

THE INFLUENCE OF PROFESSIONALS ON PRISON POPULATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Countries differ in the volumes of their prison population. This does not seem to simply be a result of differences in levels of crime, as prison populations does not appear to correspond with available indicators of crime, neither within nor between countries. Thus, other explanatory models should be available. Previously, the importance of economic, political, and cultural aspects has been studied. In this study, institutional structures mediated by the influence of professionals on the policy process may influence the volume of prison populations. The results show that the hypothesis finds support even after controlling for variables that in the literature are assumed to be of theoretical relevance for the outcome of prison populations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The prison sentence is, with the exception for the death penalty, the most severe reaction of modern legal society to a criminal act. Depriving people of their freedom through imprisonment is a deeply intervening measure at an individual level, and at a societal level an extremely costly one (in Sweden, the cost of keeping someone in prison is estimated to be SEK 1 million per person per year). Based on this, it is justified to investigate which factors affect the size of a country's prison population. Of course, one factor of importance for the prison population may be the country's crime rate. However, this does not seem to give the whole picture - empirically, prison populations do not correspond particularly well with the indicators available at the crime level, neither within nor between countries (Christie, 2000; Lappi-Seppälä 2000).

Given that differences in prison populations between different countries cannot be fully explained by the differences in crime levels, it should be possible to find other explanations for the differences that exist. In explanations for different countries' prison populations, there are certain patterns that extend over time and space. For example, countries with higher equality, a more generous welfare state, a higher proportion of union members, and a higher social trust among citizens are empirically associated with lower prison levels. Prison population is not an isolated phenomenon. The economic system may be of importance to the prison population, for example, a social democratic welfare state may be assumed to have incentives to avoid a high prison population, as a large proportion of the population is needed to maintain the welfare state (Lacey et al., 2017, p. 205). In addition to economic and political explanations, there are cultural explanatory models. Among other things, so-called Scandinavian exceptionalism (the exceptionally low prison levels that characterize the Scandinavian countries) has been explained partly by the fact that these countries have a culture of solidarity and trust between people, which allows for a more inclusive penal policy (ibid, pp. 201-202).

