

## Fight or Fix? How Americans' Political Ideology Impacts Views on Incarceration

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*When comparing our current incarceration system to other first-world countries, such as Norway's dorm room-like prison cells and rehabilitative approach to incarceration, it can lead one to wonder. Why does America utilize retribution over rehabilitation in our country's prisons? The history of our country shows that much of American public opinion greatly influences policymaking or lack thereof which has outreaching effects on governmental systems like our current incarceration system. This study was designed to discover if there is a relationship between Americans' political ideology and their favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative forms of incarceration. Using a survey experiment, I illustrate that those with more liberal ideologies favor rehabilitative forms of incarceration. In contrast, those with more conservative ideologies favor retributive conditions of incarceration—further opening up room for more questions like how this impacts the sociocultural standpoints surrounding incarceration, the legislation, and the complacency in both our government and societies surrounding injustices happening in prisons across the country.*

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## Introduction

Four walls, small windows, bunk beds, and shared bathrooms are all aspects of living that could describe a college dorm room or a prison; however, the living conditions and amount of individual freedom could not be more contrasting in countries worldwide. Certain countries have prisons that have, at times, better amenities than your typical college dorm, while others barely meet basic human needs or even infringe upon human rights. Incarceration in America is explicitly a topic of contention and political polarization contributing to growing polarization in our two-party system. Public opinion in the United States also dramatically impacts social change and policymaking. Further prompting the question; Does political ideology influence Americans' favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative methods of incarceration?

This thesis will argue that, yes, political ideology directly impacts Americans' favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative forms of incarceration. Those who tend to lean more to the left of the political spectrum identifying as either liberal or very liberal will favor shorter sentences and better prison conditions, further illustrating their favoritism of rehabilitative incarceration. While those who tend to lean more to the right of the political spectrum identifying as either conservative or very conservative, will favor longer sentences and poorer prison conditions, further illustrating their favoritism of retributive incarceration. At the same time, those who fall more toward the middle of the spectrum may pick more moderate sentences with variation in the length of sentences and less of a pattern in how they choose prison conditions that they prefer, showing that there may be micro cleavages in those who identify as moderate such as moderate-liberal, true moderate, or moderate-conservative.

This thesis will explore the research question and argument through various sections. The first section will be the literature review, where the historical implications will be discussed surrounding punishment, retributive styles of incarceration with a look into an example found in Rikers Island, and rehabilitative styles

of incarceration with the primary instance of Norwegian prisons to lay a basis for the different camps surrounding incarceration. Then my literature review will explore impacts on public opinion being party ideology, psychology, and sociology to establish the grounds on which I will conduct my experiment. My literature review will then discuss public opinion on criminal justice to illustrate the connection between our criminal justice system and how it is impacted by public opinion. I will then turn to the field of criminology for an empirical framework on the relationship between political ideology and punitiveness that will help guide my experiment and the subsequent analysis of the results. Next, I will outline where my research will fill in the gaps I found in my literature review. Then in the methodology section, I will detail which methods were used, the survey tools, the audience of the survey, the overall survey design, and measure taken to prevent bias among respondents. Finally, I will discuss my results and answer the question does political ideology influence Americans' favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative methods of incarceration?

## Literature Review

This literature review aims to provide context and background to help find a connection between political ideology and public opinion on different forms of incarceration and prison design, either retribution or rehabilitation. Within this section, the definition of punishment and the historical implications will examine both retributive and rehabilitative styles of incarceration and prison design with two real-world examples of each. Following, there will be an explanation of what leads people to choose retributive punishment from a psychological and sociological standpoint. Another factor that will be investigated is the background of both predominate American political parties and their views on one aspect of incarceration in the United States, capital punishment. There will then be a discussion on what is currently known on public opinions regarding incarceration and criminal justice, as well as a comparison between two other Westernized cultures and how the

United States matches up compared to them. I will then continue to outline an empirical framework for the relationship between political ideology and varying degrees of punitiveness as established in criminology. Finally, I will explain how my proposed experiment and thesis will help to close gaps within the current literature on this topic.

### Historical Implications of Punishment and Punitiveness

It would be a mistake to discuss the current problems surrounding incarceration without addressing the history of punishment throughout our world civilizations. The literature outlined in this section reflects the historical implications of punishment, beginning with primitive societies up to the modern-day society of the 1960s.

Early literature from the 1960s sought to find explanations for modern-day dilemmas in punishment by investigating its history dating back to primitive societies that did not have a governing body to implement punishment like modern-day societies do (Bittner and Platt 1966). It was shown through an in-depth review of the historical evidence of punishment in the early days of human civilization. In contrast, there was no immediate governing body to inflict punishment; the initial forms of criminal justice would typically be taken into the hands of either the victim or the victim's loved ones, which would make them judge, jury, and trial for the guilty party (Bittner and Platt 1966). This historical concept of implementing justice at the crime scene can be seen in modern day interactions within our criminal justice system, such as police brutality. However, as time and society progressed, the natural evolution of societies and governments began shaping the landscape for criminal justice by lifting the responsibility from the offended party to the hands of the government they lived under (Bittner and Platt 1966). The time in which this new order of criminal justice was established occurred during the time of monarchies and continued to change from the Middle Ages up to the 18th century; during that whole period, the criminal justice system was in a state of constant chaos until the 17th and 18th century when they

became very retributive in their implementation of criminal justice (Bittner and Platt 1966). Additionally, it was identified in the research that two primary forms of punishment were even being emphasized up to the 1960s: punishment and deterrence from criminal activity (Bitter and Platt 1966). In 1966 the field of psychology was expanding and beginning to address what may lead people to criminality; however, there was minimal research into what was done to rehabilitate those incarcerated (Bitter and Platt 1966). Early scholarship like this has laid the groundwork for my research into the history of punishment; however, due to the period in which this research was conducted, there has been much found out since. Thus, I have also decided to review more recent literature on the history of punishment.

