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POLS 394 – Policing and Politics
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Introduction:

Each person has been shaped through a series of institutions, and school is one of the first institutions we interact with daily. What would happen if one of these systems was the criminal justice system, but inside of schools? The United States has the highest incarceration in the world, housing 22% of the world's population in jails, which is a 20-year low, yet it remains marginally higher than any other country¹. One of the reasons this number remains elevated is a complex that funnels children out of schools into prisons. This structure is known as the school-to-prison pipeline, where students are tracked “out of educational institutions, primarily via “zero tolerance” policies, and, directly and/or indirectly, into the juvenile and adult criminal justice systems”². The pipeline targets at-risk individuals, who have garnered multiple charges for petty crimes, face probation, jail, or fines, only to be charged with similar crimes and sentences once released³. Our criminal justice system has incarcerated more than 47,000 children, with 69% of these children were children of color⁴. The effects on people of color have even been raised at the level of the Supreme Court, where Justice Sotomayor noted that certain citizens are treated “not a citizen of a democracy but the subject of a carceral state, just waiting to be cataloged,” pointing towards the extremely politicized nature of our criminal justice system⁵. Similar to adult prison statistics, more than 73% of these youth were incarcerated for non-violent offenses, but these offenses come with long prison stays that do not rehabilitate the youth, instead funneling them towards adult facilities⁶.

¹ Gramlich, John. “America’s incarceration rate is at a two-decade low.” Pew Research Center, Washington, D.C. (May 2, 2018) <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/05/02/americas-incarceration-rate-is-at-a-two-decade-low/>.

² Heitzeg, N. A. (2009). Education or Incarceration: Zero Tolerance Policies and the School to Prison Pipeline. In Forum on public policy online (Vol. 2009, No. 2). Oxford Round Table. 406 West Florida Avenue, Urbana, IL 61801.

³ Rios, V. M. (2011). Punished: Policing the Lives of Black and Latino Boys. New York: New York University Press, pg. 44.

⁴ “State-by-State Data.” The Sentencing Project. <https://www.sentencingproject.org/the-facts/#detail?state1Option=U.S. Total&state2Option=0>.

⁵ Utah vs. Strieff, 579 U.S. ____ (2016) (June 20, 2016).

⁶ The W. Haywood Burns Institute for Justice Fairness and Equity. (2015). 2015 Incarceration Rates for All Youth. Retrieved from

When literature and studies reference the school-to-prison pipeline, the system is linked to zero-tolerance behavior policies, suspensions, and even expulsions that target minority students. These policies create a system where marginalized children are removed from environments that are supposed to support their growing minds. Similar to the prison system, both are punitive institutions and target minority students more than any other demographic. Punitive systems of punishment don't rehabilitate youth, just as they do not rehabilitate adults. The school-to-prison pipeline fails students during their formative years, creating problems for the students who need the most support. Most children who are targeted by zero-tolerance policies are previously labeled "problem children," allowing schools to justify removing them from the classrooms. African-Americans make up 34% of the number of suspensions and 45% of juvenile arrests, but only 17% of the youth population, signaling that they are drastically overrepresented in the school-to-prison pipeline compared to other races⁷. These disparities showcase how the school-to-prison pipeline not only targets the students who need support, but also students of color, which promotes racial disparities in the general criminal justice population.

Previous studies have explored the effects of punitive measures through the criminal justice system on adults, where we see that an increase in punitive measures can harm political participation. But what happens when these exposures to the criminal justice system happen as children? Members of society who interact with the police more often are more likely to question their role as a citizen and the legitimacy of state practices, leading to a disconnect between the individual and their role in society⁸. When children are in school, they are supposed to learn and be supported by a community that can shape them. Instead, this exposure can shape through police and policing at a young age can shape how a child views authority. This study will show that in informal structures of authority, increased frequency of contact with the carceral state at a young age can lead to changes in political behavior as adults, especially when these children are exposed before, during, and after school. Americans have the right to vote at

<http://data.burnsinstitute.org/#comparison=3&placement=3&racess=1,2,3,4,5,6&offenses=5,2,8,1,9,11,10&year=2015&view=map>.

⁷ Cregor, M., & Hewitt, D. (2011). Dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline: A survey from the field. *Poverty & Race*, 20(1), 5-7. http://www.indiana.edu/~atlantic/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/NAACP-Dismantling_the_School_to_Prison_Pipeline.pdf.

⁸ Capers, I. B. (2018). Criminal Procedure and the Good Citizen. *Columbia Law Review*, 118(2), 653-712. <https://columbialawreview.org/content/criminal-procedure-and-the-good-citizen/>.