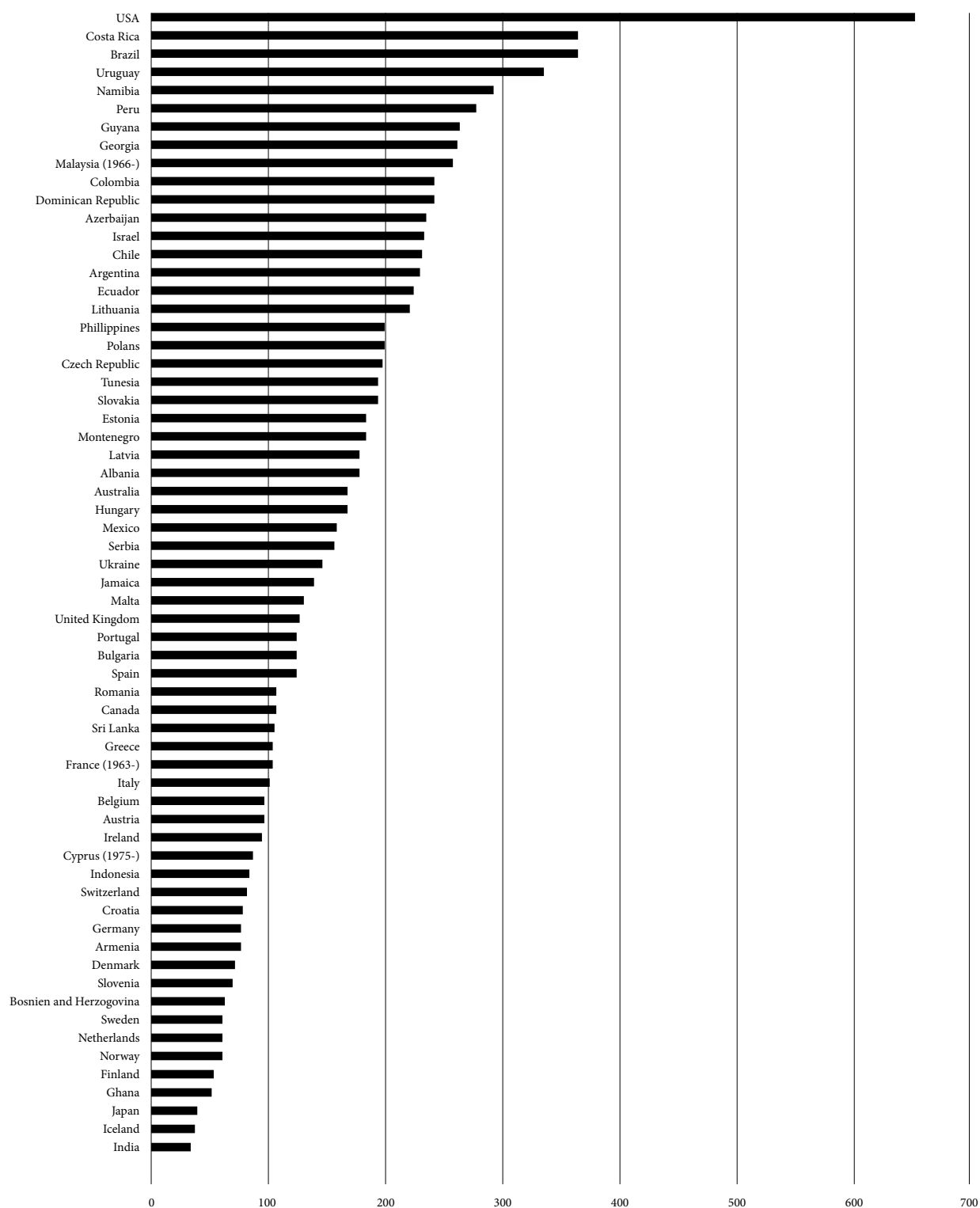


Figure 1. Prison population per 100,000 population in states with “partly free” or higher status according to the Freedom house democracy index and which are included in the current study.

Source: prisonstudies.org

In addition to political, economic, and cultural aspects, it is also viable to consider institutional explanations for variations in prison populations. Crime and punishment often involve issues that are emotionally charged to people, and more often than not, stricter penalties and a general “tougher grip” on criminals is demanded by the public. In Sweden, a survey was carried out as early as the 1980s, which showed that the public believes that the current penalties are too mild (Lindén & Similä, 1982). This has been confirmed in more recent studies, both within and outside the Nordic region (Axberger, 1996; Roberts & Hough, 2005). However, the pursuit of a “tougher grip” in general, and more extensive prison sentences in particular, generally find weak support among experts on these issues. The reason for this is that imprisonment is regarded as an expensive and ineffective measure aimed at reducing the overall crime in society (Westfelt, 2001; Travis et.al., 2014). In this sense, crime policy as a policy area is particularly sensitive to the views of the general population. Consequently, tension arises between, on the one hand, what in the general legal consciousness is considered a fair sanction for a certain crime, and on the other hand, what is considered to be effective in reducing the general crime level.

The starting point for this study is that professionals are generally more likely to focus on how effective measures are from a crime reduction perspective, while the public focuses more on the moral components of punishment, such as retaliation, redress, and a sense of justice. As a result of this tension, politicians are subjected to a kind of cross pressure on these types of issues, where they are forced to balance the public’s morally-based demand for stricter punishment with experts’ claims that the response to a particular act should be effective (in the sense that it reduces crime in society). One possible explanation for variations in the prison population is therefore that the degree of independence that professionals possess, combined with the level of influence they have on the crime policy that’s being pursued, is significant for what prison population a country generates. This hypothesis is what this paper intends to test.

