

# An Introduction to CJARS:

A new data platform for integrated criminal justice research

Michael Mueller-Smith  
University of Michigan

March 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup>, 2020

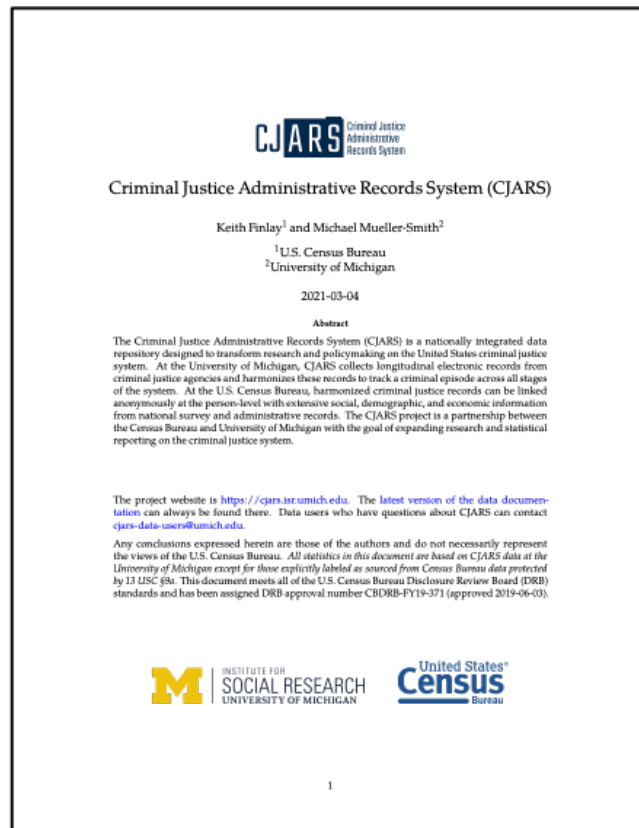
# Webinar topics

1. What is CJARS? Where to find detailed documentation?
2. Similarities and differences of CJARS to other statistical reporting initiatives on U.S. criminal justice
3. Accessing CJARS and research opportunities
4. Resources to support early-stage researchers

# Project documentation and resources

## Several key resources will be introduced:

### Data Documentation



Criminal Justice Administrative Records System (CJARS)

Keith Finlay<sup>1</sup> and Michael Mueller-Smith<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>U.S. Census Bureau  
<sup>2</sup>University of Michigan


2021-03-04

**Abstract**

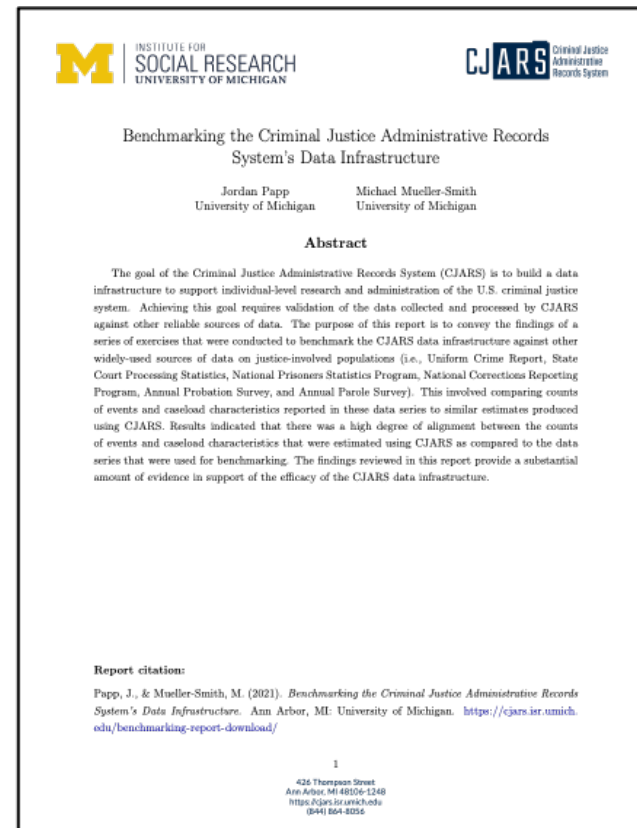
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The project website is <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu>. The latest version of the data documentation can always be found there. Data users who have questions about CJARS can contact [cjars-data-users@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-data-users@umich.edu).

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### Benchmarking Report



Benchmarking the Criminal Justice Administrative Records System's Data Infrastructure

Jordan Papp  
University of Michigan

Michael Mueller-Smith  
University of Michigan

**Abstract**

The goal of the Criminal Justice Administrative Records System (CJARS) is to build a data infrastructure to support individual-level research and administration of the U.S. criminal justice system. Achieving this goal requires validation of the data collected and processed by CJARS against other reliable sources of data. The purpose of this report is to convey the findings of a series of exercises that were conducted to benchmark the CJARS data infrastructure against other widely-used sources of data on justice-involved populations (i.e., Uniform Crime Report, State Court Processing Statistics, National Prisoners Statistics Program, National Corrections Reporting Program, Annual Probation Survey, and Annual Parole Survey). This involved comparing counts of events and caseload characteristics reported in these data series to similar estimates produced using CJARS. Results indicated that there was a high degree of alignment between the counts of events and caseload characteristics that were estimated using CJARS as compared to the data series that were used for benchmarking. The findings reviewed in this report provide a substantial amount of evidence in support of the efficacy of the CJARS data infrastructure.

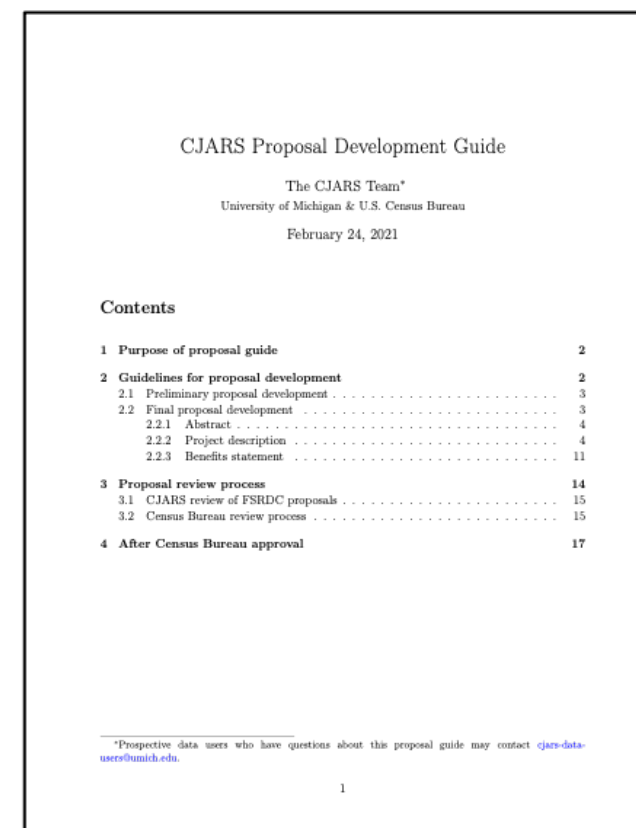
**Report citation:**

Papp, J., & Mueller-Smith, M. (2021). *Benchmarking the Criminal Justice Administrative Records System's Data Infrastructure*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan. <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu/benchmarking-report-download/>

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426 Thompson Street  
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248  
<https://cjars.isr.umich.edu>  
(844) 864-8256

### Proposal Guide



CJARS Proposal Development Guide

The CJARS Team\*  
University of Michigan & U.S. Census Bureau

February 24, 2021

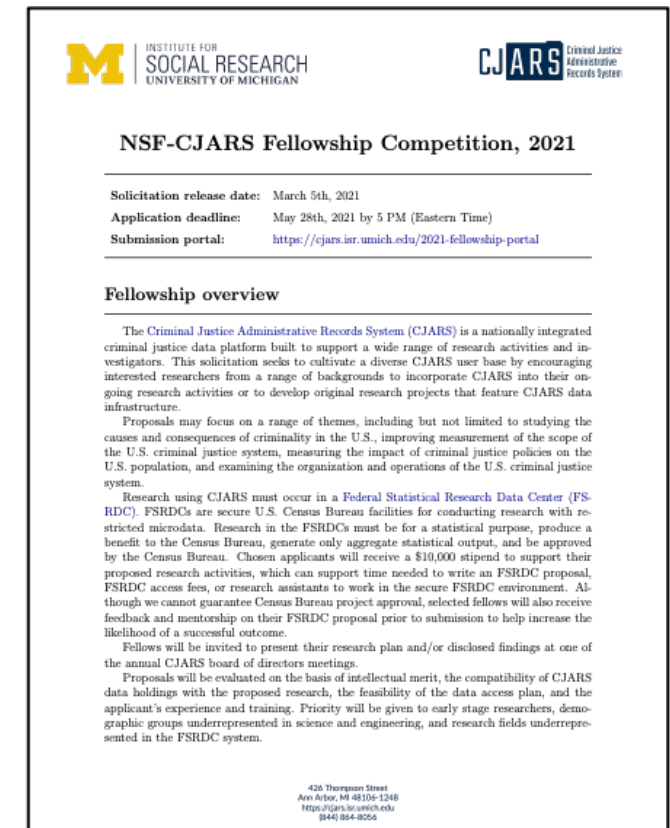
**Contents**

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\*Prospective data users who have questions about this proposal guide may contact [cjars-data-users@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-data-users@umich.edu).

