

Impact Report

Winter 2022

The Marshall Project



The Marshall Project tracks the impact of our journalism on lawmakers, advocates and other media.

Reformers like to talk about “changing the narrative” on criminal justice. But where does a narrative come from, exactly? And how can it be changed?

The media play an outsized role in affecting the public’s understanding of criminal justice. And that role hasn’t always been positive. In addition to publishing our own rigorous coverage, The Marshall Project tries to help other journalists do a better job covering criminal justice for their own media outlets. Here are some examples of our impact on other media:

AFTER BITES Our Pulitzer Prize-winning series on police violence using dogs included [one installment](#) that explained to other media how they could follow up in their own locales. And they did. A television station in Tampa, Florida, for example, produced [an investigation](#) into “the consequences when police dogs disobey their handlers,” while the [East Bay Times](#) tracked the 73 police dog bites plaguing the city of Richmond, California.

TWO STRIKES, OUT We aren’t advocates, and our stories don’t include recommendations for what policymakers should do. But our media partners at the Tampa Bay Times have an editorial board that [seized](#) on the [investigation](#) we did with them about life-without-parole sentences in Florida, saying “The state’s so-called ‘two strikes’ law has served its time and should be stripped from the books.”

ALABAMA SPLASH As part of our ongoing series about police violence against children, The Marshall Project [wrote about the experience](#) of one Alabama teen who was tased by police while she was having a grand-mal seizure at a music concert. The story was co-published with USA Today and reached a wide audience. It also appeared on the front pages of six local newspapers in Alabama: The Birmingham News, the Montgomery Advertiser, The Gadsden Times, the Mobile Press-Register, The Huntsville Times and The Tuscaloosa News. The public radio station in Birmingham also carried the story and did an on-air interview with The Marshall Project’s reporter on the story.

FOSTER FOLLOW When we published [an investigation](#) with NPR into how states were pocketing millions in federal funding meant for foster kids, we included [a sidebar](#) making it easy to track what was happening in individual states. And local media jumped on it. The Philadelphia Inquirer, for example, used findings from our investigation to [examine their city’s record](#) – and found that Philadelphia had pocketed \$5 million meant for local foster kids. Meanwhile, the Omaha World-Herald published a [sternly-worded editorial](#), opining that “Current government policy can fairly be termed as financial abuse of some of Nebraska’s most vulnerable children.”

- HIGHLY PRIZED**
- One reason the media follow our lead is that we’ve received many of the top awards in the journalism business. In 2021 alone, we won:
 - Pulitzer Prize for National Reporting
 - Goldsmith Prize for Investigative Reporting
 - Edward R. Murrow Award for Excellence in Innovation
 - National Headliner Award for Online Investigative Reporting
 - Deadline Club Awards for Digital Video Reporting and National TV Series
 - White House Correspondents’ Association’s Award for Courage and Accountability
 - Society for News Design for Best of Digital Design
 - Harry Frank Guggenheim Excellence in Criminal Justice Reporting
 - Communication Arts Illustration Award
 - Editor & Publisher EPPY Awards for Best Innovation Project on a Website
 - Online Journalism Awards for General Excellence in Online Journalism, Innovation in Investigative Journalism, Explanatory Reporting and Excellence and Innovation in Visual Digital Storytelling
 - Neil and Susan Sheehan Award for Investigative Journalism
 - Collier Prize for State Government Accountability

