ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis:	BEYOND BENEFITS: EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF WELFARE DISQUALIFICATION DUE TO FELONY DRUG CONVICTIONS ON RECIDIVISM
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One-third of American adults have a criminal record and are therefore subject to collateral consequences. One such consequence is welfare disqualification on the basis of a felony drug conviction, as outlined by the welfare reform policy PRWORA. Welfare reform is an important policy to consider as it can compound disadvantages for minority communities, potentially increasing crime rates and recidivism within high crime areas. Previous studies had inconsistent findings, demonstrating the need for further research, which this study addresses. The present study attempts to examine the effects of PRWORA on recidivism rates across different states to examine the role of aid restrictions on criminal behavior. To determine the level of aid restrictions for each state, the states were ranked on a scale from 1 to 6 with 1 representing no enforcement of the bans outlined by PRWORA and 6 representing full enforcement. The data was analyzed using descriptive, bivariate, and regression analyses, which found a significant, negative relationship between the level of aid restrictions and recidivism. However, there was also a significant, positive relationship between the level of aid restrictions and crime rate. This

discrepancy is likely due to the limited measurement of recidivism, as it was defined as a return to prison rate and likely excluded a substantial portion of offenses. This paper suggests that future research should define recidivism more inclusively, as either rearrest rates or return to custody rates, to avoid this limitation. Overall, it is recommended that states should consider further examining their welfare policies, to ensure unintended consequences do not occur and that minority communities are not disproportionately affected. Further research should be conducted to support the implementation of evidence-based policies.

BEYOND BENEFITS: EXAMINING THE EFFECTS OF WELFARE DISQUALIFICATION DUE TO FELONY DRUG CONVICTIONS ON RECIDIVISM

by

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Chapter 1: Introduction

One in three American adults has a criminal record and are therefore subject to the associated collateral consequences, or the formal and informal effects of the justice system on individuals (Kirk and Wakefield 2018; Pettit and Gutierrez 2018; Sawyer and Wagner 2023). These consequences include, but are not limited to, disenfranchisement, the inability to run for public office, the inability to obtain certain occupational licenses, and disqualification from welfare programs (Wheelock 2005). While all collateral consequences impede reentry into the community, aid restrictions, such as disqualification from welfare programs, are particularly important to investigate as these create barriers to life's necessities and disproportionately impact America's most vulnerable populations (Cole 2011; Forrest 2016; Pinard and Thompson 2005). This research aims to investigate the role of aid restrictions on criminal behavior, specifically focusing on the role of welfare disqualification on the basis of a criminal record due to a drug felony.

Research has found considerable benefits associated with welfare receipt. Receiving welfare as a child, especially enrollment in child development programs, has been shown to correlate with reduced behavioral problems, as well as increased educational achievement (Barr and Gibbs 2022; Gennetian and Miller 2002). Access to food stamps has been correlated with a reduction in poverty, more significantly for children, and is successful in reducing food insecurity (Hoynes, Bronchetti, and Christensen 2017; Mykerezi and Mills 2010; Ratcliffe, McKernan, and Zhang 2011;

Tiehen, Jolliffe, and Gundersen 2012). Thus, recipients of welfare experience a variety of benefits that improve their ability to be productive members of society.

While the welfare system benefits all recipients, it may especially benefit formerly incarcerated individuals. Access to welfare can provide access to important factors for reentry, such as housing by providing cash assistance that can be used for rent (Federal Safety Net n.d.; Zane, Reyes, and Pavetti 2022). Proper housing has been identified as an important component for successful reentry (Anderson-Facile 2009; Lutze, Rosky, and Hamilton 2014). Thus, rent assistance and cash assistance welfare are ways welfare can be used to facilitate reentry. A study examining the effects of losing Supplemental Security Income after age eighteen found that this loss significantly increased the number of criminal charges over the next two decades (Deshpande and Mueller-Smith 2022). Receiving welfare also has been found to be associated with a reduction in burglaries and recidivism rates as a whole (DeFronzo 1996; Yang 2017). Thus, receiving welfare may help prevent individuals from committing a crime, whether it be another or their first. Losing welfare, on the other hand, may increase the chances of an individual committing a crime. This makes understanding the consequences of welfare disqualification on the basis of a criminal record especially important.

As African-Americans are more likely to rely on welfare than their white counterparts and more likely to be incarcerated, access to welfare may be especially important for minority communities (King 2022; Morin 2013; Sawyer and Wagner 2023). If welfare access decreases crime, as the evidence suggests (DeFronzo 1996; Deshpande and Mueller-Smith 2022), then welfare benefits may have the greatest

impact for minority communities and increased welfare access may show significant decreases in crime in these generally high crime areas. Because the welfare and carceral systems both experience racial disparities, understanding the impacts of welfare restrictions is important for understanding social inequality more broadly.

While research has been done on the benefits of receiving welfare, little is known about the consequences of disqualification, specifically disqualification on the basis of a criminal record due to a drug felony on a national scale. In order to fill this gap, this paper examines a potential consequence of welfare disqualification, specifically a type of formal collateral consequence called "aid restrictions." The term "aid restrictions" is used to encompass a more widespread level of denial experienced by individuals with criminal records, but this study focuses on welfare disqualification. This focus is important because welfare is a vital component of aid restrictions, and disqualification from welfare is an area of study that needs further investigation.

This study asks: "Do states with higher levels of aid restrictions have higher rates of recidivism than states with low levels of aid restrictions?" This paper attempts to answer this question through a state-level analysis and provide more insight into the consequences of denying welfare to individuals with criminal records due to drug felonies.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

MASS INCARCERATION

The examination of collateral consequences and aid restrictions is especially important in the context of mass incarceration. Mass incarceration can be defined as the "widespread incapacitation of people in prisons and jails" and this phenomenon is currently happening in the United States (Pettit and Gutierrez 2018:1155). The United States is home to nearly 25% of the world's prisoners and has the world's highest incarceration rate, with approximately 1 in 37 U.S. adults incarcerated (Kirk and Wakefield 2018; Pinard 2010). This number doesn't count the individuals who have already been released from incarceration. Therefore, over 79 million Americans and approximately one-third of American adults have a criminal record (Pettit and Gutierrez 2018; Sawyer and Wagner 2023). These 79 million Americans, a substantial percentage of the United States population, are therefore subject to the formal (legal sanctions) and informal (non-legal sanctions) collateral consequences that are associated with a criminal record.

The dramatic increases in the incarcerated population and the substantial number of individuals with a criminal record can be traced back to policy changes in the early 1970s that were associated with the "War on Drugs" and the "War on Crime" (Scott 2021). During this time period, there was a shift towards punitive measures and away from rehabilitation for individuals charged with a crime (Lynch 2011; Phelps 2017). With the idea of being more punitive, long sentences were introduced and many crimes had mandatory minimum sentences implemented, therefore keeping people imprisoned for longer and leading to exponential increases

in prison population (Lynch 2011). In addition to longer sentences, arrest rates also increased in the late twentieth century (Ristroph 2019). These policy changes led to the significant increase in incarcerated populations, which subsequently became known as mass incarceration.

As overall incarceration increased, a significant increase in women's rate of incarceration has been noticed. In fact, the women's prison populations have increased much faster than men's (Mauer and McCalmont 2015; Sawyer and Wagner 2023). Although prison populations in general rose between 1980 and 2010, the number of women in prison increased by 646% compared to a 416% increase in the number of men in prison (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). This is significant because women are more likely than men to rely on welfare and be imprisoned for drug related charges (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). Therefore, the large increase of incarcerated women likely also caused a large increase in the overall number of people who are affected by welfare bans on the basis of felony drug convictions.

A policy largely responsible for the incarcerated population's increase is the "War on Drugs" (Cole 2011; Scott 2021). The War on Drugs introduced harsher punishments and excessive mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses while also increasing drug policing (Scott 2021). Each year there are over 1 million arrests for drug possession and someone is arrested for possessing drugs for personal use every 25 seconds (Borden 2016; Sawyer and Wagner 2023; Scott 2021). Oddly enough, the increase in arrests for possession came after the 1962 Supreme Court decision in *Robinson v. California*, which ruled that criminalizing addiction is unconstitutional (Robinson v. California 1962; Scott 2021). Although the decision in

Robinson v. California did not rule against the criminalization of drug possession, addiction and possession are closely associated, as it is impossible to become addicted to drugs and use drugs without possessing them (Robinson v. California 1962; Scott 2021). Therefore, a fairly large portion of individuals with criminal records are nonviolent offenders acting on their addiction symptoms and being punished for it. This punishment is further extended by welfare disqualification on the basis of felony drug convictions, which, due to War on Drugs policies, impacts a substantial portion of individuals with criminal records.

