



# Beyond Benefits: Examining the Effects of Welfare Disqualification Due to Felony Drug Convictions on Recidivism

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## INTRODUCTION

- **1 in 3** American adults have a criminal record and are thus subject to the associated **collateral consequences** (Pettit and Gutierrez 2018).



- **Collateral consequences** refer to the formal (e.g., disenfranchisement) and informal (e.g., stigma) effects of the justice system on individuals (Kirk and Wakefield 2018).
- The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (**PRWORA**) **disqualifies individuals with felony drug convictions from receiving food stamps or cash assistance**. People convicted of violent felonies are not disqualified (Paresky 2017).
- **PRWORA** falls into the collateral consequence category of “**aid restrictions**” and since each state implements PRWORA differently, **states can be categorized by their level of aid restrictions**.

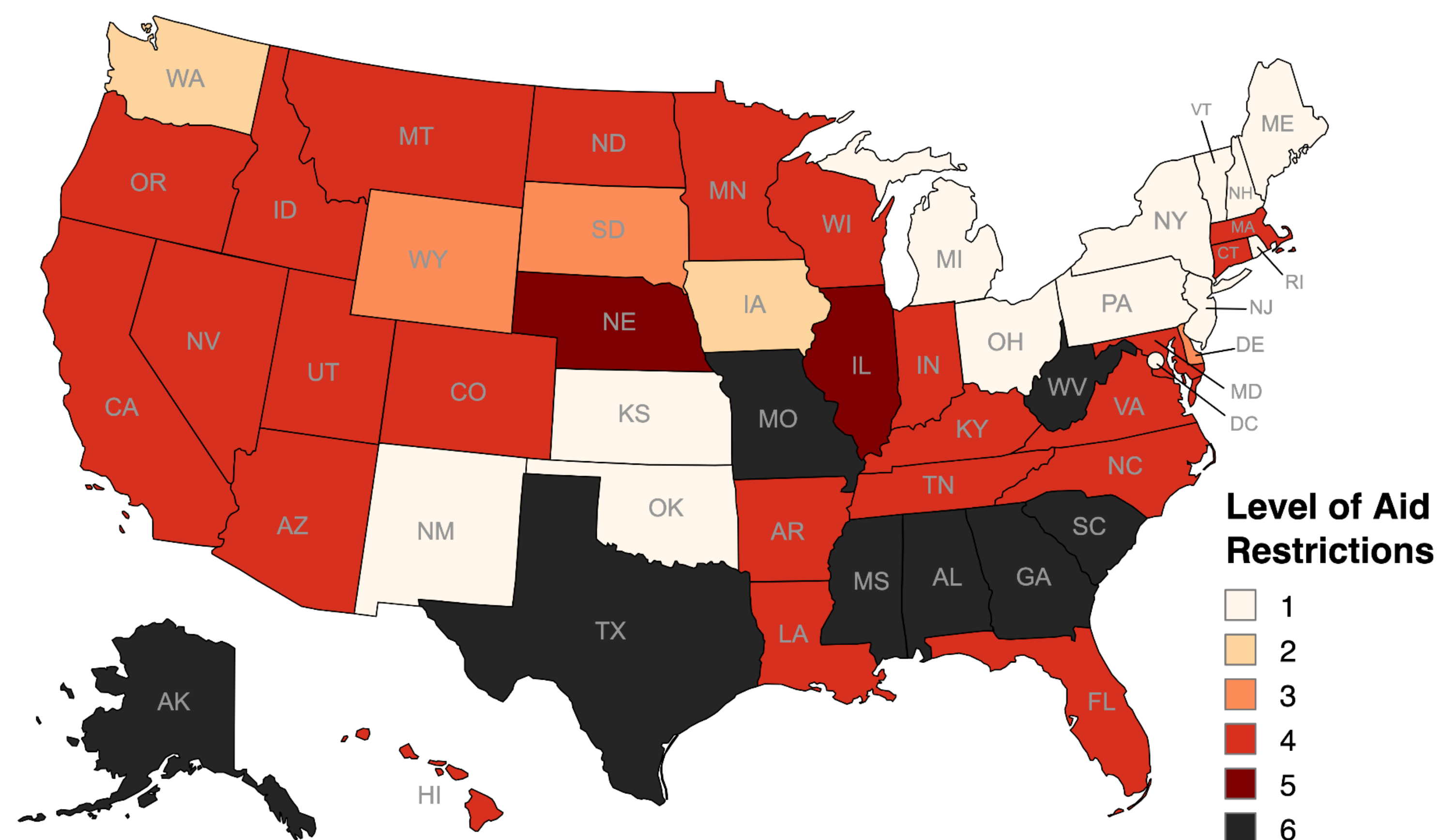


Figure 1. Levels of Aid Restrictions in 2015 by state

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Do states with **higher levels** of aid restrictions have **higher rates** of recidivism than states with low levels of aid restrictions?