The incarceration rate in the United States has gradually increased by about six to eight percent annually since the mid-1970s (Blumstein 2007). Despite the surface-level inverse relationship between punitiveness and democratic beliefs, there is a direct correlation between the two when public opinion shifts toward favoring "tough on crime" policies (Blumstein 2007). The method used in the literature surrounding this topic to measure punitiveness is by examining incarceration rates amongst a selection of 1st world countries, varying from low to high incarceration rates taken from various North American, European, and Scandinavian countries (Blumstein 2007). Through the research conducted, it was found that the United States and Russia came out on top with incarceration rates of 723 per hundred thousand and 587 per hundred thousand in 1992, respectively (Blumstein 2007). Even though we are currently 30 years removed from the time when this data was collected, it gives more recent historical insight into the increasing punitiveness and incarceration rates seen in the United States criminal justice system, which can help explain current data trends of incarceration. However, all the policies made, shifts in styles of incarceration, and the sudden increase in incarceration since the 1970s can be directly tied to public opinion on crime and incarceration. More recent literature filling in this gap in research covers from the

1930s to the 2010s, shedding light on the various societal factors that impact incarceration rates, increasing as much as 450 percent since the 1970s in the United States (Amidon 2018). These factors include politics, religious beliefs, and changing demographics in the United States; all significantly impacting the current state of our country's incarceration system (Amidon 2018). Factors such as these can lead people to support either retributive or rehabilitative styles, which will be further explored in the following sections of this literature review.

### Retribution

Retributive styles of incarceration have been a constant in many criminal justice systems globally throughout history. The literature surrounding the topic provided insight into the impacts of retributive styles of incarceration on various socio-economic classes and other demographic factors (Fording and Yates 2005). Along with other findings in the field, eyewitness testimonies serve as an example of this style of incarceration by shedding light on the conditions of one of the most retributive prisons in the United States, Rikers Island (Mooney and Shanahan 2020) (Tillman-Davis 2007).

Literature within the criminal justice field sets the background for understanding retributive forms of incarceration and their different impacts on people depending on various socio-economic factors and the current political climate (Fording and Yates 2005). Research has been conducted on the relationship between the current political environment of states on the policy and incarceration rates (Fording and Yates 2005). There were two primary factors explored on state punitiveness. The first was the impact of politics on the degree to which their citizens were incarcerated and if the punitive levels of the state were affected by the rate of incarceration of the state's minority population (Fording and Yates 2005). Findings within the literature illustrate that there is indeed a link between the conservative level of a state's government and the degree to which the racial minority population was incarcerated, which primarily affected black communities (Fording

and Yates 2005). Discoveries made within this research surrounding this topic provide essential information to my thesis because it helps to support the claim that conservative ideals lead individuals to seek retributive forms of incarceration.

Rikers Island is a notorious prison for many reasons, but more recent news has come to light due to the retributive conditions their incarcerated population experiences. However, it did not always hold the reputation it does today; through research conducted on the prison complex, scholars have explored why what was once noted as a "model" set of incarceration facilities has more recently been threatened with closure by local New York politicians (Mooney and Shanahan 2020). Rikers provides a unique case study on retributive styles of incarceration because of the dramatic class and racial disparities within the walls of their nine separate jails housing 4,000 to 5,000 people (Mooney and Shanahan 2020). The initial design of Rikers Island was supposed to be a place of cutting-edge prison design and rehabilitation. Still, because of the long dark past of the penal system of New York, it filled the same shoes as Blackwell's Island and Bellevue Penitentiary, two notoriously retributive prisons (Mooney and Shanahan 2020). However, while the design of Rikers Island may have had initial good intentions, other factors at work may affect the success rate for incarceration facilities under New York State penal reform, such as local politics and political beliefs surrounding incarceration. Literature on the history of Rikers Island and the penitentiaries that came before in New York gives insight into what a retributive-style prison is and its effects on the local community.

The history of Rikers Island may play an essential role in furthering the understanding of retributive styles of incarceration. A more impactful form of insight can be first-hand accounts providing a testament to the conditions and design of the prisons. Recent literature provides first-hand accounts from inside the prison to shed light on the

conditions and social dynamics among inmates (Tillman-Davis 2007). One of the first hand

accounts found within the literature comes from an author who was not a part of the incarcerated population at Rikers Island. However, he worked closely with inmates through the law library (Tilma-Davis 2007). The primary observations found within the literature were the layout of the prisons, which were nine in total, one housing female inmates and the other eight housing male inmates. Within this prison complex, various access to resources were available such as barber shops, beauty salons, and law libraries (Tillman-Davis 2007). While there were at face value a fair amount of resources available to inmates, not all were afforded this luxury, and some were placed in prison complexes where twenty-three hours of their day was spent in a five by nine-foot cell with little to no human contact (Tillman-Davis 2007). While those sections of Rikers Island were small, they were still a primary form of retributive punishment, as reflected within the literature (Tillman-Davis 2007). Through the literature on the current conditions of Rikers Island from the perspective of an outsider of the incarcerated population, insight is gained into the living conditions of a notoriously retributive incarceration complex, lending unique information to help further the exploration of the question that inspired my thesis.

### Rehabilitation

There has been a more recent shift to advocating for more rehabilitative styles of incarceration, and a definite change can be found in Scandinavian countries such as Norway. Much of the literature on rehabilitative incarceration styles discusses the progress made in Scandinavian countries due to their global fame for having very humane and rehabilitative-centered prison designs. Established literature has examined the impacts of mass incarceration and the side effects of retributive incarceration, with potential alternatives being rehabilitative means of incarceration. A real-world example of a rehabilitative approach to incarceration in Norway is outlined in the literature, illustrating the possibility of a less retributive way of incarceration.

Literature from the early 2000s has examined

proposed plans for revising the Model Penal Code, shifting from a rehabilitative ideal to supporting retributive styles of incarceration. There have been arguments for both sides and attempts to explain why there is a call for a switch from rehabilitating to only punishing the incarcerated population in America. It has been corroborated in literature from that period that it would be a mistake (Rubin 2003). The political climate surrounding incarceration is the primary driving factor that points out why there is a call for a switch from rehabilitative to retributive (Rubin 2003). As more Americans were condemning rehabilitative forms of incarceration due to an increased societal fear of crime, there was a notable shift from providing funding for rehabilitation-centered incarceration and a call from the public to politicians to seek retribution which in turn allowed for politicians to save state funding from those programs (Rubin 2003). The literature that has documented the American public's opinion fluctuation on incarceration ebbing and flowing from favoring either rehabilitation or retribution is helpful for my thesis because it will help to support the fact that public opinion on incarceration is affected by political ideology and the current political climate.