This portion of individuals is likely to be minorities, as significant racial disparities emerged during the dramatic increases in incarcerated populations. Young black men are significantly more likely to be stopped by police, arrested, and incarcerated than their white counterparts and are therefore overrepresented in the incarcerated population (Cole 2011; Lynch 2011; Pettit and Gutierrez 2018; Ristroph 2019; Sawyer and Wagner 2023; Wheelock 2005). In 2023, African-Americans made up only 13% of the United States' population but 38% of the incarcerated population (Sawyer and Wagner 2023). Other minorities, including Latinx and Native populations, are also overrepresented in the incarcerated population, although not to the same extent as black populations (Sawyer and Wagner 2023). Latinx populations make up 18% of the United States population and 21% of the incarcerated population and Native populations make up only 0.9% of the United States population but 2% of the incarcerated population (Sawyer and Wagner 2023). White populations, in comparison, are underrepresented, as they make up 60% of the United States population and only 38% of the incarcerated population (Sawyer and Wagner 2023).

Although these discrepancies vary by state and region, the burdens of mass incarceration still lay disproportionately on minority communities (Lynch 2011). Due to this, collateral consequences, including aid restrictions, disproportionately impact minority communities. Therefore, understanding how aid restrictions and crime interact will have the most benefit for minority populations, as crime and arrests are focused on these communities.

Drug arrests also fall disproportionately on the shoulders of minority communities and women (Cole 2011; Mauer and McCalmont 2015; Schoenfeld 2012). For example, in Florida during the 1980s, drug arrests for African-Americans increased by 117%, but only by 21% for whites (Schoenfeld 2012). Similarly, by 2011, 25.1% of women incarcerated in state prisons were there for drug offenses, compared to 16.2% of men (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). Thus, the collateral consequences associated with drug arrests and offenses also disproportionately impact the marginalized populations of minority communities and women. In this sense, women and minority communities are most affected by collateral consequences. Therefore, further understanding the effects of aid restrictions could provide the most benefit for these populations.

Not only does mass incarceration increase the number of people impacted by aid restriction policies, but understanding how aid restriction policies are associated with recidivism could affect prison populations. If aid restriction policies are determined to influence recidivism, changes in these policies could affect prison populations. For example, if aid restrictions are found to be associated with a reduction in recidivism, increasing the implementation of these policies could

decrease prison populations. Therefore, mass incarceration and aid restriction policies are interconnected, with mass incarceration increasing the amount of people who are subject to aid restrictions and with aid restrictions possibly affecting the number of individuals returning to prison and keeping prison populations high. In sum, aid restrictions and collateral consequences overall are important to discuss in the context of mass incarceration because of the interconnectedness of and the potential association between the two variables.

COLLATERAL CONSEQUENCES AND AID RESTRICTIONS

Collateral consequences, which aid restrictions are a part of, refers to the formal and informal effects of the justice system on individuals (Kirk and Wakefield 2018). Formal consequences refers to the legal sanctions one endures due to a criminal record, while informal consequences, such as stigma, are not attached to the law but are still attached to the label of a criminal record (Kirk and Wakefield 2018; Logan 2013).

According to Wheelock (2005), formal collateral consequences can be grouped into four categories: civic, service and aid, employment/occupational, and other. The civic category includes disenfranchisement, restrictions on jury duty, and exclusion from the ability to run for public office. The category of service and aid refers to any form of public assistance individuals with criminal records are prohibited from receiving. This includes welfare, school grants and loans, public housing, and military benefits (see also Uggen and Stewart 2014). The employment/occupational category refers to the bans on certain licenses, such as plumbing and cosmetology licenses, as well as bans from government positions for

individuals with a criminal record (see also Uggen and Stewart 2014). Wheelock's (2005) final category is the other category, which includes immigrant deportation, community notification, and parental custody. Community notification refers to the policies that make identifiable characteristics of eligible people publicly available, for example: the sex offender registry (Logan 2009, 2013). Informal collateral consequences fit less cleanly into categories as they are intertwined and harder to track than formal collateral consequences, but they are still significant and typically manifest through stigma and employment barriers (Hoskins 2018; Pager 2003; Pager, Western, and Sugie 2009). Overall, collateral consequences exclude individuals with criminal records from services and opportunities that many individuals without criminal records may take for granted.

Although each type of collateral consequence has detrimental effects on the lives of individuals with criminal records, the consequences that fall into Wheelock's (2005) category of service and aid, or aid restrictions, are perhaps the most significant. As mentioned previously, aid restrictions are a specific type of collateral consequence that prohibits individuals with criminal records from receiving public assistance (Wheelock 2005). Welfare bans are perhaps the most substantial of this genre of restrictions because they decrease access to necessities of life, such as food. Therefore, it is especially important to discuss the impacts of this specific consequence, as it has potentially life-altering effects.

Welfare

According to the United States Census Bureau (2023), public assistance programs are programs that "provide either cash assistance or in-kind benefits to

individuals and families from any governmental entity." These programs can be grouped into two general categories: social welfare and social insurance (US Census Bureau 2023). The difference between these two programs is based on eligibility, meaning that both programs provide assistance, but who they provide assistance to differs slightly (US Census Bureau 2023). Eligibility for social welfare programs is usually based on low income and sometimes other eligibility criteria, such as disability, that are associated with income (US Census Bureau 2023). On the other hand, social insurance eligibility depends on criteria such as age, employment status, or veteran status (US Census Bureau 2023). Some of the major social welfare programs are: Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF), and General Assistance (GA) (US Census Bureau 2023). Out of these, SNAP, commonly known as food stamps, supports the most people with about 11.8% of the United States population or about 13.9% of United States households receiving SNAP in 2021 (King 2022). This fairly large percentage of households participating in welfare programs makes examining these issues especially important.

Bans on welfare have disproportionate impacts on women and racial minorities and can be viewed as a tool that enforces racial economic inequality (Wheelock 2005). For example, welfare bans disproportionately impact women of color, as they comprise the majority of recipients of SNAP and TANF (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). Combined with the drastic increase of drug convictions and incarceration rates for women, specifically women of color, the effects of welfare

bans are skewed unevenly towards women (King 2022; Mauer and McCalmont 2015). Additionally, welfare bans impact the children of individuals who are denied benefits (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). This is because denying a parent benefits leaves less support for the entire family, as now the entire family must be supported only by the benefits given to the children instead of each household member receiving their own benefits (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). Food stamp recipients are more likely to be minorities (King 2022; Mauer and McCalmont 2015; Morin 2013). In 2013, approximately 31% of African-Americans and 22% of Hispanic Americans reported receiving food stamps compared to only 15% of white Americans (Morin 2013). Since minorities are overrepresented in the criminal justice system, they are also more likely to be denied public assistance even though they are more likely to rely on it (Lynch 2011; Pettit and Gutierrez 2018; Ristroph 2019; Sawyer and Wagner 2023; Schoenfeld 2012; Scott 2021; Wheelock 2005).

PRWORA

In 1996, the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) was signed by President Bill Clinton, following his goal to "end welfare as we know it" (Clinton 1993:220; Mauer and McCalmont 2015). The main goal of PRWORA was to help families become self-sufficient and move them off of welfare (National Credit Union Administration 2000). In pursuit of this goal, PRWORA made significant changes to welfare programs. One action was to replace the former welfare program Aid to Families with Dependent Children, also known as AFDC, with TANF, a program that provides cash assistance to families for a period of 60-months (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2022; Mauer and McCalmont

2015; Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act 1996). States are able to extend this 60-month period, but must do so with their own money, as it is only permissible, with some exceptions, to use federal funds for the 60-month period (Center on Budget and Policy Priorities 2022). PRWORA also made changes to the food stamps program, SNAP. Section 115 of PRWORA made it so people with felony drug convictions are banned from TANF and SNAP benefits for life and across all states, unless a state chooses to opt out of the ban (Mauer and McCalmont 2015; Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act 1996). States did not immediately choose to opt out, as in 2015, 37 states still fully or partially enforced the TANF ban and 34 states still fully or partially enforced the SNAP ban (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). It is important to note that PRWORA does not ban people convicted of violent felonies for life; it is specific to drug offenses, thus punishing nonviolent offenses much harsher than violent ones (Mauer and McCalmont 2015; Paresky 2017; Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act 1996). In combination with mass incarceration and the War on Drugs, PRWORA has a large impact and is a major way nonviolent criminal record holders are denied welfare benefits.

The sponsor of Section 115, Senator Phil Gramm of Texas, believed that denying welfare on the basis of a drug felony would hold welfare recipients to a "higher standard of behavior," representing the erroneous idea that a denial of benefits will reduce drug use and drug-related crimes (Godsoe 1998). This mentality ignores the association between poverty and addiction and contradicts the rhetoric in which addiction is classified as a disorder (Chen and Xu 2022; Fattore and Diana

2016; Manhica et al. 2021). Thus, PRWORA likely further disadvantages an already vulnerable population.

The disproportionate presence of women on welfare and the fairly large percentage of women incarcerated for drug offenses means that PRWORA has a substantial impact on women. In 2015, an estimated 180,100 women were impacted by the TANF ban (Mauer and McCalmont 2015). As people of color are also disproportionately represented in welfare holders and drug arrests, PRWORA also has racial implications (King 2022; Mauer and McCalmont 2015; Morin 2013; Paresky 2017). Thus, PRWORA can exacerbate already existing racial inequalities, as, like other welfare bans, it keeps many people from accessing vital public assistance. Overall, PRWORA is a harsh example of a collateral consequence that restricts who receives the aid of public assistance.