18, but seeing as adults with higher rates of contact with law enforcement have higher levels of political demobilization, this should have a similar association when the exposure begins at a younger age. The findings of this study, in addition to past studies on the school-to-prison pipeline, will identify how increased exposure to the carceral state and policing at a young age can impact adults and future political participation.

Literature Review:

In order to fully comprehend the school-to-prison pipeline and its effects on minority students, I first look to Christopher A. Mallett's book, *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Comprehensive Assessment*. In the chapters, "Punishment Pathways Exacerbate the Problems" and "Disproportionate Impact on Vulnerable Children and Adolescents," Mallett explains the effects of zero-tolerance policies on students who do not truly pose a risk to the overall student population. Mallett comes to the supposition that "[s]chool punishments are not equitably distributed across most schools because low-income students and children and adolescents of color (among other student groups) are much more likely to be punished in school than others". Mallett pulls from many other sources and shows that at-risk students are more likely to face these punitive measures when they need more rehabilitative measures than other students⁹. Mallett's research pulls in other variables, "those who experience poverty, students of color, students who have special education disabilities, children and adolescents who have been traumatized or maltreated, and young people who identify as LGBT," to explain the effects of disciplinary actions¹¹. Across the chapter, he explains how the school-to-prison pipeline can bring lifelong changes for adolescents, where the "harms, traumas, and difficulties do not end for the adolescent after leaving the juvenile justice or criminal justice systems", suggesting that those who experience the highest frequency of contact can have difficulties in the future across the board, including political participation¹².

⁹ Mallett, C. A. (2016). *The School-to-Prison Pipeline: A Comprehensive Assessment*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company, pg. 44.

¹⁰ Ibid, pg. 45.

¹¹ Ibid, pg. 85.

¹² Ibid, pg. 59.

In addition to Mallett's book, Vesla Weaver and Amy Lehrman's article, "Political Consequences of the Carceral State," depicts the core of my hypothesis. While Mallett's book depicts the consequences for children, Weaver and Lehrman share the consequences of exposure to the criminal justice system on political participation in adults. The article states that 13% of black men were unable to vote in 2008 due to criminal disenfranchisement¹³. The core of their argument is that past interactions with the criminal justice system "are antagonistic to democratic participation and inspire negative orientations toward government"¹⁴. The numbers that they drew from the Pew Center and the Sentencing Project show how black men make up a large portion of the disenfranchisement, but in the future, 1 in 3 black men will be incarcerated in their lifetime.

Lehrman and Weaver's discussion of the carceral state portrays the American criminal justice system as "an important force in shaping American mass politics"¹⁵. Lehrman and Weaver's study only focuses on the importance of exposure, showing that it can shape and explain political participation. The pair describes the number of black men 16 to 24 who are incarcerated, but does not fully delve into this problem of how early exposure can relate to their research. The research does come to the conclusion that the carceral state does have an effect on political participation, with voting posing a more significant relationship than other activities, like contacting government officials or political donations¹⁶. The same damage to trust in the system found by Lehrman and Weaver is also probable in students who were exposed to the carceral state at a young age. Those students will grow up to associate schools and the institutions that govern their lives with negative effects, which can cause a similar decrease in voting. The scholarly debates referenced in the article can all be taken to show how political justice and behavior intertwine in the future, where additional surveys that deal with exposure at a young age can be used to supplement their findings¹⁷. Lehrman and Weaver provide a vital starting point in viewing the implications of the school-to-prison pipeline in terms of how informal correctional institutions shapes citizens for the future, especially in political terms.

¹³ Weaver, V. M., & Lerman, A. E. (2010). Political Consequences of the Carceral State. *American Political Science Review*, 104(4), pg. 817.

¹⁴ Ibid, pg. 817.

¹⁵ Ibid, pg. 818.

¹⁶ Ibid, pg. 826.

¹⁷ Ibid, pg. 821.

Lehrman and Weaver's political points are supported by Sarah K. Bruch and Joe Soss' "Schooling as a Formative Political Experience: Authority Relations and the Education of Citizens," by showing how through policy, schools are truly not equal. Education is linked to politics, and Bruch and Soss show the effects of politics on education and vice versa. In the article, Bruch and Soss share their evidence that black students are exposed to more authority relations than white and Latino students, with a noticeable separation that is the same between school disciplinary environments, punitive sanctioning, and perception of unfair treatment¹⁸. The punitive measures expressed in Bruch and Soss are all aspects of the school-to-prison pipeline, although they are not explicitly explained as such. They argue that schools "'make citizens' - and advantage[s] some citizens over others," which plays to the argument of the importance of the school-to-prison pipeline in targeting at-risk students more than others¹⁹. Bruch and Soss make a push for rehabilitative measures against students, similarly to how researchers push for restorative justice in prisons. The school-to-prison pipeline is a pervasive issue that politics plays a major role in, and Bruch and Soss understand how this unfair treatment can affect the perspectives of students later in life.