2. INSTITUTIONS, CRIME POLICY AND PRISON POPULATIONS

The relationship between institutions and the prison population is not obvious. Intuitively, it is conceivable that a country's crime, rather than other factors, is the most influential factor to explain its prison population. However, the relationship between crime and the prison population is complex. To begin with, what is perceived as criminal is not given - in addition, the view of what is an adequate response to criminal acts varies. A good overview of this is given in Foucault's (1987) account of the history of punishment since the 18th century, which shows how in the Western countries, corporal punishment was abandoned in favor of the prison sentence. However, the philosophical view of the degree to which crime is something that is constructed varies. According to what Aristotle refers to as natural law (Rapp, 2010), certain acts are in principle intrinsically criminal according to a kind of universal human morality. According to this way of reasoning, the chain of events resulting in a prisoner begins with the individual's actions of choice, and the state's role is primarily restricted to simply responding to this act. Which acts or types of behaviors, which are generally considered to be in need of societal control, correspond quite well over time and space, and the argument about "natural crimes" can thus be presumed to hold at least a certain amount of accuracy.

The two approaches to the extent to which crime is the subject of social construction, and consequently the view of the very nature of the crime, have significance for the view of the relationship between institutions and the prison population. The more room available for crime as a concept to be constructed, the greater the influence that policy decisions can have on the prison population. However, the contradiction between these views is not to be exaggerated - for example, it is perfectly conceivable that crimes that show a relatively clear continuity in which actions and behaviors are perceived as necessary to control, but that the response to them differs considerably. An underlying factor for

differences in the view of punishment may be attributed to the emphasis on various components that constitute the purpose of the punishment. These are generally divided into the following:

- Prevention
- Rehabilitation
- Correction for the victim
- Retaliation
- Expressions of general a sentiment

(Sarnecki, 2017, p. 15)

One assumption for this study is that professionals prioritize the first two points to a greater extent, while the general population's perception of what constitutes an appropriate sanction can be derived from the three latter points. Since politicians are elected, they must appeal to the general public to a greater extent in their stance on criminal policy issues, while professionals have a greater scope to prioritize other values. The notion that professionals to a greater extent than politicians prize science and an approach to objectivity that exceeds ideological preferences generally finds support in the literature (Brint, 1990, p. 366). Thus, a causal relationship may exist between the degree of professionals' influence over the policy process and what prison population a country in an extension receives. This provides a macro relationship between the role of professionals and prison populations, with the theoretical assumption that actors' different driving forces are the mechanism that causes the varying outcome.

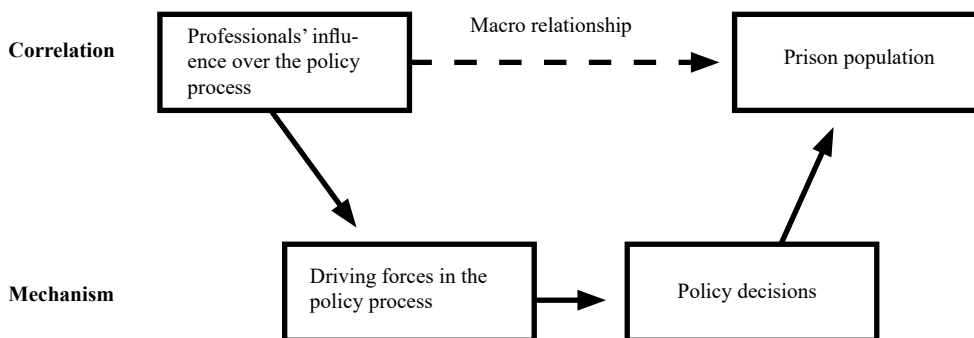


Figure. 2 Illustration of the correlation and the assumed underlying mechanism.

However, for professionals' role in the policy process to have a causal relationship to the size of a country's prison population, two pre-conditions are necessary:

- (1) policy can influence the extent of the prison population, as well as*
- (2) that professionals can influence what policy is implemented.*

How this may be done is discussed below.

2.1 Crime policy and prison population

Crime policy can shape the prison population in different ways. The most obvious and direct way is by regulating the penalty scales, i.e. that more documents are charged with imprisonment as part of the scale of punishment, or that the time of imprisonment on existing imprisonment is adjusted. In addition, case law can have a bearing on the measurement of penalties. In Sweden, for example, the principle of asperation is applied, which means that the most serious crime receives the highest prison sentence value, while the remaining crime is reduced in order according to the seriousness of the crime. This is a consequence of the main rule being that prison sentences are used as a joint sanction in cases of multiple crimes (BrB, Chapter 26, Section 2). In addition to general legal principles, penalty measures can be targeted at specific groups. In Sweden, for example, a so-called penalty discount is applied for young people up to 21 years, where the penalty is reduced by a certain percentage based on the age of the person concerned. This can have a significant effect on the prison population. This is because a large proportion of all crimes, especially those of a more serious nature, are skewed to a relatively small proportion of the population. At the same time, approximately half of the crimes that are committed in total lifetime within this group is committed before the age of 20 (see, for example, Moffitt, 1993; Sampson & Laub, 2005; Wikström, 2012).