As PRWORA affects those with felony drug convictions, the question of how this act influences recidivism has been asked before. However, findings have been inconsistent. One study found that the welfare ban as outlined in PRWORA had no measurable impact on recidivism, although this analysis was limited to only six states, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Michigan, and Minnesota, and used data before and after PRWORA's 1996 implementation date (Luallen, Edgerton, and Rabideau 2018). In contrast, when only considering the effects of a ban from SNAP, recidivism or time to arrest seems to increase (Sugie and Newark 2023; Tuttle 2019). This finding was corroborated by two studies. One study was concentrated in Florida and took advantage of Florida's modification of PRWORA, which limited the ban's effects to only drug trafficking charges and implemented a sharp cutoff date for which

convictions would be subjected to the SNAP ban (Tuttle 2019). This allowed for a comparison of the recidivism rates of those convicted of drug trafficking before the cut off date and those convicted after. In this analysis recidivism did seem to increase for those denied SNAP benefits, but this analysis is limited as it is only generalizable to individuals convicted of drug trafficking in Florida. The other study was focused on California, which compared recidivism rates, as measured by rearrest, prior to the implementation and enforcement date of SNAP and TANF bans to recidivism rates after SNAP and TANF bans were enforced (Sugie and Newark 2023). Similarly to the previous study, this study found that individuals who were banned from receiving SNAP benefits were found to be rearrested faster than those who could receive SNAP benefits. However, no effects on recidivism were found when only bans from TANF were examined.

A different study examining the effects of SNAP and TANF on six states, Alabama, California, Indiana, Massachusetts, New York, and Washington, concluded that more lenient public assistance policies may be correlated with reductions in recidivism rates, as defined by a return to prison within three years of release (Young 2019). This conclusion was made after considering each state individually, and examining the changes in recidivism based on the changes of implementation of SNAP and TANF bans over time. The trends generally showed that when the bans on SNAP and TANF were implemented, recidivism rates seemed to increase, while when the bans on SNAP and TANF were lifted, whether partially or fully, recidivism rates seemed to decrease. Although neither causal, nor a particularly strong association was determined, these results provide a general idea of an association and a foundation for

more rigorous analysis. These results were corroborated by another study, which determined that drug offenders across the nation who were eligible to receive SNAP benefits, TANF benefits, or both, saw a decrease in recidivism (defined by a return to prison within one year) compared to non-drug offenders (Yang 2017). Partial eligibility for SNAP had negligible effects, but full eligibility significantly decreased recidivism. Any eligibility for TANF, partial and full, was associated with a reduction in recidivism. The results from this study support the idea that more lenient public assistance policies will likely reduce recidivism.

While there is general support for the idea that access to SNAP and TANF should decrease recidivism based on the few studies that engage with this question, findings are inconsistent across studies and only one study has addressed this question across states. Thus, the majority of results are not generalizable to the nation and can only be utilized in the context of the specific state in which the study was conducted. Additionally, not all studies defined recidivism the same, creating possible discrepancies in results that may seem to present the same findings. Therefore, the current study engages with this question in order to further develop the research surrounding the effects of aid restrictions on recidivism rates.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Robert Merton's (1938) classic strain theory provides an ideal framework for understanding the potential relationship between aid restrictions and recidivism rates. In his theory, Merton introduces the idea that crime stems from a rejection of cultural goals and/or the legitimate means to access those cultural goals. Cultural goals are goals a society deems as acceptable and desirable. In Western societies, cultural goals

are things such as wealth, which is usually generated from prestigious employment and a generous salary. Legitimate means are ways to access the goals that are socially acceptable. To gain wealth or employment, one generally needs a degree, and thus, education is seen as a legitimate means in Western societies. Strain refers to the stress and pressure that stems from the inability to access the normalized goals and means, leading individuals to search for alternatives, which can potentially be criminal. Thus, this theory describes how strain can lead to crime.

Merton describes 5 adaptations to his outlined criteria: conformity, innovation, ritualism, rebellion, and retreatism. Conformity is an adaptation that does not result in crime. This adaptation involves an individual accepting cultural goals and accepting legitimate means, thus the individual experiences no strain and does not commit crime. The innovation adaptation involves an individual rejecting legitimate means, but still accepting cultural goals. Innovation usually leads to crime, as crime allows for cultural goals to be met without utilizing legitimate means. The ritualism adaptation involves an individual rejecting cultural goals and accepting legitimate means. This adaptation does not necessarily result in crime because, although they have rejected cultural goals, they are satisfied with the legitimate means. The rebellion and retreatism adaptations both involve rejecting cultural goals and legitimate means. They differ in that the rebellion adaptation involves the creation of new goals and means while retreatism does not. The rebellion adaptation can result in crime if the new goals and means are against the law. The retreatism adaptation can also result in crime, depending on how the retreat from society is managed. For example, one could turn to drugs for their retreatism adaptation and would be

committing a crime since drug possession is illegal. Overall, Merton's theory involves the idea that an imbalance between cultural goals and legitimate ways to access them results in strain, and strain subsequently can result in crime.

The most relevant adaptation for the current subject is innovation. Being denied welfare also denies access to legitimate means, as money and food is an important aspect for survival and thus also important for reaching cultural goals. Therefore, in order to reach cultural goals, people who are denied welfare may turn to crime, thus conforming to the innovation adaptation. Additionally, retreatism is also relevant, as individuals who are denied welfare based on a felony drug conviction may turn back to drugs as a coping mechanism for their current situation. Overall, aid restrictions can be a cause of strain and thus Merton's strain theory is applicable.

Strain theory has been updated since Merton first introduced it, most notably by Robert Agnew in 1992 when he introduced general strain theory. Agnew argued that Merton's classic strain theory only applied to utilitarian crimes, and thus Agnew attempted to modify it to fit crime more generally. Since classic strain theory and general strain theory are similar, general strain theory also provides a sound framework for understanding the relationship between aid restrictions and criminality.

Agnew (1992) describes that there are three sources of strain: the failure to achieve goals, the presence of negative stimuli, and the absence of positive stimuli. These negative life circumstances lead to strain, or negative emotions such as stress, which then leads to delinquent behavior, antisocial behavior, and/or crime. Aid restrictions are likely the cause of a lot of stress for banned participants and thus fit neatly into the categories that Agnew states cause strain. Therefore, using Agnew's

general strain theory, one could view aid restrictions as a source of strain and something that ultimately leads to recidivism.

Both Merton's classic strain theory and Agnew's general strain theory provide an excellent framework for understanding the potential reasons why aid restrictions may be associated with recidivism rates. With the idea that aid restrictions can be a source of strain and using the strain theories, it is expected that a portion of the individuals experiencing aid restrictions will commit a crime because of it. If enough of the individuals in a state experiencing aid restrictions commit crimes, recidivism rates for that state will be affected. Thus, assuming aid restrictions have an effect on crime, the number of individuals committing a crime who have aid restrictions should be substantial and therefore would be reflected through state statistics. In that sense, it is likely that recidivism rates will be higher in states with high levels of aid restrictions than the rates in states with low levels of aid restrictions. Overall, utilizing both strain theories as a theoretical framework provides a possible explanation for a potential association.

CURRENT STUDY

The current study focuses on looking at the effects of aid restrictions, specifically welfare disqualification, on recidivism rates. This research examines this question on a state level by categorizing each state into six levels of aid restrictions and examining the overall recidivism rates of each state. The research question associated with this study is: "Do states with higher levels of aid restrictions have higher rates of recidivism than states with low levels of aid restrictions?" Based on the theoretical framework, it is hypothesized that states with higher levels of aid

restrictions will have higher rates of recidivism than states with low levels of aid restrictions.

Overall recidivism rates were utilized to address this question instead of those specific to people with drug convictions for multiple reasons. The first reason is access, as states generally only publish the overall recidivism rate and few, if any, publish data regarding the recidivism rates of individuals with felony drug convictions. Overall recidivism was also used because, in many cases, the drug conviction is in addition to another more serious crime and is not always reflected in the data (United States Department of Justice 1994). Therefore, in order to make sure that individuals who committed a drug crime in addition to another crime were included in the data, the overall recidivism data was used. In sum, the rate of recidivism was used due to access and because drug crimes are often committed alongside another more serious crime and may not be reflected in drug crime specific recidivism rates.

The research question was engaged at a state level because PRWORA is a welfare policy enacted at the state level with differences between states. Therefore, to understand the effects of PRWORA, multiple states with differing enforcements of the policy must be considered. Additionally, individual effects can manifest in state statistics. For example, if each person denied welfare benefits due to their felony drug conviction committed another crime, areas which employ this restriction would see a difference in their recidivism rate compared to areas that did not deny welfare benefits.