The relationship between police in schools and political participation in the future can be tied to students' perceptions of the police as they grow up. Carla Shedd's book, *Unequal City*, evaluates the role of perceptions of injustice in students, tying it to the intersection of "personal identity, experiences and social contexts" that each student experienced with the criminal justice system²⁰. The book creates a strong argument for how the experiences that students have with the criminal justice system growing up can have lasting effects in their lives and often, the carceral state always has a hand in their lives. Shedd explains how school is a formative institution, and when the police invade the safe space that school can provide, these experiences that students shape how they ultimately engage with the world as adults. In addition to Brown and Benedict, Peter Price's article "When is a Police Officer an Officer of the Law?' The Status of Police Officers in Schools'" delves into the role of police in school, while explaining the potential for detrimental effects as children are exposed to the police at incredibly young ages. Price opens the

¹⁸ Bruch, S. K., & Soss, J. (2018). Schooling as a Formative Political Experience: Authority Relations and the Education of Citizens. *Perspectives on Politics*, 16(1), pg. 45.

¹⁹ Ibid, pg. 50.

²⁰ Shedd, C. (2015). *Unequal City: Race, Schools, and Perceptions of Injustice*. Russell Sage Foundation, pg. 100.

article with a vivid example of the school-to-prison pipeline, one that results with four police officers removing a five-year-old kindergartner from class and leaving her “cuffed... [in] the squad car...for three hours”²¹. He continues with examples, creating the visual image of how the criminal justice system takes children in school and demonizes them, stripping their humanity and replacing it with a mark that signals a child as a threat to society. In 2004, “54% of all public secondary schools had a daily police presence,” and these interactions shape the views of children in school and educate them to know they are a problem to society and not children who need support to change their behavior²². Every experience that these children have with the criminal justice system is connected. By reviewing this literature, it is possible to understand how perceptions of a child’s role in society are crafted in school and how this translates to my larger hypothesis.

Price’s argument can be supplemented by Victor M. Rios’ *Punished*, which provides additional examples of how both the administrators and police in school marginalize students of color. Rios frequently mentions how the school uses discretion in choosing who and how much punishment is used, where boys are “treated with indignity and disdain” when their needs should have been acknowledged²³. The book creates an image of how specific communities are constantly policed, creating a system “in which the boys remained in constant fear of being humiliated, brutalized, or arrested,” inside and outside of school²⁴. This constant state of policing in the lives of minority boys demolishes the trust in the police and the system of not just the boys that Rios interviews, but the people around them, highlighting how the problem extends outside of those who are policed. *Punished* is an essential source as it details the veracity with which the system criminalizes juveniles who truly need help, creating constant exposure to the criminal justice system.

The current body of work separates youth from adults, often forgetting that these children will become the same adults we wish to study. By separating the two groups, the current literature has

²¹ Price, P. (2008). When is a Police Officer an Officer of the Law: The Status of Police Officers in Schools. *J. Crim. L. & Criminology*, 99, 542.

²² Ibid, pg. 549.

²³ Rios, pg. 58.

²⁴ Ibid, pg. 81.

produced a limited view on how the criminal justice system truly shapes individuals by ignoring where the first interactions that shape people who interact with the criminal justice system come from, which can start informally through school. Past literature such as the study, “Does Incarceration Reduce Voting? Evidence about the Political Consequences of Spending Time in Prison from Pennsylvania and Connecticut” by Gerber et. al provides a framework for this study by linking low voter turnout rates with incarceration rates in Pennsylvania and Connecticut²⁵. Gerber et al acknowledge how it is difficult to define if it is a causal relationship because people have not been randomly sent to prison, but nonetheless, there is a “negative relationship between serving time and political participation” in their research²⁶.

My study will draw from past literature to show the effects of informal exposure to the criminal justice in school on political participation in the future. The school-to-prison pipeline touches juveniles on a daily basis and socializes each student differently, especially when children spend around a thousand hours in school per year. School is supposed to instruct children on how to be better citizens. For at-risk children, school becomes a space where they craft questions about their role in society, which can lead to a decrease in voting in adulthood. The informal nature of contact with the police in school is not the same as someone stopped on the sidewalk by an officer. This exposure to the criminal justice system at a young age can have lasting effects for the rest of a person’s life, shaping how they will interact with politics once they come of age.