Besides adjusting penalty scales, prison populations can also be affected informally by policy and institutional structures, one way being through police priorities and resource allocation. For example, the United States' "war on drugs," an initiative that was taken by the Nixon administration in the early 1970s to eliminate the drug from society, has been used as a common thesis to partly explain the country's exceptionally high prison population. By defining drug crime, a type of crime where people with weak socioeconomic status and African American origins are typically overrepresented in the United States, as a major societal problem. By perceiving repressive measures as a solution to the defined problem, the incarceration rate has increased by incapacitating a large percentage of people belonging to this group (Alexander, 2010). Thus, the criminal policy conducted can have an impact on the prison population through how problems are constructed and through what solutions are perceived as appropriate to these problems.

2.2 The importance of professionals in crime policy

To determine the influence of a group, the respective group must be defined. This study uses a basic distinction between politicians and professionals. This distinction rests on how positions are added, where politicians are democratically elected, while professionals are appointed on a different basis - via merits, recommendations, etc. How recruitment and removal of governmental employees is done is central to what mechanisms are used for accountability. This is a premise for the current study's thesis - it is as a result of the mechanisms of accountability that politicians, more than professionals, must consider the general public's demand for a more repressive criminal policy, while professionals can prioritize other values to a greater extent. In the current study, the term 'professional' specifically refers to government employees - independent researchers, consultants from the private sphere, etc. are thus outside the definition of a professional in this study.

The power of professionals over the policy process is impossible to quantify completely. Their influence can, for example, extend to the fact that they form the cognitive categories that underlie the thinking itself to understand the world - “the pictures in our heads” according to Lippman, or “the power over thought”, with Lukes’ terminology. However, this thesis is based on a more limited definition of influence, which can generate empirically testable hypotheses. The policy process can be divided into two stages: the preparation of policy proposals and the implementation of adopted proposals. Professionals may have an advisory function in the design and adoption of proposals and an interpretative and executive function in the implementation of a specific policy.

Democracies are characterized by the fact that power is based on the people - as is the case within the crime policy domain. It is thus politicians who ultimately make the final political decisions and who bear the political responsibility. Policy decisions that are of importance to crime policy are made by elected politicians and thus, the importance of professionals is indirect. This indirect influence can, for example, be done by professionals providing knowledge bases for the legislature to take into account in policy decisions. In Sweden, the Crime Prevention Council, which is clearly expert-oriented, is an example of this. The authority works on behalf of the Ministry of Justice and the reports produced are to a large extent directly followed by orders from above. Although this may be true, knowledge-producing authorities can enjoy a certain degree of independence. Brint (1990) discusses this tension based on two ideal types as analysis tools, where a higher degree of politicization means that professionals’ opportunities for influence over the policy process become more limited.

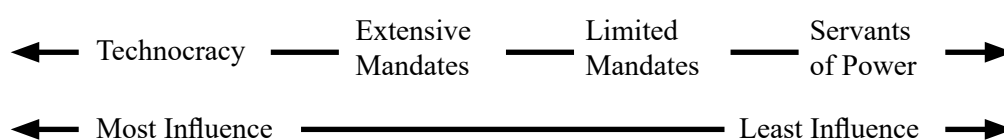


Figure 3. Continuum of positions regarding the policy powers of professionals.