More recent literature has advocated for rehabilitative incarceration techniques since it has been shown that retributive techniques are not as effective at rehabilitating or preventing recidivism despite popular opinion. Mass incarceration negatively impacts communities typically of racial minorities, with severe ramifications, such as mental health issues, substance abuse, poverty, and fewer educational opportunities (Engstrom et al. 2017). Experts in the field have drafted policy proposals that could help solve many side effects of retributive incarceration styles and the epidemic of mass incarceration in America (Engstrom et al. 2017). These proposed policy changes are primarily concerning the before and after of incarceration.

A few alternatives to incarceration would be replacing detention centers with rehabilitative centers (Engstrom et al. 2017). As a result, improvements to mental health and addiction

treatment resources would need to be made to ensure these centers rehabilitate participants (Engstrom et al. 2017). And the final part would be ensuring that the laws in our criminal justice system would be non-discriminatory and prevent the subjugation of specific groups in our society (Engstrom et al. 2017). While post incarceration, some proposed solutions include continued support for those struggling with mental health and addiction issues (Engstrom et al. 2017). Additionally, creating more robust job assistance and continued education programs for the formerly incarcerated would set them up for greater success after incarceration (Engstrom et al. 2017). These proposed solutions would aim to create a more guided path toward reentry and integration into their communities to avoid recidivism (Engstrom et al. 2017). Through these proposed prevention methods and post-incarceration care, it would need to also occur on a legislative and societal level to see a shift of public favoritism away from retributive to more rehabilitative forms of incarceration. Having looked into the two camps surrounding incarceration, it is now eminent that these contrasting views are pertinent to my thesis since they directly impact American public opinion on this topic.

Over the past 30 years, Norway has experienced a growing relationship between the quality of prisons and overall life in Norway to the remarkably low crime rates, recidivism rates, and unique opinions on crime compared to that of the United States (Denny 2016). This makes Norway a prime case study on how implementing a rehabilitative incarceration system has benefited more than just those directly impacted by the criminal justice system and has seen a waterfall effect on public opinions on crime and punishment (Denny 2016). Norway's Prison System's emphasis on rehabilitation instead of retribution during incarceration is the reason for the country's low crime rates (Denny 2016). In conjunction with the evidence of lower crime rates in correlation to rehabilitation, the recidivism rates in Norway are also significantly less due to factors such as educational opportunities and programs that allow for an easy transition

to life post-incarceration, which in turn deters recidivism among former inmates (Denny 2016). Through this case study and the preliminary evidence collected by experts within the field of incarceration, there is a strong argument that rehabilitative incarceration is showing potential as an instrument for positive change within criminal justice systems; however, other factors, such as the partisanship in America may provide unforeseen roadblocks thus continuing to influence public opinions on which style of incarceration is effective.

### Impacts of Party Ideology

With decreased bipartisan cooperation, America's political climate has become increasingly partisan over the past few decades. This growing gap is noticeable within our national government and our nation's ever-growing opposition to the "rival" political party. While party ideology did not consistently affect individuals' opinions on issues such as incarceration, with the growing gap and lack of bipartisanship, incarceration is a topic of much political debate. Through recent literature, while long-term rifts have been noticed between Republicans and Democrats, they are now starting to appear within party lines opening the potential for even more divergent political opinions with varying degrees of radicalism to either side of the political spectrum. Other literature supports the idea that political identification impacts public opinion on incarceration styles, whether retributive or rehabilitative.

Due to America's current electoral system and belief in only a two-party system, many political parties that are common in other first-world countries are left out of place as a third party that does not get to participate in the races leaving many voters to have to choose either Republican or Democrat (Noel 2016). However, information collected in the literature surrounding the topic shows the various cleavages in political ideology within the two conventional parties (Noel 2016). This is why many experts in the field propose a multi-party system in America to prevent these cleavages from appearing within the party, causing voter dissatisfaction since their political

ideology is not accurately represented in either party (Noel 2016).

Recent studies have observed the effects of party ideology on individuals' preference for rehabilitative or retributive incarceration. One study shows that those who subscribe to conservative ideologies are far more in favor of capital punishment than those who align themselves with the democratic party (Cochran et al. 2006). That fact from the first study is then corroborated in the second study, which looked at factors that may influence college students' preference for either retributive or rehabilitative forms of punishment, with the results resoundingly indicating that there is a direct and robust correlation between conservatism and support for retributive forms of incarceration (Dozier 2009). While party ideology may be a factor, it is not the sole determiner of individuals' opinions on retribution or rehabilitation. Since a significant influence can be attributed to an individual's psychology and sociology, as expanded on in the following section.

#### Impacts of Psychology and Sociology

Psychology and sociology shape how we live our day-to-day lives, even up to essential aspects that can affect our societies, such as decision-making regarding legal punishment or incarceration. As seen in both early and recent literature surrounding the topic, progression is shown in the understanding of the relationship between political science and psychology.

Two primary reasons found in research that influence an individual's decision regarding legal punishment are to control the behavior of those who commit crimes and the desire for retribution (Vidmar et al. 1980). Through examining early research, it is concluded that the data collected in the 1980s has provided more of a theoretical framework leaving many gaps within the literature (Vidmar et al. 1980). Despite the gaps within the literature, early research has proven that the motives behind one's desire for either controlling behavior or retribution are linked to psychological factors and the degree of the crime (Vidmar et al., 1980). Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that in early literature,

other factors influencing decision-making on incarceration were not considered (Vidmar et al. 1980). Through the findings and the groundwork within literature collected in the 1980s, there has been expanded knowledge on the link between opinions on incarceration and psychological explanations.

Subsequent literature from the 1990s expands upon the public psychology behind Californians' support of the "Three Strikes" law (Tyler et al. 1997). The "Three Strikes" law was initially designed as a deterrent from reoffending to decrease recidivism and elicited unusual reactions from the public, as one study noted (Tyler et al. 1997). The primary takeaway from research on this public opinion surrounding this law showed that there was not only a relationship between growing concern about crime and an increase in punitiveness but also about the shifting social conditions and issues about moral cohesion (Tyler et al. 1997). Through this research, it was found that the relationship between one's sense of belonging to a society or community can heavily influence the reaction to those who break the laws within said society or community, thus affecting the public's opinion on incarceration, especially if there is new or changing social dynamics such as an increase in diversity or introduction of new cultures (Tyler et al. 1997). Research conducted in the 1980s and the 1990s began to lay the groundwork that would eventually lead to more modern developments in our understanding of psychology and public opinions on incarceration.