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### Fellowship Solicitation



NSF-CJARS Fellowship Competition, 2021

Solicitation release date: March 5th, 2021

Application deadline: May 28th, 2021 by 5 PM (Eastern Time)

Submission portal: <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu/2021-fellowship-portal>

**Fellowship overview**

The Criminal Justice Administrative Records System (CJARS) is a nationally integrated criminal justice data platform built to support a wide range of research activities and investigators. This solicitation seeks to cultivate a diverse CJARS user base by encouraging interested researchers from a range of backgrounds to incorporate CJARS into their ongoing research activities or to develop original research projects that feature CJARS data infrastructure.

Proposals may focus on a range of themes, including but not limited to studying the causes and consequences of criminality in the U.S., improving measurement of the scope of the U.S. criminal justice system, measuring the impact of criminal justice policies on the U.S. population, and examining the organization and operations of the U.S. criminal justice system.

Research using CJARS must occur in a Federal Statistical Research Data Center (FSRDC). FSRDCs are secure U.S. Census Bureau facilities for conducting research with restricted microdata. Research in the FSRDCs must be for a statistical purpose, produce a benefit to the Census Bureau, generate only aggregate statistical output, and be approved by the Census Bureau. Chosen applicants will receive a \$10,000 stipend to support their proposed research activities, which can support time needed to write an FSRDC proposal, FSRDC access fees, or research assistants to work in the secure FSRDC environment. Although we cannot guarantee Census Bureau project approval, selected fellows will also receive feedback and mentorship on their FSRDC proposal prior to submission to help increase the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Fellows will be invited to present their research plan and/or disclosed findings at one of the annual CJARS board of directors meetings.

Proposals will be evaluated on the basis of intellectual merit, the compatibility of CJARS data holdings with the proposed research, the feasibility of the data access plan, and the applicant's experience and training. Priority will be given to early stage researchers, demographic groups underrepresented in science and engineering, and research fields underrepresented in the FSRDC system.

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# Frequently asked questions

- Live Q & A panel following presentation
- Submit questions via the “Q & A” tab in your Zoom meeting window
- FAQ to be posted to CJARS website in coming weeks

# Defining the Criminal Justice Administrative Records System (CJARS)

# What is CJARS?

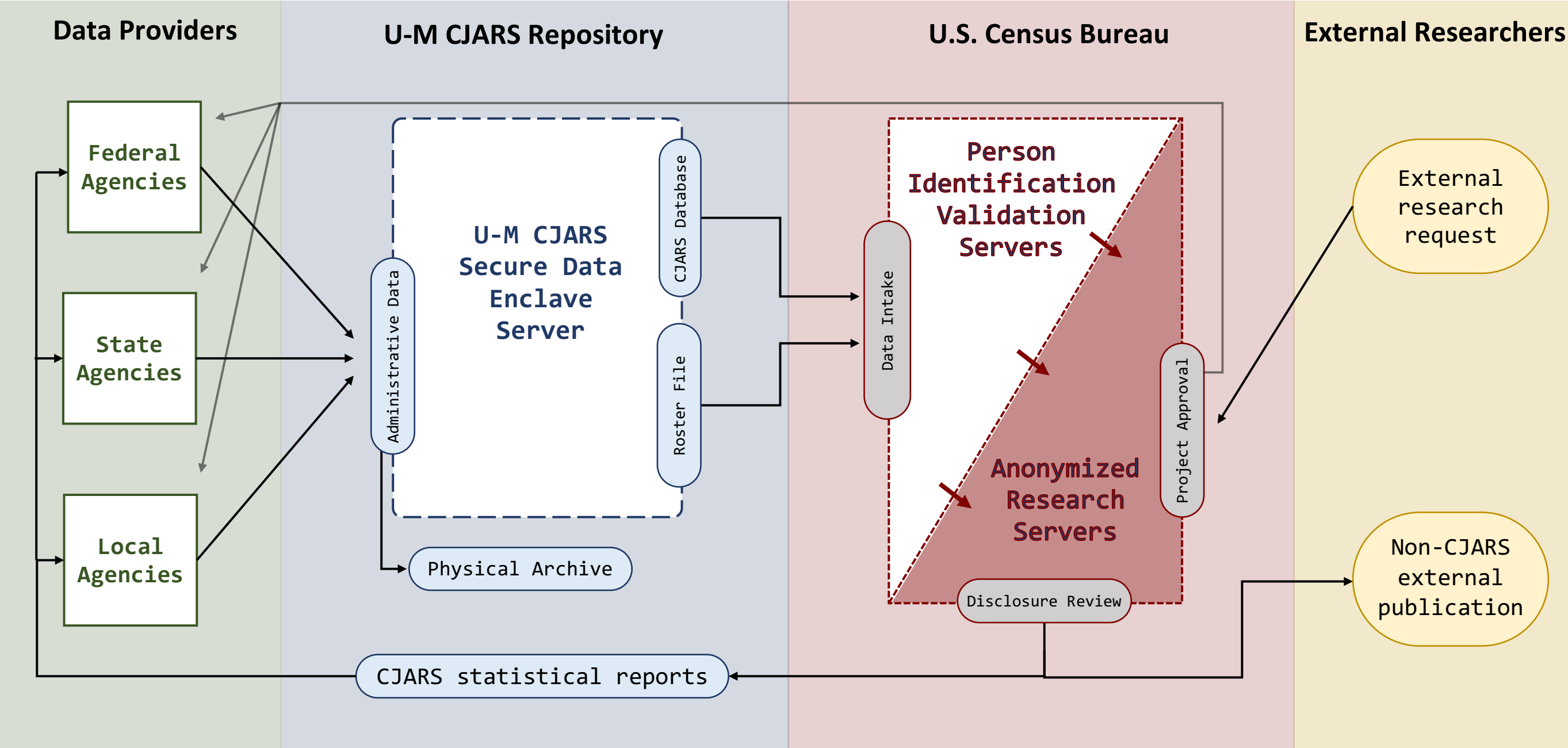
CJARS, founded in 2016, is a joint data infrastructure project between University of Michigan and the U.S. Census Bureau

Building a novel data platform to modernize research and statistical reporting on the U.S. criminal justice system, including:

- Event-level criminal justice data with nationwide scope
- Tracking across key milestones in the justice system
- Capacity to link with individual-level survey and administrative data at the U.S. Census Bureau

Financial support from the National Science Foundation, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Laura and John Arnold Foundation, the University of Michigan, and the U.S. Census Bureau

# CJARS at a glance



# Justice-involved individuals (JII)

CJARS data is oriented around the concept of the *justice-involved individual*

- Does not presuppose guilt or innocence.

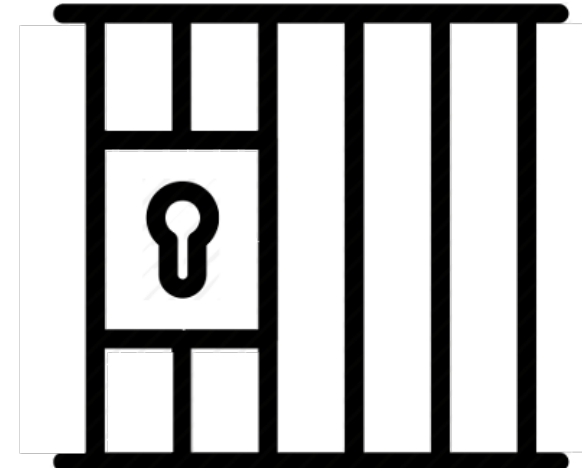
JII population includes:



Arrestees



Criminal Defendants



Inmates



Probationers/Parolees



# Why do we need CJARS?

Key contributions over existing resources:

1. Longitudinal, multi-jurisdictional data is collected, harmonized, and linked to track individuals across space and time
2. Evolution of a criminal episode is traced through the justice system
3. Built for integration with socio-economic survey and administrative data held by the Census Bureau
4. Secure, responsible research access options without gatekeeping

# What CJARS is not

Examples of groups and events that are out of scope:

- Minors involved in the juvenile justice system
- Reported crimes that do not result in an arrest
- Career progression of law enforcement, prosecutors, judges, or correctional officers
- Other events that might elevate criminal risk or be impacted by involvement in the criminal justice system (e.g. housing evictions, child welfare investigations, child support obligations, etc.)