Chapter 3: Data, Measures, and Analytic Strategy

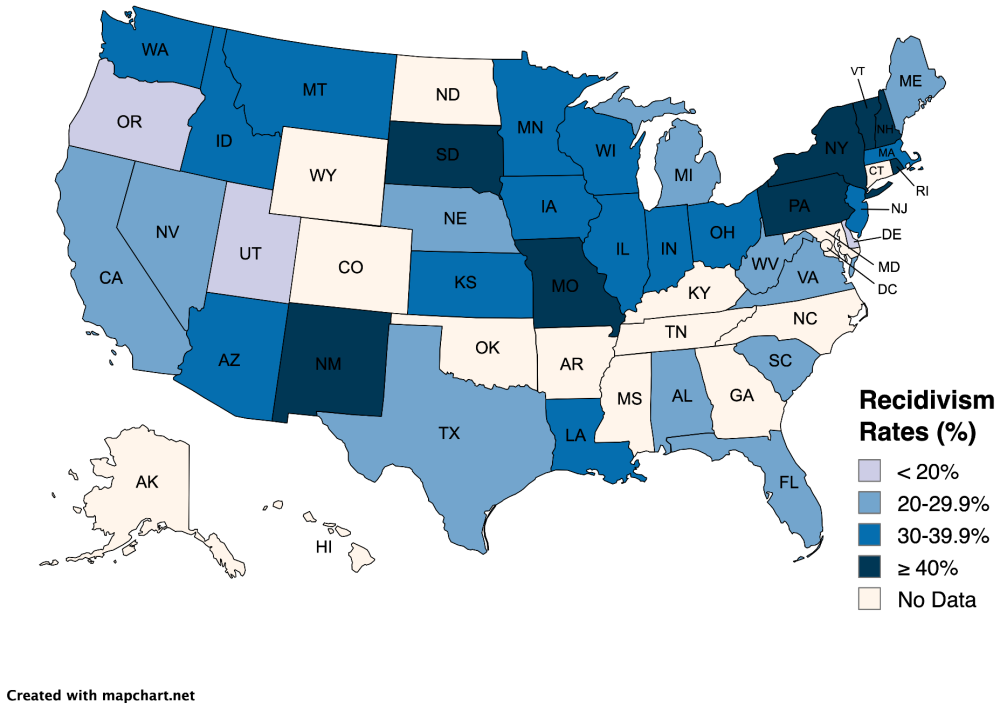
DATA

This study combined data from multiple sources to develop a state-level dataset. Data was pulled from state-specific department of corrections websites or related state-specific websites and the Sentencing Project. The state-specific websites provided information on 3-year recidivism rates for the 2015-release cohort. The Sentencing Project provided information for each state's implementation of the bans on TANF and SNAP in 2015, totaling 51 data entries, as the District of Columbia was included. Data for the control variables (political affiliation, crime rate, U-6 unemployment rate, and number of drug abuse violations) utilized in this study were sourced from the New York Times' 2012 Presidential Election results, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Uniform Crime Report (UCR), and the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics.

Recidivism data was collected from a total of 36 states (see Figure 1). The most common source for the rates of recidivism was from each state's Department of Corrections. If the state's Department of Corrections did not provide recidivism data, then another government source was utilized, such as Delaware's Criminal Justice Council and Oregon Criminal Justice Commission. Data from 14 states and the District of Columbia could not be collected either because recidivism rates were not reported (i.e. District of Columbia, Georgia, Kentucky, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Wyoming) or the definition of recidivism used did not match the majority of the states that did provide recidivism data and thus

would have skewed the results (i.e. Alaska, Arkansas, Colorado, Connecticut, Hawaii, Tennessee).

Figure 1. Recidivism Rates in 2015 by State



MEASURES

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable for this study is recidivism defined as a return to prison within three years of release from prison, meaning a new prison sentence or a revocation of parole that results in a recommitment to prison counts towards the provided statistic. Revocation of probation is not included in this statistic, as individuals on probation were not incarcerated and thus were not released from prison. Thus, the recidivism rate is calculated by taking the amount of adults, male

and female, who were released from prison in 2015 and who returned to prison within three years of their release divided by the total number of adults released from prison in 2015, also known as the 2015-release cohort.

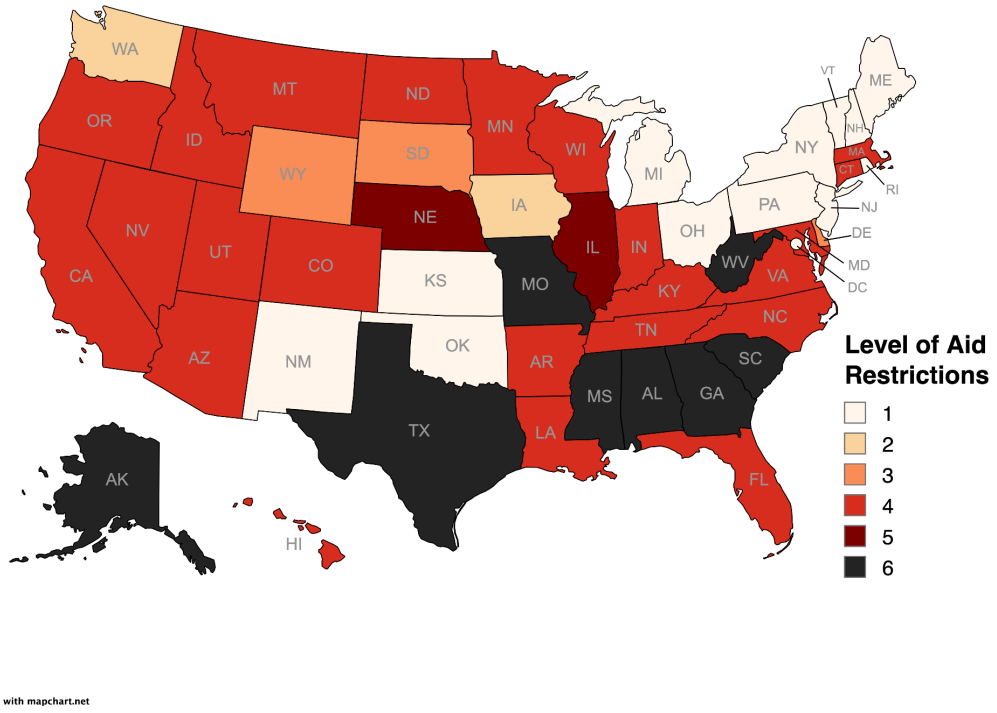
Independent Variable

The independent variable is the level of aid restrictions. States were coded on a scale from 1-6, with 1 representing the least restrictive states and 6 representing the most restrictive states (see Figure 2). In the figure, the states filled in with the lightest color represent the least restrictive states, or the states that did not enforce the welfare bans outlined in PRWORA, while the states filled in with the darkest color represent the most restrictive states, or the states that upheld the bans outlined in PROWRA.

States were coded as a 1 if they did not enforce bans on SNAP and TANF on the basis of a felony drug conviction at all. States that modified the bans on both SNAP and TANF in 2015 were coded as a 4. Modifying a ban can mean a variety of things. For example, a ban could be modified to only include certain types of drug felonies and not others (e.g., banning individuals with drug trafficking felonies but not individuals with drug possession felonies), or it could have individuals with felony drug convictions become eligible for benefits after a period of time has passed. States that were coded as a 6 implemented a full ban on SNAP and TANF in 2015. Implementing a full ban refers to the states that implement the ban as outlined by PRWORA, meaning individuals with felony drug convictions are banned for life from receiving SNAP or TANF benefits. Only seven states treated the bans on SNAP and TANF differently in 2015. These states were Delaware, Illinois, Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota, Washington, and Wyoming. These states were coded either 2, 3, or 5.

Iowa and Washington were coded as a 2, because they modified one ban and did not enforce the other (i.e., Iowa and Washington both did not enforce the SNAP ban and modified the TANF ban). Delaware, South Dakota, and Wyoming were coded as a 3, because they upheld one ban and did not enforce the other (i.e., Delaware and South Dakota upheld the full ban on TANF and did not enforce the SNAP ban, and Wyoming did not enforce the TANF ban and upheld the full ban on SNAP). Finally, Illinois and Nebraska were coded as a 5 because they upheld one ban and modified the other (i.e., Illinois and Nebraska both upheld the full ban on TANF and modified the SNAP ban).