More recent literature expands upon the baseline from prior discussion by posing the questions; "(...) what sort of control system will capture citizens' shared moral perspective on which acts should be punished and how harshly? (...) what sort of control system will produce the lowest crime rates?" (Darley et al., 2013). Literature collected more recently in this field has tried to answer these two questions by exploring the motives for American opinions on legal punishment and possible means to deter people from committing crimes through sentence duration (Darley et al., 2013). Research findings suggest that the American public bases

their decisions on legal punishment on a “just-deserts” basis which is retributive by nature (Darley et al., 2013). A possible solution proposed would alter public opinion, and lower crime rates would be longer sentencing instead of harsher punishment (Darley et al. 2013). The early and current literature investigating the influence of psychology on public opinions regarding legal punishment is a significant factor to consider when studying public opinions on retributive versus rehabilitative incarceration.

### Public Opinion on Criminal Justice

The growing fear of crime has been a consistent concern for the American public over the past few decades, and as a result, we have seen a spike in mass incarceration since the late 1970s. Due to increased concern about crime, the public response has triggered politicians to implement policies that have led to mass incarceration. Through the following literature discussed, there have been data and polls conducted that indicate there is a direct relationship between public opinion and the politics surrounding incarceration. There has been a lot of literature investigating and researching the relationship between public opinion and political ideology regarding positions taken on incarceration and degrees of retribution one feels.

Corroborated amongst literature on public opinions on incarceration, there has been a noticeable shift away from supporting punitive forms of incarceration in the United States (Ramirez 2013) (Kugler et al. 2013) (Corradi 2022). One study has shown a trend in decreasing public support for “tough on crime” policies compared to past decades, showing that the public may be shifting to a more rehabilitative approach instead of a retributive one (Ramirez 2013). It has also been shown within data collected from research on this topic that while there was much political rhetoric surrounding incarceration, there was very little correlation with the actual perception of safety within communities that were experiencing higher incarceration rates than those who were not with the demographic being studied that was most susceptible to buying into political rhetoric surrounding such issues

(Corradi 2022). Studies performed illustrate that when cross-referencing survey data between the United States, Canada, and Germany, the United States citizens align closely with Canadian public opinions on incarceration; however, the United States is perceived as more retributive since the policy and current criminal justice system does not accurately depict public opinion (Kugler et al. 2013). While these recent studies illustrate a strong argument that public opinion is shifting from retribution to rehabilitation in our criminal justice system, other scholars disagree and see an opposite shift.

Opposing literature argues that there is a shift in public opinion in favor of more “tough on crime” policies (Enns 2014). Literature collected from the early 2000s indicates that the United States provides a unique case study that is unlike any other advanced democracy due to the lack of public trust in the government, a growing concern due to the increasing levels of violence, and the procedure of electing judges and prosecutors who enforce these laws (Zimring 2006). All of these factors can be shown to cause more reliance on “tough on crime” policies by politicians to bring a sense of control and safety to the public, whether factual or fabricated changes are made (Zimring 2006). More recent literature from this point of view has provided evidence that public opinion is also affecting the work of lawmakers regarding policies on incarceration, putting more pressure on them to push “tough on crime” policies (Enns 2014).

However, despite some literature arguing that Americans desire “tough on crime” policies, many scholars are trying to find solutions that would allow lawmakers to move away from these policies and toward more humane forms of incarceration. One way suggested within the research is to re-instill public trust in the government and political actors to allow for alternative avenues of punishment instead of punitive means (Zimring 2006). The great variety of standpoints surrounding the issue of a shift from either side of the spectrum regarding incarceration illustrates that there is room to test if there is a relationship between political ideology and public favoritism of either



retributive or rehabilitative incarceration.

### Political Ideology and Criminology

Established criminology literature has created various schools of ideological thought when it comes to favoring different incarceration methods (Cullen et al. 2013). The classical and positivist schools of thought are the two initial schools that arise from criminology (Cullen et al. 2013). The classical school of thought argues that when a crime is committed, the individual acts upon their own free will; thus, they must be willing to serve an adequate punishment (Cullen et al. 2013). While on the contrasting side, there is the positivist school of thought, which primarily focuses on the offender, not the offense, and attributes lawlessness and crime to social, biological, and psychological conditions the individual is under (Cullen et al., 2013).

From these two primary schools of thought stems the three schools of political ideology concerning incarceration and crime. The first ideology is conservatism, and their view on incarceration tends to aim to keep social order rather than aiding the offender (Cullen et al. 2013). While the second ideology is liberalism, and the view this ideology has on incarceration is that crime is caused by unjustness in our societies, be it socially or economically, which is why they favor improving the offender's situation to prevent further crime (Cullen et al. 2013). The last ideology is radicalism, and their view on incarceration is that the true goal of repairing our incarceration system cannot be achieved within our current capitalistic system, which is why long-term solutions cannot be achieved until another form of governance is in acted such as socialism (Cullen et al. 2013). The theoretical view of the relationship between ideology and incarceration is imperative to the research and design of my thesis, which will help me to better hypothesize the outcomes of my experiment.

### Looking Forward

After extensive research of the field surrounding my thesis topic, my experiment and subsequent results will help fill in specific gaps within the literature on the relationship between

Americans' punitiveness and how their ideology influences their views of incarceration. While similar studies have been conducted, there has yet to be one that is trying to gather a broader sense of an individual's political ideology more than just their registered political party. Through my experiment, I hope to gain further insight into how different political cleavages and psychology would affect the punitiveness of an individual's decision-making. The unique take that my experiment would have on exploring this relationship is the method in which I plan to answer my research question of "Does political ideology affect Americans' favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative methods of incarceration?" by creating an interactive experiment that would allow the decision of a case to be in the hands of the participant as outlined within the following section of my research methodology.

