority. Discretionary funding for the DOJ's [Office of Justice Programs](#) [link-32], which oversees the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, and the National Institute of Justice, comprises a small fraction (about 7 percent) of the [DOJ's total discretionary budget](#) [link-33] of roughly \$37 billion. And the Bureau of Justice Statistics is in especially desperate need of [increased](#)

[funding and modernization](#) [link-34], a bipartisan goal that has yet to advance. Better funding for the DOJ's data and research arms could offer a relatively low-cost way to invest in public safety and the future of communities around the country, one that is valued by law enforcement professionals and policymakers across the political spectrum.

Lastly, leaders in the private sector should look for opportunities to incorporate research areas that the federal government has, for now, walked away from. Independent researchers already contribute to plugging gaps in other areas of federal data. For example, [the Real Time Crime Index](#) [link-35], a private project by a team of data experts and researchers, is an invaluable complement to the FBI's annual publications on crime statistics. There may be other opportunities to build data capacity,

at reasonably little expense.
However, because of the federal
government's resources and access
to expertise, renewed federal

investment in data and research is
essential to improving safety and
justice.

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Links

link-1: \$63 million <https://perma.cc/ZMQ2-HEMX>

link-2: health and economic issues <https://perma.cc/26ZT-EN2E>

link-3: series <https://www.brennancenter.org/series/effects-federal-funding-cuts-public-safety>

link-4: 18,000 law enforcement agencies <https://www.fbi.gov/how-we-can-help-you/more-fbi-services-and-information/ucr>

link-5: Image </series/effects-federal-funding-cuts-public-safety>

link-6: Effects of Federal Funding Cuts on Public Safety </series/effects-federal-funding-cuts-public-safety>

link-7: Accurate Crime Data <https://www.brennancenter.org/topics/criminal-justice/accurate-crime-data>

link-8: Bureau of Justice Statistics <https://perma.cc/RV8Y-SLUB>

link-9: lead agency <https://counciloncj.org/federal-data-in-the-crosshairs-whats-at-stake-for-public-safety/>

link-10: victims of crime <https://perma.cc/3LXT-VCHK>

link-11: prison and jail populations <https://perma.cc/RFU9-8B3Y>

link-12: most commonly referenced data <https://cde.ucr.cjis.gov/LATEST/webapp/#/pages/downloads>

link-13: National Institute of Justice <https://perma.cc/B46N-CMFX>

link-14: Bureau of Justice Assistance <https://perma.cc/TW43-CNG7>

link-15: April 2025 grant terminations <https://perma.cc/ZMQ2-HEMX>

link-16: criminal justice fines and fees <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/analysis-opinion/fees-fines-and-ability-pay>

link-17: community violence initiatives [https://www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-programs-can-reduce-gun-](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-programs-can-reduce-gun-violence/#:~:text=Community%2Dbased%20violence%20intervention%20serves,the%20issue%20of%20gun%20violence.)

[violence/#:~:text=Community%2Dbased%20violence%20intervention%20serves,the%20issue%20of%20gun%20violence.](https://www.americanprogress.org/article/community-based-violence-interruption-programs-can-reduce-gun-violence/#:~:text=Community%2Dbased%20violence%20intervention%20serves,the%20issue%20of%20gun%20violence.)

link-18: research https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019_10_Fees%26Fines_Final3.pdf?inline=1

link-19: one privately funded study <https://perma.cc/E2LH-K8EY>

link-20: Research https://www.brennancenter.org/sites/default/files/2019-11/2019_10_Fees%26Fines_Final3.pdf?inline=1

link-21: disproportionately burden <https://www.rsjournal.org/content/rsfjss/8/2/118.full.pdf?inline=1>

link-22: recently eliminated <https://perma.cc/D9NU-LGNB>

link-23: Price of Justice <https://perma.cc/4DEU-P855>

link-24: prevent violence <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/crime-prevention-efforts-face-setbacks-after-federal-cuts>

link-25: promising results <https://perma.cc/Y4AH-4PY4>

link-26: Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative <https://perma.cc/HUB4-LXZX>

link-27: Community-Based Violence Intervention and Prevention Initiative <https://perma.cc/8ER3-WSEV>

link-28: \$145 million <https://perma.cc/ZMQ2-HEMX>

link-29: letter <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/trump-administration-slashed-federal-funding-gun-violence-prevention-2025-07-29/>

link-30: National Institute of Justice <https://perma.cc/CJW9-EAQL>

link-31: Bureau of Justice Statistics <https://perma.cc/MD4E-GHRF>

link-32: Office of Justice Programs <https://perma.cc/8R3M-SXS7>

link-33: DOJ's total discretionary budget https://www.congress.gov/crs_external_products/R/HTML/R48643.html#_Toc214629490

link-34: increased funding and modernization <https://counciloncj.org/federal-data-in-the-crosshairs-whats-at-stake-for-public-safety/>

link-35: the Real Time Crime Index <https://perma.cc/L34J-RDCF>