Figure 2. Levels of Aid Restrictions in 2015 by State



Control Variables

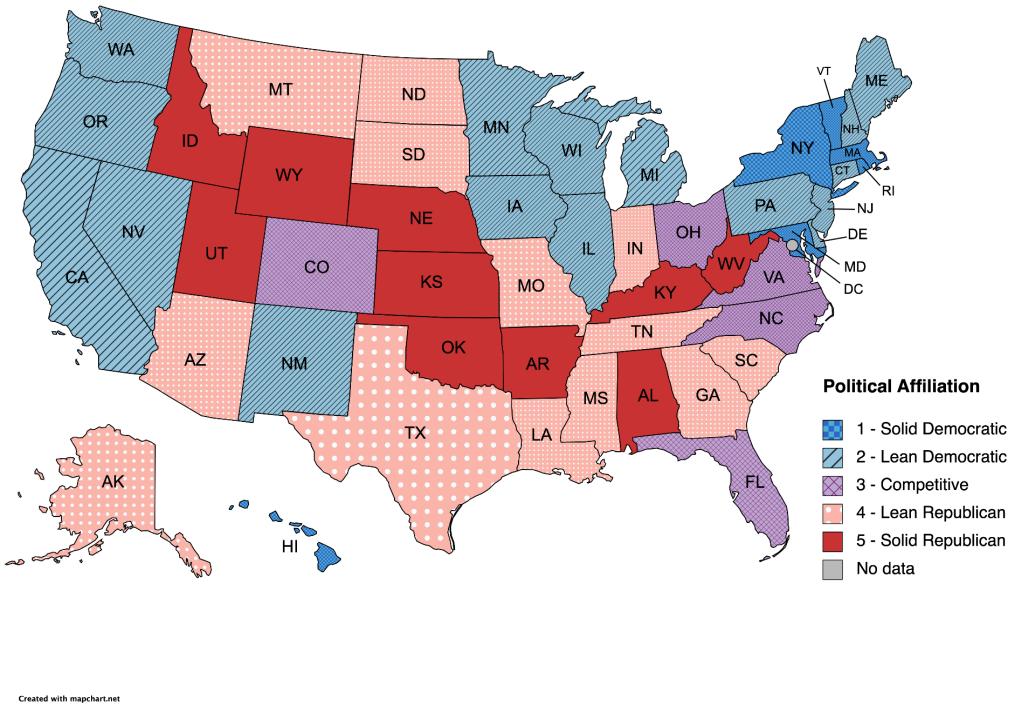
Political affiliation

A control variable for this study is the political affiliation of each state in 2015. This variable was used to determine if political affiliation has any association with recidivism rates. This variable is important to consider because Republicans generally favor more punitive measures than Democrats, which may result in a difference in the enforcement of welfare bans and other policies (Brenan 2020; O'Hear and Wheelock 2016). More punitive crime policies may be associated with recidivism rates, as harsher punishments for crime may affect the number of people committing a subsequent crime. Political affiliation as a variable is also important because it is possible that an association between level of aid restrictions and recidivism could instead be explained by a different Republican or Democratic policy.

Data was gathered from the 2012 Presidential election results as reported by the New York Times (NYT 2012). This election was chosen as it is representative of the political views of each state in the presidential election prior to 2015, the year used in this study. States were coded on a scale of 1-5 (see Figure 3). 1 represents "Solid Democratic" states or states that had at least 60% of their total popular votes cast for the Democratic candidate. 2 represents "Lean Democratic" states that had between 52% and 59.9% of their total popular votes cast for the Democratic candidate. 3 represents a "Competitive" state, meaning the candidate won the state by less than 52% of the popular votes. 4 represents a "Lean Republican" state, or a state in which the Republican candidate won with between 52% and 59.9% of the total popular votes. Finally, 5 represented a "Solid Republican" state, where the Republican candidate had at least 60% of the total popular votes. The District of

Columbia was coded as a 0, as the New York Times reported no voting data and thus it could not be categorized.

Figure 3. Political Affiliation of Each State in the 2012 Presidential Election



Crime rate

Another control variable used in this study is the crime rate for each state in 2015. Due to the small sample of states with reported recidivism rates and the fact that crime rate and recidivism are similar measures, crime rate was used as a "backup" measure, so that more data could be included in the analysis. Additionally, since many states were excluded from analysis due to their inconsistent measurement of recidivism, crime rate is controlled for to reveal any discrepancies between the definitions of recidivisms of the states included in the analysis. The crime rate,

therefore, is used to ensure that any relationship between level of aid restrictions and recidivism remained once the crime rate was controlled for.

Data was gathered from the FBI's UCR, which reported the violent crime rate and the property crime rate of each state in the year 2015. The crime rate was determined by adding 2015 violent crime rate and the 2015 property crime rate together. This was done to give a more holistic representation of the crime in each state.

U-6 unemployment rate

The third control variable used in this study is the 2015 U-6 unemployment rate for each state. Included in the U-6 rate are the percentage of the labor force that is unemployed, underemployed, marginally attached to the workforce, and those who are no longer looking for work (Kenton 2022). Data was gathered from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics, which provided the U-6 rates for each year in 2015.

This variable is used to assist in the understanding of the number of individuals who may be eligible for welfare without any restrictions. Additionally, evidence suggests that unemployment has an effect on crime, with high rates of unemployment being associated with high crime rates (Ajimotokin, Haskins, and Wade 2015; Lin 2008; Raphael and Winter‐Ebmer 2001). Thus, unemployment is controlled for, as states with higher rates of unemployment may have higher rates of recidivism regardless of the state's level of aid restrictions.

Drug abuse violations

The final control variable used in this study was the number of drug abuse violations committed in each state in the year 2015. Although not the number of

felony drug convictions, this variable is used to give an idea of the number of individuals that could be impacted by PRWORA. Data was gathered from the FBI's UCR, which provided the number of drug violations for each state in 2015.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

The dataset was first examined using univariate descriptive analysis on the independent, dependent, and control variables using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). This descriptive analysis revealed the frequency distribution and measure of central tendency for the variables. After the descriptive statistics were determined, a bivariate analysis using SPSS was conducted and the Spearman correlation coefficient was determined. Finally, a regression analysis using SPSS was performed, which included the control variables as well as the independent and dependent variables. The correlations found in these analyses will be used to help determine the relationship between levels of aid restrictions and recidivism rates.

Chapter 4: Results

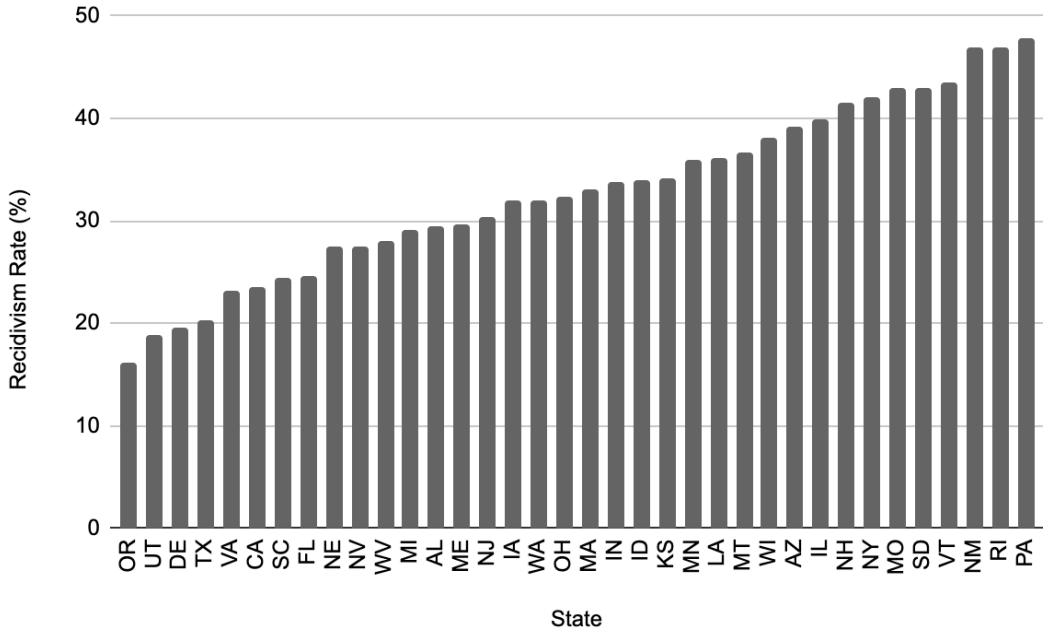
DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

A total of 36 states' Department of Corrections reported a 3-year recidivism rate, as defined by a return to prison, for their 2015-release cohort. Therefore, 14 states and the District of Columbia were not included in this analysis. For the reported recidivism rates, the mean rate was 32.89%, meaning, on average, 32.89% of adults released from prison in 2015 returned to prison within three years (see Table 1). There was some variation between states (*SD* = 8.47), as the highest recidivism rate was 47.8% and the lowest recidivism rate was 16.07% (see Figure 4). These variations demonstrate a level of difference between the states, which requires further analysis to understand.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Dependent and Independent Variables

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Recidivism (Dependent Variable)	36	32.809	32.715	8.471	16.070	47.800
Level of Aid Restrictions (Independent Variable)	51	3.450	4.000	1.712	1.000	6.000
Level of Aid Restrictions (States with Recidivism Data)	36	3.250	4.000	1.779	1.000	6.000

Figure 4. 3-year Recidivism Rates by State of the 2015-release Cohort



All 50 states and the District of Columbia were coded on a scale of 1-6, with 1 representing the least restrictive states and 6 representing the most restrictive states. States were most likely to be coded as a 4, with states coded as a 4 representing 45.1% of the sample (see Table 2). The median of the sample was also 4 (see Table 1), meaning most states generally imposed fairly moderate levels of aid restrictions. The second most frequent code was 1 and 80.4% of states were coded as a 4 or below, meaning a majority of states had low to moderate levels of aid restrictions. Only 10 states or 19.6% of states were coded above a 4, meaning relatively few states had high levels of aid restrictions during the study period.