One premise for the distinction to be relevant to the outcome of the prison population is that experts and politicians differ in how they would shape crime policy. This may be the case since the two have different driving forces. While professionals can be expected to be highly driven by science and prioritize evidence-based proposals, politicians are also influenced by other driving forces. Julian (2003) offers several suggestions on mechanisms that can influence politicians to design a more repressively embedded criminal policy. For example, such a direction can simply be an expression of the will of the people - it is thus a natural consequence of the democratic order in which the elected people are expected to listen to the general legal consciousness. However, it is also conceivable that politicians do not consider the crime policy direction to be desirable, either in terms of general will (cf. Rousseau) or according to their ideological views, but that repressive proposals are nevertheless implemented, driven by the fact that they are expected to be popular in opinion. (ibid, pp. 64 - 65). This idea is generally referred to in the literature as *penal populism*. The term is independent of ideology but has historically been associated with the political right, possibly because an individualistic ontological view is well compatible with a more repressive criminal policy.

The reasons why the public typically calls for a more repressive crime policy may be that their perception is based on incorrect information, either about the current crime situation or the effectiveness of different measures. Most opinion polls of people's attitudes have shown that people generally believe that crime levels have recently risen, even in cases where crime levels have dropped (Julian, 2003, p. 67). Some studies indicate that politicians' perceived pressure to pursue a more repressive criminal policy does not always match public opinion (Roberts & Hough 2002 p. 8), which in such cases generates the same outcome without being rooted in real demand. The link between the public and the perceived pressure of politicians to implement repressive can thus be versatile. However, although the reason for the general demand is relevant, this is a factor whose causality is sufficiently distal to fall within the purpose of this study.

Since policy processes that, by extension, can affect the size of the prison population occur in two stages - the adoption of policy proposals, and subsequently the implementation of these policy proposals - the role of professional officials is relevant at both stages. For example, if the bureaucracy instead exhibits a high degree of politicization, and professionals in the bureaucracy are thus driven by ideological preferences rather than by other values, the effect that the professionals have in preparing policy proposals can be eroded. It is therefore plausible that the various functions that professionals can have in policymaking are dependent on each other. The influence of professionals on the prison population is thus hypothesized to have a real impact only when combined with the fact that the professionals in the bureaucracy are just that, professionals. Accordingly, the degree of politicization within bureaucracy is of high relevance.

3. METHOD

3.1 Comparative method

The current study uses a quantitative comparative method, which is characterized by a sample of selected units being compared with each other to elucidate the relationship between variables. This is done to approach causal relationships, in this case between institutions and prison populations. However, this approach associated with theoretical and methodological problems. Przeworski (2004) highlights several problems with studying the importance of institutions for policy outflows. The most obvious problem is that institutions vary - but so do the circumstances under which the institutions operate. For this reason, it is in principle impossible to know whether a particular institution or other circumstance is responsible for variations in the dependent variable. The only way to know the effect of an institution would be through a counterfactual scenario, i.e. a case where the explanatory variable differs but which is otherwise identical. Since this is not possible, one way of approaching this scenario is to

select units that are as similar to each other as possible, but which differ in the independent variable (Esaiasson, 2016, p. 92). Although this would be a possible solution, countries tend to differ in too many respects for this to be possible. For this reason, the relationship in this study is studied with as many sample units as possible and, with different theoretically relevant control variables to exclude alternative explanations for a possible relationship.

3.2 Selection of cases

In comparative studies, the criterion on which choice of selection units is based on is central. In this case, it is first and foremost a necessary condition that the country establishes prison statistics that are deemed to be reliable. It is therefore justified to exclude states where the quality of statistics cannot be guaranteed. Regarding the selection in general, it is in principle desirable in this type of study to have as high variation in the independent variable as possible and, as high homogeneity as possible in the other conditions (Esaiasson et al., 2016, p. 93). However, the basic thesis of the study is not contextual, but instead claims to have general explanatory value. Aside from this, it is also desirable to include as many cases as possible in the analysis to find robust relationships. Therefore, the starting point during the selection process has been to include all states that are available in the used dataset if it is not justified to actively exclude it. Accordingly, only exclusion criteria have been used. With this approach, the following two exclusion criteria have been used:

'Not free' on the Freedom House Democracy Index

A prerequisite for testing the study hypothesizes that the states in the sample are democratic. Without a democratic governing body, public opinion does not arise from the pressure that a certain type of policy should be implemented, and the basic thesis of the study is not applicable. Consequently, states that are not at least partially free according to the democracy index established by the Freedom House, are excluded.