CJARS is well documented

# CJARS data documentation

## Contents include:

- Project description and data collection methods
- Data holdings and structure
- Linkage process and other automated algorithms
- Variable codebook and descriptive statistics

Link: <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu/data-documentation-download/>



Criminal Justice Administrative Records System (CJARS)

Keith Finlay<sup>1</sup> and Michael Mueller-Smith<sup>2</sup>

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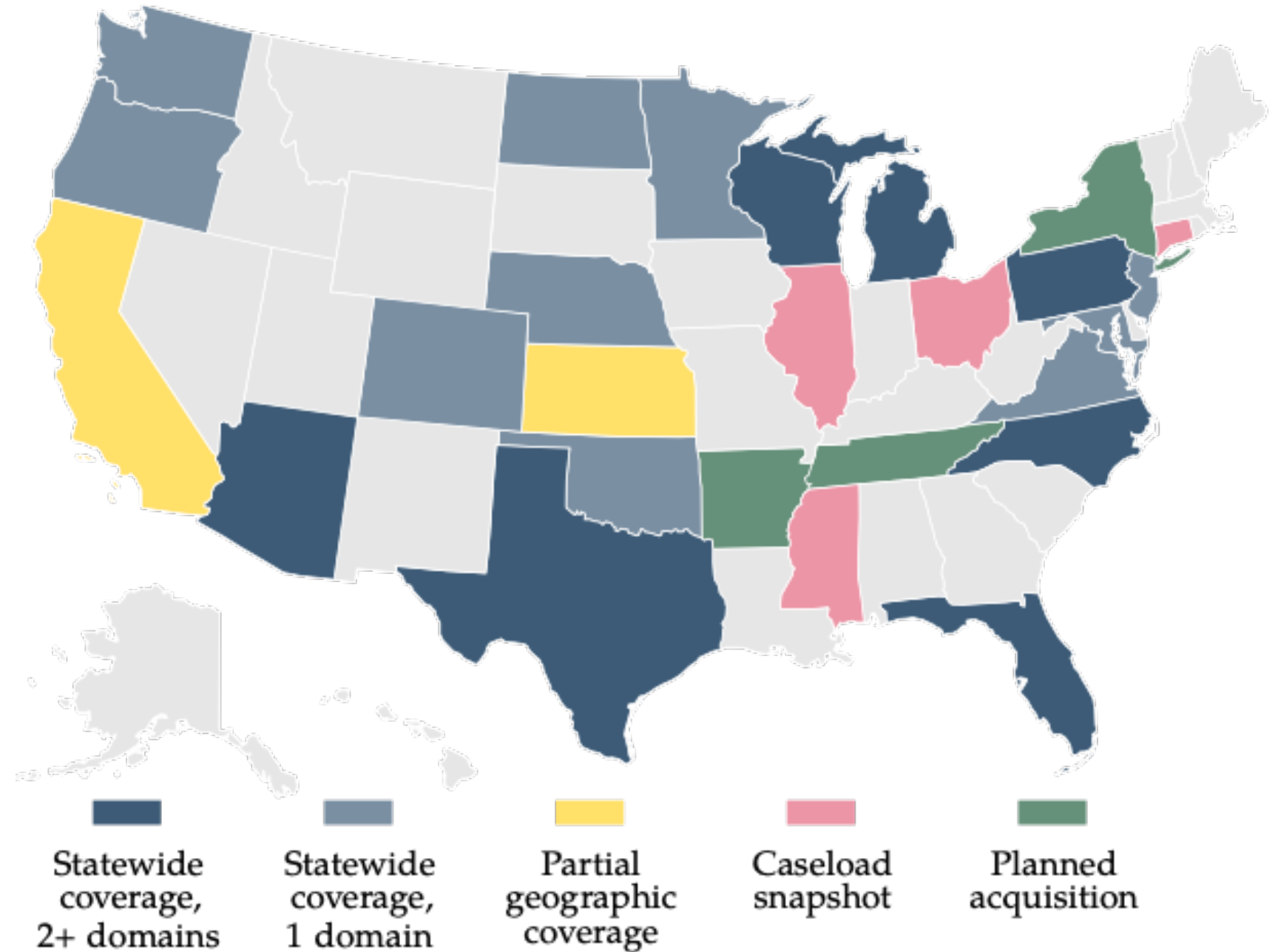


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# Data documentation: data holdings

## Extensive data holdings to date:

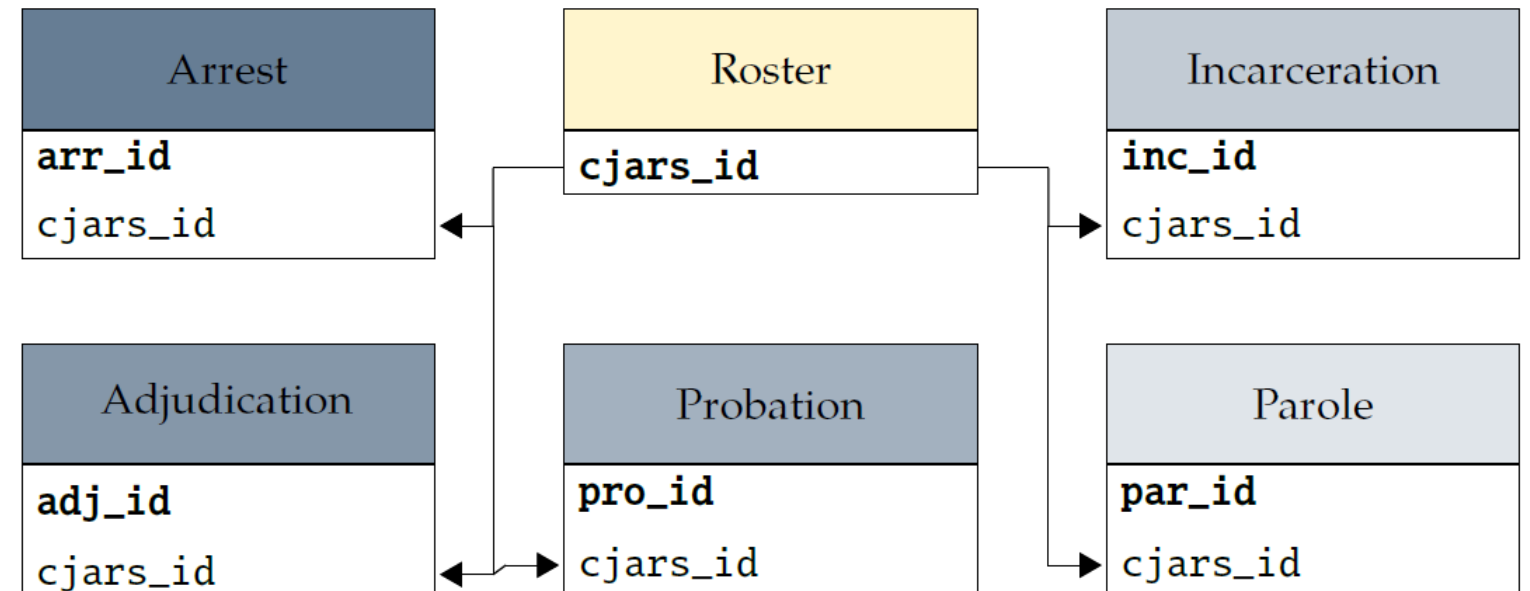
- 2+ billion lines of raw data
- 150+ million criminal justice events
- 30+ million unique individuals
- Statewide coverage in 1+ domains for 43% of U.S. population