### Methodology

To answer my research question, "Does political ideology influence Americans' favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative methods of incarceration?" I will be conducting a quantitative experiment. Within this section, I will outline the type of methods I will be using, survey tools I will use, the audience I will be reaching with my survey, the design of my survey, and some measures I will take so as not to prime the respondents in order to gain the rawest data possible when dealing with a subject as polarizing as incarceration.

I will use a quantitative experiment to analyze my research question further and prove my hypothesis. The means by which I will conduct my survey is through the online survey tool Qualtrics. I will be using this tool because it is the most easily accessible to use since Cal Poly Pomona has a license that allows students to use this service for free. Furthermore, Qualtrics also makes it easy to analyze and code the survey to allow for randomization. My survey will be distributed through a shareable link that can be sent via email or text message. I will reach my primary audience for my experiment through an all-department email sent to Political Science

Majors and Minors. I will also send this survey to a colleague currently attending CSU Chico; from there, it will be distributed via link to all those in their club.

The primary audience I will reach with my survey is current Cal Poly Pomona students and faculty, primarily from the political science department, whether majoring or minoring in the field. The secondary audience I will reach that will have a sizably less significant turnout is political science majors and those in the political field at CSU Chico since a colleague of mine is a member of many political science-oriented organizations. With these two audiences combined, I am hoping that the turnout will be in the range of 40 to 70 respondents with quality answers meaning that they complete the entire survey along with the post-treatment questions I will discuss in the design of my experiment.

My survey design begins with the prompt, "In the following scenario, you will be asked to take on the role of a judge and sentence someone based on the case details provided. You will be asked to determine the length of their sentence, if they should be able to qualify for parole, and which prison you would like to send them to" in order to engage with the respondent and allow them to know what kind of survey they are going to take. Then it will take the respondent to the first three pre-treatment demographic questions. The first question is "What is your gender identity?" with three options Male, Female, Nonbinary/third gender, or Other. The second question, "How old are you?" is split into five category options; 17-22, 23-27, 28-32, 33-37, and 38-42+. And the final demographic question is "Where do your beliefs fall on the political spectrum?" with the five options being; Very Conservative, Conservative, Neither, Liberal, or Very Liberal. From here, the respondent is taken to either the control or one of the four different experimental conditions.

Suppose the software that Qualtrics uses to randomize the survey directs the respondent to the control option. In that case, the respondent will skip over the crime details and option for sentence length those who would get any of the experimental treatments would get and instead

take them directly to the prison options. Here the respondent is given the option to send the defendant to either a Norwegian prison cell or the Rikers Island prison cell, both depicted through photos provided in the survey. After the respondent chooses between the prison cell options, the required portion of the survey will end and direct them to the post-treatment questions. However, if the respondent does not get randomized into the control group, they will have the possibility of getting one of the experimental treatments from one to four. The four different treatments vary greatly in crime type and severity in order to gain a more holistic view into differing political ideologies and their impacts on individuals' favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative styles of incarceration. The different crime types were meant not to be politically polarizing, with some crimes impacting vulnerable communities, specifically children. The first experimental treatments scenario is "You are a presiding judge at the Pomona Courthouse, and the defendant has been found guilty of felony grand theft of a neighbor's sports car. How long do you think the defendant should be sentenced?" with the sentencing options being; three years without parole, two years and one year of parole, one year and six months of parole, and finally six months, one year of parole and 50 hours of community service. The crime mentioned in experimental treatment one is far less polarizing, and the crime is less severe in human damages and more severe in financial damages. The following experimental treatment option some respondents may get is experimental treatment two: "You are a presiding judge at the Pomona Courthouse, and the defendant is on trial for child abuse of their adopted son. Their adopted son ended up in the hospital from the abuse and is now in state custody. How long do you think the defendant should be sentenced?" with sentencing options as Ten years without parole, Six years and two years of parole, Four years, two years of parole, and 1,000 hours of domestic violence counseling, and finally Two years, three years of parole, 1,000 hours of domestic violence counseling, and 400 hours of community service. Child abuse is

a crime that tugs at the heartstrings of almost everyone, no matter party affiliation and is one of the less polarizing yet very severe types of crime. The respondent may be given experimental treatment three: “You are a presiding judge at the Pomona Courthouse, and the defendant is on trial for first-degree burglary of a local apartment. They were unable to steal anything since the residents were home. How long do you think the defendant should be sentenced?” the sentencing options as; Ten years without parole, Five years and a 2,000 dollar fine, Two years, one year on parole, and 100 hours of community service, and finally, Two years on probation and 300 hours of community service. First degree burglary that was unsuccessful in robbing an apartment is less severe and not as polarizing.

The respondent may be given experimental treatment four: “You are a presiding judge at the Pomona Courthouse, and the defendant is on trial for the arson of a local school in Downtown Pomona. Over 30 fatalities and 100 were injured in the fire. How long do you think the defendant should be sentenced?” with the sentencing options of Life in prison without the possibility of parole, A fine of up to 10,000 dollars and 50 years in prison, 25 years in prison, ten years on parole, and 10,000 hours of community service, and finally 20 years in prison, fifteen years on parole and 10,000 hours of community service. Committing arson in a grade school is a severe crime that also taps into the respondents’ emotions due to the high level of human lives lost. No polarizing means in this school tragedy, such as guns, could impact the political biases that individuals may carry. As seen in the descriptions of each experimental treatment above, two severe types of crime directly affect a vulnerable group, children, and two types of crime that impact personal property and monetary loss, giving more significant variation and lessening the impact of political polarization on how respondents sentence defendants based on a brief overview of the case facts. After the respondents answered their respective experimental treatment from one to four, they are now prompted to answer which prison they would like to send the defendant to, which are the same options the control group

was given, which is two photos, the first of a Norwegian prison cell and the second of a Rikers Island prison cell.

After each of the respondents finished the required portion of the survey, they are now prompted to answer three post-treatment questions. The first question is, “Do you think our country’s current incarceration system delivers equal justice?” with the options being Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat agree, and Agree. This first question is used to gauge how the respondent feels toward the current incarceration system, especially after answering the survey questions. The next question is, “Why did you choose to sentence the defendant the way you did? Please explain in a sentence or two,” which is a free-response question solely for the further investigation into the psychology or reasoning not allowed in the limited sentencing options given in the control or experimental treatments. And the final question is, “Did any other factors or opinions influence your decision-making?” this is also a free-answer question with similar reasoning to the prior question of seeing if any further reasoning respondents had that was not stated in the survey itself or other post-treatment questions. The post treatment questions were solely for curiosity and will not be used in the final data analysis collected via survey responses.

