

# WHY SOCIAL SCIENCE ?

## Because Social Science Can Have an Impact on Public Policy

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Why Social Science? Because social science can—and should—have a real impact on public policy at the federal, state, and local levels. More than a decade ago, while serving as President of the [Southern Criminal Justice Association](#), I spoke with Mittie Southerland, who at the time was the Executive Director of the [Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences](#) (ACJS). We lamented that while our members produced the best and most topical peer-reviewed and policy-relevant research in crime and justice, getting legislators, reporters, and policy-makers to take account of it seemed an almost impossible task. How to make it happen?

Today, I chair the [Crime & Justice Research Alliance](#) (CJRA), a centralized resource of authoritative experts and scholarly studies created to provide policymakers, practitioners and the public direct access to relevant research on crime and criminal justice issues. Formed in 2015, CJRA is a collaborative partnership between the nation's two leading criminal justice associations, ACJS and the [American Society of Criminology](#) (ASC), which represent more than 5,000 criminal justice scholars, practitioners, and researchers.

The Alliance communicates with the criminal justice research and academic communities about the legislative and appropriations process, and policy developments in Washington, D.C. CJRA assists policymakers across the political spectrum by summarizing published scholarly articles and identifying expert witnesses to testify before Committees, and speak to Members of Congress and Justice Department officials. The goal of CJRA is to provide objective research to inform legislators in criminal justice policy and appropriations decisions, as well as reporters covering crime and criminal justice topics in the news. Given policymakers' recent attention to criminal justice reform, CJRA's role is more important now than ever.

During 2018:

- CJRA secured the release of more than 50 missing data tables that had been removed from the annual FBI Uniform Crime Report by conducting outreach to members of Congress and securing a letter from five Senators to the Department of Justice. CJRA assisted members of Congress with formulating questions about the missing tables at a House Judiciary Committee hearing with FBI Director Wray. After hearing of CJRA efforts to restore the tables—the deletion of which generated widespread concern from crime and justice scholars and practitioners—Director Wray agreed to do so. Continuing to make this crime and victim data available to scholars, practitioners, and the public is critical to our understanding of trends and patterns of violent crime—particularly homicide and domestic violence—and the development of law enforcement priorities and policies.
- CJRA efforts helped secure a \$2 million increase for BJS and NIJ each in the House Commerce-Justice-Science Appropriations FY19 bill, with BJS receiving \$50 million and NIJ receiving \$44 million. Should these House funding levels be signed into law, BJS will have received a \$9 million increase and NIJ will have received an \$8 million increase above the FY 2016 Omnibus levels. This represents more than a 20% increase in funding for both agencies over the last three fiscal years since CJRA began advocating

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for increased resources. Robust support for our primary Federal law and justice organizations—particularly those that support research and the development of evidence-based policy—is necessary to ensure that we learn the best ways to address issues of crime and justice in our communities.

- CJRA secured removal of a provision of the FIRST STEP Act that would have eliminated the National Institute of Corrections, which provides much-needed training and technical assistance to correctional officers across the nation. The United States imprisons 25% of the world’s prisoners—more than two million are behind bars and another five million are under some form of correctional supervision. Continuing education for those who manage the largest prison system on Earth and who work with these offenders is important because well over 90% of these prisoners will be released back into our communities.
- We presented our third annual [“Ask a Criminologist” briefing in May 2018](#), attended by numerous Congressional staff. Held on Capitol Hill, the briefing examined the connection between the opioid epidemic and violent crime/homicide. It prompted Senator Schatz’ office to draft legislative text for additional research on opioids and homicides, which the Senator plans to include in upcoming legislation. With more than 60,000 overdose-related deaths in the United States in 2017 (more than three times the number of reported homicides, and more than all Americans killed in the Vietnam War), opioid-related crime has become a serious problem in many U.S. communities. Social science research is necessary to address it.
- CJRA recently released [a fact sheet](#) with links to the most current peer-reviewed work on the association between immigration and crime to provide legislators and journalists with evidence-based research findings without political considerations. Development of immigration policy should be informed by the most accurate, peer-reviewed research available, which we are able to provide.

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In addition to these activities, CJRA also features research by scholars affiliated with ASC and ACJS. Each month we promote policy-relevant work published in our four key peer-reviewed journals, *Criminology*, *Justice Quarterly*, the *Justice Evaluation Journal*, and *Criminology and Public Policy*. Our communications outreach features more than 100 ASC and ACJS experts in a variety of crime and justice specialty areas who have been interviewed and cited by dozens of media outlets, including The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The New York Times, and an array of regional and local news outlets. And CJRA publishes a monthly newsletter that features topical, policy-relevant research from ASC and ACJS experts.

All of this is very far removed from the standard duties of a professor at a large university, and the typical pursuits of most of my colleagues. But what we do at CJRA is critical to the health and welfare of our discipline, and demonstrates that the research we generate has relevance for the development and funding of evidence-based crime and justice policy.

**Why social science? Because if we don’t represent our interests and engage in the public policy and media space, we are not in the game.** And if we are not in the game the work we produce will likely go unnoticed, and we can have no impact on the outcome.



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