# Data documentation: relational structure

1 JII roster and 5 event-specific data tables, with 2 ways to internally link:

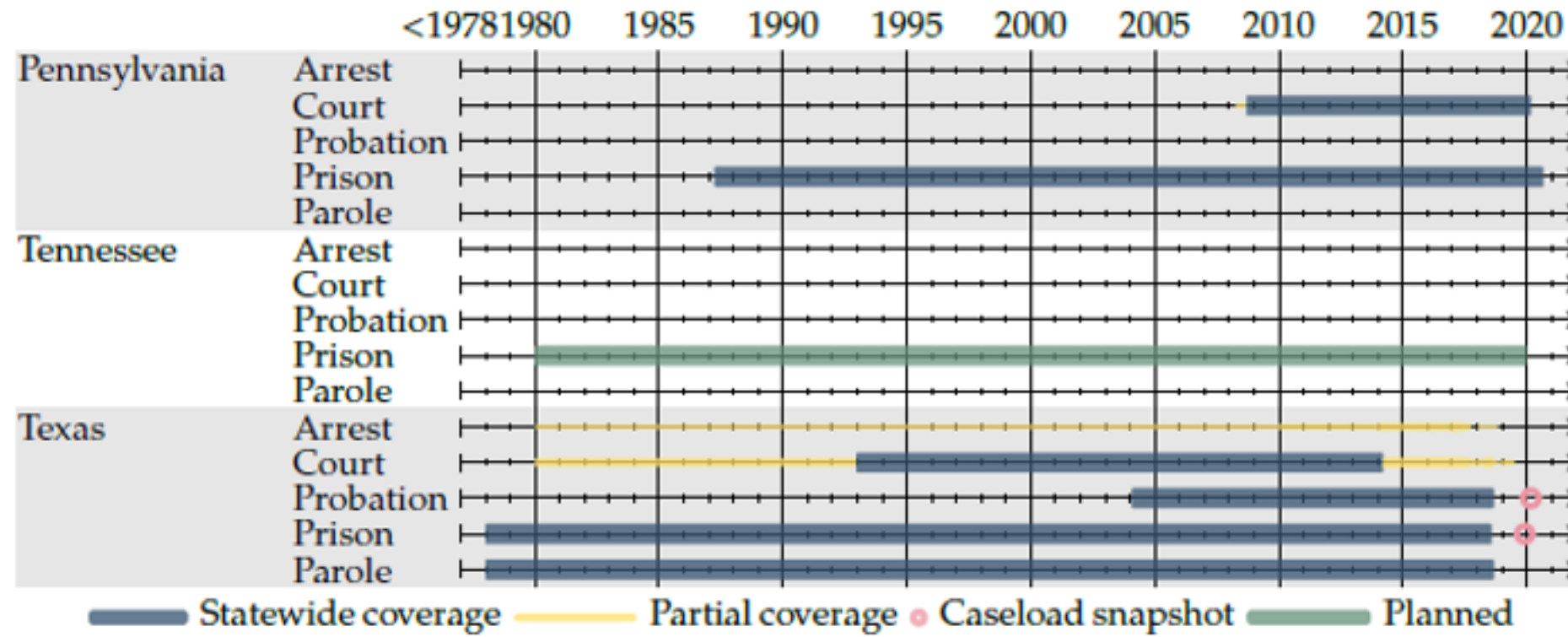
- *cjars\_id* to pool all events for one individual
- Event identifiers (*arr\_id*, *adj\_id*, etc) to follow an individual criminal episode through the justice system



# Data documentation: detailed timelines

Historical coverage varies across geography and procedural domain:

*Example timeline coverage from data documentation*



Differentiates between partial and statewide coverage, snapshot data, and data collection efforts that are currently underway.

# Data documentation: schema

National data schema balances between:

- Complexity to support nuanced research questions
- Consistency across jurisdictions to reduce barriers to working with data

Finite resources also limit the level of detail extracted from source files

- Data collection vs. data processing vs. data analysis

Where possible, we preserve source values (e.g. offense descriptions, sentencing fields) in addition to providing users with harmonized variables to support a flexible range of uses



# Data harmonization innovations

## Person-level probabilistic record linkage model

- Cutting edge machine learning model trained on fingerprint-validated identifiers
- See Mueller-Smith and Gross (2020) “Modernizing Person-Level Entity Resolution with Biometrically Linked Records”
- No biometric identifiers are transferred from the University of Michigan to the U.S. Census Bureau

## Text-based Offense Classification (TOC) Tool

- Measures for Justice collaboration
- Translate over 4 million unique offense descriptions to 271 standard offense codes
- Public web-based interface to be launched later this year

# Data documentation: variable codebook

Data documentation provides a description, summary statistics, and data visualization for every harmonized variable in the CJARS data platform

| arr_arr_dt_yyyy |  |                    |  |
|-----------------|--|--------------------|--|
| Label           | Arrest date, year                          |                    |  |
| Description     | The year when the individual was arrested. |                    |  |
| Table Format    | Arrest and booking<br>numeric              |                    |  |
| <i>Set</i>      | <i>Count</i>                               | <i>Percent (%)</i> |  |
| All records     | 32,504,351                                 | 100.0              |  |
| Valid records   | 20,402,688                                 | 62.8               |  |
| Invalid values  | 2  | 0.0                |  |
| Missing values  | 12,101,661                                 | 37.2               |  |

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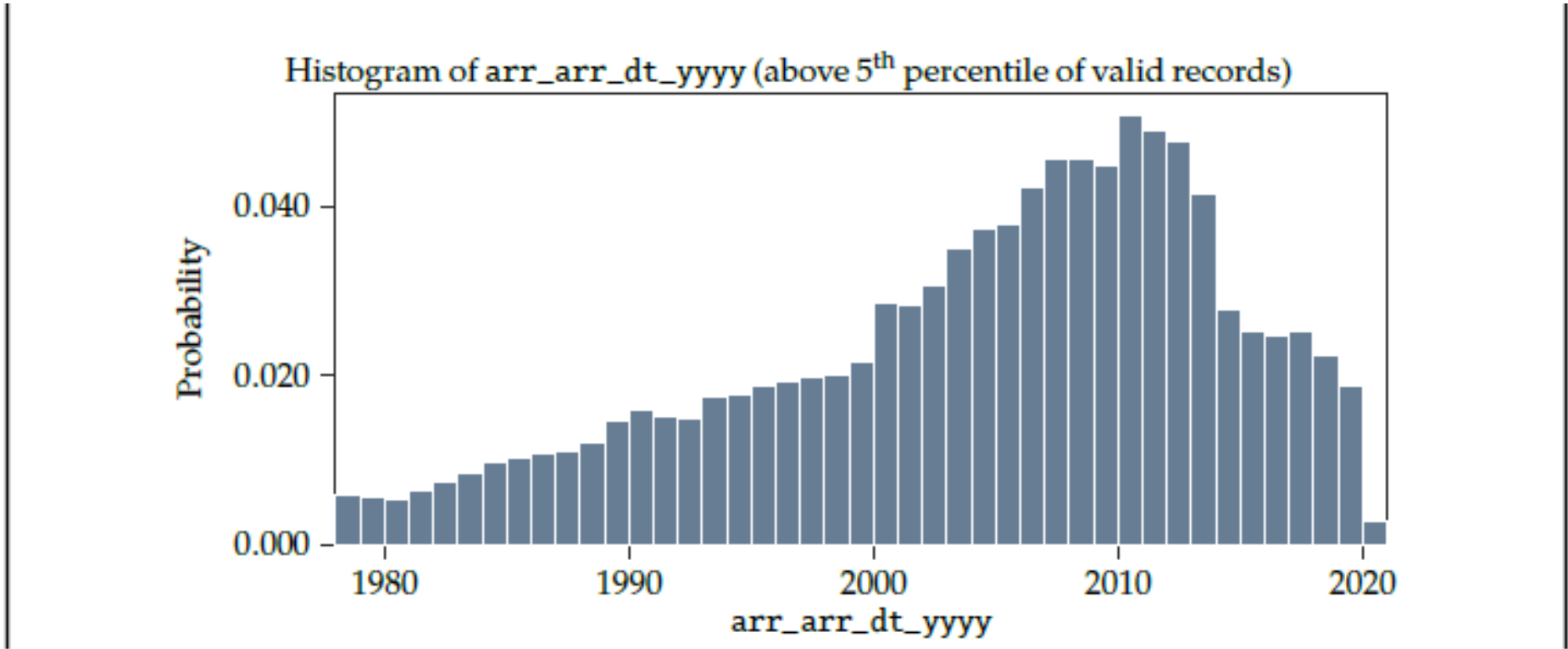
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| <i>Statistic</i>            | <i>Value</i> |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Mean                        | 2,002.2      |
| Minimum                     | 1,901        |
| 25 <sup>th</sup> percentile | 1,996        |
| Median                      | 2,005        |
| 75 <sup>th</sup> percentile | 2,011        |
| Maximum                     | 2,020        |