Efforts were taken to structure the survey in a way that does not prime respondents to feel they have to answer a certain way due to political ideology or other factors that may influence their decision-making. Words such as “retributive” or “rehabilitative” and other words similar to these were not used in any part of the survey so as not to influence the respondents’ answers and sentencing choices. Some types of crime are more polarizing than others, such as gun violence-related or racially motivated crimes. So, I carefully selected which crime types to use in my experimental treatments to avoid influencing the respondent and skewing my data, leading to the final draft of my survey, which was sent out to respondents in late February, and the collection of responses ended at the end of March before the senior thesis conference.

## Results

Through the use of SPSS in running regressions with the data collected from the survey, the survey design is discussed in the methodology section of this thesis. This results section will discuss four different models derived from four different regression tests with other variables and factors designed to answer the research question, “Does political ideology influence Americans’ favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative methods of incarceration?”. As hypothesized earlier in this thesis, there is a direct relationship between an individual’s political ideology and their favoritism of retributive or rehabilitative incarceration. There will be an exploration of the results collected, and then the answer to the research question will become evident by examining the four different models.

The first model will explore the initial findings without any other variables factored into it to give us a baseline of how respondents’ answers impacted the data. Then the second model will explore the impacts of respondents’ political ideology on their preference for either retributive or rehabilitative incarceration. The third model will factor in political ideology and gender to see how it impacts the results. And finally, in the fourth model, crime typology and the difference between severe and non-severe crime types and how they influence the results. Exploring these four models will help resolve the research question that inspired this thesis and lead to new possible discoveries that could contribute to furthering our collective understanding of political ideology and its relationship with incarceration.

### Demographics of Respondents

The demographics of the respondents and the size of the collected survey pool are worth noting since aspects such as gender and political ideology are primary components of this experiment. The final number of total respondents in a results report compiled by Qualtrics was 50 total respondents that had completed the entire required portion of the survey. Regarding gender identity percentages of

the respondents, they were 58% Female, 38% Male, 4% Non-binary/third gender, and 0% Prefer not to say. With a 58% Female respondent population in this smaller sample size, it can be inferred and is shown to have an impact on the results as discussed in the Model 3 section of the results. Concerning the age of respondents, a primary number of respondents were in the 17-22 age group at 62%, with subsequent groups being 23-27 at 24%, 28-32 at 8%, 33-37 at 2%, and 38-42+ at 4%.

Furthermore, the political ideology of the respondents had a majority of Liberal respondents at 48%. The next largest category was Neither at 20%, followed by Conservative and Very Liberal, which were both at 14% and finally, Very Conservative at 4%. The lack of diversity in political ideology can also impact the data, further exacerbating the effects of having a smaller sample size. These three pre-treatment questions helped gain further insight into the respondents who participated in the experiment and how their demographics may have impacted the results due to the smaller sample size, which was further explored once the data was brought from Qualtrics into SPSS for further analysis.

### Analyzing the Results

The software that was utilized in order to analyze the data collected through Qualtrics was SPSS. The raw database imported from Qualtrics into SPSS was re-coded in certain sections, and other sections were cut out due to irrelevance to the hypothesis and impact on the data. The primary sections that were re-coded were political ideology from a one to five spectrum, with one being Very Conservative to five being Very Liberal. The political ideology was re-coded to be analyzed on a positive two to negative two scale, with two being Very Conservative to negative two being Very Liberal. This alteration of the political ideology scale was made to align with other Political Science experiments since this is how political ideology is measured quantitatively. Another value added to the data set to best analyze the results was whether the individual selected the photo of Norway or the US prison cell regardless of their experimental condition or

if they were in the control group. This addition of this new value is vital to all of the models that were constructed following regression testing. Five more values were added to the data set after collection before regression testing to ensure that those who did not complete the survey were excluded, and all of the other respondents were included whether the respondent answered for the control or experimental treatments one to four. This helps to control which experimental conditions are compared to the rest of the data set, which can be helpful when running regressions when comparing different crime types and the responses they evoked from respondents.

Model One is the initial regression I ran to establish the baseline for further testing using regression in SPSS. This regression was conducted by placing the “Norway or U.S.” variable in the dependent variable column and then placing Experimental Treatments; one, two, three, and four in the dependent variable section in SPSS. After running this regression, the data that was paid close attention to was the standardized beta coefficients which are shown in all of the data tables as the top value; below the standardized beta coefficient value in parenthesis is the coefficients standard error, and the asterisks next to the standardized beta coefficient illustrate the statistical significance depending on the point value of the significance of each set of data which were “\*p≤.10, \*\* p≤.05, \*\*\*p<.01”

which were all shown in Figures 1,2,3 and 4. By observing these three values, the trend and significance of the data are illustrated in a more easily accessible and quantifiable way.

As seen in Figure 1, which illustrates the data collected from regression number one, the baseline, there is statistical significance for two of the four experimental treatments. Experimental Treatment 1’s data showed .450 as the standardized beta coefficient, .222 as the coefficient’s standard of error, and .017 as the statistical significance, illustrated by the two asterisks in Figure 1 on the Experimental Treatment 1 line. Experimental Treatment 2’s data showed .243 as the standardized beta coefficient, .217 as the coefficient’s standard of error, and .190 as the statistical significance. Experimental Treatment 3’s data showed .204 as the standardized beta coefficient, .229 as the coefficient’s standard of error, and .256 as the statistical significance. Experimental Treatment 4’s data showed .495 as the standardized beta coefficient, .229 as the coefficient’s standard of error, and .008 as the statistical significance, illustrated by the three asterisks in Figure 1 on the Experimental Treatment 4 line.