Missing data

The states where data are missing in the dataset that is being for the independent variable are excluded from the selected cases.

3.3 Study Design

The data is collected with a cross-sectional design and refers to 2015. The study being based on cross-sectional design is, of course, problematic in terms of the study's purpose, i.e. to illustrate a causal relationship between a set of variables. To establish causality, certain criteria must be met. One such is that what is assumed to be the causal variable precedes the effect variable in time (Teorell & Svensson 2017; Martin, 2002). For obvious reasons, this is not possible to determine with the help of a cross-sectional design, since this type of design means that data is collected at one given moment in time. For this reason, longitudinal data would have been desirable, but since this is not currently available, a cross-sectional design is used to investigate whether any relationship exists at all. The independent variable refers to 2015 and the dependent variable refers to 2019, and the temporal relationship between the variables is thus in accordance with the causality criterion which states that the causal variable must precede the effect variable temporally (Esaiasson, 2016, p. 68).

3.4 Description of variables

The study's independent variable addresses the influence of professionals on the policy process. This is based on the preparation of policy proposals and the implementation of the policy proposals.

Independent variable: the influence of professionals

The independent variable is operationalized through two indexes of influence and the meritocracy of the bureaucracy.

There is no consensus on how to measure bureaucracy's degree of meritocracy between countries, and there are only a few studies where this has been done. When this has been done, data collection has been based on expert surveys, which have been based on questions about the appointment of bureaucrats, job security, and the salaries of government employees (Charron, 2016). The reason for the definition of a bureaucracy independent of politics is that there are two ways in which to work governmentally: either government personnel can be employed and dismissed based on the will of political actors, or they can be hired independently of the policy and instead hired on the basis of merits and abilities (Charron, 2016). How bureaucrats are appointed is central because the accountability mechanism looks different for politicians and bureaucrats under a meritocratic system.

In earlier studies, meritocratic recruitment has been measured by a set of items (Charron et al. 2016; Dahlström et al. 2012). The same items are used for the operationalization of the nature of the bureaucracy in this study:

1. Applicants' skills and qualifications determine who gets the job,
2. The absence of political recruitment (the applicants' political contacts determine who gets the job)
3. That members of the political elite recruit senior officials.

For the operationalization of experts' influence over the policy process, no such index has to my knowledge been made before. Consequently, the index used is created on own initiative. The operationalization consists of the following items:

1. In the preparation of policy proposals, both politicians and employees in the public sector are involved.
2. In the implementation of policy proposals, both politicians and employees in the public sector are involved.
3. Policy creation in the social policy sector is characterized by very complex problems that have no obvious solutions.

The two indices are highly correlated with each other ($R = 0.619$), which makes it difficult to discern the effect of the individual effect of each variable. In addition, the study hypothesizes that the influence of experts on the dependent variable is particularly affected when the bureaucracy shows a low degree of politicization. Thus, a combined index is created by the two indices. To take both influence and meritocracy into consideration in the index, they are multiplied with each other, in order to avoid that the values of the respective sub-indices can outweigh each other. The index is then normalised to a value from 0 – 1.

Data for the independent variable that constitutes the index has been obtained from the University of Gothenburg's QoG Expert Survey database (qog.pol.gu.se).

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is the number of people in prison per 100,000 inhabitants. The number of prisoners is divided by 100,000 inhabitants to take population amount into account. To account for extreme values on the dependent variable a logarithmic operation is performed to make the sample more normally distributed (Sundell, 2012).

For this variable, data is obtained from prisonstudies.org and dates from 2019.

Control variables

Three different variables are controlled for. The first control variable is the GDP per capita of each state, to take countries' different levels of wealth into account. Data for this variable is obtained from the University of Gothenburg's QoG standard dataset, 2015.

The second variable controls for state inequality. The GINI index is used for this measure. The index measures the extent to which the income distribution

deviates from a perfect distribution. A higher value of the coefficient indicates higher inequality. Data for this variable is obtained from the University of Gothenburg's QoG standard dataset, 2015.