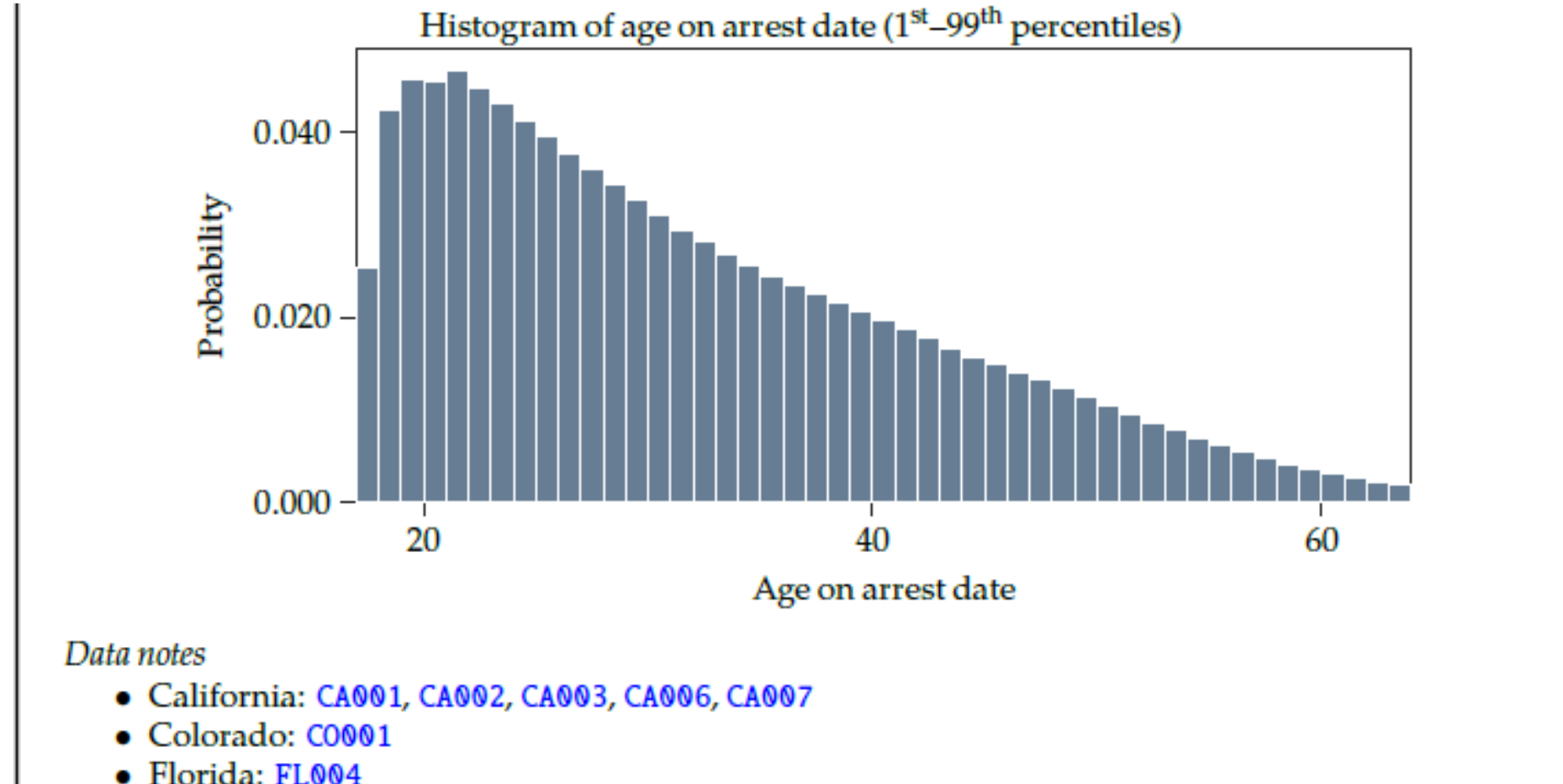
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CJARS has been validated against  
official federal statistical series

# Why benchmarking is critical

Comparative strengths of CJARS come with potential vulnerabilities:

- Enterprising data collection (i.e. scraping, DUA's, research agreements, and donations)
  - ⇒ Inconsistent data structures and value codes
- Probabilistic matching algorithms in the absence of unique identifiers, and,
- Machine learning-augmented harmonization strategies

Need to validate the CJARS data product against existing statistical series


# Benchmarking report

Assess reproducibility of official Bureau of Justice Statistics published series using CJARS micro-data, including:

- Uniform Crime Report (UCR)
- State Court Processing Statistics (SCPS)
- National Prisons Statistics Program (NPS)
- National Corrections Reporting Program (NCRP)
- Annual Probation and Annual Parole Surveys

Link: <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu/benchmarking-report-download/>

 INSTITUTE FOR  
SOCIAL RESEARCH  
UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

 Criminal Justice  
Administrative  
Records System

Benchmarking the Criminal Justice Administrative Records  
System's Data Infrastructure

Jordan Papp      Michael Mueller-Smith  
University of Michigan      University of Michigan

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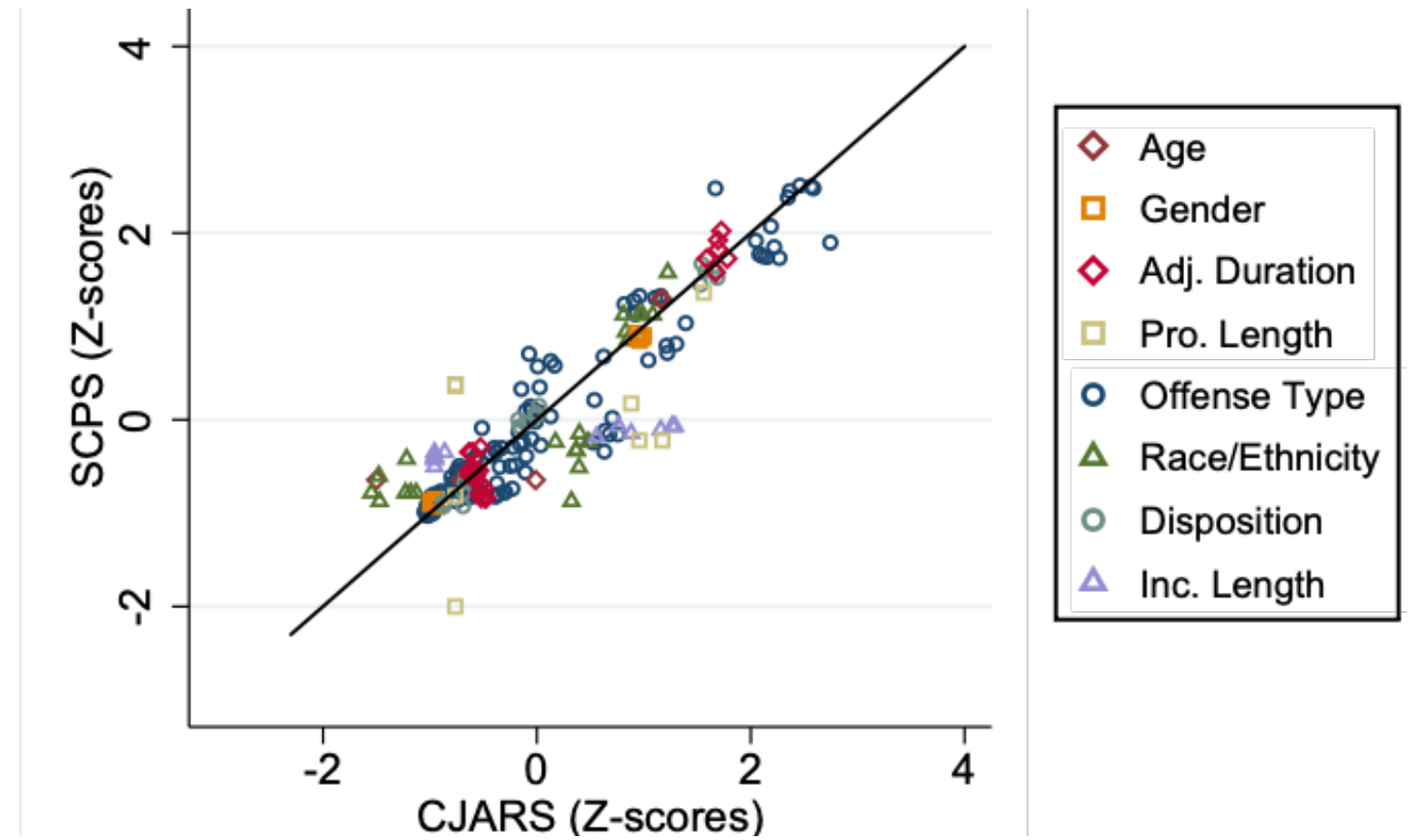
# Benchmarking report: empirical approach

Examples exercises include:

- Caseload composition (e.g., demographic composition of felony defendants)
- Event counts (e.g., yearly entries onto parole)
- Caseload populations (e.g., yearly inmate population)

State or sub-state results where possible to align with our level of data acquisition and processing

*Felony Characteristics in Large U.S. Cities*



Note: Estimates created using UM CJARS repository. See Papp and Mueller-Smith (2021).