The data shown in Figure 1 on the Experimental Treatment One Line indicates that the group assigned the Grand Theft Auto case is statistically significant, as seen through the two asterisks next to the standardized coefficient. The subsequent experimental treatment

### Model 1: The Baseline

**Regression 1: Baseline (Figure 1)**

Variable Name	Model 1
Experimental Treatment 1: Grand Theft Auto	.450** (.222)
Experimental Treatment 2: Child Abuse	.243 (.217)
Experimental Treatment 3: Burglary	.204 (.229)
Experimental Treatment 4: Arson	.495*** (.229)

Standardized Coefficients; \*p≤.10, \*\* p≤.05, \*\*\*p<.01

that showed great statistical significance is Experimental Treatment Four which was the Arson in a local school case, through the three asterisks next to the standardized coefficient in Figure 1 on the Experimental Treatment 4 line. Both experimental treatment results in Model One illustrate favoritism of retribution or rehabilitation before party ideology is a variable in the regression.

Model Two is the second regression that was run, and it differs from Model One, “The Baseline,” because it factors in political ideology as a dependent variable. Before running the regression, the independent variable was established as the Norway or the U.S. variable. The dependent variables were Experimental Treatments One, Two, Three, and Four, with the addition of the Political Ideology variable. As discussed in the Analyzing the Results section, political ideology was recoded to match how political ideology is commonly measured in other political science research. With the addition of political ideology into Model Two, the statistical significance helped to confirm my hypothesis further.

Figure 2 shows Experimental Treatment 1’s data as .454 for the standardized beta coefficient, .066 for the coefficient’s standard of error, and .001 for statistical significance, which indicates strong statistical significance illustrated in Figure

2 on the Experimental Treatment 1 line through three asterisks. Experimental Treatment 2’s data shows .387 for the standardized beta coefficient, .196 for the coefficient’s standard of error, and .020 for statistical significance indicated in Figure 2 on the Experimental Treatment 2 line through two asterisks. Experimental Treatment 3’s data shows .240 for the standardized beta coefficient, .202 for the coefficient’s standard of error, and .133 for statistical significance. Experimental Treatment 4’s data shows .462 for the standardized beta coefficient, .202 for the coefficient’s standard of error, and .005 for the statistical significance, illustrated in Figure 2 on the Experimental Treatment 4 line through three asterisks meaning great statistical significance. The Political Ideology variable’s data shows .454 for the standardized beta coefficient, .066 for the coefficient’s standard of error, and .001 for statistical significance, shown in Figure 2 on the Ideology line as three asterisks indicating strong statistical significance.

As seen in Model One, statistical significance was found in Experimental Treatments One and Four; however, the statistical significance when adding political ideology as a variable dramatically impacted the results and made an additional experimental treatment statistically significant. While both Experimental Treatments One and Four remained statistically significant, as the first

## Model 2: Political Ideology

**Regression 2: Political Ideology (Figure 2)**

Variable Name	Model 2
Experimental Treatment 1: Grand Theft Auto	.387** (.196)
Experimental Treatment 2: Child Abuse	.272* (.190)
Experimental Treatment 3: Burglary	.240 (.202)
Experimental Treatment 4: Arson	.462*** (.202)
Political Ideology	.454*** (.066)

Standardized Coefficients; \*p≤.10, \*\* p≤.05, \*\*\*p<.01

regression showed, Experimental Treatment Two also became statistically significant. The addition of two asterisks to Experimental Treatment Two illustrated statistical significance, as seen in Figure 2 on the Experimental Treatment 2 line. The relationship illustrated through this addition of political ideology shows that Experimental Treatments One, Two, and Four, specifically since it is a positive trend, elicited more retributive responses from respondents since they were more likely to send defendants to the U.S. prison option over the Norway option.

The primary difference between Model 1 and 2 was the addition of political ideology, which illustrated great statistical significance with three asterisks in Figure 2 on the Political Ideology line. This discovery is vital in confirming my hypothesis that political ideology directly impacts an individual's favoritism of either retribution or rehabilitation because, due to the statistical significance and the trend illustrated in this second regression test, there is a positive relationship between ideology and favoritism of retribution or rehabilitation. The positive relationship means that the more positive or conservative an individual identifies with on the political ideology scale, which would be either 2 Very Conservative or 1 Conservative, the more positive their choice for which prison will be since the U.S. is coded as one, and Norway is

coded at zero. The inverse can be implied based on this established relationship where the more negative or liberal an individual identifies on the political ideology scale, which would be -2 Very Liberal or -1 Liberal, their choices would be reflected as negative as well since Norway is coded as zero and the U.S. is coded as one. With this relationship confirmed through this second regression test, it is pertinent to the conclusions I draw from my data. However, I continued to test more variables to see if there was any impact on the results, as discussed in the following sections.

Model 3 kept the same aspects as Models 1 and 2; however, there was the addition of gender identity into the regression, which unexpectedly impacted the results. Like the previous models, the dependent variable was whether the respondent chose Norway or the U.S. photo. The dependent variables were Experimental Treatments 1, 2, 3, and 4, along with the political ideology variable. The difference was the addition of gender identity that was collected as part of the pre-treatment section of the survey. The four categories that are outlined within the methodology section for gender identity options are 1 Male, 2 Female, 3 Nonbinary/third gender, and 4 Prefer not to say and were kept as they were coded in the data set exported from Qualtrics to SPSS. The impact that the addition of gender as a dependent variable had on the results of

### Model 3: Gender and Party Ideology

**Regression 3: Political Ideology and Gender (Figure 3)**

Variable Name	Model 3
Experimental Treatment 1: Grand Theft Auto	.367* (.227)
Experimental Treatment 2: Child Abuse	.266 (.196)
Experimental Treatment 3: Burglary	.239 (.204)
Experimental Treatment 4: Arson	.456*** (.207)
Political Ideology	.443*** (.071)
Gender	-.035 (.152)

Standardized Coefficients: \*p<.10. \*\* p<.05. \*\*\*p<.01

the third regression was negative. It made some experimental treatments and variables less statistically significant as a result.