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of the Independent Variable (All Data Points)

Level of Aid Restrictions		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Least Restrictive	1	13	25.5	25.5
	2	2	3.9	29.4
	3	3	5.9	35.3
	4	23	45.1	80.4
	5	2	3.9	84.3
Most Restrictive	6	8	15.7	100
Total		51	100	

When the states without recidivism data were excluded from the descriptive analysis of the independent variable, little changed. The median of the sample remained "4" (see Table 1), meaning that even with only 36 data points, most states imposed moderate levels of aid restrictions. States were still most likely to be coded as a 4, with 38.9% of the total sample (see Table 3). A majority of the states had low to moderate levels of aid restrictions, with 80.6% of the sample being coded as a 4 or less. Considering all 51 data points, relatively few states had high levels of aid restrictions, with only 19.5% of the states were coded as a 5 or 6.

Table 3. Frequency Distribution of the Independent Variable (States with Recidivism Data)

Level of Aid Restrictions		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Least Restrictive	1	11	30.6	30.6
	2	2	5.6	36.1
	3	2	5.6	41.7
	4	14	38.9	80.6
	5	2	5.6	86.1
Most Restrictive	6	5	13.9	100
Total		36	100	

Descriptive analyses were also conducted on the control variables. For the "political affiliation" variable, when all 51 data entries were considered, the median was 3, which means that Democratic and Republican states were approximately equal in the sample, as competitive states represented the middle (see Table 4). When only 36 data entries were considered for the political affiliation variable, the median was 2 (see Table 4). This means that there were slightly more Democratic states than Republican states because the middle data point represented a Democratic state. The most frequent code for the political affiliation variable was "Lean Democratic," with 41.7% of the states being coded as "Lean Democratic" when only 36 data entries were considered (see Table 5).

For the "crime rate" control variable, the average crime rate, when all 51 data entries were considered, was 2898.45 (see Table 4). This means that the average rate of crime was 2898.45 crimes per 100,000 residents. When only 36 data entries were considered, the average crime rate dropped slightly to an average of 2753.74 crimes

per 100,000 residents (see Table 4). In both instances, the crime rates of the states varied substantially, as the standard deviation was very high.

For the "U-6 unemployment rate" control variable, the average rate when all 51 data entries were considered was 9.93 (see Table 4). This means that on average, 9.93% of the labor force was unemployed, underemployed, marginally attached to the workforce, or no longer looking for work. When only the 36 states who had recidivism data was considered, the average U-6 unemployment rate increased slightly to 9.98 (see Table 4). Therefore, even when the number of data entries was reduced, little changed for the U-6 unemployment rate control variable.

The last control variable, "number of drug abuse violations," had a mean of 24916.63 when all 51 data entries were considered (see Table 4). In other words, on average, there were 24916.63 drug abuse violations. When the number of data entries was reduced to 36, the average amount of drug abuse violations increased to 29287.72 violations (see Table 4). Similarly to the crime rate control variable, the standard deviation of the drug abuse violation variable was very high (see Table 4). This was the case for when only 36 data entries were considered and for when all 51 data entries were considered. This means that the number of drug abuse violations varied greatly between states.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics of the Control Variables

	N	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Political Affiliation	51	3.040	3.000	1.428	0.000	5.000
Political Affiliation (States with Recidivism Data)	36	2.920	2.000	1.339	1.000	5.000
Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents	51	2898.445	2973.200	807.524	1524.600	5945.300
Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents (States with Recidivism Data)	36	2753.744	2697.800	692.307	1524.600	4353.500
U-6 Unemployment Rate	51	9.927	10.100	1.843	5.300	13.900
U-6 Unemployment Rate (States with Recidivism Data)	36	9.983	9.950	1.876	6.300	13.900
Number of Drug Abuse Violations	51	24916.630	14430.000	36030.257	232.000	206194.000
Number of Drug Abuse Violations (States with Recidivism Data)	36	29287.720	15719.500	41575.450	610.000	206194.000

Table 5. Frequency Distribution of the Political Affiliation Control Variable

Political Affiliation (States with Recidivism Data)		Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Solid Democratic	1	4	11.1	11.1
Lean Democratic	2	15	41.7	52.8
Competitive	3	3	8.3	61.1
Lean Republican	4	8	22.2	83.3
Solid Republican	5	6	16.7	100
	Total	36	100	

BIVARIATE ANALYSIS

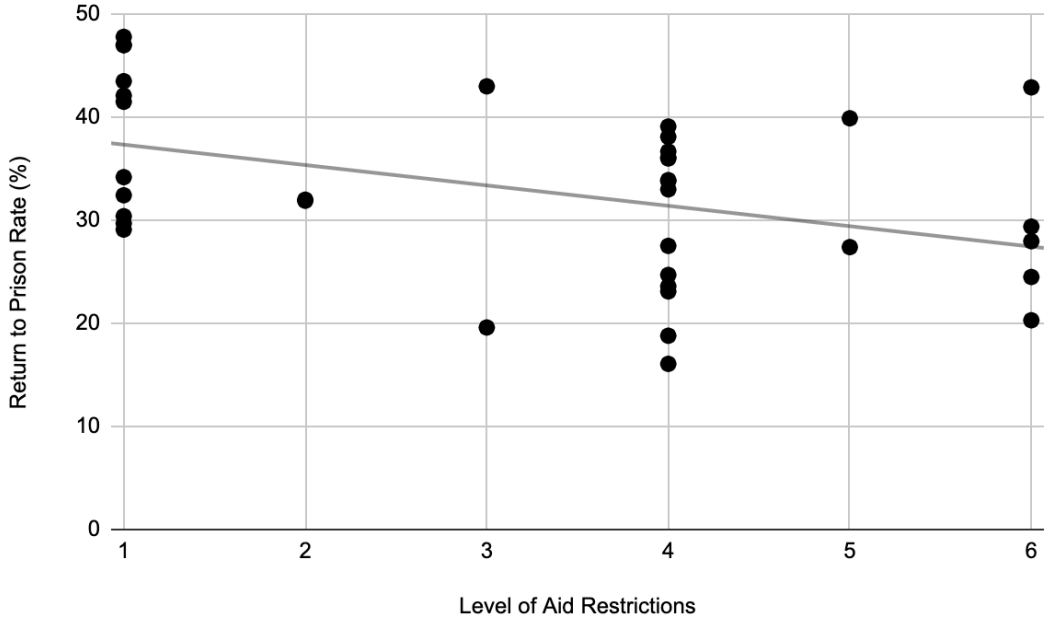
Bivariate results indicated a significant negative association (r = -0.399, *p-value* = 0.016) between the independent variable of level of aid restrictions and the dependent variable of recidivism (see Table 6). This negative association means more restrictive states also had lower rates of recidivism (see Figure 5). To further understand this relationship, the control variables were added to this analysis.

Table 6. Correlation Between the Dependent and Independent Variables (Spearman)

	Level of Aid Restrictions
Recidivism, 3-year return to prison rate	-0.399* (0.016)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Figure 5. Scatterplot of the Association Between the Dependent and Independent Variables



When recidivism was analyzed in regards to the control variables, a variety of associations were found (see Table 7). First, a weak, negative correlation between political affiliation and recidivism was found, although this association was not significant (r = -0.274, *p-value* = 0.106). This means that within the sample, there was a weak trend of more conservative states having lower rates of recidivism. There was also a weak, non-significant, negative association between crime rate and recidivism (r = -0.264, *p-value* = 0.12). In this sample there was a weak trend showing that as

states' crime rate increased, their recidivism rate decreased. A very weak, non-significant, negative association between the U-6 unemployment rate and recidivism (r = -0.134, *p-value* = 0.437). In this sample, this association conveys a very weak trend of unemployment increasing and recidivism decreasing at the same time. Finally, there was a weak, non-significant, negative association between number of drug abuse violations and recidivism (r = -0.225, *p-value* = 0.188). This association indicates that within this sample, there was a weak trend of drug abuse violations increasing and recidivism decreasing.

Table 7. Correlations Between the Dependent and Control Variables (Spearman)

	Political Affiliation	Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents	U-6 Unemployment Rate	Number of Drug Abuse Violations
Recidivism, 3-year return to prison rate	-0.274 (0.106)	-0.264 (0.120)	-0.134 (0.437)	-0.225 (0.188)

The independent variable, level of aid restrictions, was also analyzed in relation to the control variables (see Table 8). When all 51 data entries were considered, a significant positive association between level of aid restrictions and political affiliation was found (r = 0.438, *p-value* = 0.001). That is, conservative states had higher levels of aid restrictions. When only 36 data entries were considered, the association remained significant and positive (r = 0.552, *p-value* = <0.001). In fact, when only 36 data entries were considered, the relationship got slightly stronger (see Table 8). In both instances, Republican states had higher levels of aid restrictions.