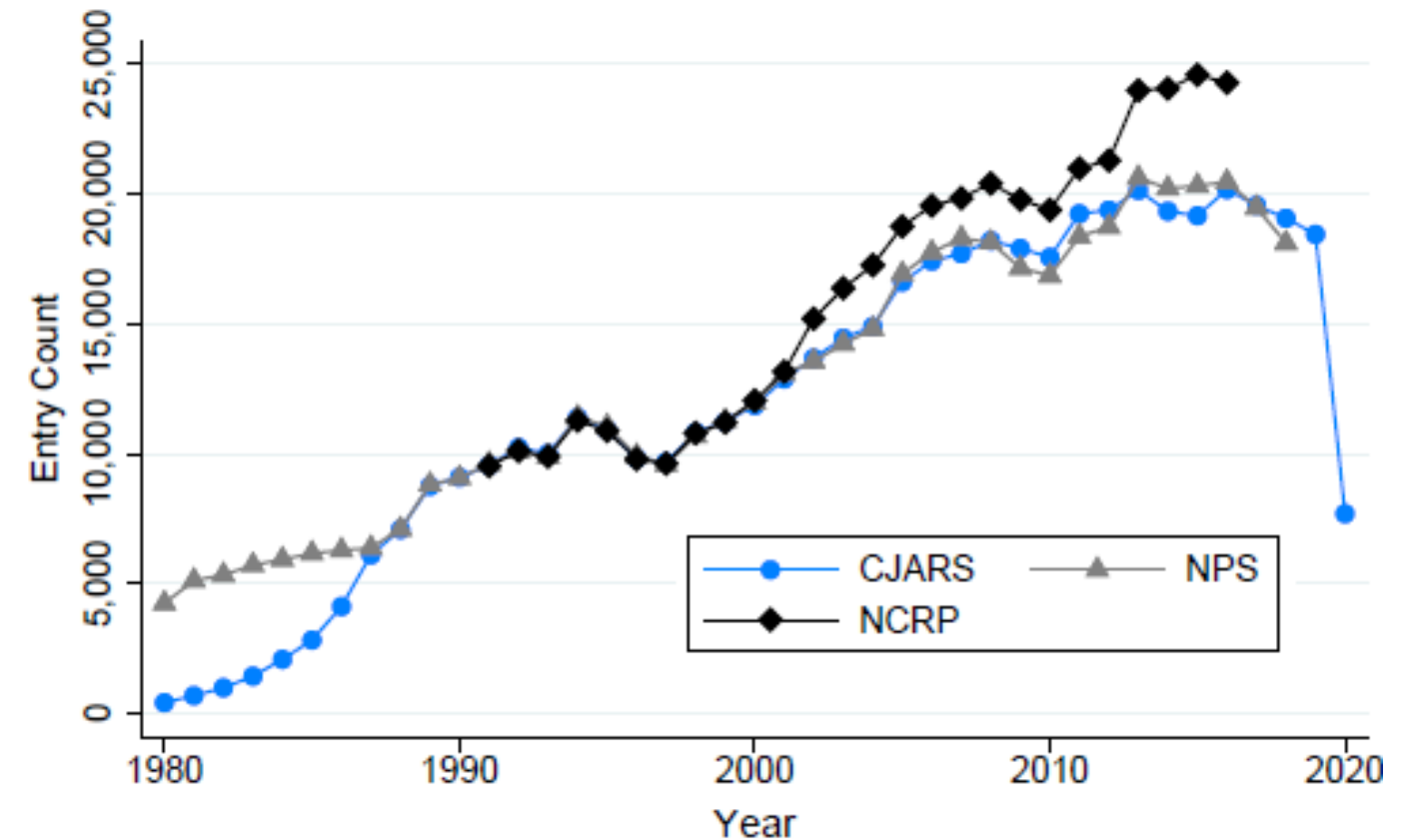
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*Prison Entries in Pennsylvania*



Note: Estimates created using UM CJARS repository. See Papp and Mueller-Smith (2021). Decline in CJARS entries in 2020 reflect partial-year data collection.

CJARS can be accessed through the  
Federal Statistical Research Data Centers

CJARS micro-data is **currently** available for external request to qualified researchers on approved projects through the FSRDC network

- No CJARS project charges but FSRDC sites may have access fees

Public synthetic data product, which reproduces the underlying variation in CJARS without compromising individual privacy or confidentiality in development

- Expected release in 2022q3

Public data portal for aggregate statistical information about caseloads and socioeconomic outcomes under development

- Launch date is to be determined

# Title 13 proposal guide

FSRDC research is authorized under United States Code, Title 13

- Meeting Title 13 requirements can be an opaque process for those without prior experience

CJARS Title 13 Proposal Guide will help facilitate successful CJARS-based research proposals. It covers:

- Requesting CJARS data access through the U.S. Census Bureau's FSRDC system
- Proposal development and requirements
- Guidance on how to meet Title 13 statutory requirements
- Where to find information on other linkable datasets held in the FSRDC system
- Bringing in your own data to the FSRDC system
- Review timelines and what to expect after proposal submission

Link: <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu/proposal-guide-download/>

# Requesting access to CJARS through the FSRDC

FSRDC proposals require:

- A project overview and description of research methods
- A list of requested data and linkage procedures
- An explanation of statistical output that will be generated
- A statement of benefits of the project for the U.S. Census Bureau

Additional review by CJARS data providers depending on:

- What jurisdictions are being studied?
- What level of geographic aggregation are intended for your findings?

Contact our staff ([cjars-data-users@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-data-users@umich.edu)) with your questions or concerns

# Federal Statistical Research Data Centers

Once approved, research occurs in the FSRDC network:

- Secure Census Bureau facilities housed in partner institutions
- 30 locations around the U.S.
- Access costs vary by location, affiliation, and project duration
- Researchers can bring in own data for linkage
- COVID-19 virtual access
- Only aggregate statistical material, reviewed by the U.S. Census Bureau Disclosure Review Board, can be released from FSRDCs



# Researchers can link amazing data

Anonymized data can be linked at person-, address-, and employer-levels

Survey data:

- Decennial censuses, American Community Survey, Current Population Survey–Annual Social and Economic Supplement, Survey of Income and Program Participation, others

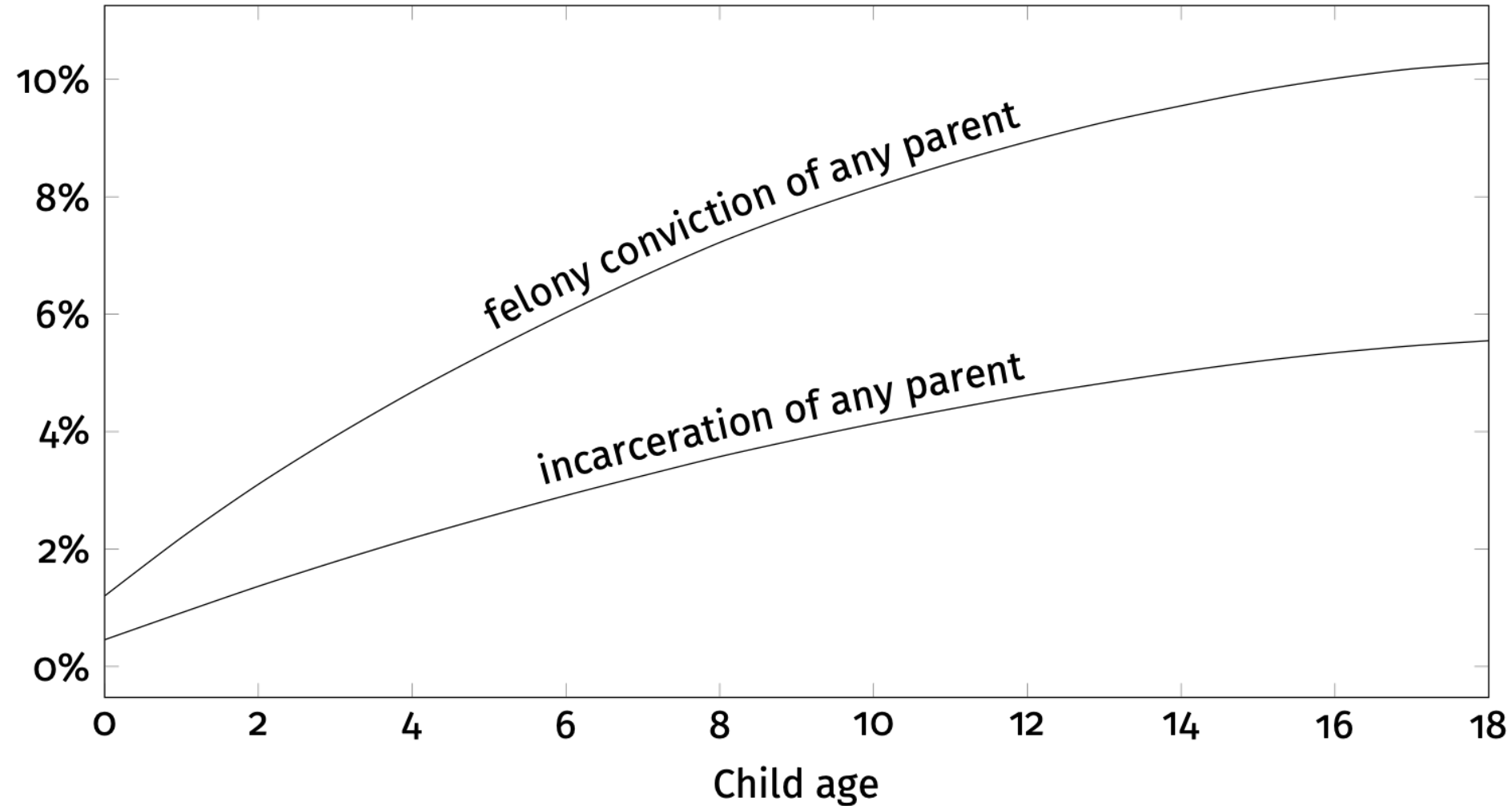
Administrative records:

- Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) quarterly earnings data
- Federal program data: Medicaid and Medicare enrollment, Social Security programs, HUD assistance
- State program data: SNAP, TANF, WIC



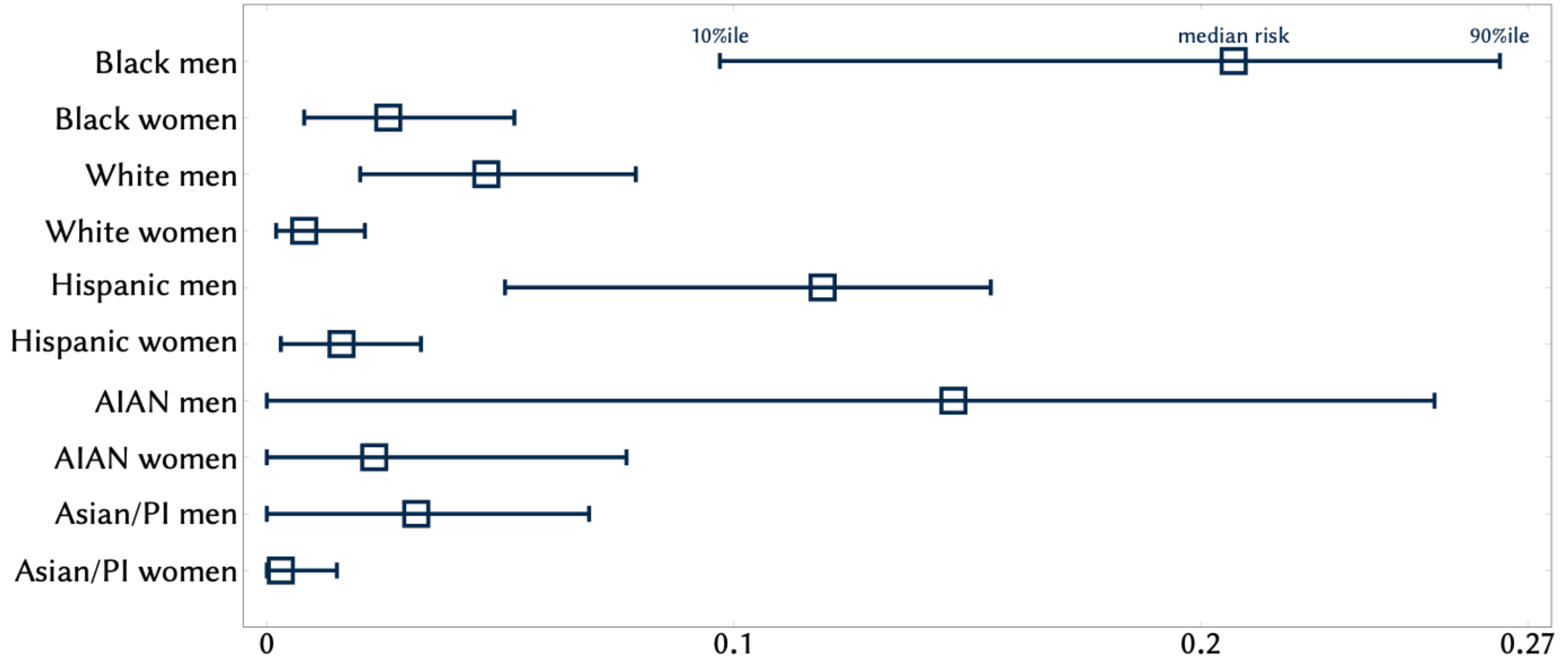
Any views expressed herein are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Census Bureau. All results were approved for release by the Disclosure Review Board of the Census Bureau, authorization numbers CBDRB-FY19-444, CBDRB-FY21-ERD002-017, and CBDRB-FY20-ERD002-021.

*Percent of children who have ever experienced parental justice involvement*



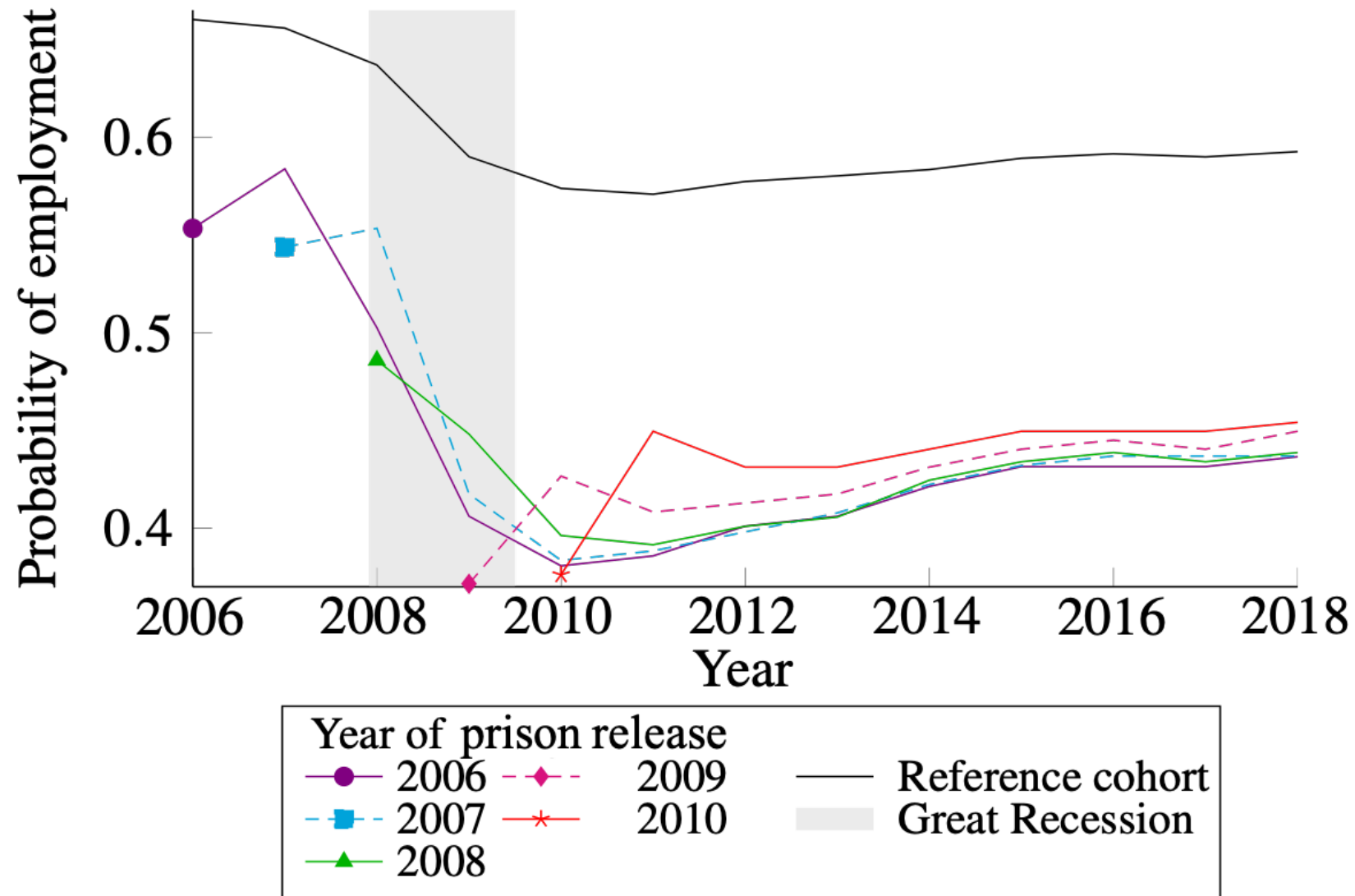
Note: Estimates based on CJARS data linked by Census-provided PIK to family relation crosswalk that was synthesized from a variety of survey and administrative data. These results were disclosed by the U.S. Census Bureau’s Disclosure Review Board with approval number CBDRB-FY20-ERD002-021.