Figure 3 shows Experimental Treatment 1's data as .367 for the standardized beta coefficient, .227 as the coefficient's standard of error, and .054 as the statistical significance, indicating statistical significance illustrated in Figure 3 by two asterisks. Experimental Treatment 2's data shows .266 for the standardized beta coefficient, .196 for the coefficient's standard of error, and .115 for statistical significance, indicating no statistical significance. Experimental Treatment 3's data shows .239 for the standardized beta coefficient, .204 for the coefficient's standard of error, and .140 for statistical significance, indicating no statistical significance. Experimental Treatment 4's data shows .456 for the standardized beta coefficient, .207 for the coefficient's standard of error, and .007 for statistical significance, indicating strong statistical significance illustrated in Figure 3 by three asterisks. Political Ideology's data shows .443 as the standardized beta coefficient, .071 as the coefficient's standard of error, and .003 for statistical significance, indicating strong statistical significance illustrated in Figure 3 by three asterisks. Gender Identity's data shows -.035 as the standardized beta coefficient, .152 as the coefficient's standard of error, and .828 for statistical significance, indicating no statistical significance.

While Experimental Treatments One and Four remained statistically significant as they were in Models 1 and 2. The same can be said for political ideology, with the statistical significance

remaining strong, with three asterisks illustrating the strong statistical significance. The addition of the gender variable, as shown in Figure 3 and through the prior explanation, brought down the statistical significance of otherwise significant values from other variables. However, despite the other three variables that have remained statistically significant, it was found that gender was not statistically significant in the relationship between political ideology and favoritism of retribution or rehabilitation. Another reason is that when running regression and adding additional variables such as gender, it can impact the outcome of the results due to the small

working sample size of respondents and the demographics of respondents since, as previously mentioned, a significant percentage of respondents self-identify as female. Despite gender showing no statistical significance, it was still worthwhile testing this variable along with the following variable of crime typology to see if it impacted the results.

Crime Typology was a variable explored in Model 4 to see if it impacted respondents' favoritism of either retribution or rehabilitation in relation to their party ideology since in Models 1 and 2, there was statistical significance on two very contrasting forms of crime, which were Grand Theft Auto for Experimental Treatment 1 and Arson of a local school for Experimental Treatment 4. Model 4 took a different approach to test the statistical significance of this relationship since it excluded Experimental Treatments 1, 2, 3, and 4 from the regression test. When setting up this fourth regression test, the independent

### Model 4: Crime Typology

**Regression 4: Crime Typology and Political Ideology (Figure 4)**

Variable Name	Model 4
Crime Typology	.511*** (.077)
Political Ideology	.140 (.069)

Standardized Coefficients; \*p≤.10, \*\* p≤.05, \*\*\*p<.01



variable remained the same, which was the “Norway or U.S.” variable. For the dependent variable, the two variables that were tested were political ideology and crime type.

The crime type was measured on a one to four scale being; 1 Very Moderate, 2 Moderate, 3 Severe, and 4 Very Severe. These labels were then placed in accordance with which case the respondent was assigned from Experimental Treatments One to Four. When placing the four types of crimes into each category, considerations of the loss of human lives and the amount of financial damages were considered when assigning the categories to each crime. Thus, Experimental Treatment One, Grand Theft Auto, was given 2 Moderate. Experimental Treatment Two, which was Child Abuse, was assigned 3 Severe. Experimental Treatment Three, First Degree Burglary, was given 1 Very Moderate. Finally, Experimental Treatment Four was Arson of a local school and was assigned 4 Very Severe. The control was left out of this regression since there was no degree of crime to measure in the control group.

However, no statistical significance was found for the crime type variable despite a hypothesized correlation based on prior models between the crime type and the degree of retribution or rehabilitation in sentencing. The data for the crime type variable is .140 for the standardized coefficient, .069 for the coefficient’s standard of error, and .355 for the statistical significance. In comparison, the data for the political ideology variable was .511 for the standardized beta coefficient, .077 for the coefficient’s stand of error, and .002 for the statistical significance illustrated by three asterisks in Figure 4. The new regression with the crime type variable made the political ideology variable slightly less statistically significant. Yet, it is not illustrated through the asterisks since the change was not drastic similar to the decrease in statistical significance when adding the Gender variable in Model 3.

### Conclusion

The question that started this thesis was, does political ideology influence Americans’ favoritism of retributive or rehabilitative forms

of incarceration? However, before answering the question through the experimental design and results sections, the groundwork for my thesis was done in the literature review section.

Through the literature review section, topics such as the history of punishment and punitiveness gave greater insight into the historical origins of our current incarceration systems globally. Then within the retribution section, the real-world example of Rikers Island was discussed, which was once designed with rehabilitation in mind and turned into one of the most retributive prisons in the country. In contrast, when talking about the opposite end of the incarceration spectrum, which is rehabilitation, the example of Norway was used and how they were successful in implementing rehabilitative methods to their incarceration system, which leads us to beg the question of how come this has not been applied to the United States. One of the primary limitations was discussed in the party ideology section, where it was outlined that growing polarization in our current two-party system may be one of the primary limiting factors in preventing bipartisan cooperation on issues such as incarceration as well as further illustrating through a recent study that there is a relationship between party ideology and favoritism of capital punishment. From there, another impact on public opinion was discussed pertaining to the psychology and sociology behind individuals and their views on criminal justice. The public opinion section then further explored and illustrated two opposing sides on whether American public opinion is shifting from rehabilitative to retributive or vice versa. After exploring public opinion on criminal justice, the literature review continues to delve into the theoretical relationship between party ideology and incarceration through a criminology lens, giving a theoretical framework for my thesis. This led to where my thesis was to fill in the gaps of research discussed in my literature review by conducting a survey experiment to see if there is a relationship between political ideology and favoritism of retribution or rehabilitation.

In the design and execution of the experiment, some limitations were predicted and found

within the sample size that may have impacted the results of my thesis. Due to the smaller sample size of 50 respondents, there was less variation in political ideology, gender, and age. If I were to conduct this experiment again, I would aim to have it on a grander scale to gain greater diversity in my respondents. However, as proven through the experiment and subsequent analysis of the results, political ideology does influence Americans' favoritism of either retributive or rehabilitative forms of incarceration. Illustrated through the three regression tests that factored in political ideology as a variable, there was great statistical significance for the political ideology variable in all three regression tests regardless of other variables added, such as gender in the third regression test or crime type in the fourth regression test.

More insight has been added to political science literature through the data analysis, further confirming my hypothesis and answering my research question along with improving

our understanding of how an individual's political ideology can influence public opinion on incarceration, the reaction of our country's political climate, and the possibility for future improvements to the current system.

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