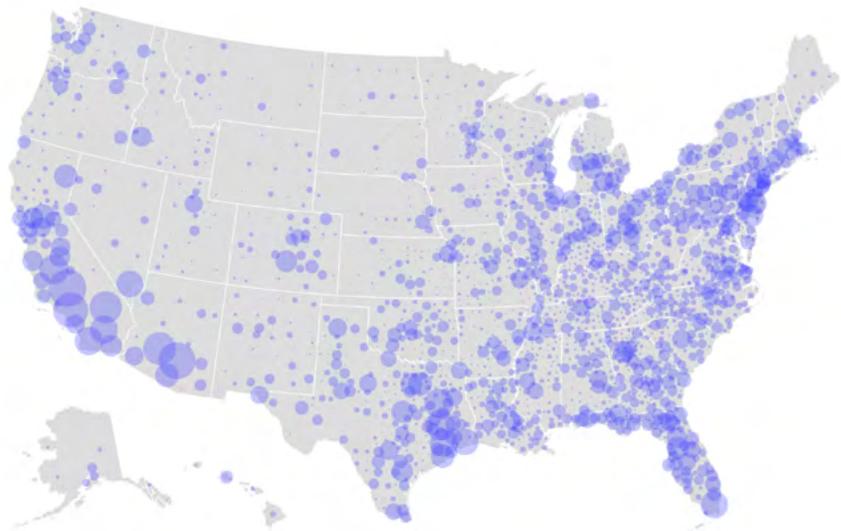
KENTUCKY COPS [Our investigation](#) into rural police shootings zeroed in on the country's most deadly department, the Kentucky State Police. Over the last six years, they killed 33 people in isolated rural communities where there were few witnesses. No state troopers were ever prosecuted for those deaths. But shortly after we co-published this story on the front page of the New York Times, Kentucky's governor [asked the state legislature](#) for millions of dollars to equip state troopers with body cameras.

TEXAS KIDS This year, the Texas legislature will consider a bill that prohibits the state from taking federal funds away from foster kids for its own use. Policy staffers at the Children's Advocacy Institute say they used [The Marshall Project's investigation](#) into this issue to press lawmakers into action. They are also advocating with the state's Social Security Administration for a new administrative policy to stop taking these funds away from foster kids. "Nothing increases public awareness and political pressure like a good investigative report," one of their advocates advised in a law review article.

MISSISSIPPI PRISONS In November the Mississippi Department of Corrections [admitted in court](#) that it failed to monitor conditions in the state's three private prisons. The Marshall Project had sued to obtain weekly reports that track health and safety in the prisons. We had previously revealed how the private company MTC let [gangs run one prison](#) and profited from [short staffing](#) that made the facilities [unsafe for staff and incarcerated](#) people alike. The Corrections Commissioner responded by kicking MTC out of one of the prisons. In court, prison administrators admitted they couldn't find more than half of the contractually mandated safety reports. A big thanks to our pro bono lawyers from the Mississippi Center for Justice for forcing the department to obey the public records law.

DATA ON NATIONAL INCARCERATION RATES, 2021

Nearly two million adults were incarcerated across the country, according to the 2020 Decennial Census. Each circle represents the incarcerated population in a county.



Our data journalism is designed to fuel great investigations at The Marshall Project. We also deliberately process data and make it easy to use, so that policymakers, other media, academics, and advocates can use it as seamlessly as possible in their own work. Some recent examples:

- We took incarceration data published by the U.S. Census Bureau, and [processed and documented](#) it for easier access. Our data release not only generated [our own story](#) for The Marshall Project analyzing why incarceration rates have gone down, but also powered stories by [U.S. News and World Report](#), [WVFT Virginia Public Radio](#), and [WFAE Charlotte Public Radio](#). The census data release was also featured in the popular open data newsletter [Data is Plural](#).
- [A letter signed by 93 members of Congress](#) cites a [data analysis](#) by The Marshall Project in partnership with the Associated Press, and argues for more robust and accurate collection of excess mortality statistics by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Our story visualized the striking data on racial disparities in COVID deaths. The CDC only publicly released data about excess deaths by race after The Marshall Project pursued that information for several months via public records requests.
- Our [investigation](#) into a special immigration status for juveniles found 26,000 young immigrants stuck in bureaucratic limbo for years. Our data also informed a new [coalition of advocacy groups](#) pushing reform legislation in Congress. Their website uses our charts and figures to illustrate how many kids are affected, and their [recent study](#) of the issue built upon our work.
- No more than one in four people convicted of felonies were registered to vote in time for the 2020 election, according to [our data investigation](#) in four battleground states that had legally restored the right to vote to these communities. This reporting informed a [legislative resolution in Nebraska](#) to study voting among formerly incarcerated people. The resolution acknowledges that "data and system errors have impermissibly disenfranchised eligible voters from participation in the election process."
- We are releasing as much data and methodology as we can on [Observable](#), to make it easily accessible to experts across civil society. For example, our dataset about the practice of [states collecting federal benefits intended for foster children](#) has been used by advocates, journalists and government officials from Massachusetts to Montana and Michigan. Our data also powered a [simple tool](#) that allows users – including foster kids themselves – to check the policy in their state.