

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/publications/a-prosecutors-guide-for-advancing-racial-equity>

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

Black and Latino people are overrepresented in the U.S. criminal justice system. While racial disparity in case outcomes is often attributed to law enforcement practices or judicial decision making, the role of prosecutors is overlooked. In fact, prosecutors have wide discretionary power in case processing decisions from initial screening, charging, bail, and pretrial recommendations, to diversion, plea bargaining, and sentencing.

Until now, prosecutors have lacked ready access to analytical tools that would help them see the overall impacts of their decisions, and whether their decision-making power affects racially disparate case outcomes. Vera's Prosecution and Racial Justice Program (PRJ) published this guide to aid prosecutors seeking to conduct research into their offices work and address any problems contributing to racial disparity the research uncovers. The guide is based on PRJ's nine years of experience as research partner with a number of district attorneys around the country.

Giving prosecutors a coherent, evidence based picture of their offices performance in the area of racial fairness is the essential first step toward achieving more equitable results.

PRJ researchers partnered with several district attorneys offices and used statistical methods to study whether, all things being equal (including a defendants prior record or seriousness of the charged offense), race is affecting case outcomes.

Despite efforts to be fair and equitable, prosecutors may unintentionally contribute to the overrepresentation of minorities in the nations courtrooms, prisons, and jails.

This guide helps equip prosecutors with the research tools necessary to launch racial-impact studies similar to those PRJ has overseen, and to find innovative solutions to racial disparity in the criminal justice system.

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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