## METHODOLOGY

- Each state and DC was categorized on a scale from 1 to 6 based on their enforcement of bans on food stamps and cash assistance. 1 represents the states with the lowest level of aid restrictions while 6 represents the highest level of aid restrictions (see Figure 1).
- Recidivism rates measured by the 3-year return to prison rate was collected from 36 states.
- Crime rate, calculated by adding the reported violent crime rate and the reported property rate, was also collected for 50 states and DC.
- The level of aid restrictions for each state was compared to the collected recidivism and crime rates to determine if there was an association.

## RESULTS

- States with **higher** levels of aid restrictions had significantly **lower** rates of recidivism (see Figure 2).

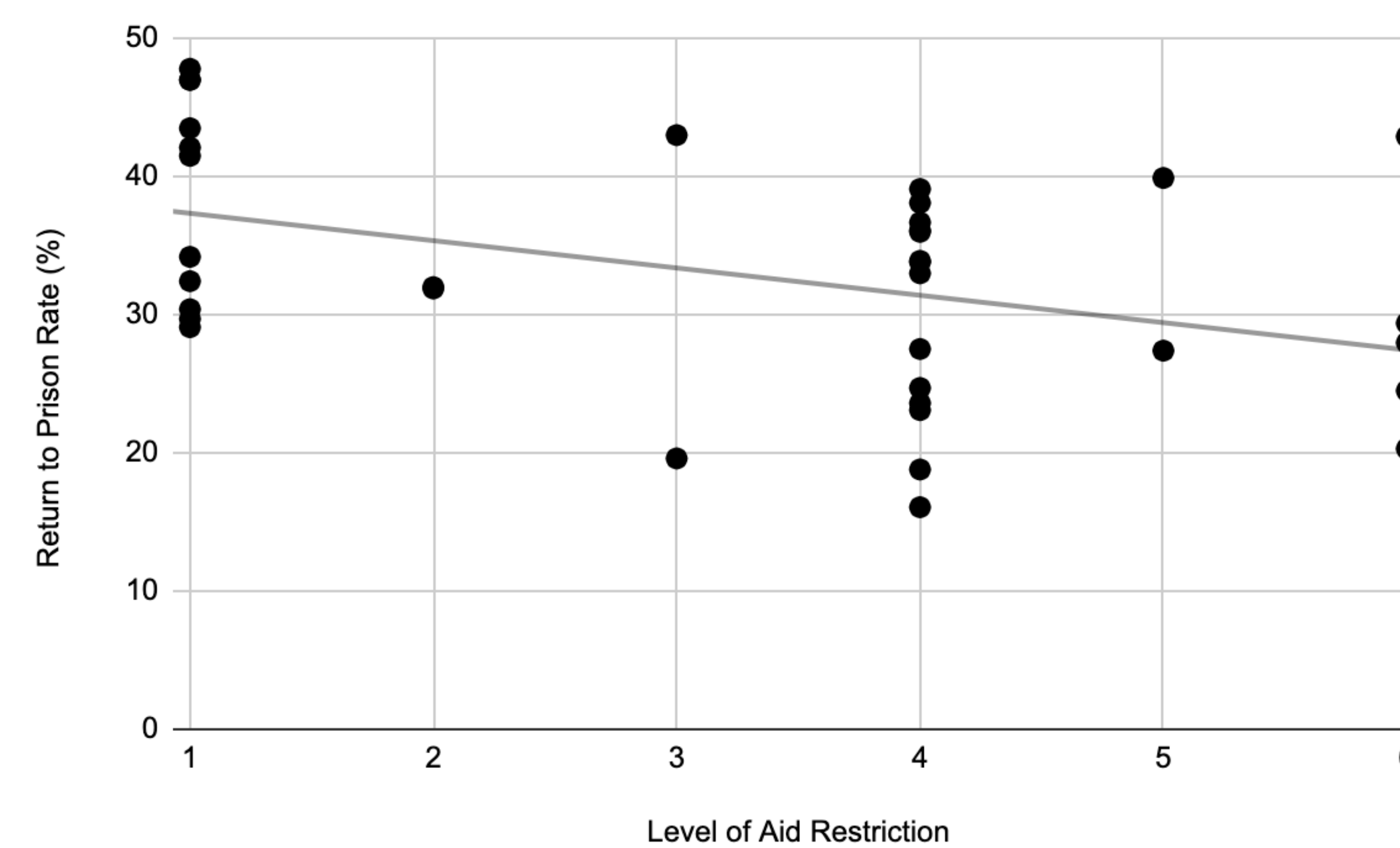


Figure 2. Association Between Levels of Aid Restrictions and Recidivism Rates

- States with **higher** levels of aid restrictions had significantly **higher** crime rates (see Figure 3).