The third control variable is interpersonal trust, and is operationalized by the question 'People are generally trustworthy', to which one can either agree or disagree. This is the most common way to measure interpersonal trust, and has shown to correlate well with other measures of trust. Data for this variable is obtained from the University of Gothenburg's QoG social policy dataset, 2012.

Reliability

Theoretically, the trustworthiness of a measurement has to do with two basic concepts - validity and reliability. Validity refers to systematic measurement errors, while reliability has to do with random measurement errors (Teorell & Svensson, 2007). Validity in this study's case has to do with what is more specifically called conceptual validity, i.e. how well the indicators used can be said to correspond to the theoretical concepts under study. There is no statistical measure of how good the conceptual quality is, so in this case, I have been omitted for logical reasoning. Part 3.4 shows which indicators are used to measure 1) the degree of professionals political independence and 2) the degree of influence that experts have on the policy process. These are as far as possible based on previous ways of measuring the concepts used. Since the measures consist of several indicators that together constitute an index, the internal reliability of the index can be measured quantitatively (Bryman, 2011). This means that individual indicators that might deviate from the other indicators can be excluded from the index, which can strengthen the reliability of the measure. Accordingly, a Cronbach's alpha operation is performed, showing a high degree of internal reliability (.767).

As the study compares selection units with each other, the choice of cases becomes relevant for both internal and external validity. Internal validity has

to do with the validity of the theoretical reasoning, in this case, whether the conclusions drawn about the causal relationship between expert politicization and expert influence. The external validity is about whether the relationship can be assumed to apply in other circumstances as well - under, for example, other board conditions, during other periods, and so on (Esaiasson, 2016, pp. 154 - 155). Since the cases are selected to test a theory, the external validity then gets back in favor of internal validity. However, this need not exclude reasoning about the validity of the relationship in other circumstances.

4. RESULTS

Initially, basic descriptive data for the mean value of the two explanatory variables, standard deviation, and the range of values are presented. Thereafter, the basic bivariate relationship between the two study variables is presented. Finally, a multiple regression analysis follows to check for potential underlying variables.

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Prison population	165	106	34	655
Professionals' influence	.443	168	.11	.84
N= 61				

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the two main variables.

The average number of prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants is 165.12 with a standard deviation of 106.26. The United States is the country with the highest number of prisoners per capita with 655 prisoners per 100,000 population. India is the country with the lowest number of prisoners per capita with 34 prisoners per 100,000 population.

Table 2. Bivariate analysis	Prison population/100 000 inhabitants
Prison population/100 000 inhabitants	1
Professionals' influence	-1.511**
N= 61	

Table 2. Bivariate relationship. Independent variable: the influence of professionals. Unstandardized b coefficients, standard errors in parentheses. ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Looking at the bivariate relationship between the variables, a negative relationship is found. This indicates that the higher the influence of professionals, the lower the prison population. Thus, the basic claim finds empirical support. Since the prison population variable is logarithmised, the change refers to in change in percentage points. The prison population decreases by just over 1.5 percent for a unit increase from a minimum value to a maximum value for the variable of professionals' influence.

