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**NORTH AMERICA
MONTHLY NEWSLETTER**

February 2025

Good afternoon,

Crime and public safety are major concerns for people across the United States. Crime can dramatically disrupt people's lives while also imposing enormous social and economic costs—the societal costs of gun violence alone **exceed \$100 billion annually**.

Meanwhile, the US criminal legal system oversees over five million individuals through incarceration, probation, or parole. Communities of color and residents of high-poverty neighborhoods are disproportionately likely to bear the economic and social costs of crime, victimization, and contact with the criminal legal system.

We spend our own time considering how policy can reduce the costs of crime prevention while better keeping people safe. **Sara** uses large-scale randomized evaluations to understand what shapes the choices that young people make around crime and violence, and how that interacts with their decisions about education and employment. **Amanda** uses quasi-experimental methods and randomized evaluations to explore the employment and recidivism impacts of policies meant to improve labor market opportunities for people with criminal records in the United States.

We are thrilled to co-chair J-PAL North America's new **Initiative for Effective US Crime Policy (IECP)**, which aims to tackle two interconnected problems: the costs and consequences of crime and the harm that can come from excessive or poorly targeted crime control measures. This initiative is dedicated to generating rigorous evidence on public safety, enforcement, and crime prevention policies that reduce crime and are cost-effective for communities.

We look forward to advising IECP as it supports randomized evaluations of strategies that foster a more effective and fair criminal legal system. If you're interested in getting involved with this initiative, please don't hesitate to **reach out** and stay tuned for funding opportunities opening in fall 2025.

Warm regards,

Amanda Agan and Sara Heller

Co-chairs of the Initiative for Effective US Crime Policy, J-PAL North America



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Beyond legal evidence: An interview with Judge Veronica Galván on evaluating judicial programs

From courtroom decisions to juvenile justice programs, evidence plays a critical role in shaping the criminal legal system. In a [recent post](#) on the J-PAL blog, Judge Veronica Galván, a longtime advocate for fairness and effectiveness in the judiciary, shares her experience using and generating evidence at King County Court in Washington State. She discusses how rigorous evaluation, data-driven decision-making, and randomized evaluations can help identify effective interventions and drive meaningful reforms in the judicial system. [Read more »](#)

NEW RESEARCH RESULTS



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The hidden health care crisis behind bars: A randomized trial to accredit US jails

In the United States, people who are incarcerated have a legal right to 'reasonably adequate' health care, yet there is little oversight for health care in jails. A new working paper from J-PAL affiliated professors Marcella Alsan (Harvard) and Crystal Yang

(Harvard) evaluated the impact of health care accreditation—a process in which jails certify their compliance with safety and health standards—on the [health of people who are incarcerated](#) in US jails. They found that accreditation reduced mortality, improved coordination between health and custody staff, and increased compliance with quality standards. [Read more about the results](#) »

NEW RESEARCH RESULTS

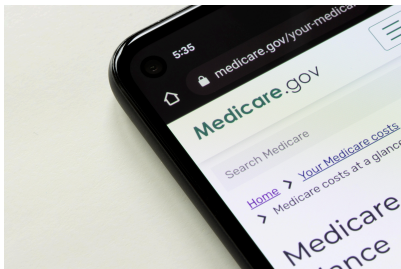


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The effect of Medicaid on crime: Evidence from the Oregon Health Insurance Experiment

Individuals who have contact with the criminal legal system are more likely to face mental health disorders and substance use disorders. Could increased access to health care services, such as through Medicaid, improve criminal legal outcomes for these individuals? A new analysis from J-PAL affiliated professors Amy Finkelstein (MIT), Sarah Miller (University of Michigan), and Katherine Baicker (University of Chicago) investigated how eligibility for Medicaid in Oregon affected criminal charges and convictions. While [previous research](#) from this experiment demonstrated Medicaid's impacts on increased health care use, reduced depression, and reduced financial strain, this analysis found that receiving Medicaid did not affect an individual's involvement with the criminal legal system. [Read the paper](#) »

NEW RESEARCH RESULTS



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A cognitive view of policing

Police officers often face cognitively demanding situations that require them to act quickly under stressful circumstances. Unless officers are prepared for these demands, they may quickly jump to conclusions without fully considering alternative explanations of unfolding events, which can lead to adverse policing outcomes. In a new randomized evaluation with 2,070 officers from the Chicago Police Department, J-PAL affiliated professor Oeindrila Dube (University of Chicago), with coauthors Sandy Jo MacArthur and Anuj K. Shah, developed and tested the impact of a new cognitive training that integrates behavioral science insights with real-world policing demands. They found that the training led to reductions in the use of force, discretionary arrests, and arrests of Black civilians, with effects lasting up to 5–8 months after the training ended. [Read more »](#)

FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY



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The impact of informational interventions about police alternatives on police reliance in the United States

Police officers are called upon to address both violent and nonviolent situations in the United States. Several government and community-based organizations exist to provide alternatives to police in situations related to domestic violence and nonviolent situations such as mental health crises. Researchers conducted a randomized evaluation to test the impact of providing information about police alternatives on individuals' reported likelihood of calling the police. They found that information about police alternatives had a bipartisan decrease on police reliance in nonviolent scenarios. [Read more »](#)

FEATURED WEBINARS



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Understanding the impacts of cash transfers on health outcomes

On March 18, J-PAL North America is hosting a webinar to showcase and discuss recent research evaluating the impacts of cash transfers on health outcomes. This webinar will bring together researchers from three randomized evaluations to understand the connections between study findings, discuss how these results inform our understanding of the impacts of cash transfer programs on health, and highlight the actions policymakers can take to apply research insights to their own contexts. [Learn more and register »](#)



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Advancing decarbonization through rigorous evaluation in the Climate Action Learning Lab

J-PAL North America is offering two webinars that explore how data and rigorous evaluation can be leveraged to build the evidence base on decarbonization and scale solutions that work. The webinars will showcase completed and ongoing randomized evaluations of transportation decarbonization and residential energy efficiency programming conducted by our network of researchers in partnership with state and local jurisdictions. We will also provide information about J-PAL's new [Climate Action Learning Lab](#) for US state and local government climate leaders and answer questions related to this exciting opportunity. [Register for transportation decarbonization webinar | 2/27 @ 3pm ET »](#)
[Register for residential energy efficiency webinar | 3/6 @ 1pm ET »](#)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

How to improve policing with evidence-based training

Rochester Beacon, Featuring: Oeindrila Dube

Harvard study suggests tactic for U.S. jails to reduce inmate deaths

Los Angeles Times, Featuring: Crystal Yang, Marcella Alsan

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