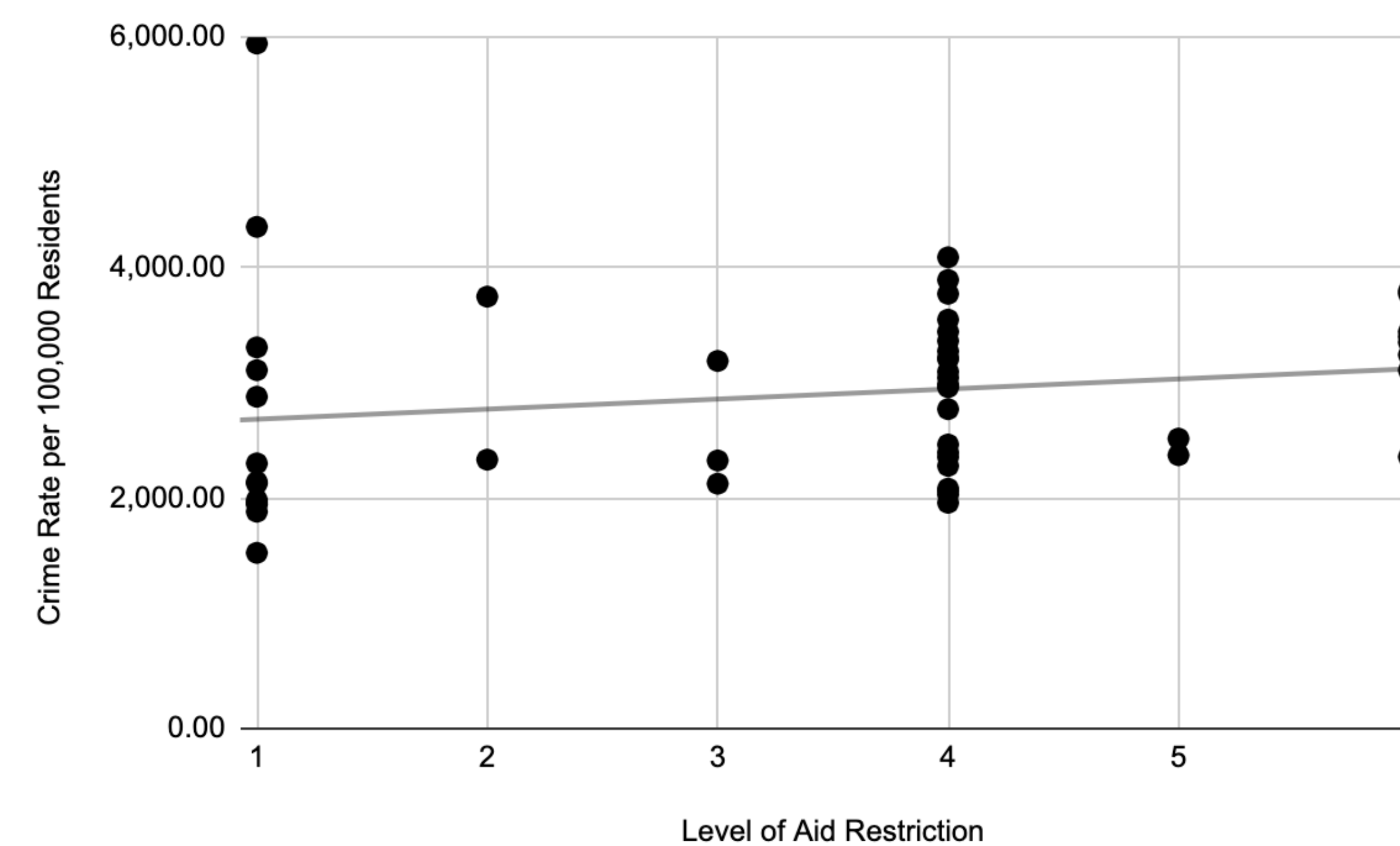


Figure 3. Association Between Levels of Aid Restrictions and Crime Rates

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

- **Crime rate** and **recidivism** rate are very similar measures. It would make sense for aid restrictions to be **similarly associated** with both measures. However, **the opposite is true**.
- Potentially, measuring recidivism as the return to prison rate **did not accurately represent** the total number of people committing a subsequent crime as it does not count non-prison sentences.
- This reveals a **potential flaw** in the **most common measure of recidivism**. Studies using this reported measure may be presenting **inaccurate associations**.
- Future studies should **consider measuring recidivism differently** and studying a cohort of individuals with drug felony convictions.

## FULL THESIS



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