Another significant positive association was found when all 51 data entries were considered, this time between level of aid restrictions and crime rate (r = 0.348,

p-value = 0.012) (see Table 8). This means that more restrictive states had higher crime rates (see Figure 6). Similarly, with 36 data entries, the relationship between level of aid restrictions and crime rate remained positive and significant ($r = 0.448$, *p-value* = 0.006). The relationship actually became more significant once the number of data entries was decreased (see Table 8), demonstrating the strong positive relationship between the two variables.

The third association between a control variable and the independent variable was a weak, non-significant, positive association between level of aid restrictions and unemployment rate ($r = 0.188$, *p-value* = 0.186) (see Table 8). When all 51 data entries were considered, there was a weak trend demonstrating that more restrictive states had higher rates of unemployment. When the number of data entries decreased to only the 36 states with recidivism data, the association between level of aid restrictions and unemployment rate got weaker but remained positive and non-significant ($r = 0.083$, *p-value* = 0.631) (see Table 8). Thus, while states with higher levels of aid restrictions generally had higher rates of unemployment, the association is relatively weak.

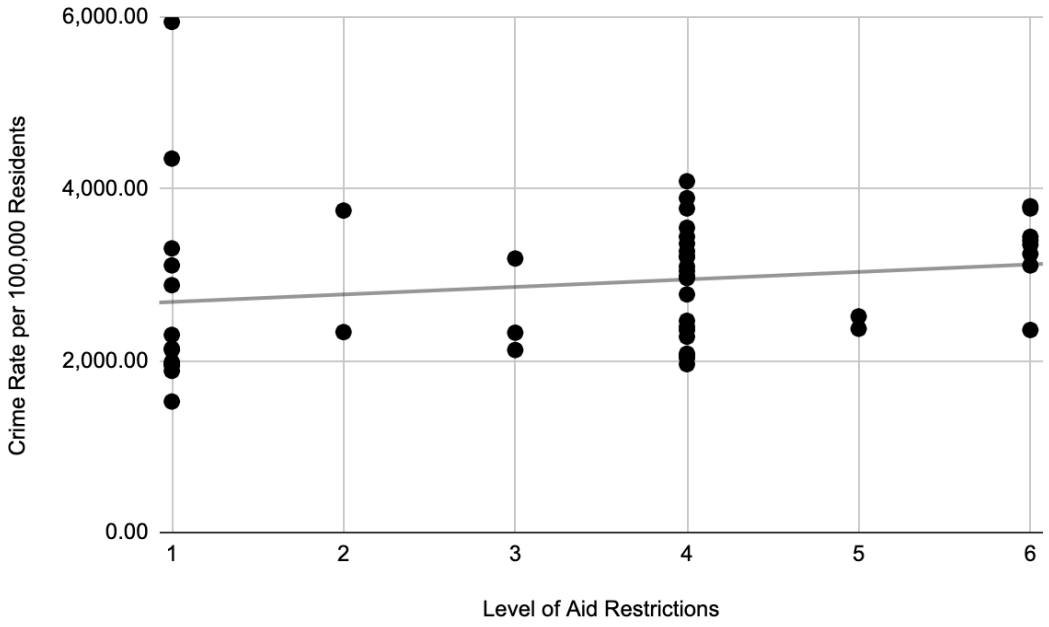
Finally, there was a weak, non-significant, positive association between level of aid restrictions and drug abuse violations ($r = 0.117$, *p-value* = 0.415). When all 51 data entries were considered, there was a weak trend indicating that more restrictive states had higher reported numbers of drug abuse violations (see Table 8). When only 36 data entries were considered, the positive relationship between level of aid restrictions and number of drug abuse violations got slightly stronger, but overall still remained weak and non-significant ($r = 0.125$, *p-value* = 0.467) (see Table 8).

Table 8. Correlations Between the Independent and Control Variables (Spearman)

	Political Affiliation	Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents	U-6 Unemployment Rate	Number of Drug Abuse Violations
Level of Aid Restrictions	0.438** (0.001)	0.348* (0.012)	0.188 (0.186)	0.117 (0.415)
Level of Aid Restrictions (States with Recidivism Data)	0.552** (<0.001)	0.448** (0.006)	0.083 (0.631)	0.125 (0.467)

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Figure 6. Scatterplot of the Association Between Level of Aid Restrictions and Crime Rate



The control variables were analyzed in relation to each other and a variety of associations were found (see Table 9). First, a weak, non-significant, positive association between political affiliation and crime rate ($r = 0.233$, *p-value* = 0.099). A weak trend shows that more conservative states had higher crime rates. A weak,

non-significant, negative association was found between political affiliation and unemployment (r = -0.182, *p-value* = 0.202). Within this sample, a weak trend demonstrated that more conservative states had lower rates of unemployment. There was a significant positive relationship between crime rate and unemployment (r = 0.369, *p-value* = 0.008), meaning that as crime rate increased, unemployment also increased. Unemployment and drug abuse violations had a weak, non-significant, positive association (r = 0.2, *p-value* = 0.16), demonstrating that unemployment and drug abuse violations both increased. Finally, the control variable of drug abuse violations was barely associated with two other controls, political affiliation and crime rate. Effectively this means that the variable, drug abuse violations, is not correlated with political affiliation (r = -0.005, *p-value* = 0.972) nor crime rate (r = 0.012, *p-value* = 0.932) and any variation is likely due to chance.

Table 9. Correlations Between Control Variables (Spearman)

	Political Affiliation	Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents	U-6 Unemployment Rate	Number of Drug Abuse Violations
Political Affiliation	—			
Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents	0.233 (0.099)	—		
U-6 Unemployment Rate	-0.182 (0.202)	0.369** (0.008)	—	
Number of Drug Abuse Violations	-0.005 (0.972)	0.012 (0.932)	0.200 (0.160)	—

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Table 10. Regression Analysis

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 5
	β (Sig.)	β (Sig.)	β (Sig.)	β (Sig.)
(Constant)	39.699 (<0.001)	42.474 (<0.001)	43.244 (<0.001)	42.566 (<0.001)
Level of Aid Restrictions	-1.875 (.047)	-1.758 (0.70)	-1.743 (0.080)	-1.472 (0.138)
Political Affiliation	-0.245 (0.840)	-0.094 (0.940)	-0.163 (0.908)	-0.447 (0.751)
Crime Rate per 100,000 Residents		-0.001 (0.545)	-0.001 (0.645)	-0.001 (0.646)
U-6 Unemployment Rate			-0.101 (0.910)	0.099 (0.912)
Number of Drug Abuse Violations				-4.89E-05 (0.163)

The regression analysis is another way to examine the relationship between the dependent variable, independent variable, and the controls. Model 5 (see Table 10), demonstrates that when the control variables remain constant, the association between the level of aid restrictions and recidivism is weakened and no longer statistically significant (β = -1.472, *p-value* = 0.138). However, even when control variables are accounted for, the association between level of aid restrictions and recidivism is still negative. Overall, this lessening in significance indicates that there may be other extraneous variables that better account for the significant finding in the initial bivariate analysis.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

DISCUSSION

This research's goal was to understand the relationship between levels of aid restrictions and recidivism rates using state level data. Based on the bivariate analysis, it would be easy to say that high levels of aid restrictions correspond with low recidivism rates, and thus states should increase their levels of aid restrictions. However, when the control variables are considered, this story becomes much more complicated.

The control variable, crime rate, produced an interesting correlation with the dependent variable, recidivism. The results showed that recidivism and crime rate were negatively correlated, meaning as crime rates increased, recidivism decreased. Although this is not a significant finding, it is noteworthy because crime rate and recidivism are very similar measures. Both are either a measure of crime or a measure of criminal legal system behavior. Crime rate encompasses all crimes, including those which would be counted in the measure of recidivism. Recidivism encompasses crimes committed by someone released from incarceration that returned them to incarceration. Thus, it would make sense for these two variables to have a positive correlation, as an increase in individuals committing a second crime would also increase the overall crime rate. Instead, a negative correlation was reflected, suggesting either the measure of crime rate or the measure of recidivism is not an accurate reflection of the crime occurring in each state.

With the understanding that crime rate and recidivism are very similar measures, it is also interesting that crime rate and the independent variable, level of

aid restrictions, had a significant, positive association. The results therefore indicate that states implementing more restrictive aid policies have high rates of total crime, but lower rates of individuals committing a subsequent crime. However, as stated above, since the overall crime rate includes instances of recidivism, it would make sense for these two measures to trend together. The disparate results regarding the association between crime rate and recidivism as well as crime rate and level of aid restrictions further could suggest an error in the measurement of one of the variables. However, these results could also suggest a real relationship, and thus more research is needed on this subject.

Although it is likely the crime rate provided by the FBI's UCR is underreporting the true amount of crime in each state, the inconsistencies between the measure for recidivism and the measure for crime rate is much more likely due to issues with the measure for recidivism. It is possible that defining recidivism as a return to prison is too restrictive, as it discounts any crime that did not result in a prison sentence, for example those sentenced to a rehabilitation facility. Measuring recidivism as a return to prison rate also discounts any crimes committed by an individual who was not originally sentenced to prison (e.g. someone who was sentenced to probation). Therefore, when recidivism is measured by a return to prison rate, the actual rate of people committing another crime is drastically underrepresented as it excludes a large proportion of crimes and people, which is especially true in the era of mass probation.