*Probability of any felony conviction by age 25*



Note: Estimates based on CJARS data linked by Census-provided PIK to Census Numident (to identify Commuting Zone of birth, sex, race, and ethnicity). These results were disclosed by the U.S. Census Bureau's Disclosure Review Board with approval number CBDRB-FY19-444.

*Annual probability of employment, by prison-release cohort*



Note: Estimates based on CJARS data linked by Census-provided PIK to IRS W-2 filings to measure annual employment status. Reference cohort composed of adult ACS respondents with less than a high school degree. These results were disclosed by the U.S. Census Bureau's Disclosure Review Board with approval number CBDRB-FY21-ERD002-017.

## Labor market outcomes after a criminal justice intervention

- Link CJARS individuals to Longitudinal Employer-Household Dynamics (LEHD) data to measure quarterly employment, earnings, industry

## Neighborhood environment and criminal justice involvement

- Link CJARS individuals to addresses using decennial census data, measure outcomes in American Community Survey data

## Criminal justice contact as an outcome for a non-CJ intervention

- Bring your person-level program participation or randomized control trial data to FSRDC, link to CJARS, measure criminal justice involvement

# Integrate your data into CJARS

Continually working to expand CJARS to nationwide coverage:

- Partnerships with criminal justice agencies
- Donations of public, legally redistributable data from researchers
- Suggestions of data resources we may have overlooked

Contact [cjars-staff@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-staff@umich.edu) to discuss how we can integrate your data holdings in future CJARS vintages

**THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE ADMINISTRATIVE RECORDS SYSTEM PROJECT (CJARS)  
DATA TRANSFER AGREEMENT**

This Transfer Agreement ("Agreement") is made by and between \_\_\_\_\_ ("Transferor") and the Regents of the University of Michigan, a Michigan Constitutional corporation ("Michigan"). Throughout this Agreement, Transferor and Michigan are individually referred to as "Party" and collectively as "Parties."

**A. BACKGROUND**  
The Criminal Justice Administrative Records System Project ("CJARS") was established at the University of Michigan to improve public administration of the criminal justice system in the United States by collecting criminal justice administrative data from state and local agencies, including arrest records, court proceedings, incarceration records, and other sanction files ("Data").

Michigan will make the Data available to the U.S. Census Bureau ("Census Bureau") to enable the Data to be linked to confidential employment, program participation, and survey records held at the U.S. Census Bureau in order to create an integrated de-identified dataset that follows each offender through each criminal episode, from arrest through exit from the criminal justice system ("CJARS Database").

In consideration of the mutual promises below, the undersigned parties agree as follows:

**B. SCOPE OF AGREEMENT**  
This Agreement sets the terms and conditions by which Transferor will transfer the Data described in Exhibit A to Michigan and Michigan's obligations and rights to receive, process, use, and distribute the Data for research purposes.

**C. TRANSFEROR OBLIGATIONS**  
Transferor agrees:

1. Any Data provided to Michigan by Transferor were, to the best of Transferor's knowledge and belief, collected pursuant to and in accordance with any applicable laws, regulations and policies. This Agreement only contemplates the transfer of Judicial Data Warehouse (JDW) data.
2. To provide the Data, as applicable, to Michigan, in accordance with mutually agreed specifications as articulated in Exhibit A.
3. That Transferor has the authority to make the Data available to Michigan and hereby grants Michigan explicit permission to:
  - a. Integrate the Data with data from other sources and from the Census Bureau for research purposes.
  - b. Link the Data to public and restricted data sources for the purposes of report production, including reports to Transferor on the composition and outcomes of your caseload. Details shall include standardized criminal justice measures, like recidivism,

Form CJARS-2020-01, Last Revised: 9/25/20

**Data Donations to the Criminal Justice Administrative Records System**

Instructions: Please complete this form to the best of your knowledge and return with a signed Deposit Agreement (Form CJARS-2020-02), compressed zip folder with data documentation and codebook (if applicable) or completed variable worksheet (Form CJARS-2020-03) as well as an IRB approval letter (if applicable). Contact [cjars-staff@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-staff@umich.edu) to determine the proper transmission mechanism depending on the size and security requirements of your data.

**Depositor Information** (Please fill out "Additional Contributors" section at conclusion of this form if there are other collaborators that should be acknowledged)

First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Middle Name or Initial \_\_\_\_\_

Employer Name \_\_\_\_\_ County and State of Employment \_\_\_\_\_

Position/Title \_\_\_\_\_

Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_  Mobile  Work  Home (check one)

**Acquisition Information** (Please fill out a separate CJARS-2020-01 form for each agency if you are donating multiple sources of data.)

Name of Data Provider (Public Agency, Private Data Archive, Etc.) \_\_\_\_\_ County and State of Data Provider \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Contact's First Name \_\_\_\_\_ Primary Contact's Last Name \_\_\_\_\_ Primary Contact's Middle Name or Initial \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Contact's Position/Title \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Contact's Email address \_\_\_\_\_ Primary Contact's Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_  Mobile  Work  Home (check one)

Agency Covered in Data Donation (may be the same as the Data Provider) \_\_\_\_\_ County and State of Covered Agency \_\_\_\_\_

Mode of data acquisition:  Data Use Agreement  Public Records Request  Web Scraping  Purchase from Private Vendor  Other (check all that apply)

Brief description of acquisition if "Other" was checked: \_\_\_\_\_

**Data Summary**

Jurisdictional coverage:  Federal  State  County  Municipal  Tribal  Other (check all that apply)

Procedural coverage:  Arrests  Bookings  Criminal Charges  Convictions  Jail  Prison  Probation  Parole  Other (check all that apply)

Brief description of Jurisdictional and/or Procedural coverage if "Other" was checked for either: \_\_\_\_\_

Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) Code for Geographic Coverage (Mark "XXX" for statewide datasets in the last three digits): \_\_\_\_\_

Extracts often contain a wide range of dates (either due to data entry errors or legacy IT systems). Ignoring such outliers, please fill in the information below:

Data Begin Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Data End Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Is this data a population snapshot of the agency's caseload on a given date?  Yes  No If yes, Snapshot Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Codebook or other documentation submitted with data deposit?  Yes  No

Completed CJARS variable worksheet (Form CJARS-2020-03) submitted with project?  Yes  No

Observation level:  Individual  Case  Charge  Event  Period of Supervision  Other

Brief description of observation level if "Other" was checked: \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of method to link data if multiple files are submitted: \_\_\_\_\_

Were the data collected as part of an IRB approved project?  Yes  No Date of Approval: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Institutional Review Board \_\_\_\_\_

IRB Approval Number \_\_\_\_\_

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Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1248  
<https://cjars.isr.umich.edu>  
(844) 864-8056 Page 1 of 2

NSF-funded fellowships will jump-start access

# CJARS-NSF fellowship competition

## Fellowship Benefits:

1. \$10,000 stipend to be used in support of your research (e.g., to defray data access costs, to support researcher time, or to hire research staff)
2. Mentorship on FSRDC proposal development from CJARS
3. Opportunity to present research findings at the annual CJARS Board of Directors meeting

Application deadline May 28, 2021. Decisions announced mid-June



# How to apply

Solicitation and submission portal on project website

## Application Requirements:

1. Research Proposal describing the topic of study, intended data to be linked, and research methods (2000 word limit)
2. Current C.V. or resume
3. Data Access Plan describing which FSRDC location you plan to conduct your research in, any anticipated data access barriers, and plans to address barriers (500 word limit)

Contact local FSRDC administrator about data access options prior to submission

Link: <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu/2021-fellowship-competition>

# Proposal scoring

Four evaluation criteria:

1. Intellectual Merit of the Research Proposal
2. Compatibility of CJARS Data Holdings with Proposed Research
3. Feasibility of the Data Access Plan, and
4. PI Experience and Training

Priority groups:

1. Early stage researchers
2. Demographic groups underrepresented in Science and Engineering, and,
3. Research fields underrepresented in the FSRDC system

For more information on the material described in this webinar,  
please check out our website – <https://cjars.isr.umich.edu> –  
or contact the CJARS team with your questions regarding

- Data collection/integration: [cjars-staff@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-staff@umich.edu)
- Research projects: [cjars-data-users@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-data-users@umich.edu)
- Fellowship program: [cjars-fellowships@umich.edu](mailto:cjars-fellowships@umich.edu)