Hypothesis:

My research question delves into the relationship between the political participation of minorities and exposure to the criminal justice system at a young age, as a result of the school-to-prison pipeline. This research is vital because it adds a significant layer in the study of criminal punishment and politics, highlighting how the frequency of a child’s exposure to the criminal justice system can limit minority political participation as adults. The independent variable is political participation of minorities, shown through various methods such as voting, protests, or

²⁵ Gerber, A. S., Huber, G. A., Meredith, M., Biggers, D. R., & Hendry, D. J. (2017). Does Incarceration Reduce Voting? Evidence About the Political Consequences of Spending Time in Prison. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(4), 1130-1146.

²⁶ Ibid, pg. 1135.

community engagement. The dependent variable is increased exposure to the carceral system, through both voluntary and involuntary contact before, during, and after school as a result of the school-to-prison pipeline. This hypothesis can explain the gap in literature around exposure to the criminal justice system that pertains to children, not adults. In public schools, African Americans are 17% of the public school population and 16% of the national population, but represent 34% of the number of suspensions and 45% of juvenile arrests²⁷. Through this research, I have been able to configure a hypothesis to explain the findings.

H: As minority students have more frequent voluntary and involuntary contact with the criminal justice system during their school years, as adults, they are less likely to participate in the political system.

I predict that there will be a strong relationship between increased exposure and a decrease in political participation, despite controlling for race. Additionally, I predict a trend between the number of minority students in a school and the number of disciplinary behaviors used.

Research Methods:

The research will be evaluated through a Multivariate Regression in an Ordinary Least Squares model, in order to properly explore the impact of the set of variables chosen for this project. Based on my research, some members of society have more contact than others with the criminal justice system, so this model would allow for the impact of these varying levels to be explained. The correlates in this project include, but are not limited to: racial identification, living below the poverty line, LGBTQ+ identification, family violence & abuse, mental health issues, single parent household with a parent incarcerated, the presence of police in schools, and presence of a juvenile record. The data will stem from national and state-level data in order to provide an analysis that studies the effect of each correlate, while getting to the core of the relationship of my hypothesis. By using both national and state-level data, this model will allow for the creation of a tool that monitors the effects of the school-to-prison pipeline in each state, but also the impact of differing degrees of exposure on juveniles. This tool will be available for public

²⁷ Cregor, M., & Hewitt, pg. 7.

consumption, so the public, future researchers, and lawmakers can use the tool to create strategies on how to combat the school-to-prison pipeline on the national and state levels.

Existing Data:

Quantitative data will be drawn from data sources, such as the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), United States Department of Justice: Bureau of Justice Statistics, and National Archive of Criminal Justice Data (NACJD). One of the major problems in studying the school-to-prison pipeline in its relationship to politics is that most people participate in the political system as adults, instead of youth. Datasets are present and readily available to provide information on the number of registered past felons, felons who voted, and those who participated politically in other ways. Qualitative data for the model can be pulled in a similar manner to Sarah K. Bruch and Joe Soss. This data can provide a new way of viewing how the intersectionality of experiences can affect political outcomes. can affect the relationship. This data will be used in order to explain the correlates in the multivariate regression model. There is additional data available on political participation, including with the Election Assistance Commission (EAC), which surveys voter participation each election year. This data is limited as it does not narrow it down to race or past incarceration, but I am confident that this data will be helpful in mapping voter turnout nationally before adding in outside variables.

Conclusion:

The U.S. currently incarcerates 25% of the world's entire prison population, despite only holding 5% of the world's population²⁸. Many of these inmates have been involved with the system since they were children, with the criminal justice system playing a serious role in their lives from a young age. The intention of this research is to share how the school-to-prison pipeline is a systemic way to marginalize specific protected classes, while reaping widespread negative effects on each juvenile affected by the pipeline. These negative effects can change voting and other forms of political participation, which allows researchers to identify additional correlations

²⁸ Walmsley, R. (2003). *World Prison Population List* (pp. 1-6). London: Home Office.
http://web.archive.org/web/20131215143319/http://www.prisonstudies.org/sites/prisonstudies.org/files/resources/downloads/wppl_10.pdf

between characteristics students cannot control, such as poverty, race, or sexuality. This study has the potential to expand on the influence of involuntary contacts of children with police, to understand if when the sum of these contacts is compiled, can they persuade a person against political participation? This data has the opportunity to take steps towards possible solutions to mobilize the marginalized youth as Rios suggested in *Punished*²⁹. There will be outliers from the research who fight the system and participate more after interactions with the criminal justice system, but by the effect of early experiences, future research can create a possible explanation for consistent low minority turnout. This research can open the door for increased mobilization by examining where the experiences began to relate to decreases in political participation. If supported by the Foundation, this research can expand the focus on formal institutions and adults versus informal institutions and juveniles, by looking at the interconnections to understand how the school-to-prison pipeline plays a hand in the disenfranchisement and discouragement of political participation by minorities through the criminal justice system.

²⁹ Rios, pg.164.

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