The China Drug, Crime and Detention Database Project:

Project Overview

Emile Dirks
28 May 2019

Introduction to the Database

The China Drug, Crime and Detention Database Project is the first open access quantitative database focused on Chinese government drug policy and the country's justice system. Spanning 500+ categories and drawing on data from more than 200 publicly available sources, the database presents quantitative data on a range of topics, including: illicit drug use; drug harm reduction programs; criminal and administrative offenses; criminal and extrajudicial detention; judicial sentencing; and policing.

As an open access resource, the China Drug, Crime and Detention Database Project addresses a common issue faced by researchers: access to data. Today more quantitative data on drugs, crime and judicial sentencing in China are available than ever before. Unfortunately, government data are often scattered across numerous sources, with indicators appearing in earlier ministerial reports but disappearing from later editions. Other figures only appear in news reports or scholarly works. Although these sources are public, collating data drawn from them requires considerable time and effort. By providing a centralized repository for these data, the China Drug, Crime and Detention Database Project will address these problems.

The database is the creation Mr. Emile Dirks, a research associate at the London School of Economics and Political Science's International Drug Policy Unit and a PhD candidate in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto. Assistance with research and translation was also provided by Ms. Yifei Xu, a masters student in Development Studies at the London School of Economics. Prior to release, the project passed an ethics review conducted by the London School of Economics and Political Science's Research Ethics Committee. A data management plan has also been created through DMPonline.

Uses of the Database

The China Drug, Crime and Detention Database Project is an open access resource for researchers, advocates, journalists and organizations engaged in the study of drug policy, criminal justice, policing and detention in China. This database can be used to examine a range of topics, including:

- the total number of people detained in more than half a dozen kinds of criminal and extrajudicial detention facilities in China;
- arrest rates for criminal and administrative offenses;
- judicial sentencing patterns, including recent data on sentencing for serious offenses related to national security;
- the growing use of community corrections, probation and parole;
- changes in China's domestic illicit drug economy from a market dominated by heroin to an increasingly methamphetamine-centred one;
- the expansion of drug harm reduction programs along with the continued use of drug detention;
- the demographics of the growing population of registered users of drugs;
- the budget of the Ministry of Public Security and People's Armed Police as a proportion of

the overall national budget;
- how trends in China compare with those in more widely examined national cases, including the United States.

While the current database presents national-level data, in the future separate databases will be created for each of China's twenty three provinces, five autonomous regions and four central government-administered municipalities. These subnational databases will help researchers analyze subnational variation across a range of indicators.

Data Sources

Data have been drawn from publicly accessible Chinese and English language sources. These sources include:

- annual anti-narcotics reports by China's Ministry of Public Security;
- yearbooks by China's National Bureau of Statistics;
- the China Law Yearbook;
- online media articles;
- academic publications;
- reports by advocacy groups, foreign governments, international organizations and international non-government organizations.

Digital sources were accessed through Baidu, Google, CNKI and JSTOR. Non-digital resources were accessed through the University of Toronto's library system or drawn from the principal investigator's personal collection.

Selection of Categories

Database categories cover data related to illicit drugs, crime, judicial sentencing, detention and public security in China from 1990 to the present day. Demographic and economic data have also been added for greater context. Database categories are based on similar categories found in reports produced by the Ministry of Public Security, the National Bureau of Statistics and in the China Law Yearbook. All other categories were created by the principal investigator. New categories may be created in the future in response to the interests of users.

Supplementary Documents

Along with this introductory document, other supplementary documents are available for download on Zenodo. All documents are in both English and Chinese. These include:

- a document listing the 500+ categories in the database;
- a document explaining all data points for which there exist multiple estimates;
- a bibliography of all digital and non-digital sources.

Addressing Data Issues

Given the number of sources used when compiling this database, discrepancies between data sources are inevitable. A supplementary document provides a list of different estimates for particular data points. Users may use the alternative data in this document to substitute data points in the Excel version of the database. Blank fields in the database indicate that no data for this category were found. It is possible that data for these fields exists and has simply not been found by the principal investigator.

Commitment to Open Access

As an open access resource, the China Drug Database Project is freely available for download through Zenodo and the International Drug Policy Unit. Users are simply asked to properly cite the database when using it.

This database project's commitment to open access extends to user participation in the improvement of the database. Users who discover errors in the data, have data to contribute or who have questions about the project can write to the principal investigator to request corrections or additions. The principal investigator, Mr. Emile Dirks, can be contacted by email at emile.dirks@mail.utoronto.ca or on Twitter at @emiledirks.