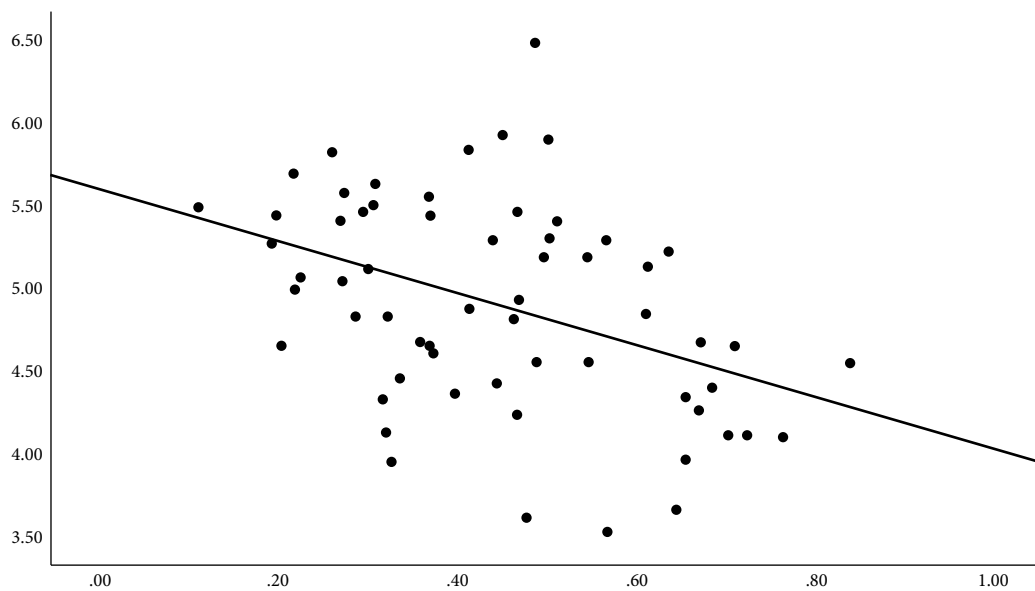


Figure 4. Bivariate relationship between professionals' influence and the logarithmised prison population.

To exclude potential underlying explanatory variables, a multivariate regression analysis is performed.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Professionals' influence	-1.511** (.448)	-1.557** (458)	-1.770* (.774)	-0.915 (1.025)
GDP/capita		-4.71 (.000)	3.12 (.000)	5.4 (.000)
GINI Index			-.003 (.017)	.009 (0.19)
Interpersonal trust				-1.314 (1.243)
R ²	.169	.169	.163	.244
N	61	61	33	26

Table 3. Multivariate analysis. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$.

5. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

Previous studies have indicated that some economic, political, and sociological factors coincide with the size of a country's prison population. The current study aims to investigate whether also institutional structures can independently affect the size of the prison population. More specifically, the role of professionals in the policy process has been studied. The hypothesis for the study was that higher professional influence over policy issues that are of relevance to the prison population, because of their unique approach to these types of issues, would result in a lower prison population.

The studied relationship has been assumed to have a general explanatory value in democratic states. Consequently, other variables that in the literature have been empirically associated with a lower prison population have been controlled for. The basic argument finds support: the relationship is significant even when controlling for the per capita GDP, the degree of equality and the interpersonal social trust. Thus, the influence of professionals may be thought to be significant

for the country's future prison population, regardless of these factors. However, the relationship is not significant when social trust between people is controlled for. This is likely due to low number of selection units, which is a consequence of internal data loss on the variable for interpersonal trust.

The conclusions about the causal relationship of professionals to the prison population should be drawn with caution. Besides not being significant in model 4, the current study is carried out with cross-sectional design, which means that causality is impossible to determine. To establish a causal relationship, longitudinal design would have been desirable, since changes in each variable could have been studied over time. However, due to lack of available data, this has not been possible. For this reason, the study's ambition has primarily been to investigate whether the hypothesis can be falsified. Since the hypothesis finds support, it may be relevant to study the relationship with a longitudinal approach in the future. It would also have been interesting to include other control variables that may be of theoretical relevance, to examine whether the influence of professionals is dependent on certain structural circumstances. For example, it is conceivable that the effect of the influence of professionals is more noticeable under certain types of political systems than others. It is also plausible that public demand for stricter penalties is weaker in some circumstances than in others, with the result that the importance of professionals' role in policy processes is reduced. For example, actual levels of serious crimes could provide a threshold for what is possible through policy proposals to influence the prison population. Taking crime levels into account would have been an appropriate approach for future studies, although crime levels between countries are notoriously difficult to compare due, mainly due to variations in legal and statistical routines between countries.

In case the relationship is intact over time and with control for further potential confounders, the influence of professionals might be a real determinant of the prison population. This may be an important finding. The size of the prison

population is not merely an empirical issue, but also a normative one. Given that the size of the prison population is influenced by political decisions, the future prison population is not given in advance; the society has an opportunity to choose. The overall long-term ambition should be to reduce the total amount of suffering. Consequently, the primary focus becomes not to punish unnecessarily, but instead to prioritize measures that can be assumed to reduce the general amount of crime. This statement may be made without any utopian vision that the need to punish anytime soon shall disappear completely - it is rather about, with Christie's (2000) terminology, finding a suitable amount of pain.

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