Mass probation increased alongside mass incarceration, with significant increases in the later half of the twentieth century (Phelps 2020). The majority of

people under correctional supervision are on probation (Kaeble and Cowhig 2016; Phelps 2017, 2020). In 2007, the peak of mass probation, 4.3 million adults were on probation compared to the approximately 1.6 million people who were incarcerated (Kaeble and Cowhig 2016; Phelps 2017, 2020). Probation is usually seen as an alternative to incarceration, but it can actually serve as a "net-widener," meaning that it increases overall supervision (Phelps 2013, 2017). Additionally, probation can have strict rules for the probationers and breaking those rules can lead to time in jail or prison (Klingele 2013; Phelps 2017). In a 1996 sample of 1,500 probationers in the state of Michigan, 74.1% of probationers violated the criteria of their probation (Gray, Fields, and Maxwell 2001). These violations varied in seriousness, but the percentage of probationers who had a violation remains important as even less serious violations can result in revocation of probation and therefore incarceration (Gray et al. 2001; Rodriguez and Webb 2007). Nearly half of state prison admissions, approximately 45% in 2017, were due to violations in probation or parole, showcasing how commonplace revocations can be (Phelps 2020). A probation sentence is not limited to individuals convicted of minor crimes as, depending on criminal history and judicial discretion, a felony conviction can still result in a probation sentence (Guisti 2020). Therefore, by defining recidivism as a return to prison rate excludes a majority of the people who are under correctional supervision, making the return to prison rate an inherently restrictive measure.

Level of aid restrictions and political affiliation had a significant, positive association, meaning that more conservative or Republican states had more restrictive levels of aid restrictions. This is an unsurprising finding as Section 115 of PRWORA

was proposed by a Republican Senator, and thus Section 115 could be classified as a conservative policy (Godsoe 1998). In other words, it is understandable that the higher the level of aid restrictions is, the more conservative the state is, because having high levels of aid restrictions is a reflection of a conservative policy.

The control variable, political affiliation, also produced disparate correlations when examining recidivism and crime rate. Political affiliation has a negative correlation with recidivism but a positive correlation with crime rate. More conservative states had lower rates of recidivism but higher crime rates. Although weak and insignificant in both instances, the discrepancy is interesting, as conservative policies for reducing recidivism and reducing crime are likely very similar, if not exactly the same. This contrast could be weakly pointing to the idea that conservative policies, including high levels of aid restrictions, have little to no impact on crime rate and recidivism reduction, however more research is required before this can be claimed.

With recidivism defined as a return to prison rate, this study's hypothesis was incorrect. However, as definitions of recidivism can vary significantly, the hypothesis may be correct when using a less restrictive measure of recidivism. More must be done to continue to investigate the relationship between level of aid restrictions and recidivism before assuming either a negative or positive relationship between the variables.

LIMITATIONS

This research has several limitations. First, with only 36 data entries, the study had a small sample size. Having such a small sample size can make it difficult to

draw reliable conclusions as small sample sizes increase the chances of a false negative, meaning that the conducted analyses may not have been able to determine significance, even if it was there. While the sample size is a limitation of this study, the results gathered still contain valuable information, especially when considering areas to research further.

Second, not all states define recidivism the same. Due to this, many states were excluded from the sample, causing the sample size for this study to be relatively small. Although precautions were taken during data collection to ensure all states included in the sample defined recidivism as a return to prison rate, there is no guarantee that "return to prison" means exactly the same thing across the states. Due to this, there is a possibility that the measure for recidivism is not consistent across entries and is, thus, a limitation of this research.

Recidivism is an inherently complicated measure. There are many different ways to define recidivism, including rearrest, return to custody, and return to prison. Any report of recidivism could be using any definition, meaning not all measures of recidivism are directly comparable. For example, if recidivism is defined as a return to custody, revocations of probation may significantly influence the recidivism rate of a state, as each revocation or infraction would likely be counted as recidivating. Similarly, if recidivism is defined as a return to prison, crimes committed by individuals who were not initially incarcerated would not be reflected in the recidivism rate. Thus, individuals on probation may experience aid restrictions but the association between aid restrictions and recidivism for individuals on probation may not be reflected in official recidivism data, depending on the official definition,

making this relationship potentially difficult to truly discern.

The aid restriction focused on in this study, welfare disqualification on the basis of felony drug convictions, only directly affects individuals who have felony drug convictions, and thus is most impactful for individuals with an initial drug offense. However, the measure of recidivism includes individuals who have been convicted of any crime as long as they were sentenced to prison. Therefore, it is possible that the results of this study do not accurately reflect the experiences of individuals who have felony drug convictions.

Data for this study was taken from the year 2015, nearly 20 years after PRWORA was first passed and the year The Heartland Institute published their "Welfare Reform Report Card" (Bast, Glans, and MacDougal 2015). It is likely that states revisited their welfare policies based on their grades from this report and could have been in the process of revising their policies when the data for this study was collected. Thus, the data from this study could have been collected during a period of change and any changes made to the welfare policies may not have been enacted long enough to generate significant changes to the variables examined in this study.

Finally, the most important limitation in this research is the fact that it utilizes the return to prison rate as a measure of recidivism. As mentioned previously, the return to prison rate does not accurately encompass all forms of recidivism, as it ignores minor crimes and crimes that do not result in a prison sentence. It also ignores any crimes committed by an individual who was not sentenced to prison. Therefore, since the definition of recidivism used in this study does not capture all instances of recidivism, the findings of this study are limited to a small selection of individuals

who were sentenced to prison and then returned.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has a variety of implications, both for research and policy. In terms of research, this paper fills a gap, as it analyzes a substantial portion of the total states, 36, compared to many other studies that only examined 6 at most. By examining as many states as possible, this research is more likely to be generalizable across the United States than previous studies. It also reveals a potential flaw in a common measurement for recidivism. The return to prison rate is likely not a good measurement for recidivism, as it does not include crimes that do not result in prison sentences, and thus a different measurement of recidivism should be considered for future studies. Instead, a different, less restrictive measurement, such as rearrest or return to custody, should be used.

This study also has policy implications. First, states should consider reporting multiple measures of recidivism, as the return to prison rate is likely underreporting the true rate of recidivism. By reporting multiple measures of recidivism, a more accurate depiction of the recidivism rates would be revealed. Second, states should conduct further research into their implementation of welfare bans and ensure that their policies are having the anticipated and preferred effect. Additionally, states and the federal government should be aware of how policies can compound disadvantages and fully investigate this path before implementing a new policy.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Future studies may find it beneficial to discuss the effects of aid restrictions in

the context of race and ethnicity. As the literature revealed, PRWORA as a policy not only disproportionately impacts minority communities but is also likely to deny welfare to those who depend on it. It is important to understand how policies may affect disadvantaged populations and act in ways that will not exacerbate existing forms of inequality. Thus, examining race and ethnicity as a variable may be beneficial. Investigating this concept could be helpful for understanding how race and aid restrictions interact. While this question could be answered quantitatively, a qualitative approach may be especially helpful for revealing how individuals navigate aid restrictions, whether marginalized or not. In fact, future studies may want to consider a qualitative approach, as it would likely provide insight into why trends are occurring.

Based on the results of this study, future studies should consider using rearrest rates or return to custody rates as their measure of recidivism. Expanding the definition of recidivism to be more inclusive, may help future studies to appropriately investigate the relationship between recidivism and aid restrictions. Additionally, future studies may want to consider examining clearance rates and convictions rates as control variables. Especially if recidivism is defined as the return to prison rate, understanding how likely an individual is to return to prison if they commit a new crime will likely be beneficial.

Finally, future studies may want to examine a cohort of individuals with felony drug convictions instead of using overall recidivism rates. This could help focus the study on individuals who are directly affected by the SNAP and TANF bans and therefore remove potential confounding variables. Following a specific cohort of

individuals may reveal information previously hidden by the inclusion of a variety of initial crimes in the recidivism measure.

CONCLUSION

While this study was unable to provide a specific welfare policy recommendation, the finding of a potential flaw in the return to prison rate as a measure of recidivism reveals an important consideration for future studies. If state governments and researchers move away from using the return to prison rate as the only measure of recidivism, future studies and states will likely produce more accurate depictions of recidivism. Since 2015, the year the data was taken from, a majority of the states have modified or removed the bans on SNAP and TANF. When considering the association between fully upholding the bans on SNAP and TANF (i.e., states with high levels of aid restrictions) and high overall crime rate, this showcases a potentially encouraging trend towards reducing crime and ensuring justice. These bans, however, are not the only type of collateral consequence individuals face in addition to their sentence. Individuals with criminal records can face disenfranchisement, stigma, unemployment, and more. It is therefore important that more research examines collateral consequences to ensure evidence-based practices are enacted through policy and no unintended effects occur. Additionally, it is likely that many of the consequences have racist undertones and disproportionately affect minority and marginalized communities, as PRWORA does. Researchers must examine collateral consequences to ensure that policies and practices are enacted for the purpose of a safer and more just society.

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